

Newsletter

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Society news

The Society has replaced the meeting that it had planned for 31st October with an online event on Saturday 5th November at 2pm. There will be an update from Antananarivo on the latest impact of the Covid-19 virus as well as a short presentation by the environmental biologist Nina Finley and a short film from the marine conservation group Blue Ventures on the life of a Vezo fisherwoman in the marine environment of south-west Madagascar. There will be time for questions and we expect the event to run for 90 minutes. If you would like to attend please send an email to anglomalagasy@gmail.com and you will receive the joining instructions for Zoom.

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 usual 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 December 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.

At the risk of sounding like a stuck record we may keep in place the request for help in tracing the elusive four previous editions of the newsletter which would complete our archive: numbers 7 (1980), 13 & 14 (1984-5) and 16 (1986). The promised separate supplement with excerpts from some of these previous editions will now be one for Christmas.

Mr David Ashley has been appointed Her Majesty's Ambassador to the Republic of Madagascar and Her Majesty's Non-Resident Ambassador to the Union of the Comoros in succession to Dr Phil Boyle. Mr Ashley will take up his appointment during December 2020.

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Politics in Madagascar

The coronavirus Covid-19 has continued as a dominant issue in recent months in Madagascar.

By 2nd July the number of reported new cases had risen above 100, including two deputies at the National Assembly, which prompted a thorough clean of the premises. On 5th July the government re-imposed restrictions in the capital and in the province of Anamalanga, banning transport and limiting the opening hours of essential services to between 6am and midday, with only one member of a household being allowed out during those hours. The measures were due to last a fortnight and proved difficult to enforce. There was a sharp increase to 216 in new incidences on 4th July while 210 of the 222 cases reported on 7th July were in Anamalanga, when there were two further deaths: Lucien Rakotomalala, who was deputy for Morambe, and a French citizen, although the French embassy had helped to organise flights to take many of its citizens and other Europeans out of the country. Rakotomalala was later said to have shown symptoms but tested negative, although the former minister Paul Rabary in turn tested positive.

In a communiqué on the pandemic the platform for civil society organisations PFNOSC noted that corruption had limited the effectiveness of road blocks in stopping the spread of the virus. It also criticised the delay in engaging with business to manage the crisis and described how increasing poverty had added to the levels of insecurity in the country, which had also seen an impact on education and a shortage of proper equipment for medical staff.

On 12th July the authorities adopted a new approach to rely on three new treatment centres in the capital, at the Ivato conference centre, the Mahamsina stadium and the technical college at Alarabia while also rolling over the restrictions in place for a further period. The armed forces deployed armoured cars in the capital and helicopters in the regions to help with enforcement. By mid-month the virus had spread to nineteen of the twenty-two regions, if still mostly in Anamalanga, with 262 cases and a further four deaths, including a third for officials in the Lutheran church. More districts faced restrictions and by 22nd July there had been a new record of 614 cases, with four deaths. The number of reported deaths reached ninety-nine at the end of the month, during which there had been mixed reports on the success of the artemisin-based remedy Covid- Organics, with the president of Guinea Bissau claiming its benefits but with the DRC and Nigeria having doubts.

On 3rd August President Andry Rajoelina defended his handling of the crisis and said that the use of Covid-Organics had saved Madagascar from a death rate similar to those seen in the US and Brazil; some 1.3m families had reportedly received the remedy. Rajoelina was active in the launch of a new form of aid to benefit the population called *sosialim-bahoaka* and intended for 200,000 individual households initially at a cost of \$20m; this came alongside a second stage of the social aid *Tosika Fameno* in the cities of Toamasina and Toliara, run in parallel with the *Vatsy Tsinjo* programme. The president noted that the economic cost of the restrictions was proving too great for many and he eased some, allowing activity up to 5pm in the capital, although the medical emergency was further extended.

Rivo Rakotovoao, the Senate president, called for the emergency measures to be lifted as the Ministry of Health indicated that a peak in new cases had passed in early July. The head of the Protestant churches FJKM, Pastor Ammi Irako Andriamahazosa, announced that church services would resume in Antanananarivo and Toamasina. On 22nd August Rajoelina announced a further easing of restrictions, with some internal flights to resume on 1st September, and said that the virus could be beaten in a fortnight. On 24th August the number of positive cases was down to 75, based on the 420 tests undertaken.

On 20th August there was a ministerial re-shuffle, with the Minister of Health Ahmad Ahmad dismissed following his criticism of the handling of the crisis. Irmah Naharimamy, the minister for population, also lost her job; she was due to accompany her new husband, Stuart Wilson, the chargé d'affaires at the US embassy in a new position. Marie Michelle Sahondrarimalala took on the vacant role of Minister of Education.

By the start of September there had been an improvement in the crisis with only twenty new cases, to make for a positive test incidence under 10% compared to approx. 60% in July. The total number of cases by then had been 14,668 with 192 deaths. On 5th September Rajoelina said that the virus was under control and that, while the fight would continue, the restrictions would ease: restaurants and bars could stay open to 10pm, places such as churches and national parks could re-open and ground transport could resume. The incidence of cases did increase further and there were a half-dozen positive tests of people arriving into the country. Yet in his address to the annual meeting of the United Nations on 27th September the prime minister, Christian Ntsay, noted the disease had been controlled: 93% of victims had recovered and the mortality rate was 1.1% (and Covid-Organics was seen as a distinguishing feature).

Through September members of the Senate fought against legislation passed by the National Assembly that would complete the re-structuring of the upper house. The number of senators would reduce from 63 to 18, of whom twelve would be elected in a poll, mostly among the country's mayors, which the electoral commission CENI planned for 11th December. An appeal to the Haute Cour Constitutionnelle (HCC) was unproductive. The opposition parties of TIM, backing former president Marc Ravalomanana, and of HVM, the party which supported Rajoelina's immediate predecessor Hery Rajaonarimampianina, planned to boycott the election and said that they had no confidence in CENI. Ravalomanana had been under pressure following moves to close down various of his businesses over unpaid tax or rent.

Economic and social matters

Finance and aid

The country has received further substantial support to counter the impact of the crisis. A report at the end of July indicated that Madagascar's technical and financial partners had committed \$671.7m of which \$186.4m had been disbursed, mostly from the World Bank and the IMF.

In July the African Bank for Development (ABD) provided a loan of \$37m to help the health sector in particular. The ABD also gave \$2m to deal with climate issues such as drought and cyclones while USAID funded 8,330 tonnes of food for vulnerable people with \$8m. The Norwegian government gave \$4.2m to offset the pressure on the education system, allowing 31,000 pupils to return to school. The EU, France and Germany pledged €40m and the Japanese government gave \$6.5m to fight infectious diseases. The IMF released a further \$172m under its Rapid Credit Facility.

In August Japan provided \$3.8m for medical equipment and the AFD a further \$15m. The EU gave €5m to help those affected by the drought in the south and the US \$5m to help vulnerable families.

In September the World Bank agreed to provide a further \$75m to offset the impact of the crisis and noted that the total of aid had reached \$476m in 2020, equivalent to 3.1% of the country's GDP. The European Union committed a further €36m with a focus on infrastructure spending and job creation.

An amended Finance Act passed in early July. In spite of reduced revenue the state planned a thirteen-fold increase in spending on sports, with sixty stadia, eighteen gymnasias and two Olympic-sized swimming pools due for construction over two years.

Given concerns over possible corruption given the level of aid, the Ministry of Finance announced in July that it would publish accounts monthly.

The Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) said in August that it would not write off the \$8.1m in annual dues that Madagascar owed, of which \$6.7m accrued when the country was suspended from SADC after the events in 2009.

Health

A grant in July of \$470,000 from Unicef helped to provide soap and fund subsidised water (at a cost of 20 ariary rather than Ar. 30 for twenty litres) for 500,000 people in communities that were particularly affected.

The lack of access to family planning clinics due to the crisis has contributed to a higher level of unplanned births in 2020, notably among those aged fifteen to nineteen.

France 24 carried a feature on how cultural shame over menstruation in Madagascar has prevented women being from achieving a true level of empowerment; the report is at <https://www.france24.com/en/20200703-period-shaming-the-battle-for-menstrual-hygiene-in-madagascar>.

Madagascar has seen a higher incidence of malaria in 2020 than in previous years at a rate of 1m compared to a more usual level of 700,000-800,000 cases per year.

Agriculture

In July the African Risk Capacity Insurance Company Limited paid \$2.1m to Madagascar to cover anticipated losses to livelihoods after crop failure in the latest farming season, as a result of drought insurance taken by the country with the support of the African Development Bank.

Mongabay reported in July on the potential impact from an agreement in April to grant an exclusive licence to export live mud crabs to five Chinese companies, in a trade said to be worth \$10m. The details are at <https://news.mongabay.com/2020/07/an-export-boom-threatens-to-put-madagascars-mud-crabs-in-hot-water/>.

In September the Blue Ocean company increased its efforts to secure 250 hectares of mangroves in Manombo-Sud for shellfish farming, in the face of local opposition.

In September Andry Rajoelina attended the re-opening of the sugar processing plant in Brickaville some thirteen years after it closed. The government has plans to gain self-sufficiency from a position in which it imports 100,000 tonnes a year.

The pandemic has contributed to a reduction in rice production and distribution which indicates that there will be a shortfall of 200,000 tonnes; in 2019 the country imported 417,000 tonnes to complement domestic production of 2.39m tonnes.

Insecurity

There was little easing through the third quarter of the year in the number of incidents of banditry, summary justice and kidnappings, while the impact of the coronavirus crisis led to an increase in crime in the capital. In September a conference of bishops called on the government to find a strategy to avoid the population living in fear.

Prisons

There was an incident at the Farafangana prison on August in which twenty-three inmates were killed during an escape attempt; the UN and Amnesty International condemned the excessive use of force. One of those killed was reported to be a seventeen-year old who had spent six years in the prison pending trial.

The government announced plans to build new prisons by 2022 with three due to open this year in Fianarantsoa, Sambava and Imerintsiatosika.

Religion

The festival of Eid Al Adha on 31st July was added to the list of official public holidays, reflecting the rise in importance of Islam; a US report estimated that Moslems represented 20-25% of the population in 2019, compared to a figure of 7% in the 1993 census.

Tourism

The tourism sector has struggled. At end July the industry confederation reported that nine out of ten of the 300,000 jobs in the sector were technically redundant, with implications for some 1.5m people dependent on an income which had also represented 7% of the country's GDP. The loss of revenue has been estimated at \$750m.

Air Madagascar in July formally ended its agreement with Air Austral, whose 40% stake returned to the government. The pressure remained on the start-up airline Madagascar Airways, which had seen its flights suspended over a minor irregularity in February. Air Madagascar undertook twelve flights from Paris in September to repatriate Malagasy citizens although its thirteenth flight was cancelled at short notice, a move that the French authorities ascribed to equalising the position with Air France.

In August the government announced the re-opening of Nosy Be to tourists as of 1st October, with an initial 1,000 visitors a week subject to strict control.

Minerals and mining

Further cuts in output at the Ambatovy nickel and cobalt left Sumitomo of Japan taking control as first the Canadian company Sherritt International and then Korea Resources cut their losses. Exports fell from 4,000 tonnes in January to 2,000 tonnes in April, while the price was also lower by a third. An audit by the Court of Accounts found a number of irregularities in the application for the Base Toliara project.

In September the Singaporean company Reenova made a formal application for a full mining licence for its 75%-owned rare earths project 500km north of Antananarivo. The project has an estimated resource of 560,000 tonnes including the minerals Praseodymium (Pr), Neodymium (Nd), Terbium (Tb) and Europium (Eu). Separately researchers at the universities of St Andrews and Brighton announced the results of tests in northern Madagascar at the Ambohimirahavavy volcano, which showed that the composition of clays are identical to those in southern China, which are the source of a significant proportion of the world's rare earths.

Wildlife and conservation

Forests and protected areas

In July a fire destroyed the historic building containing the National Office for the Environment and its paper records, while the government dismissed its director-general in a move that it said was not linked to the event.

A forum of those running the country's protected areas announced in August that twenty-nine of the 123 sites had seen an increase in fires in 2020, six of them a dramatic one. A separate report from WWF estimated that seventy-two of the areas also faced damage from climate change.

In August South Korea pledged \$5m over five years to help biodiversity in the national parks of Andohahela, Marojejy and the Montagne des Français.

Mongabay carried an article in July on how increasing air pollution was threatening bird life in the 27-hectare Tsarasaotra Park in Antananarivo, one of the few remaining refuges for the water-birds of Madagascar's highlands and the first private site to be classified as a wetland of international importance by the Ramsar Convention. The report is available at <https://news.mongabay.com/2020/07/in-madagascars-capital-pollution-threatens-an-oasis-for-birds/>.

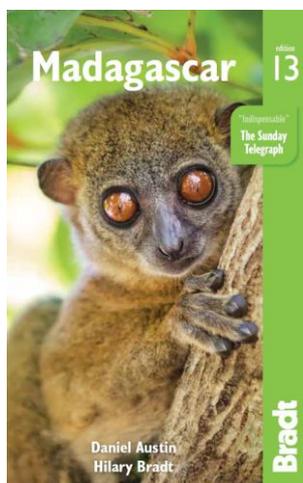
Madagascar was reported in July to be purchasing a dozen tree-planting drones before the end of 2020, theoretically capable of planting up to 400,000 trees a day. The drones first fly over an area to map it and then collect data on soil conditions and topography, combining them with satellite data to determine the best locations for seed development, before finally shooting a small biodegradable capsule into the soil that contains a germinated seed and nutrient.

Species

In July the American Journal of Primatology published a paper on the identification of a new species of lemur named *Microcebus jonahi* named in honour of Dr Jonah Ratsimbazafy, if one first seen in 2009 in the North Mananara national park.

Reports on fossil examinations indicated that a small, insect-eating reptile *Kongonaphon kely* was a miniature ancestor of the dinosaurs. It inhabited a floodplain region of what is now south-western Madagascar during the Triassic period about 237m years ago.

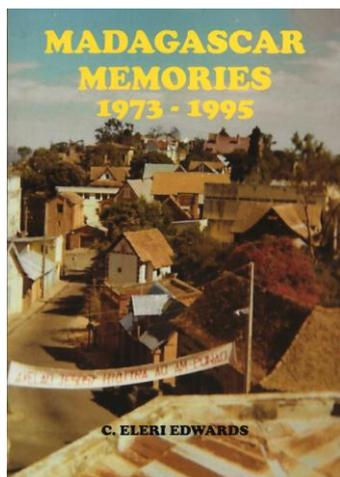
Books



The latest Bradt Guide to Madagascar, the 13th edition, was published on 18th September 2020. The region-by-region portion of the book has undergone a complete restructuring so that the flow of the chapters more closely mirrors the routes visitors typically take around the island. It remains the most detailed guidebook to Madagascar (in any language) and indeed this edition is the most comprehensive yet, with 530 pages featuring contributions from more than 50 experts, 58 detailed maps, almost a hundred colour photographs and coverage of 1,300 hotels and restaurants in 200 towns and villages as well as descriptions of ninety national parks and wildlife reserves. The authors Daniel Austin and Hilary Bradt, with their sixty years' experience of exploring Madagascar

and leading tour groups there, have been particularly indebted to David Hananel, whose generosity enabled the book to go to print in challenging times for the global tourism industry.

The book is available from www.bradtguides.com and other UK book retailers. Bradt have set up a discount code AMS25 which entitles Society members to 25% off the new edition when purchased from the Bradt website; the code expires at end March 2021. The discount also applies to Bradt's other Madagascar titles, including *Madagascar Wildlife*.



A Welsh missionary C. Eleri Edwards has self-published a new book *Madagascar Memories 1973-1995* on many years in Madagascar, completed during the coronavirus lockdown. The 157-page memoir has over one hundred colour photographs and is Edwards' second book, following 'FAZA MAMRE FJKM' which she wrote in 2011. The price of the book is £12.50 (including UK shipping) with all proceeds going to help the work of the Mamre Sisters, with whom Eleri lived. You are able to obtain a copy by making a cheque payable to C. Eleri Edwards at 41 Bradfield Road, Stretford, Manchester M32 9LA while the author is also happy for individuals to make contact through c.e.edwards.t21@btinternet.com or on 0161 866 9629.

Charities and NGOs



The ethical chocolate brand MIA (Made In Africa) has launched a Girls' Education Fund under its 1 for Change programme to support vulnerable students. It has been working in partnership with Money for Madagascar, whose director Irenée Rajaona-Horne noted that school enrolment has significantly decreased in the country, falling as low as 55% in some areas. Of every 100 children who start primary school only 33 make it to secondary school, while girls are the most impacted by the education crisis in Madagascar as they are the first to be removed from school to assist with domestic chores and to support family income. The first two recipients are secondary students in Antananarivo.

Money for Madagascar has also published its latest annual report which is available at <https://moneyformadagascar.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/AR-2018-19-33rd-Digital-English.pdf>.