

Newsletter

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Society news

The Society held a second event for 2021 online on 3rd July when Rija Rakotoson, the Director General of Madagascar's National Environment Office, gave a talk on *Preserving natural resources in a time of uncertainty in Madagascar*.

The next event is a meeting in person on Saturday 30th October at the usual venue of the Upper Vestry Hall at St George's Church, with the entrance on Little Russell Street. In the morning the focus will be primarily on the issues related to climate change in Madagascar as well as the opportunities from the recent re-opening of the country to tourism. In the afternoon there will be a talk from Cath Butlin, the founder of the NGO Famadagascar, on establishing alternative family-based care for children.

There are details of events and other topics on Facebook and on our website at www.anglo-malagasy.com. To mark the Society's 60th anniversary, we have launched a brand new website which we have expanded with details of over sixty previous events, including video recordings of our last three meetings. There is a chronology of Anglo-Malagasy history and the early history of the Society with many past issues of the newsletter (and more being added). The site also includes travel advice comprising details of airlines, embassies and visas, a list of our recommended books about Madagascar and information on organisations connected with the country Madagascar. We have introduced a streamlined process for new members to sign up as well as to apply for tickets for forthcoming events.

There remain an elusive four previous editions of the newsletter to complete our archive in numbers 7 (1980), 13 & 14 (1984-5) and 16 (1986); we would be pleased to have any help.

We shall publish the next newsletter as of December 2021. 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.

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Politics in Madagascar

The third quarter of 2021 saw Madagascar dealing with some further political tension as well as the continued famine in the south of the country, while also seeing an end to the medical emergency to counter the coronavirus Covid-19.

On 6th July the Gendarmerie announced an attempt on the lives of five ministers including the Secretary of State for the service, General Richard Ravalomanana. A number of people had been arrested on 23rd June after a meeting of the council of ministers and were reported to be a serving gendarme, two bodyguards for the former president Hery Rajaonarimampianina, two businessmen and a sixth person recently released from detention on a kidnapping charge.

An event in Toliara served to show the influence of Siteny Randrianasoloniaiko, the president of the Malagasy Olympic Committee (who was appointed in May president too of the African Judo Union), given the attendance of members of the government, Professor Raymond Ranjeva, the former prime minister Monja Roindefo and Roland Ratsiraka. A new opposition group, known as Panorama, represented supporters of Rajaonarimampianina and was led by Rivo Rakotovao, a former Senate president from the HVM party who was reported to be ready to sign a political accord with the government. Another former president, Marc Ravalomanana, was involved with another grouping, the RMDM, which at the end of July called for the resignation of President Andry Rajoelina and for a new constitution.

On 8th July Rajoelina led a second council meeting for governors of the country's regions and said that the development of each would help the country as a whole. In mid-July the controversial construction of a coliseum within the precinct of the Rova saw a submission to the Haute Cour Constitutionnelle (HCC); the building was due to be opened in June 2020 for the national day and is as yet unfinished. The Ministry of the Interior said that the proposed elections for heads of the *fokontany* were in hand if with no set date, amidst concerns that there had been increased abuse of their position by some in the post for a number of years.

On 20th July the Minister of Public Security announced that six people had been arrested over a reported assassination attempt on Rajoelina and other senior members of the government. They included Paul Rafanoharana, a Franco-Malagasy investor, and Philippe François, a retired French colonel who was reputed to have worked as an adviser to the Catholic archbishop of Antananarivo, Monsignor Odon Razanakolona, who was questioned extensively at the end of the month and who denied any link. The American chief executive of Madagascar Oil, Russell Kelly, was also among those questioned given an email from October 2020 following one in April that year, which the company said it had ignored but had also not reported. In this the alleged perpetrators had approached the company to finance plans to use recruit fifteen mercenaries with a budget of €5m, some of which was said to be held by Rafanoharana. Four senior members of the Groupe de Sécurité et d'Interventions Spéciales (GSIS), an elite unit of the Gendarmerie, were also questioned as was the artist Sareraka, a former member of the Haute Autorité de Transition (HAT).

On 1st August a further twenty-one people were arrested including a dozen military personnel of whom five were generals. Benchmark Group, the owner of Madagascar Oil, confirmed that it

had been approached for funds. On 4th August Paul Rafanoharana and Philippe François were moved to the prison at Tsiafahy while their wives were held at Manjakamadiana. Aina Razafindrakoto, a business associate at the firm Tsarafirst, was also held at Tsiafahy and Victor Ramahatra, a former prime minister under Ratsiraka and a consultant to Madagascar Oil, was held at the Imerintsiatosika prison. On 9th August Rajoelina spoke for the first time on the alleged plot and its various planned phases.

In early August a majority in the National Assembly called for the government to resign. On 15th August Rajoelina announced the dismissal of the government given criticism of their performance and potential sympathy for the plot. He announced one made up of thirty-two ministers, of whom twenty-one were new and eleven were women, along with three deputy ministers and two secretaries of state. The prime minister, Christian Ntsay, remained in place. Rajoelina appointed a former special adviser Patrick Rajoelina (not a relation) as Minister of Foreign Affairs and Edgard Razafindravahy, a former special administrator of Antananarivo, as Minister of Industry and Business. Rindra Rabarininarison, a senior figure in the ministry, was appointed to the post of Minister of Economy and Finance, General Serge Gallé replaced Richard Ravalomanana as Secretary of State for the Gendarmerie while Professor Arivelo Zely became the fourth Minister of Health since 2019. Imbiki Herilaza was appointed as Minister of Justice, a post his father had held under the former president Didier Ratsiraka, who had died in March; Sophie Ratsiraka, his daughter, became Minister of Arts and Crafts.

The new Minister of Mining and Strategic Resources, Brice Randrianasolo, resigned on 19th August following online comments relating to previous charges of fraud he had faced in 2018; the prime minister assumed the role on an interim basis and spoke of the need to make full use of the country's resources, while noting that the mines were not renewable.

On 19th August Madagascar restored access to the country to the medical charity MSF, allowing nine visas for relief work in the south.

Rajoelina undertook a visit to France in late August and met President Emanuel Macron at the Elysée Palace on the 27th, their second official meeting since 2019. Macron made reference to the financial commitment France had provided to Rajoelina's Plan d'Emergence, worth €240m in the years up to 2030 for agriculture, education and urban development, while he also pledged to provide support in dealing with the drought in the south and the impact of the coronavirus. On the contentious issue of the Iles Eparses Macron aspired to a frank and constructive discussion and the visit was seen as an indication of an improvement in what had been a tense relationship in the prior two years, while also pointing to a potential need for Madagascar to revive French commercial interest.

At the end of August Rajoelina announced the Malagasy diaspora in France would be entitled to vote in the presidential elections due in 2023, in spite of a protest by some of its members him during his visit. Fanirasoana Ernaivo, one of the protestors, was questioned by the French police following a request from the Malagasy authorities, who had raised an arrest warrant. Rajoelina called on the diaspora, estimated at 150,000 in France out of a total of 200,000 in the world, to contribute to development in the country. Rajoelina also took the opportunity to

promote business opportunities, including those for operators from Morocco, where the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said it would open an embassy.

The anti-corruption body BIANCO provided its annual report in late August and said that it had received 3,772 complaints over possible incidents, of which 881 were considered worthy of investigation; it had passed 184 of these in turn to the appropriate bodies who investigated 291 people, including five former government ministers. The director-general, Laza Andrianirina, spoke of the need to improve the investigative process and to have dossiers approved by the National Assembly.

On 1st September Berthine Razafiarivony of the Court of Appeal in Antananrivo announced that the state had completed its enquiries and that a trial would soon start for those implicated in the reported coup d'état, known as the Apollo 21 affair after its apparent code name.

Ravalomanana resumed his public appearances if without the support of other members of the opposition, showing divisions in its ranks. On 3rd September Rajoelina announced an end to the state emergency introduced to deal with the Covid-19 epidemic, as the number of people infected had dropped to a low level. The Ministry of Health data indicated that the total number of reported cases amounted to 42,878 with 956 deaths recorded since March 2020.

The government objective is to have half the population vaccinated by the end of 2022 starting with 840,000 people in 2021, then four million in 2022 and ten million in 2023. The Ministry of Health had received an initial 250,000 doses under the COVAX programme of which 197,001 were administered. A further 302,400 doses of the Janssen vaccine from Johnson & Johnson were due by end July.

On 2nd August Madagascar received 200,000 doses of the Astra Zeneca vaccine as a gift from France under the COVAX programme, intended to provide a second jab to the 197,000 who had received the Covishield one first. On 16th August the Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that it would allow the repatriation of 1,500 people on five special flights in the month after 19th August. The prime minister received a jab on 26th August, having declined to do so with the first deliveries. The Ministry of Health also received 300,000 doses of the Sinopharm vaccine from China on 25th September.

On 5th September Rajoelina attended the formal opening of the new stadium named as Barea Mahamasina in honour of the national football team's exploits in 2019 and built by a Chinese construction company; there were ten hours of televised events.

On 20th September Rajoelina raised the matter of the Iles Eparses at the General Assembly of the United Nations, saying that he expected a positive, fair and peaceful outcome. Madagascar signed an accord with Qatar to establish diplomatic relations.

At the end of September the prime minister chaired a meeting with a number of ministries to deal with the persistent issues of insecurity in the country. Fanomezantsoa Randrianarison, the Minister of Public Security, said that there would be a massive deployment of security forces.

Economic and social matters

Famine in south

In July the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Ministry of Water reported that agricultural production was only half of that in the previous five years, given the lack of rain and the *tiomena* phenomenon of shifting sands, the persistence of which was estimated to have impacted two-thirds of cultivable land in the Androy district. An article in *The Economist* in September pointed to the impact of climate change, as emphasised by the UN, the coronavirus pandemic and bad governance.

In July the Norwegian government extended its programme of support for schools, providing at a cost of \$5.4m meals for 114,400 children in the regions of Anosy, Androy and Atsimo Andrefana as well as helping to build 64 new classrooms. USAID pledged a further \$7.5m. The Ministry of Agriculture and the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) said that the country needed \$6.8m to deal with the renewed threat from locusts in the south.

In August UNICEF reported again on how the south of Madagascar was facing a major emergency in terms of nutrition and food security, with more than 500,000 children under five at risk of acute malnutrition up to April 2022. The WFP highlighted the risk of a 'climate change famine' as covered at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-58303792>.

In September a scientific article covered how climate change had contributed to the issue, with data suggesting that since 2015 (with the exception of 2018/19) seasonal rainfall usually falling from October to May had been within the driest ten percent of years since 1981; there are details at <https://phys.org/news/2021-09-climate-contributed-madagascar-food-crisis.html>.

At the United Nations General Assembly in September President Rajoelina met Antonio Guterres, its Secretary-General, who emphasised the challenges of climate change in his opening remarks to the session.

Finance and aid

In July the World Bank announced funding for Madagascar of \$470m including \$200m for the rehabilitation of 1,200km of the road network and \$140m for the purchase of vaccines against Covid-19. In September the government announced a \$235m project to improve the RN6 on its 233km between Ambilobe and Antsiranana, funded with aid of \$115m from the European Union and a loan of \$120m from the World Bank. Madagascar was reported to be due to return \$800,000 which UNICEF had provided as it could not account for the expenditure.

In August the World Bank provided a loan of \$40m to improve irrigation and to promote sustainable agriculture.

In September France contributed to the €152m needed for the construction of a cable car project in the capital Antananarivo, in an agreement signed when Rajoelina was in Paris. There will be a loan of €117m and the Malagasy state will cover €15m. The specialist company Poma is due to manage the project with the construction firm Colas, intended to provide 274 cabins each with

a capacity for ten to twelve passengers on two lines. France also committed €47m to enlarge the hydro-electric power station at Mandraka, intended to increase the rate of access to electricity in the capital from 15% to 50% by 2023.

The United Nations agreed through its various agencies to provide \$20m for development in Madagascar from October 2021 to end 2023.

In September the French company Sofema moved to repossess the military troop transporter aircraft that Rajoelina had bought for €4m in 2019, given a pattern of missed payments. The plane has been at an airport in Johannesburg since February 2020.

Health

A report in August indicated that the Franco-Malagasy company Aerial Metric had arranged one thousand drone deliveries in two years to provide medicines to some 140,000 people in remote locations, in association with NGOs.

As of mid-September there had been a total of 38 suspected cases of pulmonary plague which had led to six deaths. The regions of Analamanga, Itasy and Haute Matsiatra were placed under a high level of surveillance. The Ministry of Health suggested that *famadihana* might have been a factor, in spite of the banning of such ceremonies under the medical state of emergency, which was finally lifted on 3rd September.

Madagascar has a reported low level of standard vaccination for infants of 12-23 months, at a rate of 38% or about half of what it was in 2013, which was closer to the target of 90%.

Business

In August the South African firm Shoprite announced that it would be selling its ten stores in Madagascar to the French operator Super U, as well as exiting from Uganda.

The Central Bank of Madagascar has started a project in two phases to evaluate the scope to issue a digital currency, the e-ariary.

Insecurity

There has been no relenting in the incidents of zebu theft, banditry and summary justice in spite of an increased military presence.

Fisheries

Mongabay carried a first article in August on fishing off Madagascar and the increasing presence of Chinese vessels, at <https://news.mongabay.com/2021/08/china-joins-the-foreign-fleets-quietly-exploiting-madagascars-waters/>. The not-for-profit organisation OceanMind, based in Oxfordshire, had highlighted the predatory nature of foreign fishing in Malagasy waters as part of its analysis of maritime data.

On 30th September Madagascar became the fifth country to join the Fisheries Transparency Initiative after Mauritania, Senegal, Seychelles and Cape Verde.

Tourism

The Malagasy government announced plans in September to re-open the country to visitors from October, starting with regional flights from Reunion and Mauritius, although Ethiopian Airlines said that it would not be ready and Air Austral not ready before the end of October.

The national airline Air Madagascar has faced continued financial pressures, with accumulated reported losses of \$70m. In September three of its ATR 72 aircraft were impounded by creditors with a sole fourth in operation with its domestic subsidiary Tsaradia. Aéroports de Madagascar announced in August an agreement on the operation of fourteen secondary airfields and plans for a new terminal at Antananarivo.

The Society member John Gimlette provided an insight into the opportunities when travel resumes in an article at <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/travel/escape/article-10008445/Madagascar-set-welcome-Britons-experience-exotic-wildlife-colourful-capital.html>.

Minerals and mining

In August members of the Senate held discussions on the Base Toliara ilmenite project, which was suspended in 2019, while the state also prepared for negotiations on the fiscal regime for the QMM/Rio Tinto mine, first established in 1998 for a period of twenty-five years. Rio Tinto signed an agreement with CrossBoundary Energy for a renewable energy system.

In September Tirupati Graphite completed the installation and commissioning of a first 9,000 tonne flake graphite module at its Vatovina project in Madagascar.

Climate and conservation

Forests and protected areas

In July the Minister of the Environment, Baomiavotse Raharinirina, confirmed that Madagascar would have a delegation at the COP-26 talks in Glasgow in October 2021 and that there would be a final preparatory meeting in the Androy district, given the particular issues there. The Ministry announced an agreement to reduce the cost of butane gas with a lower rate of VAT at 5% as against 20%; the industry also committed to the reforestation of sixty hectares a year.

Madagascar was reported to be losing each year more than 5,000 hectares of mangroves which cover 236,400 ha, mostly on the west coast. The Ministry of Agriculture intends to re-establish 10,000 ha by 2023 with World Bank finance of \$3m.

In September a serious fire took hold in the Ankarafantsika National Park and was not extinguished for six days, in part due to strong winds. There were suggestions that it was started as a protest against the imprisonment of previous arsonists. The Minister of the Environment alluded to the challenges from a drier climate and called for greater resources, including helicopters to fight such fires.

Julie Razafimanahaka is one of the finalists for the Tusk Award for Conservation in Africa, for her work in helping to establish protected area in the Mangabe forest. There is a profile at <https://www.tuskawards.com/julie-razafimanahaka-2021/> and the ceremony will take place on 22nd November at BFI South Bank. Madagascar is one of the countries with a fragile ecosystem that the UK government has committed to support with £100m from its Biodiverse Landscapes Fund ahead of COP26: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/madagascar-to-benefit-from-lifeline-for-some-the-worlds-most-precious-biodiverse-habitats>.

Species

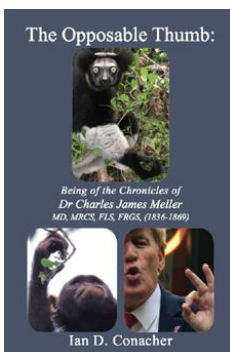
An article in *Kew Bulletin* in August identified six coffee species as new to science: *Coffea callmanderi*, *C. darainensis*, *C. kalobinonensis*, *C. microdubardii*, *C. pustulata* and *C. rupicola*. All six are endemic to northern Madagascar and four are narrowly endemic to specific forest areas. Madagascar is home to 59 species, nearly half of the 124 known to exist in the world.



A mural on a house in West Green in north London has raised the profile of lemur conservation. Stephanie Grant, who volunteered on a project with SEED Madagascar, commissioned the work from a local artist James Straffon. English Heritage has details on how Stephen and Virginia Courtauld, the owners of Eltham Palace in south London, incorporated a

pet lemur in designs: <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/eltham-palace-and-gardens/history/mah-jongg/>.

Books and events



Dr Ian Conacher, who spoke to the Society at a meeting in March 2017 on Dr Charles Weller, one of the medical team who accompanied Dr Livingstone on his explorations, has now published his book on the subject, to follow two previous books on the theme. Dr Weller visited Madagascar and has a duck named after him.

The book is available in stores or online, including through Haycroft, its publisher: <https://www.hayloft.eu/opposable%20thumb.html>.

Charities and NGOs

Money for Madagascar has made its seasonal selection of cards, calendars and alternative gifts available on its website at <https://moneyformadagascar.org/mfm-shop/>, and there is plenty from which to choose.