



Anglo-Malagasy Society



Newsletter no. 60 - June 2008

Society activities

At the meeting on 23rd April Professor Paul Racey of Aberdeen University gave an eloquent and evocative talk on the results of his studies into the bats of Madagascar, where they suffer from the destruction of their roosts and from hunting for bushmeat and sport. He spoke of his team's efforts to monitor the mammals and to show the ecological benefits of flying foxes in seed dispersal, and described the educational projects that now encompass workshops and the building of schools.



The next Society meeting is on Wednesday 18th June when Professor Alison Richard, the Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University, will talk on the subject of 'Community, Collaboration and Conservation in Southwest Madagascar'. The evening will start at 6.30pm with the Society's Annual General Meeting and will be held at the the Ognisko Polish Club at 55 Exhibition Road, London SW7, just north of the Victoria & Albert Museum in South Kensington. The talk will be followed as usual by a meal of delicious Malagasy food.

On Saturday 18th October the Society will host together with the Friends of Madagascar a daytime event that will include music, a Malagasy lunch, a raffle and market stalls. The two talks will be by Mark Jacobs of Azafady on the integrated approach the charity takes to its work in the south-east of the country; and by Stuart Cable and Justin Moat of the Royal Botanic Garden Kew on their projects to map Madagascar's vegetation and to establish a seed bank to preserve its plants.

Full details of future meetings together with other useful information are on our website at www.anglo-malagasysociety.co.uk. The next edition of the newsletter will be in September; please send any material for inclusion or any changes in your contact details to the editor Julian Cooke, whose email address is juliancooke@yahoo.co.uk and phone number 07796 883024.

We plan to provide membership cards to those members who are kindly up to date with their subscriptions. The cards will be available at the June and October meetings and will be sent by post to those who are unable to attend.

Bilateral relations

Ewan Ormiston was in Madagascar from Mauritius for a political dialogue between the European Union and Madagascar, and when there visited bat conservation projects that the High Commission is supporting. The non-resident Ambassador John Murton is also visiting some of the work of the Andrew Lees Trust when in Madagascar in June to attend the meeting of the Malagasy government with donors - the UK is the second largest source of funds for the EU and World Bank in Madagascar.

Officers from the High Commission now go once a month to Antananarivo to collect biometric data (fingerprints) for visa applications, which is now a requirement for all visa applicants to the UK and which entails a longer process, though at short notice applicants can submit the data in Port Louis, Pretoria or Paris. Applicants can also now pay for visas in Ariary and make deposits to a bank account in Antananarivo, which can thus avoid the need to make costly transfers to Mauritius.

Guardian project

The Guardian Weekend magazine is undertaking a project (which Channel 4 will also cover) to photograph and interview a child living in the UK from what could well be each of the 193 countries in the world. They have to date reached 128 countries, but Madagascar is one of those missing from the list. The intention is to provide a snapshot of the diversity in Britain today and to reflect differences between those countries and the UK. The journalist involved, Caroline Irby, travels to meet the children, and takes some informal photos while chatting for an hour or so. She is CRB-checked and has worked regularly with children on various assignments. If you can help, please call her on 07967 659043 or send an email to caro@carolineirby.com. You can also see her work at www.carolineirby.com. The deadline is becoming more demanding but the criteria are less so: although the ideal child is someone up to the age of 16 born in Madagascar to Malagasy parents, one born outside the country would still be most welcome.

Events

Concert: the celebrated Malagasy musician Modeste will perform on Friday 10th October 2008 at St Ethelburga's, 78 Bishopsgate, London EC2N 4AG.

Politics in Madagascar

Senate

The ruling party Tiako-i-Madagasikara (TIM) won all 22 of the seats in the elections to the new, smaller Senate on 20th April. They won even where they were in a minority in the electoral college of mayors and regional councillors, in the three regions of Analanjirifo, Anosy and Sofia. The new senator in Anosy is Jean André Soja alias Kaleta, who was deputy for Amboasary Atsimo and who aligned his own party Liaraike with the ruling party. Arema, which had previously held 49 senate seats, did not contest the election, nor did Leader-Fanilo.

The President made concessions to the opposition in choosing non-TIM members for the eleven people or one-third of the total that he was entitled to nominate to the Senate, although one of his appointments subsequently rejoined TIM. The most notable appointment was Ruffine Tsiranana, the president of the Parti sociale démocratie (PSD), and the list also included Tovonanahary Rabetsitonta, the founder of the Groupe de réflexion et d'actions pour le développement (Grad Iloafo) and the former deputy Johanita Ndahimananjara of Asa vita ifampitsarana (AVI), whose president Norbert Ratsirahonana said 'It's better to have one Senator rather than none at all'. Both the PSD and AVI are currently aligned with TIM, however, and attended its congress. Mme Tsiranana suggested that she might be able to act as an intermediary between the President and the opposition. The non-TIM senators chose Charles Sylvain Rabotoarison, former minister for the environment, as the head of their group.

Only six senators of the ninety in the previous house remain. Yvan Randriasandratiniony is the new president of the Senate, replacing Rajemison Rakotomaharo and the sole candidate, though there was also some support for Noël Rakotondramboa, who by not being in TIM appeared to have some advantage.



New government

The President shuffled his government at the beginning of May and the new one, his eighth, consisted only of members of TIM, thus making no concessions to the opposition or regions, unlike in his nominations to the



Senate. There were five new members. At the Ministry of Education Stangeline Ralambomanana has replaced Benjamin Radavidson Andriamparany, who appeared to lose a power struggle with Haja Nirina

Razafinjatovo, the Minister of Finance and who is apparently under investigation over his expenses in the electoral campaign in September 2007. Pierrot Botozaza, the deputy for Toamasina I, is the new Minister of Transport ; Armand Panja Ramanoelina the Minister of Agriculture ; Abdou Salame the Minister of Public Affairs; and Dr Marius Ratolojanahary head of a new Ministry of Financial Reform. The Interior Ministry, at present held by the Prime Minister Charles Rabemananjara, now also includes the former Ministry of Decentralisation.

In his presentation of the new team the President also said that he intended to continue to work for the development of the country as head of state, which suggested he had revised his earlier suggestion of stepping down. His opponents, such as Evariste Marson, the president of the Rassemblement du parti social démocrate (RPSD), expressed disappointment but not surprise at Ravalomanana's apparent desire to continue in power, which could be arranged through a change in the law as TIM has more than two-thirds of the votes in the Assembly and Senate.

Changes

During a visit to Nosy-Be at the beginning of April Marc Ravalomanana criticised the lack of progress on a number of fronts and sacked the Président de la délégation spéciale (PDS), Colonel Gérard Randriamahavalisoa, only to re-instate him a day later, although the colonel then said he only took the job out of duty and would rather be back in Toliara. Nosy-Be was one of three towns which had a PDS appointed in place of mayoral elections in December 2007; it is struggling with 1bn Ariary (£300,000) of debt. In something of a first for the country President Ravalomanana suspended the Department of Youth, Sports and Culture on 1st May, arguing that sport was not a current priority when the challenges were food production, internal security and the health of mothers and babies. The move was also linked by some to the dispute between the Minister of Sport, Patrick Ramiaramanana, and the Malagasy football federation which he had suspended, and by some of the opposition to the challenge of sending Malagasy athletes to the Beijing Olympics. (The football federation was re-instated incidentally by FIFA and the team made a good start to its World Cup qualifying campaign, for a welcome change.)

Tension

There were reports of another attempt on the life of President Ravalomanana ahead of a commemoration of the events of 1947; at a subsequent church service he declared that 'We will not retreat in the face of difficulties and criticisms, wherever they come from', but he did talk of the need to improve collaboration to develop the country. Former President Albert Zafy continued his criticism of the regime, calling for a Committee for National Reconciliation (CRN) and planning protest rallies.

There was tension in Toliara where the political party Monima wanted to organise a rally to commemorate the uprising in January 1971 that led to the end of the Tsiranana regime.

Electoral reform

Even though, or perhaps because, there will be no more elections for a while the Prime Minister Charles Rabemananjara raised the possibility of electoral reform, which was met with some support and some cynicism by opposition parties who, led by Albert Zafy, made yet another attempt at forging some form of unified front. The US ambassador, Nils Marquardt, had remarked on the weakness of the opposition, which prompted a rare comment from the founder of Leader Fanilo, Herizo Razafimahaleo, on the need for the international community to bring pressure to bear on the government to allow equal access to the media and the financing of political parties, as well as respect for the existing electoral law. A senior EU representative indicated in June that there should be some reform within two to three years.

Justice

The Minister of Justice, Mme Bakolalao Ramanandraibe, announced the creation of a High Court of Justice that under Articles 126 and 127 of the revised Constitution would rule on acts of the President, Prime Minister and members of the Assembly and Senate.

General Fidy was sentenced to fifteen years' hard labour for his role in the attempted coup at the Base Aero-navale d'Ivato in November 2006, as were five fellow officers. Two other officers received ten years, as did the former mayor of Fianarantsoa Pety Rakotoniaina, who had denied any part in what Fidy had characterised as something of a charade. They were each also fined 55.7m Ariary (£17,500). Fidy had earlier been sentenced to three years in jail for kidnapping the base commander and Rakotoniaina to five years for his part in the stealing of vehicles used in the incident.

Zakahely Boniface, the deputy for Mananara Avaratra, was sentenced to thirty months in prison. Jean Eugène Voninahitsy, the president of the Rassemblement du parti social démocrate nouveau (RPSD Vaovao), failed in late May in an appeal over his sentence to four years in prison for his alleged involvement in an escape from the Antanimora jail in 2006.

TIM

At the Tiako-i-Madagasikara congress held in late May the newly-appointed president of the party, Yvan Randriasandratiniony, made a strong call for unity not infidelity and said that respect for discipline was at the heart of the party. He announced an increase in the number of TIM representatives in the

Assembly from 105 to 109 as well as an increase in mayors loyal to the party from 997 to 1250, as those who had stood as independents and were excluded were in fact welcomed back. He held that the Comité pour la redynamisation du TIM (CRTIM) had never existed; one of its leaders, Jean Théodore Ranjivason, said instead that they were now a new association called Matsilo, whose registration only became official on the eve of the senatorial elections.

Economic and social matters

Cyclones

There was unfortunately little apparent response to the appeal for \$36m to help victims of the cyclones, particularly Ivan, in January to March this year. The World Food Programme in April still needed \$6m of the \$16m it had requested to be able to ensure food deliveries for a full six months to some 200,000 people of the up to half a million affected. In June UNICEF said it required emergency funding to continue its work, particularly in helping the more vulnerable and in rehabilitating schools. A recent estimate put the total cost of the cyclones at \$360m.

Food crisis

The cyclones have held back rice production as they destroyed around 50,000 hectares of rice paddies, so that this year's expected harvest of 4m tonnes will be only a small increase on the 3.7 m tonnes in 2007. Madagascar was one of ten African countries that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said in April it would consider helping to counter food shortages by an increase in financing under its Growth and Poverty Reduction scheme. After the summit in Rome in early June organised by the UN FAO, Madagascar received promised support of \$15m from the World Food Programme and \$10m from the World Bank .

At the summit President Ravalomanana elaborated on his pragmatic plans for a 'Green Revolution' that could provide lasting benefits to the country and Africa as a whole, by reducing the need to import food and by providing much greater resilience to shocks like the cyclones. His six-point plan comprised improved training for farmers; an increased yield per hectare through better use of seeds, fertiliser and irrigation; an improved supply chain; systems to standardise production to achieve the right certification; new products to meet international demand; and new marketing strategies.

The President announced the creation of a government task force to address the crisis. There was also support for the scheme the government set up in September 2006 of a novel form of military service: conscripts in the Service Militaire Action Développement receive three months of training in

citizenship and then nine months in the basics of agriculture, after which they receive five hectares to cultivate. Madagascar also suspended its exports of rice, though they only amounted to 1,000 tonnes in 2007.

Inflation

A strong exchange rate (which on 11th June had moved to 3,190 Ariary:£) and slightly weaker demand meant that the annual rate of inflation at the end of April was 6.9% compared to 8.2% at the end of 2007. However, the cyclone damage and the high cost of oil have had an impact, and the President announced in May plans to subsidise the prices of transport and essential goods. The World Bank and the IMF did not oppose the move provided it was well-targeted. The monopoly company Jirama has introduced a 15% price increase for electricity and water, which it still sells at a loss; the previous increase was in October 2007, and the price per kWh has now doubled since 2005. Jirama employees went on strike in late May in support of colleagues already striking against planned reforms.

Fever

An outbreak in April of Rift Valley Fever, which is transmitted from animals, killed 17 people in the regions of Alaotra Mangoro, Analamanga, Itasy, Vakinankaratra and Anosy. The fever has often been associated with times of unusually heavy rainfall and flooding.

Trafficking

Madagascar moved into the best category in the US State Department's authoritative annual report on human trafficking, including sex slavery and forced labour, a move which was credited to effective government policy in spite of limited resources.

Railways



There has been further progress in rehabilitating Madagascar's railways under the 25-year contract given to Madarail in 2003. The company has taken delivery of five new engines, the \$6m cost of which was financed by the World Bank and the European Investment Bank. The engines can greatly improve productivity and further boost tonnage, which has doubled in last five years. In 2008 chrome is expected to account for 32% of freight carried, hydrocarbons 23% and cement, foodstuffs et al the remainder.

Trade

Three years after its integration into the Southern Africa Development Community Madagascar was running a massive trade deficit, with imports from the member countries of 400bn Ariary (£125m) but exports to them of only 50bn Ariary. Tariffs have been lowered this year ahead of a customs union in 2010 and a common market in 2015.

The World Trade Organisation suggested in a report in early April that Madagascar could further improve its economic growth by reforming its tariff structure and opening up its service industry to more competition. The country's current account would deteriorate with the need to import mining equipment and other goods, but the WTO expected the overall balance of payments to remain in surplus, with significant flows of foreign investment taking gross official reserves, excluding those generated by mining, to an estimated 3.9 months of imports by 2010.

Peace

Madagascar scored creditably in the Global Peace Index announced in May, an attempt by the Economist Intelligence Unit to rank countries according to their peacefulness, measured according to a wide range of indicators that included military expenditure, local corruption, ease of access to guns and the level of respect for human rights. Madagascar came 41st out of 121 countries, ahead of the UK which was ranked 49th. Norway and New Zealand were top, Iraq and Sudan bottom.

Other news

Aid: the World Bank announced in April \$40m of grants to enhance reforms and so support economic growth.

Hydro-electricity: the European Investment Bank has agreed to lend €24.5m or half the cost for the expansion of a hydro-electric scheme east of the capital; the country hopes to generate three-quarters of its power from such sources by 2012.

Cement: the Chinese company Menaci is due to start the building of a second plant that would cost \$72m and have a capacity of one million tonnes. Current demand in Madagascar is 1.5m tonnes and 230,000 tonnes were imported in 2007, mainly of Portland cement.

Airport: the President confirmed plans for a major extension to the airport at Ivato, the \$132m cost of which he hoped would be met by the Japanese. A number of opposition politicians criticised the move.

Fish: the head of the BIANCO anti-corruption unit indicated at a symposium in May that illegal exploitation of fish was costing Madagascar \$900m a year, for want of effective protection of its territorial waters.

Biofuels: the UK-listed company D1 Oils, which has plans to develop biofuels based on jatropha plantations in Madagascar, has experienced financial difficulties and had to cut back at its UK biodiesel refineries. The founder, Karl Watkin, has left the company and made extensive criticism of those who did not distinguish between jatropha and other sources such as palm, though Friends of the Earth pointed out some problems with jatropha such as lower than expected yields and possible poisoning.

Budget: the Ministry of Finance said in April that it might need to revise its financial plans given the problems of cyclone damage and the high cost of fuel. However, government receipts in the first part of the year were a little over budget.

Minerals

Sapphires: a company called MineCore International has plans to raise \$50m to take sapphire mining at its North Fork properties in Madagascar to full production by 2009. The company intends to use lower-grade stones for the solar power and semiconductor industries.

Gold: Madagascar Holdings, a subsidiary of ARA Minerals, received an initial licence to mine gold in the area of Betsiaka (just south of Antsiranana) in partnership with the state company KRAOMA. The company envisages investing €20m over two years, though that is dependent on the success of its exploration. Majescor entered into an agreement to sell four properties in Madagascar, the principal one in Besakoa, to Sunridge Gold.

Pan African: the Canadian company Pan African Mining announced in April the sale to Asia Thai Mining for C\$141m of its assets in Madagascar, which comprise approximately 7,500 square kilometres of diversified mineral properties and 5,000 square kilometres of uranium properties.

Uranium: UMC Energy Plc wrote down the value of its 80%-owned project at Morondova by £1.4m and announced a wider pre-tax loss of £2.4m for 2007. It spent £1.5m on project-related activities and found encouraging levels of uranium, but blamed the lack of results on poor support and performance from a number of service providers it used.

Nickel: Sherritt has said it faced challenges in meeting cost pressures and finding the right personnel at its Ambatovy project. NGM reported promising indications from samples at its nickel exploration in the Andriamena region, close to properties where Jubilee Platinum has drilled.

MML: an Australian company, Malagasy Minerals Limited, is planning to raise A\$10m and to seek a listing in July. The funds are to cover the costs of assets already bought and to fund at its eight exploration projects, including nickel and copper in Ampanihy and coal close to Sakoa.

Oil: Enermad Holdings, in which Pan African Mining has a 10% stake, has raised C\$3.6m to fund its offshore exploration for oil in the Mozambique Channel. An investment company, Africa Oil Exploration Plc, has taken an initial 10% stake with an option to buy the rest in Wilton Petroleum, which has assets onshore in Madagascar. Sterling Energy announced reduced losses of \$3m in 2007 and said that it expected to sell its US assets by the end of 2008, which will provide finance for its planned drilling in Madagascar in 2009.

Wildlife and conservation

Road map

Scientists (and Society members) from the Natural History Museum and RBG Kew were part of an international team that announced in April the results of a ten-year study of the wildlife of Madagascar. They built a huge library of information on the habitats of 2,315 species of ants, butterflies, frogs, geckos, lemurs and plants, and developed software to analyse their findings so as to devise the best conservation approach. The information is the type of road map that could be used elsewhere in the world to protect other biodiversity hotspots threatened by human activities, and the findings would vindicate a new approach to saving endangered species by treating wildlife as a complex web of interacting animals and plants, rather than by one species at a time. The article is in *Science*, 320: 222-225, by Kremen et al, and the title 'Aligning conservation priorities across taxa in Madagascar with high-resolution planning tools'.

Africa atlas

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has produced an impressive new atlas covering the 53 countries of Africa that was launched on 10th June. The atlas uses satellite photography to show the degree of usually disappointing environmental change in the continent over the last four decades. The publication highlights the problems of deforestation; of a major loss of biodiversity, with Madagascar having more species under threat than any other African country; and of the damage to land from slash-and-burn agriculture and of soil erosion, with three-quarters of land in Madagascar classified as severely degraded in 2003 and an estimated soil loss per annum of over 200 metric tonnes per hectare, twenty times the world average. The pressures of population growth are also a feature: between 2000 and 2005 Africa's population grew at an average annual rate of 2.3%, nearly twice the

global rate of 1.2% and the rate is forecast to continue, leading to pressure on land - in 1950 there were 13.5 hectares of land per person in Africa, by 1990 4.7 hectares, by 2005 3.2 hectares and on present estimates there will be just 1.5 hectares by 2050. The full, nearly 400-page atlas is available on the UNEP website at www.unep.org/dewa/Africa/AfricaAtlas/PDF/en.

Amphibians

A call to take a more active approach to the conservation of amphibians was made in an article published in April. No Malagasy amphibian species have been reported as extinct yet, though a quarter of the 220 species evaluated by the World Conservation Union are deemed to be threatened. The devastating chytrid fungus has yet to affect Madagascar, which it is feared might lead to complacency but should instead provide the basis for a detailed study.

Research undertaken in Madagascar by Christopher Raxworthy of the American Museum of Natural History and colleagues, which was published in *Global Change Biology*, showed that global warming forces species to move higher up tropical mountains as their habitats change, and predicted that at least three species of amphibians and reptiles found in the mountains of north Madagascar would become extinct between 2050 and 2100.

Heron

Delegates to a conference in Kenya developed an action plan to protect the endangered Madagascar Pond-heron (*Ardeola idea*) whose population of less than 6,000 birds is spread over an area of 2 million square kilometers in the western Indian Ocean.

Lemurs

New research published in BioMed Central's journal BMC Biology covered the unusual communication patterns of grey, golden brown, and Goodman's mouse lemurs, which were all thought to be the same species but have been proven to be three distinct species so similar that they cannot be told apart by their appearance, so called cryptic species.

Dolphins

An estimated 55 Electra dolphins died in early June when stranded on a beach among mangroves near Antsohihy in the north-west of Madagascar; more often called melon-headed whales, the species is relatively unknown.

Zoo visit



In a visit to Chester Zoo in early June the Malagasy Ambassador, Dr Iary Ravaoarimanana, discussed conservation issues and also saw a Madagascar radiated tortoise, believed to be the first hatched in the UK, as reported in the Wrexham Evening Leader.

Profile - Azafady



Azafady is a registered UK charity and a Malagasy non-governmental organisation that was set up in 1994 to tackle human poverty and suffering and to protect the environment in Madagascar. We work internationally to raise awareness of the situation on the island and run projects in the southeast, which is home to a great variety of rare and endangered plants, animals and eco-systems. Azafady works with communities among the Antanosy peoples around the last remaining stands of littoral forest in this area, with a bias towards projects that bring benefits to the poorest and most vulnerable people. Project work focuses on hygiene and on environmental education as well as food security, alternative livelihood strategies, school-building, conservation-gearred research, reforestation and the development of health infrastructure.

Azafady depends on volunteer support and runs two volunteering programmes: a general scheme, Pioneer Madagascar, and Lemur Venture, which is focused on lemur conservation. Azafady is an award-winning international team, having been presented the Sting & Trudie Styler Award for Conservation & Human Rights in 2001 for its Sustainable Livelihoods Initiative and having won the Best Volunteering Organisation category in the Responsible Tourism Awards in 2007.

We continue to work with local government bodies and on various regional committees focused on health, education and the environment, and find that Azafady's help is in ever-greater demand.

For more information, please do have a look at the Azafady website on www.madagascar.co.uk, or get in touch with us directly at our London office: Studio 7, 1a Beethoven Street, London W10 4LG, UK ~ Telephone +44 (0) 20 8960 6629 ~ Fax +44 (0) 20 8962 0126. You can also email Mark Jacobs, Azafady UK's Managing Director, on mark@azafady.org. Mark will also be one of the speakers at the Society's meeting on Saturday 18th October.