



for a living planet®

NEWSBITES OCTOBER- DECEMBER 2009



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### POLITICAL SITUATION

While all the hopes were high in November 2009 after a meeting in Addis Ababa where a compromise seemed to be emerging, the process of resolving the political crisis in Madagascar is in total deadlock today. On the initiative of the President of Mozambique and Joachim Chissano, the SADC mediator, the movements Zafy, Ratsiraka and Ravalomanana signed an agreement to share ministerial posts during a meeting in Maputo. The movement Rajoelina refused to participate. The agreement was formally dismissed by the President of the transition Andry Rajoelina who has said "negotiations for the formation of national government and the establishment of other institutions must be held in Madagascar." The last straw was a letter that the three other movements seemed to have sent to the Prime Minister of Denmark and the Secretary General of the United Nations asking them "not to grant visa or accommodation to any delegation led by Andry Rajoelina" for the Copenhagen Summit. For the latter, it shows that "collaboration with the three other movements is impossible," and he "rejected any negotiations with them." According to Andry Rajoelina, the only solution to the current problem is a congressional election that he calls on March 20, 2010. He dismissed the Prime Minister of consensus, Mangalaza Eugène, and appointed a new one: Camille Vital, a colonel from the army.

### ILLEGAL LOGGING

In our last newsbites we referred to the inter-ministerial order no. 38244 allowing the export of 325 containers of illegally harvested rosewood in exchange for a "payment" of 72 million ariary per container. This order was reinforced in November by order no. 38409 despite the avalanche of criticism that the former order raised. This new order, while recognizing the "illicit nature" of the wood aims at ensuring that the payment is done and confirms the intention of the State to take advantage of the traffic to make money. Towards the end of November, we heard rumors from reliable sources that some 350 containers had again left the port of Vohemar without any attempt at stopping them from authorities.

A study of the economic impact of these two inter-ministerial orders shows that the State earned at most 15,519,439 USD out of the 325 containers exported from September to November 2009, while the loss in terms of biodiversity, ecotourism and watershed protection is estimated at 13,144,559 USD. Moreover, the distribution of the few benefits from the exploitation and export of the wood is widely uneven with the traffickers still getting 40,94% of the total value, while the Treasury General Budget gets 29,93% and collectors 19,36%. In comparison, a scenario under which the wood would have been seized and sold through an open tender by the State would generate 40% of the value for the National Forest Fund, 30% of the Treasury General Budget, 20% for judicial agents, 10% for communal/regional authorities and 19,36% for collectors. In both scenarios, loggers only get 2% of the value of the wood.



The results of this study and a legal analysis of the two inter-ministerial orders undertaken by the legal firm MCI in November were used by the Alliance Voahary Gasy – now a legally established environmental civil society alliance – to sue the State "for violating the law" and to demand the cancellation of the orders. We are awaiting the results of this bold initiative. In the meantime, the much expected Global Witness/EIA report came out in November,

shedding light on the intricacy of the system in which the trafficking is done, the confusion within the legal texts and procedures used by subsequent forest administrations to either close or open hardwood exploitation and exports and the involvement of large array





of players from the international buyers mostly in China to the loggers, the collectors, the authorities at all levels, etc. A new poster and article published in the December 2009 issue of Madagascar Conservation and Development provides an updated list of the exploiters and details on the final destination of the wood in China. Clearly, dealing with the traffic will require not just intervening in Madagascar but in those consumer countries as well. In that light, the resolution adopted by the US House of Representatives on November 4, 2009 and condemning the Malagasy hardwood traffic is a first success. A first seizure of palissandre-made guitar parts used by the famous Gibson guitar firm is also an encouraging fact that things can still be done.

On November 30, 2009, Prime Minister Mangalaza issued a note requesting from all ministries "a strict application of forest legislation pertaining to rosewood, ebony and palissandre" and declaring that "all movements (exploitation, transport, sale...) of precious wood are strictly forbidden all over the national territory". This would have ended the year with a sign of hope if only the Prime Minister had not been replaced a few weeks after....

## SHIPWRECK - GULSER ANA

On November 24th, a second trip, funded by WWF, has been organized to assess the impact of the shipwreck in Faux Cap. The same experts who conducted the first mission, visited the 3 districts of the Androy Region. Direct observations revealed the existence of tar beaches in certain localities. Cleaning work was carried out by the owner of the ship in the affected area, but according to the local community, some sites have not been cleaned. The local community also observed a high mortality of marine organisms (reef fish, crabs, lobsters, oysters etc ...) and a large area of algae affected by the spill in one of the sites.

The wreck also has an important impact on the population. The decline of marine resources has resulted in lack of sources of income for the fishermen. This has resulted in the migration of some fishermen to Fort-Dauphin and to the coast of the District of South Amboasary. The remaining fishermen formed associations to better manage the current situation (aid from donors, etc..) and to coordinate their fishing activities.

From the socio-economic assessment of the region to assess the deficit in the fishing channel of the affected municipalities to provide a decision tool for the authorities on compensation and restitution for victims, it is estimated that over 30,000 persons are affected by the impact of the sinking. This represents a deficit of almost 2 billion of MGA (about EUR 700,000) for the income of the population, in three months of fishing closed. It has been recommended that a large part of the compensation is given as fishing equipment for the associations or in arranging their landing facilities or other infrastructure necessary for fishing so that they receive direct compensation.

On December 10th, an official ceremony has been held in Ambovombe to give food compensation to the local population. The Head of Region took the opportunity to announce that fishing is now allowed apart from 5 villages located in the immediate vicinity of the grounding of the vessel.

However, the concerns of fishermen will continue as long as the wreck Gulser Ana is still there.

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## SOME NEWS OF OUR PROGRAMME

### NEW FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

#### Consolidating Creative Financing Mechanisms for Biodiversity Conservation and Income-generating Activities in the Fandriana - Marolambo Landscape

**Donor:** WWF CH

**Budget:** CHF 150.000 (per year)

**Duration:** 3 years

**Status:** Proposal submitted to donor

This project aims at consolidating creative financing mechanisms and income-generating activities compatible with conservation in the Fandriana - Marolambo landscape to ensure the sustainability of biodiversity conservation



#### Modernized Law Enforcement and Surveillance of Protected Areas

**Donor:** WWF US/ Bonderman

**Budget:** USD 250.000

**Duration:** 2 years

**Status:** Proposal submitted to donor

This project aims at reducing threats to Madagascar's spiny forest, including fires, illegal harvesting of wood and the trade in illegal species by establishing an early warning system for the detection of illegal activities and effective policing of forested areas.

### NEW PROJECTS

**Project number:** MG0939

**Title:** Support for the dissemination of SRI to local communities near the protected areas in Ivohibe (Ihorombe Region)

**Start date:** 10 October 2009

**Planned end date:** 10 August 2010

**Donor:** Better U Foundation

**Summary:** The Project is conducted in the locality of Ivohibe, an area producing rice for the Ihorombe region where the threats and pressures on forest resources are still very heavy. Its purpose is to increase production of rice in order to satisfy the rural communities' needs.



**Project number:** MG0940

**Title:** **Review of the MSC Assessment for Maldives Pole & Line and Handline Tuna Fisheries**

**Start date:** 1 November 2009

**Planned end date:** 31 October 2012

**Donor:** WWF SE/Sida, WWF DE, SFNI

**Summary:** The goal of this project is to contribute to sustainable tuna management in the Indian Ocean. It will ensure that WWF's concerns are effectively taken into account in the MSC assessment of the Maldives pole & line and handline tuna and, at the same time, it will develop WWF MWIOP's capacity to effectively address tuna management in the Indian Ocean.

**Project number:** MG0941

**Title:** **Counting Lemurs - The biological corridor of Midongy-Vondrozo**

**Start date:** 1 December 2009

**Planned end date:** 30 September 2010

**Donor:** WWF SE

**Summary:** The objective of this project is to conduct a census of lemurs within four forest of the Madagascar's southern corridor (Mahabe,



Marovovo, Vohitsidy, and Vohimary), to map lemurs habitats threats and pressures, and to train local villages at the selected sites in monitoring lemur species using a standard protocol.

## VISITS

### 1<sup>st</sup> visit of the new president of MacArthur Foundation in Madagascar

WWF MWIOP is supported by the MacArthur Foundation for several of its marine projects mainly on adaptation to climate change and focusing on coral reefs and mangroves ecosystems.

The new president of the Foundation, Robert L. Gallucci, decided to make his first third-world trip to Madagascar from November 6 to 12. Although it was a short stay only, the president and his staff visited several sites in the country (Maroantsetra - Makira, Nosy-Be - Mitsio Archipelago, Toliara - Maromena/Befasy, University of Antananarivo), and met with several personalities and NGOs. They took the time to descend the Makira river by boat, dived in Mitsio Archipelago and talked with local communities in southern Toliara after having crossed the Onilahy river by boat again.

It was a very hectic week for them as well as for the trip organizers (CI, WCS and WWF), especially because an important 2-day workshop (a MacArthur's grantees workshop) followed the next day. During the closing cocktail of their trip, Mr. Gallucci's speech reflects how much he was satisfied and that learnt a lot from this field trip. Actually, he recognized in a private discussion that what he saw exceeded his expectations.

This example of donor's visit is the typical action that the environmental NGOs (and even other sectors) should foster in order to demonstrate to donors how rich the country is and how committed people on the ground and from these organizations are in striving to build a better world for Madagascar, their communities and their offspring.

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## WWF, GoodPlanet and Air France join forces in the field

For the first anniversary of the Holistic Programme for Forest Conservation, WWF, GoodPlanet and Air France – sole sponsor of the project – organized a visit on a forest landscape restoration site in Fandriana Marolambo.

They also met with community leaders involved in the transfers of natural resources management, one of the main activities of the programme.

The group of partners went on a field trip to the project site, accompanied by journalists from France, Belgium and Switzerland. Malagasy media was invited to a press conference which informed them on the progress of the programme during its first year.

With 13,500 hectares dedicated to forest landscape restoration, Fandriana Marolambo is the most important site for this activity.

Participants in the field trip were introduced to a community tree nursery and learned more about the indigenous tree species used to restore degraded land and connect fragmented forests to the main, still relatively untouched, forest corridor.

The meeting and discussions with community representatives helped understand better the complex process by which grassroots communities benefit from more land security, increased capacities and autonomy to manage their natural resources.

Detailed presentations also revealed the wide network of partnerships and technologies developed and used by the programme during its first year to measure the amount of greenhouse gas from deforestation and degradation of forests that it will eventually be able to reduce. Presentations included explanations on technologies used for land use analysis and carbon stock assessment.

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## TRAININGS

### Interpersonal communications

Following the annual performance evaluation and career development carried out in June 2009, some staff have expressed their need for an interpersonal communications training.

In November 2009, a 2-days training has been held for 15 staff to develop their fluency and express themselves convincingly, to increase their self-confidence and, to create and maintain a healthy and friendly atmosphere.

All the staff who attended the training expressed their satisfaction and their willingness to actually do their best to attain the objectives set together with the trainer at the end of the training.





## Leadership in Transition

Thanks to the Oil and Gas Development for Coastal and Marine Areas Project (MG0917.01), the 'Leadership in transition', part 2 took place in early December 2009. As WWF MWIOPo wanted to involve the broader organization in the process, this time, the training targeted 20 participants mostly project managers and finance and administrative technicians.

Apart from the training itself, the group focused on 3 Must Win Battles:

- To Build strong project teams
- To Create a culture of recognition
- To Make positive impacts of WWF's activities in local communities



The training involved 4 facilitators/coaches : 3 from Better Future and 1 from MWIOPo.

## WORKSHOPS

### Oil and Gas: First meeting for a shared vision

September 2009 , Madiorano, North of Toliara - WWF MWIOPo organized a workshop to launch the preparation of a three-year operational phase of its Oil for Development Programme funded by the Norwegian government. This programme focuses on the integration of best practices for environmental conservation within the industry, and developing active civil society participation in petroleum development as a means to ensure good governance, transparency and accountability. For the first time ever, WWF staff and their partners from Madagascar, Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania met together to develop a shared vision and strategies for our future work. The collaborative approach shows very clearly that WWF wants to work with a wide range of partners and also to address transfrontier challenges. Our shared aims are to constructively engage with government and industry as oil exploration and exploitation unfolds, and to ensure a watchdog role. The operational phase of the programme begins in January 2010.

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### Farewell to ACCPAC

WWF MWIOPo was one of the programme offices visited by the Network Finance & Operations Department from Gland conducted by Carlo Scapinelli during the last week of October 2009. This mission focused on the review of the current process, workflow, reporting structures and other key aspects of our programme office in order to analyze the adaptation of our processes to the Oracle system.



All the Finance and Administrative team was involved in the workshop. The action plan until the month of December has been agreed during the session. In January

2010, Carlo will inform us on the next steps to be tackled for the roll out of Oracle. This new system will be applied by our office in July 2010 and we will say goodbye to ACCPAC after 13 years of services.

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## Leveraging Partnerships to Improve Madagascar's Marine Conservation

Right after the visit of the Foundation's president, all MacArthur grantees held a workshop, entitled "*Leveraging Partnerships to Improve Madagascar's Marine Conservation*" on November 12 and 13. The goal of the workshop was to foster partnerships, collaboration, and synergy among actors to improve overall marine conservation strategic and programmatic planning, implementation and monitoring. The main themes addressed turned around the orientation and policy framework for marine conservation in Madagascar, the knowledge of climate change and its integration into marine conservation programs, the governance and management of coastal and marine ecosystems and resources, to finally produce recommendations for national policy and strategic orientations.

This gathering was very helpful in generating dialogue on national marine policy to further enable new environmental legislative initiatives, reviewing outcomes of the climate change assessments and their relevance and impact on biodiversity conservation and marine conservation and policy, and sharing experiences, lessons learned and approaches to community-based marine conservation.

The diversity of the subjects of the presentations and themes gratified the 60 participants from very different organizations and enlightened their understanding about the stakes and issues related to marine and coastal domains in Madagascar. Recommendations were turned into practical action plans and will be closely followed up by the key organizations appointed for this.

Mrs. Elizabeth Chadri, a MacArthur's Senior Programme Officer, who was attending the workshop, was obviously pleased about the outcomes of this thinking process, satisfied of the synergy shown by her grantees, and was able to see clearly the level of contribution of the Foundation's support to the Madagascar's marine and coastal conservation.

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### Prioritization and strategy for WIOMER

More than 70 people, experts, ministries' representatives, NGOs, environmental managers, met in November for a 2-days workshop to identify the most important sites and the threats to the preservation of wealth biodiversity and marine resources in the Western Indian Ocean. Besides the prioritization of sites of importance which deserve the attention of environmental managers, scientists and donors, this workshop has also helped develop a mapping of threats in the region. It is now possible to base the creation and establishment of the protection of this marine and coastal richness (marine reserve, MPA ...) on studies and valid scientific realities, which was not possible previously. It is the culmination of years of hard work done by the RAMP IOC Project.

Now it's up to WWF Madagascar and Indian Ocean and the IOC to finalize the results of the workshop and once again unite the countries members to develop and validate a common strategy to preserve this marine and coastal richness, source of pride ... and life.

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## Climate change adaptation for the sake of ecosystems and communities

Over 60 conservation professionals attended WWF's national workshop on climate change adaptation that was held in Antananarivo between the 30 November and 2 December. The workshop, which was financed under a 4 year NORAD / WWF-Norway project to strengthen national capacity on climate change adaptation, provided participants with information on climate change science, likely effects of climate change on ecosystems and communities, and practical experience in planning of adaptation strategies. Adaptation specialists from WWF-US office provided the training, and workshop participants came from a wide range of organizations including Government, local and international NGOs, WWF staff and university researchers. Participants received



information from the Direction Générale de la Météorologie on the potential climate change projections for Madagascar in 2050: Key amongst these projections are a potential temperature increase of 1.8°C to 2.6°C, increased variability in precipitation patterns and increased intensity of cyclones. The two priority ecoregions of Ala Maiky (south western spiny forests) and Ala Atsinanana (eastern moist forests) were then used as case studies to guide the workshop participants through the steps required to assess potential impacts of future climate change on ecosystems and local communities, and develop ecosystem based adaptation strategies that increase the resilience of ecosystems and the communities that depend on the goods and services that these ecosystems provide. The workshop represented a first step in a series of training and research activities that will be carried out under by WWF in relation to climate change adaptation. Activities forecast for 2010 include further detailed adaptation planning in the two ecoregions, capacity building with Malagasy government officers in key economic sectors and research into the vulnerability of Madagascar's species to climate change.

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## Birth of a National Platform for Sustainable Biofuels

A workshop held by the project "Promotion of sustainable production of agrofuels in Madagascar," in early December 2009 saw the birth of the National Platform for Sustainable Biofuels (PAD). Strong support of stakeholders has been observed. The PAD is made up of all relevant institutions of the agrofuels sector, private sector operators and distributors, farmers' associations, national and international NGOs, and technical and financial partners.

Despite the divergence of interests, the various stakeholders have undertaken concerted thinking through the work of thematic groups that have concluded that the greatest challenge of this sector in Madagascar is problems of land tenure security (for both communities for investors). Apart from that, environmental and social aspects, particularly as regards food security, remain a central concern for the sector. Proposals for the action plan of the PAD have been issued by the actors work groups (Group of Institutions, Investors Group and Group of local community associations, NGOs and technical and financial partners). The establishment of this platform has implanted initiatives, on the need, for example, for an organization of producers of biodiesel from *Jatropha*.

As sharing and updating information are crucial for the dynamics of this platform, an idea of establishing a system of exchanges was raised by for example creating a website, newsletters, etc.

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## SOME NEWS FROM OUR FIELDS

### Recent Discoveries from PK32-Ranobe

The discovery in south-western Madagascar of a lemur species that may be new to science has highlighted the biological importance of the region. The animal was found in remaining fragments of gallery forest along the Fiherenana River, which are due to become part of a new, landscape-scale protected area (PA) to be co-managed by local community associations with the support of WWF. Known as PK32-Ranobe, this important remnant of the region's gallery forests, wetlands and spiny thickets is one of nine new protected areas to be established within the spiny forest ecoregion in partnership with local communities. The nocturnal lemur belongs to the genus of giant mouse-lemurs (*Mirza*), from which two species are currently known; *Mirza coquereli* and *M. zaza*. The population from the Fiherenana appears to show significant differences in the colouration of its coat to suggest that it may represent a new species or subspecies. Recent years have seen the discovery and description of large numbers of new lemurs, and at least 97 species are now recognised; this astonishing diversity, all of which are unique to the island, represents around a quarter of the world's living primate species.

The lemur is not the first exciting mammal discovery from PK32-Ranobe in recent

years: in 2005, scientists described the rediscovery of *Mungotictis decemlineata lineata*, a subspecies of the narrow-striped mongoose that hadn't been observed since 1915, and which was only ever known from a single specimen. The protected area has recently been shown to harbour the greatest animal diversity of any site within the spiny forest ecoregion, due in part to the great variety of habitat types within its borders. It protects populations of eight lemur species, including the charismatic ring-tailed lemur (*Lemur catta*) and Verreaux's sifaka (*Propithecus verreauxi*), as well as two bizarre and unique birds, the long-tailed ground-roller (*Uratelornis chimaera*) and the sub-desert mesite (*Monias benschi*). In total 32 mammal species have been recorded, as well as 124 birds, 75 reptiles and eight amphibians: many of these species are classified as vulnerable, endangered or critically endangered in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

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### 30,000 Signatures for a Living Planet

October 2009, the ecological magazine Vintsy No. 62 focused on a special theme "Climate Change" and especially on the impacts of climate change in Madagascar. A month later, while the conservation world struggles to make Copenhagen a success for the Environment, 170 of 456 Vintsy clubs in Madagascar were asked to take part in this great event. Then, 21,000 young people from Vintsy clubs, and 9,000 scouts, completely won to our cause, who can be trusted, and who want to change the world, signed a petition for the big leaders of this world to take action. It is a great premier in Madagascar, particularly because Malagasy people are accustomed to resign themselves. May this momentum continue and be emulated to achieve its goal!

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## A New Logo for the Madagascar Protected Areas System

A competition to create the logo of the Madagascar Protected Areas System has been organized for all the school students in Madagascar. The competition is run jointly by the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, the Ministry of Education and, the Tany Meva Foundation.

The organizers received a total of 278 projects logo. The first three winners from the cities of Vatomantry, Mahajanga and Midongy South are invited to Antananarivo by the organizing committee to receive their prizes at a ceremony on December 22, 2009.

Once again, by participating in the contest, young Malagasy demonstrated their commitment to preserving the unique biodiversity of Madagascar.

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## Exchanges of experiences among villagers

A project to promote female development on the sustainable management of natural resources has been launched in five villages in the rural town of Beahitse, one of the thirteen municipalities of the Mahafaly Plateau. Functional literacy and introduction to market gardening and nursery management are among the key actions of this project. Some nurserymen and gardeners of the rural commune of Ejeda visited five villages to train and mentor women on technical nurseries and vegetable gardening. During their stay, these farmers were able to

attend to female literacy. In return, the market gardeners of the village of Andranomena have gathered the villagers to explain what happens in the neighboring municipality. They decided to organize in their village literacy sessions. Thirty adults (men and women) participate in sessions every Saturday and Sunday from

some months now. Working with communities so motivated to go ahead give additional motivations to us to continue to support sustainable development through biodiversity conservation.

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## Ankilimidega: Reconciliation with nature

Ankilimidega is a village of 680 inhabitants, situated north of the green village of Andranomena, in the rural town of Ejeda. This village has not been selected for the intervention of the Water Resources Management Project but the villagers do not give up. At first they just reproduced what happens in the village of Andranomena at the extent of their capabilities: The point of water is managed by a management committee and water users pay a monthly

contribution of MGA 100 (about EUR 0.035) per month per household. The water users adopted a local agreement to govern the operation of village wells.

13 women observed the activities of gardening in the village of Andranomena and decided to try this activity in the vicinity of the wells. In June 2009, they have procured the necessary seeds and have installed a dozen flowerbeds over a total area of 5 acres.

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## Adaptation to climate change: green villages are not on the fringe

The three years of planting campaigns we faced demonstrated that climate change is no longer a mere hypothesis but a reality. Farmers are struggling to find their bearings to organize their agricultural activity: tamarind trees tend to bloom too early, the egg of certain animals comes a little later than usual, etc. But above all, rain time is almost unpredictable: many farmers watched helplessly their plants withering and dying. Activities of reforestation and forest restoration have yielded mediocre results.

So, with the support of the WWF Water Resources Management project, the farmers from the green villages installed simple rain gauges to collect new information on the precipitation in order to have information on climate trends at the local level. Thirty rain gauges were installed in the villages. Young volunteers and fokontany leaders have been trained on maintenance of gauges and data collection. The first rains have already been registered. In Sakoantovo, where there is a primary forest for example, they register 29mm of rain whereas in Andranomena, a village located far from forest, they register only 5mm of rain. These data will allow villagers and local authorities to be more aware about climate change and the importance of forests. At the same time, the data will help them organize their activities according to weather patterns.

Next step would be to install thermometers, near these gauges, to monitor temperatures as well.

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## A Brand New Center for Interpretation and Documentation on Mangroves

November 11th 2009 was marked by the official inauguration of the Center for Interpretation and Documentation on Mangroves in Ambondrolava. The center will be used as a training/meeting place for students, teachers and tourists but also a place of discovery for rural communities. Many efforts have been made by the Honko Association during 9 months of work and training. The Association is led by 2 experts in restoration of mangrove and works in partnership with WWF.

Following the traditional custom of South-western Madagascar, a zebu has been sacrificed for the guests and especially for community leaders and local communities in the area. Guests visited the infrastructure for the production of biogas and the mangrove forest and received explanations by the new guides from Honko Association. "The role played by mangroves to the marine ecosystem and its contribution to minimize sedimentation" was the point that stroke most during the ceremony.

The construction of the center by Honko Association and WWF will allow different entities (schoolchildren, students, tourists, etc.) to discover the importance of the mangrove ecosystem, but also promote the participatory conservation of local communities for this ecological niche. This ecosystem, if well conserved, will be the base for sustainable natural resources products on which local community depend on. Tourism nowadays is a great opportunity for the local population, as tourists can visit the mangroves.

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## Social mobilization to control wildfires

After analyzing the information collected by local communities in rural communes of Behompy, (where the new protected area PK 32 is located) and Maromandra, three major outbreaks of fire was determined. It was decided to establish an emergency unit (WWF, Direction Régionale des Forêts and, army) with as objectives: extinguish fires, mobilize local communities to identify the origins of fires and act accordingly .



As the 3 main outbreaks of fire were in two different areas, two groups were formed to:

- Encourage local communities to get involved by informing them of the existence of fires in and around the new protected area,
  - Raise their awareness on the status of this protected area and on relevant legislation
- Extinguish fires
- Establish a mechanism empowering local communities in the prevention against forest fires and responding to settle cases of forests fires that are reported.

Fires have been extinguished and firewalls have been established.

### And on our communications side...

With double the manpower, we can do a lot more in communications these days. While we continue the press work on a national level by creating radio programs, writing press releases in French and organize press conferences to interact with the local press, we reinforced our efforts on an international level. We write press releases every month and publish them on "panda.org" on the front page. The news stories there usually get a good pickup in the international media.

[http://www.panda.org/wwf\\_news/news/?178781/Shipwreck-an-ecological-disaster-for-southern-Madagascar](http://www.panda.org/wwf_news/news/?178781/Shipwreck-an-ecological-disaster-for-southern-Madagascar)

[http://www.panda.org/wwf\\_news/news/?182662/Madagascars-major-reefs-among-most-at-risk-from-climate-change](http://www.panda.org/wwf_news/news/?182662/Madagascars-major-reefs-among-most-at-risk-from-climate-change)

<http://www.panda.org/?184461/30000-young-Malagasy-back-strong-Copenhagen-deal>

A general focus was the climate change campaign. We organized a TV debate, a press conference and participated in several international activities for the climate summit in Copenhagen. Madagascar's youth collected 30,000 signatures for "Vote Earth" with the help of WWF.



The communications department made sure, those signatures were uploaded to the "Vote Earth"- campaign site and the People's Orb as well as shown on a huge banner in Copenhagen.

We also had quite a number of international journalists coming over in the last three months. Our department organized their trips and helped them with contacts. Behind the scenes, we are preparing and revising our new communication strategy. A lot more to come in the next couple of months!

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## TESTIMONY FROM OUR EXPLORERS

It was a strangely tranquil morning in Maromena. Even through this silence outside of the house, I could feel an unquietness in the air. My departure was meant to be today, and the blue sky was unusually patterned with white clouds in disarray.

The backpacks feel heavier than when I arrived, full of dust and sand from neglect these last few months. It seems strange to use shoes again, let alone to prepare for the readjustment to the once familiar surroundings of basic civilization. I find my mind filled at once with a flash of three months' worth of activities and memories, from my arrival to today.

I took stock of the various challenges which I now recall fondly, as they improved my character and my mindset, from the obstacles that were overcome to the fears enriched the soul.

In a fraction of seconds, the many faces which became familiar, the warm smiles and the simplest dialogues (due to my poor Malagasy!)...

each sifted through my mind. I wanted to hold on to each memory in detail. Unable to recall every moment, I opt for holding on to the wisdom

that they provided. Despite the lack of formal education, I appreciate the many skills which this community have acquired for reading signs of Nature, and the amazing discovery of recognizing one's own foot print on the fine sand.

Within the 3 months placement I always tended to picture the day of my departure as a joyful moment where, after all, I would strongly desire all the amenities which I missed in this challenging setting. But life has shown me otherwise. My mind filling with memories, expressing promises of return, exchanging honest handshakes and pure hugs, with eloquent watery eyes filled with heartfelt meaning. Unaware of my change, I had grown a *vezo* within.

To be a volunteer one needs to be able to acknowledge that there's no right or wrong, but different ways to perceive issues. A volunteer needs to be able to learn more than teach, and become an eternal chameleon . He/She needs to be able to weep, get attached to people that they've never imagined being attached to—simple strangers on arrival. You need to be able to survive after this experience, knowing that somewhere in a tiny hamlet, where neither electricity nor mobile networks are available, there are people which somehow made you by simply showing how they are.





And while these people were eager yet reticent about learning, after a while they would demonstrate pure acts of compassion which would blow you away. That's just the malagasy way, it's never enough just to throw money at good causes and go away. We need respect, face-time and tolerance in order to achieve things together. That's the foundation which true friendships are built. Obviously to say good bye to these people, who became your extended family, community and only source of human connection for some months may be much harder than it sounds.

The hours dwindled to minutes, minutes to seconds, and soon I would be seeing Maromena, my "field home", for the last time—at least for the time being. Slowly I realize that whatever has been shared about Conservation and Sustainability, whatever impact was made on the ecosystem, would have had no meaning if at the time of my departure I didn't feel the bitter salty taste of tears. I would have needed more than guile to be drifted totally intact.



And walking through the fine sand, I leave footprints after me. Reaching the warm shore, where waves break knee high, I felt the sea weeds interlacing on my legs. In some way it felt comforting and familiar, so I faced the turquoise lagoon one last time.

As we are bound to return to the source one day, I left Maromena through the same lagoon which to a certain extent brought me here. Riding off on a high tide, waves splashing on my face, drops of sea mingling with tears, my footprints somewhere in the sand may be erased by the same waves. Hopefully those footprints are remembered by some—after all, they recognize each other's footprints, so why not mine then? I will always recognize theirs, anytime I look within, for their footprint has somehow shaped the man I am today, a former volunteer in their hidden world.

Ramon Moraes Sales Moura

**BONNES FETES DE FIN D'ANNEE A TOUS!**

