

Newsletter

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Society • Politics • Economics • Tourism • Minerals • Wildlife • Events • Society • Politics • Economics • Tourism • Minerals • Wildlife • Events

Society news

The Society meeting due to be held on Wednesday 24th June was cancelled given the continuing restrictions in place. There is still in place the daytime event planned for Saturday 31st October, with talks by the environmental biologist Nina Finley and by the marine conservation group Blue Ventures, to include a short film on the life of a Vezo fisherwoman.

Details of this event and other are on our website at www.anglo-malagasysociety.co.uk and on Facebook. The website also has a summary of some of the previous talks for those unable to attend, together with much other useful information. This includes directions to the venue for our meetings, which is the Upper Vestry Hall of St George's Church, Bloomsbury, London WC1A 2HR, which is two minutes' walk from the British Museum.

We shall publish the next newsletter as of September 2020. Please send any material for inclusion as well as any changes in your contact details to the editor Julian Cooke, whose e-mail address is juliancooke@yahoo.co.uk.

We now have nearly a complete archive of previous editions of the newsletter, which started in March 1977, with thanks in particular to Theresa Haine and Chris Stone who have helped to fill most of the gaps since we last made an appeal. We are only missing four elusive editions and we would appreciate any assistance in tracking down a copy of each: numbers 7 (1980), 13 & 14 (1984-5) and 16 (1986). We plan as indicated before to provide a separate supplement to a future newsletter with excerpts from some of these previous editions, which contain a wide range of fascinating material.

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Politics in Madagascar

As in most countries, the coronavirus Covid-19 has been the dominant issue in recent months in Madagascar, which appeared to contain the threat if with a degree of controversy over its approach.

The first weeks of April saw an increase in the number of cases of those who had been infected, which reached 95 on the 7th of the month, a fortnight after the first one was detected. A number of flights repatriated foreign nationals while it was clear that the arrival from abroad of those carrying the virus was a factor in the provinces of Antananarivo, Fianarantsoa and Toamasina, which had restrictions on transport and a curfew in place. The state extended its emergency measures, ordered 4m masks to be produced locally and deployed the army to help to maintain order especially in the capital's *gares routières*, which were re-opened ahead of the Easter weekend.

On 8th April President Andry Rajoelina claimed that a plant-based remedy Covid-Organics might solve the crisis and so could change the history of the world; he announced plans to build a production plant as well as to collaborate with other countries. One of his predecessors, Didier Ratsiraka, pledged his pension to help to fund the project and he also backed the security measures in place, saying that discipline was key. The prime minister, Christian Ntsay, emerged from a period in which he had kept a low profile with a series of meetings in Fianarantsoa.

By the end of the Easter weekend the number of cases had moved to 108 and the government started to distribute sums of 100,000 ariary (approx. £21) to up to 160,000 households in the capital as the effects of the lock-down took hold.

On 19th April Rajoelina gave more details of the herbal remedy, based on the *Artemisia annua* or sweet wormwood plant, which has been used in treating malaria through artemisinin and for which there had been tests by the Malagasy Institute of Applied Research (IMRA). There were some doubts over the product although the president dismissed sceptics as enemies of the state. The product was launched formally on 20th April with plans for its distribution free of charge to the vulnerable as well as a compulsory consumption by children returning to school. While the president said a number of western countries were interested in the product, the World Health Organisation (WHO) advised against its use as did the Académie Nationale de Médecine de Madagascar (ANAMEM) given the lack of detailed scientific testing. The firm Bionexx SA was set to produce the first batches of the product and Rajoelina announced plans to plant artemisia in the Haute Matsirata region.



distribution of the remedy in areas of the capital.

On 22nd April WHO issued a communiqué saying that there was no proof that the remedy could prevent or cure the effect of the virus, while another former president Marc Ravalomanana expressed concern as to how the product was being distributed in schools, which had started to re-open in part. Over 1,000 military personnel and 120 vehicles were engaged in the bulk

There were four days with no new cases up until 24th April when the total was steady at 121, of whom some two-thirds were in hospital and one-third considered to have recovered. The government eased restrictions as of 27th April with employees able to work a longer period from 6am to 1pm and with a resumption in public transport, although the wearing of masks was compulsory; those not doing so were liable to serve fifteen minutes of community service, such as street cleaning, a punishment later increased to thirty minutes.



Some 45,000 bottles of Covid-Organics were distributed in Antananarivo, Toamasina and Fianarantsoa while after a meeting with Rajoelina the president of ANAMEM, Professor Marcel Razanamparany, said that the Academy did not oppose use of the product as an enhanced traditional remedy rather than as a medicine. The armed forces drank samples to show its safety.

Rajoelina said that Senegal had ordered the product and at the end of April Madagascar sent a consignment to Equatorial Guinea as a gift, officially to supply all fifteen countries in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS, if met with some denials), while Tanzania and the Comoros were among other countries to take a delivery.

On 1st May the Council of Ministers extended the health emergency for a further period. In early May tighter controls went into place in the north-west of Madagascar over concerns of an influx of Comorians fleeing the possible effect of the virus on their archipelago. On 3rd May, in an extended television broadcast, Rajoelina said that there would be a new factory to produce Covid-Organics within a month, that the product would help to promote Madagascar and that all criticism should stop.

On 4th May transport operators suspended operations given mounting losses under the partial lock-down while church services were again permitted in the regions under lock-down, if on a limited scale. On 7th May there was a sharp rise in the number of cases, 35 in total, of which 22 were in the capital and 13 in Toamasina, linked in part to the Ambatovy mine. Those in the capital included nine children at a private school and the Ministry of Education faced renewed calls to re-assess its policy. WHO called for Madagascar to undertake formal clinical trials on Covid-Organics, with its support.

The higher incidence of positive cases continued, based on a number of tests taken, and reached 45 out of 205 on 16th May when the state of emergency was further extended. The next day saw the first reported death, that of a non-medical member of staff at a hospital in Toamasina who had underlying health issues and was, according to the president, too sick to take Covid-Organics. Rajoelina also suggested that an apparent difference in the counting of cases might be down to outside manipulation and appealed to the patriotism of all. An Ethiopian Airlines flight brought a third consignment of medical equipment from the Jack Ma Foundation.

The port of Toamasina accounted for a high proportion of new cases and Roland Ratsiraka, a deputy and several times mayor of the city, raised concerns over the capacity of its hospitals. On 25th May the government sent both doctors and soldiers to help to deal with the growing crisis, in which corpses were apparently found on the streets. Rajoelina visited Toamasina and

announced plans for a new laboratory to undertake analysis. Ratsiraka now moved to criticise the government's approach and called for an end to the quarantine as of 1st June.

By late May there had been over 650 cases if only out of some 10,000 tests carried out since March. There was a growing scandal over the Ministry of Education spending 8.4bn ariary (£1.8m) on sweets to take away the bitter taste of Covid-Organics when administered at schools. Later, on 5th June, the Minister of Education, Rijasoa Josoa Andriamanana, left the post she had only taken up in January over the matter. Rajoelina had to deny reports that he had said that that WHO had offered a \$20m payment to poison Covid-Organics, part of a wider set of stories on the role of a developing nation.



The coronavirus aside, other issues in the second half of May related to the refurbishment of the Rova palace in the capital and the Iles Eparses. In the first there were concerns about the nature of a new Roman-style amphitheatre and how it had come to be approved at the UNESCO-listed site. In June a dozen organisations lodged three claims with the Conseil d'Etat objecting to the building and the process; Raymond Ranjeva, the head of the Malagasy

Academy, noted that the issue was dividing the country and called for a national consultation, which was rejected. On the second topic Christine Razanamahaso, the president of the National Assembly, called for mediation by the African Union and the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) over plans by France to make the islands a marine nature reserve, which some experts saw as weakening the country's position rather than a forthright re-affirmation of its rights.

At the end of May there was a record number of new daily cases at sixty, which made for a total of 826 since 19th March, of whom six had died. The government tightened restrictions in the regions of Atsinanana and Sava although it eased those in the capital, where shops could now stay open until 3pm. Rajoelina noted that, in spite of the increasing numbers, the epidemic was coming under control. The authorities used a plane and five boats to patrol for illegal journeys in the north-west of the country as well as on the Pangalanes Canal. The nature of the restrictions prompted altercations in the port of Toamasina.

On 4th June came the first death in the capital, that of a pregnant woman whose child was delivered by a caesarean operation. The head of the Police Nationale said that there would be tighter control of the curfew and on the wearing of masks. The Contrôleur Général of the police, Dany Rakotozanany, reported that there had been 175 incidents of domestic violence, higher during the lock-down than normal as in other countries. By 6th June the total number of cases passed 1,000 to reach 1,026 if still a relatively modest number, although the number of deaths reached eight. There were discussions on the logistics of repatriating some 1,250 vulnerable Malagasy citizens abroad as well as plans for more European citizens to leave, while 164 Malagasy workers returned from Kuwait in line with a government order there in April.

Over sixty health workers had been infected by mid-June, which prompted paramedics to call for greater protection. Although the medical emergency was extended for a fifth time, on 14th June Rajoelina ended the confinement measures in all but four districts of the Analamanga

region, saying that the virus had been controlled, although restrictions remained on travel and large gatherings of over fifty people. The president announced that a new factory would soon be built to manufacture Covid-Organics in a gel form, to be known as COV+, the fourth variant of a product reported to have cured 354 people. Rajoelina said that the product would go on sale on the international market and that Madagascar would launch other drugs to compete with the large global pharmaceutical companies.

The repatriations and the number of daily cases increased, with a record number of 153 over the two days to 21st June, while a fourteenth victim died. Rajoelina inaugurated the Laboratoire d'Analyses Médicales Malagasy (LA2M) on 23rd June, intended to test for a range of diseases and to increase the daily capacity for Covid-19 to 1,000 alongside existing clinics; the country had by then carried out 19,027 tests since the start of the epidemic.

On 24th June the National Assembly approved a revised Finance Bill with no amendments, with only the eleven pro-Ravalomanana TIM deputies abstaining. Meanwhile in Germany scientists at the Max Planck Institute said that initial tests on Covid-Organics had shown some promising results.



Ravalomanana was absent from the muted celebrations of the country's 60th anniversary as was Rajoelina's immediate predecessor Hery Rajaonarimampianina, although Didier Ratsiraka did attend as did Norbert Lala Ratsirahonana, a former interim head of state. The new amphitheatre, known as Masaondro or Sun, was not ready in time and the debate continued over the merits of the £1.3m project.

At the end of June the government extended the emergency and the prime minister said that the increase in cases had to an extent been expected.

Economic and social matters

Finance and aid

The substantial impact of the lock-down led the Ministry of the Economy in April to revise its estimate of economic growth down from 5.5% to 1.5% for 2020, while it assumed tax receipts would be nearly a third lower than expected at 5bn ariary (c. £1.1bn), if the crisis lasted no more than three months. By the time of the Finance Bill amendment in June the expectation was for only 0.8% growth, with a loss of c. £600m in output and a fall of 26% in fiscal receipts.

The country has received considerable support to help its efforts to counter the impact of the crisis. Tourism has seen a dramatic decline, while there has been disruption to mining operations and manufacturing exports, as well as to trade and investment. In April WHO outlined a programme worth \$31m to help those most in need, which it estimated at 2m people. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) released \$166m in funds under its rapid credit facility to support government revenues. The total amount of aid by late April was put at

\$444m and by mid-May at \$518m, of which \$169m was being negotiated still and of which 51% comprised loans at favourable rates. The US government had given \$2.5m, the European Union provided first €3m than a further €21m to help Madagascar to fight the pandemic and France announced the release of €15m of funds through its own development agency. There was apparent progress in debt relief following an earlier accord with the IMF, under which Madagascar would be spared \$16m in monthly payments as interest or capital on debts to G20 countries. In June the United Nations launched an emergency appeal for \$82m.

Tinaharivelo Razafimahefa, the Minister of the Interior who also headed the council CCO Covid-19 that was managing the government's response to the crisis, said that there would be transparency on all gifts, small and large; there were concerns that some funds had gone missing.

In mid-June Rajoelina announced an ambitious funding programme worth 1.043bn ariary (c. £220m) with a focus on infrastructure.

Health

There were 463,689 recorded cases of malaria in Madagascar in the first four months of 2020, of whom 487 victims had died. By the end of May there had been 552 deaths compared to 657 in the whole of 2019.

There was also an outbreak of dengue fever in Mahajanga and the Boeny region for the first time since 2010.

In June the civil society on water, sanitation and hygiene (OSCEAH) made a representation to certain senators in which they highlighted that 57% of the population did not have access to clean water, that four out of five of these drank water contaminated with faecal matter and that the budget for such services had reduced even before the crisis.

Press

Madagascar was ranked 54th out of 180 countries in a survey on press freedom by Reporters Without Borders (Sans Frontières) in April. In May President Rajoelina announced the release of any journalists in detention on the international day to mark press freedom; this followed the arrest of Arphine Rahelisoa from the newspaper Valisoa over her criticism of Rajoelina's handling of the coronavirus pandemic, on the basis of inciting hatred. Gaëlle Borgia, the *France 24* correspondent in Madagascar, was one of the team at the *New York Times* that received a Pulitzer prize for the work on Russian intervention in the presidential election in 2018 and other elections.

Telecoms

In June it was reported that Exim Bank of China was ready to provide \$47m of finance to help to modernise Madagascar's communications network, which Huawei would undertake. In the same month Telma switched on its 5G commercial service in Madagascar, in Antananarivo and Toamasina initially, based on equipment from Ericsson.

Agriculture

A report in May from Aust & Hachmann (Canada) noted that vanilla prices had fallen by half from their highs in 2018. While the industrial vanilla market, comprising some 80% of the vanilla trade, had benefitted from the increase in home baking during lock-downs, the food service and institutional sectors, where much of the gourmet quality vanilla is sold, had seen a sharp fall in demand. Initial projections for the 2019 harvest in Madagascar were in the range of 1,100–1,200 tonnes yet final production was probably closer to 1,500t with improved quality and maturity as early picking and theft were reduced, a factor in an indication of a harvest nearer 2,000t in 2020. The government in Madagascar has been stricter in enforcing opening and closing dates for harvesting and it had imposed an export ban at end May, but then deferred it, while there was also a first minimum price set in decades, at \$350/kg. With the onset of Covid-19, the government relaxed some of the stricter regulations for the repatriation of foreign currencies, which helped to mitigate the constraints of an official minimum export price.

There were various new projects to plant artemisia to supply the manufacture of Covid-Organics. In Ambalavao there had been 27 farmers in 2007, a number that had now increased to over 2,000 in nineteen of the twenty communes in the district. The cultivated area amounted to 500 hectares and the historical production had been 250 tonnes per annum, mainly for the treatment of malaria. President Rajoelina has indicated that the country should produce 3,000t pa and encouraged farmers to switch production from rice given the ten-fold higher selling price at \$3,000 per tonne.

Insecurity

The familiar pattern of incidents of bandit attacks, summary justice and kidnappings continued through the second quarter of the year. In May, in a heated exchange in the National Assembly, General Richard Ravalomanana, the Minister for the Gendarmerie, accused certain deputies of having been complicit with the *dahalo*, or bandits. In mid-May the authorities captured Norbert Ramandiamanana alias Lama, whose gang had been involved in a suspected fifty kidnappings over a period of twenty years, including the recent one of Anil Karim, released after a fortnight; Lama died of his injuries during the arrest.

Prisons

Remarkably the first incidences of the virus in prisons were not apparent until June. To mark the 60th anniversary of independence Andry Rajoelina granted an amnesty to prisoners over 60 if men and 55 if women if they had already served ten years of a sentence, as well as those whose remaining term was less than three months, but excluding crimes such as corruption, murder and harming natural resources. The measures also did not also cover those awaiting trial, who represent perhaps half of the 28,000 prisoners in total in the country.

Energy

In late June the European Investment Bank agreed a \$39m funding of the JIRAMA Water III project with the Minister of Finance, Richard Randriamandrato, which followed a \$34m EU grant from the Africa Investment Platform (AIP). The funds are intended for investment in the drinking water supply system in the capital Antananarivo; the balance of the \$83m total cost

will come from the state and the Water & Sanitation for the Urban Poor (WSUP), a not-for-profit organisation.

Business

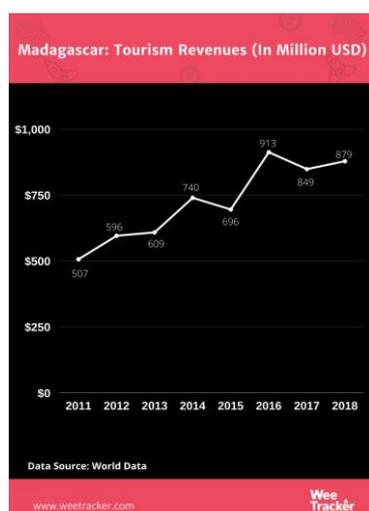
The coronavirus crisis hit businesses hard in Madagascar's free enterprise zones with only call centres spared, as some 90% of firms expected to lay off some employees, who numbered 150,000 in total. The private sector had regretted the lack of initial support from the government, which did in mid-June issue a statement that that it would soon launch an economic stimulus package to help more than 980,000 small businesses. The package would be worth approx. £60m and comprise loans targeting small farmers and agricultural distributors, as well as businesses in the tourism, trade, handicrafts and manufacturing sectors. The loans would have interest rates below 10% with repayment periods of 6 to 24 months, which compares to typical rates from commercial banks of 20-40%.



The Enhanced Integrated Framework initiative of the World Trade Organisation carried a report on how the long-established Groupe Socotra textile mill in Madagascar had adapted to the challenges brought by the coronavirus. The article, which draws on previous work by Fabrice Lehmann, also explores the complexity of global supply chains and how the fashion industry might re-engineer the value chain to the benefit of producer countries.

In June Andry Rajoelina unveiled prototypes of a new brand of locally made cars as well as motorbikes due to be on the road in three years. The GasyCar will initially involve an assembly of parts from German and Chinese manufacturers who are shareholders in the project; the firm has an initial order from the police for motorbikes.

Tourism



The tourism sector has struggled with wide-reaching consequences after a period of decent expansion. The sector accounts for some 44,000 direct jobs and a further 300,000 indirectly. The five-month period from July to November accounts for 83% of the volume of passengers and so there are limited prospects for the industry given continued travel restrictions.

Air Madagascar was reported to be on the brink of ending its agreement with Air Austral even before the coronavirus crisis, which saw the fleet grounded and which prompted moves to re-launch the business with a focus on cargo.

The New York Times carried an article in May by the photographer Marcus Westberg, if based on a trip in 2015, which is available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/05/travel/madagascar.html>.

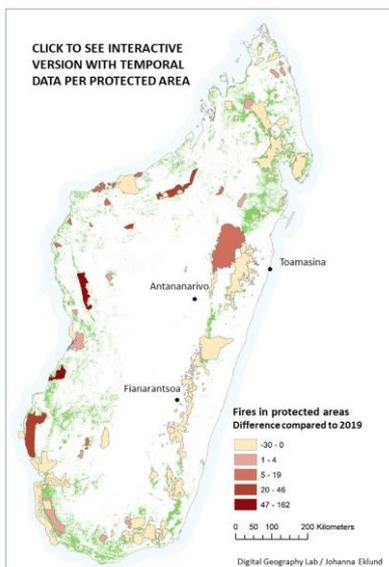
Minerals and mining

The coronavirus has created considerable uncertainty in the mining sector, with a fall in prices and health concerns contributing to lower production. Many or most foreign workers at the Ambatovy nickel and cobalt left the country, for example.

In June Madagascar was reported to have fulfilled seven of the fifteen recommended actions by which it might be approved for the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), while it had a further 18 months to address the eight remaining points.

Wildlife and conservation

Forests and protected areas



The fire season appears to have started early and is likely to be more intense in 2020 as rural populations short of tourism revenue and employment opportunities turn to the forest to survive, while there has been a reduction in the activities of the NGOs and state agencies that might offer protection. The Ministry of the Environment recorded 52,000 forest fires from January until the start of June, with dry forests in the west of the country worst affected. There are more details in a Mongabay article at <https://news.mongabay.com/2020/06/in-madagascars-dry-forests-covid-19-sparks-an-intense-early-fire-season/>.

In April Voahary Gasy Alliance warned of the impact that the crisis was having on protected areas in the Diana region in the north of the country, which have seen an increase in illegal acts since the end of March 2020. Mongabay carried an article based on an email correspondence with the Minister of the Environment, Baomiavotse Vahinala Raharinirina, which highlighted the pressures that the crisis would bring given lower tourism revenue, increased illegal activity and more fires as people moved back to the country; the full report is at <https://news.mongabay.com/2020/04/covid-19-will-hurt-madagascars-conservation-funding-qa-with-minister-vahinala-raharinirina/>. Mongabay also highlighted threats to the Tsaratanana Reserve, where satellite images showed rapid clearing of forest from slash-and-burn agriculture for marijuana cultivation.



An article in April explained the work of Madagasikara Voakajy, a long-standing partner of Fauna & Flora International (FFI), in planting out seedlings of the Perrier's baobab, having worked to find that boiling the seeds for sixteen seconds optimised germination. The details are at <https://phys.org/news/2020-04-baobab-brink-thousands-trees-madagascar.html>.



BirdLife International provided an update on progress at its Ampasy Research Station, set up in 2015, which helps to protect the lowland Tsitongambarika Forest through providing alternative livelihoods and an extensive programme of tree-planting. There are details at <https://www.birdlife.org/worldwide/news/new-research-station-protects-madagascar-forest-inside-out>.

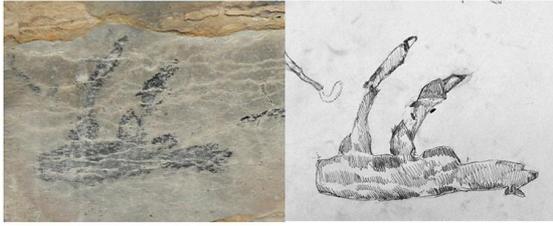
The EarthTouch News Network carried an article in April (previously on *bioGraphic*) about the cultivation of insects as a food as part of a programme to help to protect Madagascar's environment. <https://www.earthtouchnews.com/conservation/conservation/farming-insects-to-save-lemurs/>

Species

The Royal Botanic Gardens Kew have published a new paper showing that Madagascar's central grasslands have much in common with ancient grasslands in other countries. The paper notes that Madagascar's grasslands are under-investigated and there is a perception that disturbance shaped them only after human arrival, yet the country would be an anomaly, as around the world fire and grazing have shaped tropical grasslands. The study found that levels of endemism, diversity and grass age supported the presence of fire-maintained ancient assemblages, primarily composed of tall caespitose species with narrow leaves and low bulk density, and of grazer-maintained assemblage characterized by mat-forming, high-density grasses with wide leaves. Grazer-dependent grasses would only have co-evolved with a now-extinct megafauna and ironically, the human introduction of cattle was likely to have introduced a megafaunal substitute. The citation is Solofondranohatra CL, Vorontsova MS, Hempson GP, Hackel J, Cable S, Vololoniaina J, Lehmann CER. 2020 Fire and grazing determined grasslands of central Madagascar represent ancient assemblages. *Proc. R. Soc. B* 20200598. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2020.0598> (which is a paid-for site), while there is a review of the research at <https://www.kew.org/read-and-watch/dispelling-myths-madagascar-grassland>.

In June a new species of huntsman spider was described in Madagascar and named in honour of the climate activist Greta Thunberg as *Thunberga greta* by German arachnologist Peter Jäger. In the same paper published in *Zootaxa* (<http://dx.doi.org/10.11646/zootaxa.4790.2.3>), Jäger also moved three existing species into a new *Thunberga* genus, creating *Thunberga malagassus*, *Thunberga nossibeensis* and *Thunberga septifera*, the three having originally been described in 1907-08 in the genus *Olios* by Norwegian entomologist Embrik Strand.

Dr Mark Scherz identified a new species of diamond frog named *Rhombophryne ellae*, known only from the Montagne d'Ambre National Park. The SciNews article at <http://www.sci-news.com/biology/rhombophryne-ellae-08539.html> includes the publication details in *Zoosystematics and Evolution*. A new species of stump-toed frog named *Stumpffia troschaueri* was found in the Sahamalaza forest on the north-west coast of Madagascar. Dr Samuel Penny of the University of Brighton noted that the frog, which is only 0.4 inches in length and is already considered critically endangered, was named after Christoph Froschauer, the 16th century Swiss printer whose family name derives from 'the floodplain full of frogs'.



In a new paper published in the *Journal of Island and Coastal Archaeology*, Julian Hume of the Natural History Museum and his colleagues described what is thought to be the only known drawing of a giant sloth lemur from caves in western Madagascar. The museum has details on its website at

<https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/news/2020/june/only-known-drawing-of-extinct-giant-sloth-lemur-found-in-cave.html>.

The most complete skeleton of any mammal found from the southern hemisphere from the Mesozoic age, 66m years old, has identified a new species named *Adalatherium hui*, which in Malagasy and Latinized Greek translates into 'crazy beast' with a tribute to Yaoming Hu, a paleontologist who died in 1988. The animal had an unusual anatomical structure, such as more vertebrae than other contemporaneous mammals. The research was published in April in the journal *Nature* with the citation Krause, D. W., Hoffmann, S., Hu, Y., Wible, J. R., Rougier, G. W., Kirk, E. C., ... Rahantarisoa, L. J. (2020). Skeleton of a Cretaceous mammal from Madagascar reflects long-term insularity. *Nature*. doi:[10.1038/s41586-020-2234-8](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-020-2234-8). There is more at <https://www.livescience.com/ancient-bizarre-mammal-madagascar.html>.

Professor Jonah Ratsimbazafy warned in April of the risks of lemurs being contaminated by the coronavirus.

Charities and NGOs

Money for Madagascar's appeal to help those in the country vulnerable to the impact of the coronavirus has to date raised £41,000 and its website has details of the work it has been doing, including emergency grants; the charity's site at <https://moneyformadagascar.org/covid-19-appeal/> has more details. Unfortunately MfM was not one of the winners of the Ecclesiastical Movement for Good awards. The UK chocolate brand MIA (Made In Africa) supported communities alongside MfM by committing part of its Change charitable fund to enable local production of face masks and to provide free meals. MfM also celebrated World Rainforest Day on 22nd June with a twinning plan aimed at restoring Madagascar's rainforests and protecting the vulnerable communities that depend on them. To do this, they have looked to raise £5 for each tree to plant, maintain and protect it: https://moneyformadagascar.org/tree_twins/.



TASC Madagascar has continued to support Feedback Madagascar in Fianarantsoa by sending £4,000 to help with the urgent issue of the provision of clean water and hygiene education as the crisis led to a deterioration in the outlook.

Books and films

The book on Madagascar *Gardens of Mars* by Society member John Gimlette has been delayed until January 2021 due to the virus but holds plenty of promise according to the publishing blurb: *As well as visiting every corner of Madagascar, John journeys deep into its past in order to better understand how Madagascar became what it is today. Along the way, he meets politicians, sorcerers, gem prospectors, militiamen, rioters, lepers and the descendants of seventeenth-century pirates.*

The 13th edition of the definitive Bradt Guide to Madagascar has gone to print, after its own delay due to the coronavirus, and will now be available in September.

A new documentary *Madagasikara: The Real Madagascar* had its digital premiere in June. The film has been described as aiming to dispel myths as it ‘shines a cold and unforgiving light on how capitalist corruption and lack of international solidarity plunged a country into despair’. The production was directed and produced by Cam Cowan, who since 2014 has focussed on the resilience of three women Lin, Deborah and Tina, against the background of the problems the island faces. There is a trailer for the film at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TcHXkU3TmUU&feature=youtu.be>.



A Canadian Keriann McGoogan has written a book about her 2006 trip to north-west Madagascar to study the behaviour of lemurs and some of the issues she had, which seem to reflect a number of factors.