



Anglo-Malagasy Society



Newsletter no. 59 - early March 2008

Society activities

On 9th January Ewan Laurie gave an interesting and well-illustrated talk entitled 'Into the Eighth Continent' about the British School Expeditions Society trip to Madagascar in July 2007, which contributed to scientific research in the Antsirabe region.



The next meeting of the Society will be at 6 for 6.30pm on Wednesday 23rd April, at the Ognisko Polish Club at 55 Exhibition Road, London SW7, close to South Kensington station. Paul Racey, the Regius Professor of Natural History at Aberdeen University, will talk on 'Conserving the Unconservable in Madagascar', based on his twenty years of research visits to the country. There will be a meal of delicious Malagasy food after

the talk. The cost of the event will be £20 for members and £23 for guests, and £10 for students. Non-members who wish to attend may contact the Secretary Stuart Edgill on 01375 677138 or by e-mail to smedgill@aol.com.

The Society events later in the year will be the AGM on Wednesday 18th June when the speaker will be Professor Alison Richard, the Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University; and a daytime event with Malagasy music on Saturday 18th October with talks by Stuart Cable and Justin Moat of the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, and by Mark Jacobs of Azafady.

As ever full details of future meetings, as well as directions to Ognisko and other useful information on the Society and Madagascar, are available on our website at www.anglo-malagasysociety.co.uk.

The next newsletter will be in early June. Please send news items and articles for inclusion, or any changes in contact details, to the editor Julian Cooke, at juliancooke@yahoo.co.uk. He can also be contacted on 07796 883024.

Bilateral relations

Dr John Murton, the non-resident Ambassador to Madagascar, and other colleagues from the High Commission in Mauritius have visited the island in recent months.

In early March Dr Iary Ravaoarimanana, the chargé d'affaires at the Embassy of Madagascar, visited the Bryn Elia school in Conwy in north Wales, which has established a twinning agreement with the country.

Politics in Madagascar

Municipal elections

The municipal elections to choose the mayors of the country's communes were held on 12th December 2007. Andry Rajoelina of Tanora Gasy Vonona (TGV) won in Antananarivo, where the ruling party Tiako i Madagasikara (TIM) had taken all twelve seats in the September legislative elections and where low levels of voting at only 40% might have been expected to help the ruling party. Rajoelina won with 63.3% of the vote against 32.4% for Hery Rafalimanana of TIM and 3.6% for Marc Ramiarinjatovo of Madagasikara Vaovao. The rapid rise to prominence of the youthful new mayor, who is also a businessman, has earned him the nickname Andry TGV after the French high-speed Trains à Grande Vitesse.



The low turnout in the capital was echoed elsewhere; for example, in Antsirabe it was only 36% and the sole candidate, Mme Olga Ramalason, won with 21,843 votes, not so far ahead of the 16,347 blank and void.

The results were annulled in five communes in the regions of Itasy and Vakinankaratra for flagrant breaches of procedures. Election observers noted certain irregularities and called again for electoral reform, including a law on the financing of campaigns. Shortly before the elections the government decided to defer indefinitely the contests in Nosy Be, Sainte-Marie and Fort Dauphin, in what was suspected to be an attempt to stop them being won by opposition parties who might then control sizeable funds disbursed under the Pôle Intégré de Croissance or Integrated Growth programme; the three towns will be run instead by a Président de la Délégation Spéciale.

Opposition parties remained divided and failed to exploit any unpopularity of the ruling party. Some parties boycotted the polls; others, such as MFM, failed to do well; and there appeared to be little general reaction to the results.

Antananarivo

The new mayor of Antananarivo, Andry Rajoelina, pledged to solve problems in the capital, such as poor rubbish collection at the end of 2007, but was constrained by finding the administration had debts of 7.8bn Ariary (£2.2m) equivalent to half its annual income, plus a further 2.8bn which was owed on the rubbish collection lorries, which helped to explain the state of the streets. Jeanel Ramarofidy was elected president of the capital's municipal council by 35 of the 53 councillors present, ahead of 16 votes for his rival from TIM; like the mayor, he called for all parties to work together. Antananarivo was ranked an unfortunate third in a report in *Forbes* magazine on the world's least healthy cities, better than Baku in Azerbaijan and Dhaka in Bangladesh but worse than Port-au-Prince in Haiti and 211 others.

Changes

The Council of Ministers replaced the heads of six regions in early January: they were Sofia and Anamalanga (both scenes of defeat for TIM in the elections), Anosy, Haute Matsiatra, Sava and Analanjirofo. Only four of the original 22 regional heads appointed in September 2004 remain in place.

The new minister of Defence, Cécile Manorohanta, made sweeping changes to the administration of the army including the appointment of eleven relatively young colonels to important posts.

More elections

The date of the elections for the 147 councillors to represent Madagascar's 22 regions was set in January for 16th March; the campaigning started quietly on 1st March, in part because of the cyclone damage. The regions replaced the provinces after last year's referendum and the new councillors will join an electoral college, along with the country's mayors but not now the members of the Assembly, which will elect two-thirds of the Senate on 20th June. There will be only one senator chosen per region, while the President has the right to nominate one-third of what will be a new total of 33 senators, down from 90 previously. The influence of senators both individually and collectively has been much reduced and the ruling party's control will most probably be much enhanced.

The government announced in early March that the heads of the regions would not be chosen by universal suffrage, prompting criticism of an apparent centralisation. President Marc Ravalomanana had earlier denied rumours that he planned to change the constitution to allow him an unlimited time in power, beyond his current second term. In his speech at the opening of parliament he also emphasised the need for collaboration between parties. He said he believed 2008 would be a year for hard work and responsibility.

Economic and social matters

Cyclones



Madagascar has again been badly affected by cyclones. Cyclone Ivan hit the island on 17th February, killing at least 83 people and leaving some 188,000 homeless, according to figures released at the end of the month. The storm, with winds of 230 kmh, was at its worst on the east coast and was reported to have affected thirteen of the island's 22 regions. Subsequent flooding caused damage in Antananarivo and in the rice-producing district of Alaotra Mangoro north-east of the capital. The Malagasy government announced plans to import a further 70,000 tonnes of rice in addition to a previously arranged delivery of 50,000 tonnes. Its initial calls for aid once again met with only a limited response, and in early March the United Nations launched an appeal for \$36.5m of funds; the European Union promised €6.8m for humanitarian aid and to rebuild transport infrastructure. The Red Cross also made an appeal for up to \$1m to help 50,000 people in the regions of Sofia, Boeny and Menabé.

At the end of January an earlier cyclone, Fame, caused thirteen deaths and affected 11,600 people mainly in the west of the country, particularly in Mampikony and Mahajanga. In early March Cyclone Jokwe crossed the top of Madagascar.

The World Health Organisation has warned of an increased risk of malaria in Madagascar and a number of countries in southern Africa due to the recent heavy rains.

Economy

There is generally encouraging news on the overall economy in Madagascar but a strong sense also that life is becoming more difficult. The Minister of the Economy, Ivohasina Razafimahefa, claimed that per capita income had risen from 477,440 to 628,260 Ariary (£131 to £172, a change of nearly a third) in the years between 2002 and 2007, and that the poverty rate had reduced from 80% to 67.5%. There is still some way to go to meet the government's target of a level of 32.5% by 2012. Wages in the private sector were increased by 10.1% in January, a compromise between the 12% sought by workers and the 8% which had been offered by employers. Prices of fuel and other products had risen even before the effect of the recent cyclones, while it is perhaps no coincidence that there has been an unwelcome resurgence in banditry on the RN7.

The International Monetary Fund commended the Malagasy government for its economic performance in 2007 and welcomed the tax reforms introduced

in the 2008 budget, which should increase revenues to finance priority spending. The IMF also called on the Malagasy authorities to strengthen the management of public finances and to use the large inflows of money from mining investment to build foreign exchange reserves. The mining sector accounted for 95% of the total inward investment of Ariary 1.9bn (£0.5m) in 2007 and will be a significant contributor again this year, as the QMM ilmenite and the Sherritt nickel projects continue. One weakness, however, is that only the energy and transport sectors also saw an increase in investment in 2007.

Aid

The EU agreed in February to finance a €1.5m project to help rehabilitate the sugar industry in Madagascar, with the funds being in addition to €8.4m allocated for the period 2007-10 under the latest and tenth Fonds européens de développement (FED). This FED was signed in Lisbon in December 2007 and will be worth €577m from the second half of 2008 through to 2013. The major emphasis will again be on improving the road infrastructure of the country, accounting for 40% of the proposed funds, with 30% allocated to budgetary support, 20% to promoting rural development and 10% to assisting good governance.

At the end of 2007 the United Nations International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) announced plans to spend over \$30 million to help the development of micro enterprises in rural Madagascar. The programme is expected to create up to 50,000 new jobs by offering training, improved technology and greater access to financial products and services.

In January the IMF completed the second and third reviews of Madagascar's economic performance under its Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF) arrangement, which enabled the country to draw some further US\$25 million of low-interest loans, bringing the total disbursements so far under the PRGF to about US\$ 50 million of the \$85m total agreed in 2006.

Other news

Amnesty: the tax amnesty announced in June 2007 benefited 300 companies and individuals, largely in the capital, while the infringements related mainly to VAT; the amnesty secured 1.5bn Ariary (£0.5m) of revenue.

Jirama: in early January Jirama restored the supply of electricity and water to certain districts of Antananarivo that had been cut off for a week, after reaching an agreement with the capital's administration over the payment of debts: the city owed some 6bn Ariary (£ 2m) for 2006 and 2007, while Jirama apparently agreed to pay a surtax of the same amount.

Tourism

Hotels In an effort to boost construction the government has exempted all new 3-star hotels with 150 beds or more from taxes on materials until June 2009. Five such projects are pending, with work already having started on an Ibis hotel from the Accor group at Ankorondrano in the capital. There are at the moment 22 hotels of 3 or more stars with some 1,000 beds in total, whereas 4,000 people are expected to attend the African Union summit in July 2009 in Antananarivo. Cyclone Ivan destroyed an estimated 80% of the hotels in and around Toamasina and Foulpointe on the east coast.

Visitor numbers The number of tourists to Madagascar was 344,000 in 2007, an increase of 11% on the 311,000 in 2006. 58% were from France, 11% from Switzerland, 5% from Italy and 3% from Germany, with the remaining 15% from a range of countries including the US, Spain and Japan. According to an analysis by the Ministry of Tourism the majority at 58% went for the country's natural elements, 19% for sun and sand, 15% for culture and 8% for sport. The majority again went to the south, with about a fifth going to each of the north and the east of the country.

Award Madagascar came close to knocking New Zealand off the top spot in the *Wanderlust* Travel Awards for favourite country in 2008. Not even in the top ten last year, Madagascar scored 96.47%, just behind NZ on 96.86% and just ahead of Namibia. The magazine will publish an article on the island later this year.

Vignette The tourist tax raised 1.2bn Ariary (£ 0.3m) in 2007, which was only 55% of its projected income but about half as much again as the 0.8bn Ariary earned in 2006; the vignette is the main source of funding for the Office National du Tourisme de Madagascar and its various promotions.

Flights Under a new code-sharing agreement Corsairfly will from May 2008 operate the Tuesday flight from Paris to Antananarivo, which will include a stop in Marseilles and use an Airbus A330-200. Air Madagascar was reported to be increasing to 500 the number of staff it planned to lose, further to the 1,400 who had already taken voluntary redundancy under a plan initiated in 2006. A new accord between France and Madagascar on flights between the countries was made law in January 2008; it allows French carriers to serve four destinations in Madagascar.

Minerals

Uranium Pan African Mining reported encouraging levels of uranium in the latest drill holes at its Tranomoro project in the south-east of Madagascar and announced plans to accelerate exploration at two other projects.

Mine costs The worldwide boom in mining has meant that the estimated costs for the QIT Madagascar Minerals (QMM) ilmenite project have risen sharply from \$780m to about \$1bn, of which four-fifths will be spent in Madagascar including \$145m at the new port of Ehoala. The company still expects to make its first shipment in December 2008.

Government Mineral exports earned the country \$40m in revenue in 2007, of which \$2m went in administrative expenses. In January the Minister of Energy and Mines, Elisé Razaka, confirmed it was the government's plans in 2008 to decentralise operations, including the opening of an office in the sapphire boom town of Ilikaka.

Wildlife and conservation

EAZA When it closed in September 2007 the campaign of the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria had generated over €450,000 for a range of different projects in Madagascar. Woburn Zoo stood out for raising over €40,000 with Broxbourne and Blackpool each contributing €20,000 or more. The total raised was well above the initial targets of the campaign, and EAZA was able to contribute €25,000 to the appeal launched after the cyclones last year and then to help finance a project at Tsitongambarika in the south of the island as part of the matched funding for a much larger EC grant.

New palm A palm that grows to 18 metres in height and then dies after an impressive terminal florescence has been found in Madagascar. *Tahina spectabilis* has been named after the Latin for 'spectacular' and the Malagasy for 'blessed', with Tahina also the name of the daughter of the cashew plantation owner who discovered it. It was identified by Dr John Dransfield, co-author of the *Field Guide to the Palms of Madagascar* (and a member of the Society), who confirmed the discovery of an entirely new genus within the Chuniophoeniceae tribe, which has unusual distribution across the world.



Frog find Scientists led by Dr David Krause of Stony Brook University have identified the fossil remains of a giant frog that lived in Madagascar 65 to 70 million years ago and which appears to be a close relative of the horned toads living in South America. The frog, named *Beelzebubo ampinga* or shielded devil toad, was about 16 inches long and weighed 10lbs, whereas the largest of the present-day species in the country only measures four inches. The research was published in February by Dr Susan Evans and Dr Marc Jones of the University College, London.

Smuggling A Nigerian man was convicted in late 2007 of planning to smuggle out of Madagascar a highly-valued hoard of 300 tortoises that

included eight of the rare ploughshare species; the man was arrested after a tip-off, and faces ten years in prison. Two Russians convicted of poaching were fined \$300 and sentenced to three months in prison. Illegal hunting and the wildlife trade together with habitat destruction were the main reasons that extinction threatened the country's tortoises and turtles, according to the Wildlife Conservation Society.

Forests In January 2008 the government cancelled for three months all its permits for exploiting and exporting forestry products, as part of an attempt to eliminate illegalities especially in the north of the country; but trafficking appeared to continue. The discovery of thirty containers of wood destined for Shanghai was one factor in leading to the corruption enquiry into the forestry industry. Prices of some wood subsequently doubled. In December the Environment Minister Harison Randriarimanana announced a review of the lenient approach to those starting bush fires, for which fines can be a mere 200 Ariary (5p). He also announced plans to educate the country's mayors on the effects of deforestation.

Birdsong In December the British Library published a CD featuring 127 birds from Madagascar, including the alarm of the red-capped coua and the call of the red-shouldered vanga, recorded when it was first reported in 1997. The collection was made by Richard Ranft together with Frank Hawkins of Conservation International, lasts 77 minutes and costs £9.99; it is available from the British Library shop.

Publications The new editor of the online Journal Madagascar Conservation and Development, Lucienne Wilmé of the Missouri Botanical Garden, has started accepting articles for the third issue, due to be published in November this year at www.mwc-info.net. Contributions should be sent to Journal MCD, Anthropological Institute, University Zürich-Irchel, Winterthurerstrasse 190, 8057 Zürich, Switzerland or by e-mail to info@journalmcd.net.

Events

Friends of Madagascar The next annual meeting of the Friends will be on Saturday 29th March from 10.30am to 4pm in the Highfields Centre at 96 Melbourne Road, Leicester, LE2 ODS. The speakers will be the former British ambassador Brian Donaldson and Lalasoa Ramiarimanana, who set up a clinic in Ivato. Those wishing to attend are welcome on the day but to help with planning on catering they should contact Katharine Harding on 020 7708 5531 or at Friends of Madagascar, 75 Iliffe Street, London, SE17 3LL and by e-mail to friendsofmadagascar@hotmail.com.