

Newsletter

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Society activities

The latest Society event was on 13th June when Cornelia Schiller gave a talk on the increasing and in many ways positive role of the Chinese in Madagascar. At the AGM that preceded it the meeting approved the appointment of Chris Brown as the new Chairman to succeed Stuart Edgill after his years of excellent work, as well as Daniel Austin as the new Secretary. Bob Dewar, Ruth Frost and Alisdair Harris have joined the committee.

On Saturday 13th October we will hold a day-time meeting with talks by Glyn Young on Durrell's experience of captive breeding, Ailie Tam on the factors increasing the risk of HIV for women in south-east Madagascar and Jonathan Paul on ten million years of landscape evolution in Madagascar. There will be food, drink and music from Olga del Madagascar.

Our website at www.anglo-malagasy.com has more details as well as a summary of previous talks for those unable to attend, together with much other useful information. This includes directions to the venue for our meetings, at the Upper Vestry Hall of St George's Church, Bloomsbury, London WC1A 2HR, close to Holborn, Tottenham Court Road and the British Museum.

The next newsletter will be published in December 2012. Please send any material for inclusion as well as any changes in your contact details to Julian Cooke via juliancooke@yahoo.co.uk. We would as always be very happy to cover any particular developments, projects or fund-raising by NGOs and charities, especially ahead of the Christmas gift season.

Yvonne Orengo, one of the Society's members and until recently a committee member responsible for NGOs, has been awarded an MBE for her services to the Andrew Lees Trust in southern Madagascar. The investiture is at Windsor in October.

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Politics in Madagascar

There have been a number of developments in the efforts to end the dead-lock between Andry Rajoelina, president of the Haute Autorité de la Transition (HAT), his main rival Marc Ravalomanana and Madagascar's two other former presidents, Didier Ratsiraka and Albert Zafy. There have been meetings between Rajoelina and Ravalomanana under the auspices of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), dates have been set for elections in 2013 and official aid has started to flow again. But there is still much to resolve.

Ravalomanana's ability to stand in an election is a major issue. Legislation in Madagascar in July that banned convicted criminals from standing in elections could prevent him from doing so given his conviction in absentia, although that verdict could be rendered invalid as the court which sentenced him was not senior enough to judge a president according to Madagascar's constitution. He also falls foul of a requirement for candidates to have paid all taxes due in the previous year, as his Tiko group is disputing a substantial claim, and faces the requirement to be resident for six months before the poll.

The Malagasy Assembly approved the proposed time-table for elections of May-June 2013 in a single session on 5th July, which could be ascribed to the fact that there was little new in the proposal and also to the absence of the Ravalomanana contingent. The Congress voted a week later.

There were initial expectations of a summit between Rajoelina and Ravalomanana ahead of the summit of the AU heads of state in Addis Ababa on 15-16th July, although it did not materialise. Rajoelina said that the boycott of the government by the ministers in the Ravalomanana camp since 2nd May would lead to their suspension, which they criticised as an absurd provocation.

The new French ambassador, Jean-Christophe Belliard, said when presenting his credentials that the planned rendez-vous must be productive and that there was no point in meeting just to meet. He confirmed that a stabilisation of affairs would lead to much more aid being provided along with the IMF and also that France would continue to have a presence in a country that counted to it.

Raymond Ranjeva called for the proposed meeting to concentrate on the means of organising the forthcoming elections, which would be best handled by a neutral and technocratic government. He argued that the road-map was not the basis for an agreement and again called for the two other former presidents to be parties to the talks. Professor Ranjeva, who had kept a low profile since the BANI affair in March, also proposed that both Rajoelina and his rival Ravalomanana stand in the elections to face up to their responsibilities and be judged.

The prime minister, Omar Beriziky, called in July for a swift and full financing of the electoral commission, the Commission Electorale Nationale de la Transition, which should also be truly

independent. He said on his return from a trip to Brussels that the EU was ready to provide \$17m of funding for the elections once there was a clear timetable in place, as well as to discuss in September the next round of its overall aid financing. The head of the commission, Béatrice Atallah, confirmed on 9th July that she agreed with the idea of joint legislative and presidential elections in May-June 2013 as proposed by UN experts on 18th June. However, she called for the UN team to re-visit the country to help establish the exact date. Léonidas Tezapsidis, the EU ambassador, said the \$17m figure was only indicative and that the Malagasy state had to play its part. Rajoelina for his part said that he still believed elections could be held in November this year although one of his allies, Jean Lahiniriko, said that only local elections might be held then.

The SADC gave in mid-July an ultimatum for the end of the month for the main protagonists to reach an agreement or risk being excluded from the political process. Atallah confirmed that the commission would meet later in July and would provide a definitive date on 1st August. Political tensions remained high. On 18th August the council of ministers suspended the five members of the Ravalomanana camp who had yet to take up office, and the deputy prime minister, Pierrot Botozaza, called for a general inspection of their departments. Ravalomanana faced a summons in a South African court after the Association des Victimes du 7 Février (2009) pressed charges. However, he took comfort from the election to the head of the African Union of Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, the SADC candidate and the first South African to hold the post.

On 20th July came confirmation finally of the rumoured and planned meeting of Rajoelina and Ravalomanana, to take place the following week in the Seychelles, behind closed doors and with only the two protagonists present.

There was a mutiny at the air force base at Ivato on 22nd July, the day that Rajoelina was due to leave for the talks. A score of men were involved, led by a corporal who had been a bodyguard to a previous defence minister, Noel Rakotonandrasana, who is currently in jail. The mutineers made a broadcast on Free FM to announce a new military directorship. Three soldiers were killed in the incident which ended when units of the army stormed the camp, and a fourth died later of his wounds. Flights from Ivato airport were suspended for a day. Some 120 soldiers were subject to an inquest and six people, including two soldiers, were remanded in custody. Two journalists and a technician from Free FM, including director Lalatiana Rakotondrazafy, were later offered refuge in the South African embassy.

The talks took place at a private resort on Desroches Island and were chaired by James Michel, President of the Seychelles, with Jacob Zuma, the South African president, also present. They ended inconclusively on 25th July with little said but each side insinuating that the other was to blame for the impasse; the issue of the return of exiles was as before a major stumbling block. It was at least agreed to hold a second round of talks ahead of the SADC summit on 17th August.

Lalao Ravalomanana, the wife of the ex-president, landed in Madagascar on 27th July but after a few hours was deported on a flight to Bangkok, from where she returned to Johannesburg. It was her third attempt, after earlier unsuccessful efforts to return in January and February, and both sides criticised the other for acting provocatively over the incident. The US was forthright in condemning what it saw a breach of her human rights.

Béatrice Atallah announced on 1st August that Madagascar would hold a first round of presidential elections on 8th May 2013 followed by a second round on the same day as legislative elections on 3rd July. Local elections were still due to be held this year, on 23rd October, but the plan was later dropped given the difficulty of organising and funding them as well as the limited time before a new government would be in power.

Ravalomanana denounced as a political move the fact that South African prosecutors were investigating charges against him of crimes against humanity. The enquiry into the events of 7th February 2009 opened on 1st August and was deferred for a fortnight to allow more evidence to be presented by the claimants, who asked for \$23m in damages. The hard-line Minister of Justice, Christine Razanamahasoa, said that the South Africans should proceed with the case while the Ravalomanana camp believed the charges would not stand.

Ravalomanana was re-elected as the lay vice-president of the FJKM, the association of Protestant churches, in its quadrennial meeting. Pasteur Lala Rasendrasahasina was re-elected as president. There was the usual debate between the extra influence that Ravalomanana had brought and might bring again with the concerns of the apparent politicisation of the church, which might impede its role in proposed inter-Malagasy talks on the crisis.

Rajoelina, ahead of the second round of talks, said that his rival had no right to set conditions on the elections and indicated that he was still ready to proceed unilaterally. The talks again took place in the Seychelles, on 8th August, and were chaired by Jacob Zuma. This time they were much shorter and while few details were given it was clear there was little agreement at all. On the return of exiles, under Articles 20 and 45 of the road-map, Rajoelina recalled the explanatory note his regime appended on the independence of its judiciary. Rajoelina said that he would think further on his possible candidature, and his decision was predicated on his view that he must stop at all costs the return to power of his predecessor, who was set to stand. The two protagonists did agree on the planned dates for the presidential election, although Rajoelina wished to see legislative elections held before November 2012.

The SADC was particularly anxious to find an accord ahead of its own summit and announced a further round of discussions with the signatories of the road-map, members of civil society and church leaders. Marius Fransman, the head of the SADC delegation, returned to Madagascar and was joined by Jean-Paul Adam, the Seychelles Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Both Rajoelina and Ravalomanana were invited by Zuma to the summit of the SADC on 17-18th August in Maputo, a little over three years since they were there with Ratsiraka and Zafy to

sign one of the accords that was meant to end the crisis. The final communiqué was open to interpretation, while a further evaluation of the conditions for the potential return of Ravalomanana was due within sixty days. This would be negotiated between the SADC's security chiefs and the Malagasy armed forces, whose chiefs have been implacably opposed and who were prominent in Maputo.

The issue of insecurity in the south of the country led to calls in the first week of September for an extraordinary session of parliament, which the council of ministers rejected. Retired General Dolin Rasolosa, the head of the Conseil Supérieur de la Transition, called for a special committee of members of the presidency and parliament to address the insecurity. Beriziky called for everyone from mayors to sociologists to be involved.

Ravalomanana wrote to the SADC to protest about the proposed confiscation of his passport and a form of house arrest following further allegations from AV7 that he was involved in a supposed attempt on Rajoelina's life on 7th September.

Raymond Ranjeva announced on 13th September that he had collected 40,000 signatures asking him to form a new transitional government and that another 35,000 were expected. He said that he expected criticism for his apparent manoeuvre and had no particular timetable, but said that all the institutions of the current transition had failed. He also said the intention was more to co-ordinate projects rather than reconcile people.

Rajoelina attended the 67th General Assembly of the United Nations in New York where he signed two protocols on abolishing the death penalty and protecting the rights of children. In his address to the Assembly Rajoelina insisted on the sovereignty of the Malagasy people in deciding their fate and said that no-one was above the law. He also called for further support from the international community on the elections, for which \$20m has been committed out of an estimated cost of \$71m that some see as excessive but which was judged reasonable by the UN in comparison with similar African polls. There have been contributions from the EU, France, Norway and Switzerland while the state committed \$8m. The census of the electorate is due to take place in October but might be difficult in the south. There is also the issue of an amnesty for a number of potential candidates and the Cour Electorale Spéciale which should review disputes at the polls has yet to be created.

The US government view, as expressed by Johnnie Carson of the State Department, is that anyone should be free to stand in the elections, contrary to the neither/nor policy that would exclude the two main protagonists. The requirement for presidential candidates to be resident in Madagascar for at least six months prior means that the issue of the amnesty and return of exiles would need to be resolved by 8th November.

Economic and social matters

Finance and aid

The European Union announced in mid-July that it would provide €54m of aid to help the most vulnerable elements of Madagascar's population as well as €2m to help fund elections. Of the main sum €22m was allocated to each of education and health and the remaining €10m to civil society, in particular women's groups and youth associations to encourage their greater involvement. The Japanese government agency was also reported to be ready to resume aid.

The African Development Bank Group, UNICEF and the Malagasy government signed on 23rd August a \$1m agreement to fund the rehabilitation of social infrastructure in the country that had been damaged by the cyclones Giovanna and Irina, which hit in February. The aid will finance the reconstruction of 34 classrooms and three health centres. Mauritius also gave Madagascar as well as the Comoros \$50,000 in aid to help deal with the impact of natural disasters in 2012.

The International Fund for Agricultural Development said in early August that it would provide a grant of \$2m and a loan of \$33m to finance vocational training and productivity improvement in Madagascar's agricultural sector, for which the Spanish would lend a further \$14m.

State of society

There has been a marked escalation in zebu rustling in the south and west of the country. A series of violent clashes between zebu breeders, villagers and the armed forces on one hand and the thieves or *dahalo* has left probably hundreds dead. Over one weekend in early September nearly 100 people were killed, including over twenty cattle rustlers in an ambush by villagers armed with rocks, spears and firearms. In a clash on 7th September near Betroka three gendarmes, two soldiers and thirty dahalo were reported killed. A special army unit under Colonel René Lylison was mobilised and Rajoelina went to Betroka to launch the counter-offensive as did the army Chief of Staff, General André Ndriarijaona and the head of the Gendarmerie, General Bruno Razafindrakoto. Armed forces commandos later killed eleven dahalo in an assault in the south of Betroka.

There was also a further twist in the dispute between magistrates and the police over the death of a merchant in May, when members of a police squad forced the release of five colleagues who were in court.

The US Department of State's annual Trafficking in Persons report which was published in July placed Madagascar in the lowest category for the second year in a row for its lack of effort to prevent the exploitation of its people. The report was particularly critical of the lack of any prosecutions in the year, of the increase in forced labour and sex trafficking and of the terrible

conditions faced by the 4,000 Malagasy women recruited to work in the Lebanon. An article by IRIN at the end of August reported that one in seven residents of Toamasina were sex workers, due to the rise in poverty and the nearby location of the Ambatovy nickel mine.

There were a series of strikes in July by teachers, doctors and paramedics which the régime sought to end in various ways, including court cases. The Ministry of Education suspended the pay of 171 teachers in mid-July and the Ministry of Health replaced striking doctors. At the end of July there were clashes between the army and students calling for the resumption of courses that had been persistently delayed. Customs officials at the port of Toamasina went on strike for three days in September

Food and agriculture

The World Food Programme reported in August that it ranked Madagascar as the most vulnerable country in Africa with 57% of the population living in extreme poverty and 83% of those in rural areas facing food insecurity. Other data indicated that over half of children under the age of five suffered retarded growth while a rate of chronic malnutrition at 57% of the population was the sixth worst in the world.

A report in early September said that Madagascar was one of the five African countries most affected by the grabbing of agricultural land by foreign investors, along with Ghana, Ethiopia, Mali and Sudan. The study was conducted by the UN's FAO, the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) and IFAD, the International Fund for Agricultural Development. There were clashes when police helped evict some 6,000 local farmers to clear land for Bionexx.

Exports of the important vanilla crop are forecast to be higher this year at 1,700 tons against 1,500t in 2011.

An agreement in mid-August between the Malagasy government and Sucoma (Sucrerie Complant de Madagascar) entails an investment of \$24m over ten years and full production of 20,100 tons of sugar at Sucoma's Morondova factory compared to 16,000t currently.

The threat of locusts remains and in mid-August the Minister of Agriculture, Roland Ravatomanga, admitted that the state did not have the money nor the means to combat it alone. He indicated that \$1.8m was needed in the short term and a further \$8m in 2013-14.

There have also been stories of bandits raiding cocoa farms in the north of Madagascar. A BBC news report on 10th September can be seen at www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-19256838.

Tourism

The number of visitors to Madagascar's national parks was 20% higher in the first half of 2012 compared to the previous year and had regained the level seen in 2008 before the crisis. However, there were concerns on the impact of the dahalo incidents with warnings both in Madagascar and outside. The US State Department has advised against travel in the south. The FCO has advised against all but essential travel to Andohahela National Park and against all travel on the RN13 between Ambovombe and Ihosy.

The Manjakamiadana royal palace which was burnt down in 1995 re-opened to the public on 22nd September. The entry price for locals was 500 ariary and for tourists 10,000 ariary.

Madagascar Highlights, the new guide to Madagascar by Daniel Austin and Hilary Bradt, was published in August and understandably well received. AMS members are entitled to a 30% discount with the coupon code AMS30 when ordering online at www.bradtguides.com. The offer is also valid for the main Bradt Madagascar guidebook and the Bradt Madagascar Wildlife book. Postage in the UK is free, moreover.

Minerals

In August three ministerial departments agreed to provide the accountancy firm Ernst & Young with documents to help with a review of the payment of £118m of revenue to the state from nine mining companies in 2010. The Chinese company WISCO is also due to be part of the process.

Sherritt Resources was given a licence on 12th September to start production at the Ambatovy mine. The licence is initially for six months during which an international firm is due to carry out a technical, financial and environmental audit. The company has been required to deposit \$50m as a guarantee in the event of environmental problems while a second fund of \$25m will finance infrastructure projects.

The Australian company Lemur Resources announced in September that the results of its drilling programme at the Imaloto coal project in Madagascar had confirmed a potential yield of approximately 67% export grade thermal coal.

Madagascar Oil said it had started production at its Tsimororo heavy oil operation. It also announced interim results at the end of September, showing a similar loss of some \$5m, and said it was not aware of any reason for a sharp rise in its share price earlier in the month.

Wildlife and conservation

The largest protected wildlife park in Madagascar has been established. The Makira Natural Park covers 1,438 square miles (372,470 hectares) of rainforest in the north-east of the country and contains twenty of the island's 103 lemur species, including the red-ruffed lemur and the silky sifaka, as well as the Madagascar serpent eagle and the fossa.

Four boats loaded with rosewood harvested in spite of the ban left for Asia on 14th September from the port of Maroantsetra. The court case started in mid-September on the illegal export of six containers of rosewood seized in Mauritius in June 2011, in which an unnamed member of Congress was one of four to receive a prison sentence. Gibson Guitar Corp. has been fined \$300,000 for not acting on information that the ebony it was sourcing in Madagascar may have been harvested illegally.

Eight species from Madagascar were on a list of 100 of the most threatened animals, plants and fungi on the planet that was compiled by over 8,000 scientists from the IUCN Species Survival Commission. A report called *Priceless or Worthless?* was presented at the IUCN World Conservation Congress in South Korea in September. Top of the list were the Tarzan's chameleon in Madagascar, the Spoon-billed sandpiper and the Pygmy three-toed sloth. The other Malagasy creatures were the Ploughshare tortoise, Madagascar Pochard, the Greater bamboo lemur, the Silky Sifaka, Durrell's Vontsira, the Suicide Palm and the Forest Coconut.

A workshop in Antananarivo on 9th to 12th July, convened by the IUCN and Bristol Zoo and chaired by Russell Mittermeier, provided a new assessment of the status of lemurs and gave a higher conservation status to nearly all of the 103 known species; 23 were now judged critically endangered compared to 8 in a 2005 survey and 52 judged endangered, compared to 18 then.

The corals of the Western Indian Ocean are among the richest in the world, according to a study over the years from 2002 to 2011 that has been published in PLoS One. The researchers identified 369 coral species in the West Indian Ocean but estimated that further studies may show up to 450 species, which would put it close to India's Andaman Islands or the northern Great Barrier Reef. The greatest richness was found in the North Mozambique Channel, the waterway that separates Madagascar from Africa's west coast, with 250-300 species. The report can be found at www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0045013.

Less encouraging reports indicated that sediment carried by rivers draining deforested areas in Madagascar was smothering local coral reefs, increasing the incidence of disease and suppressing growth. The new studies published in the journals *Biogeoscience* and the *Marine Pollution Bulletin* included data on luminescent coral bands, rather like tree rings, from Antongil Bay and the western coast.

A report in September claimed that the forestry conservation project set up by the GoodPlanet

Foundation in partnership with WWF and with the support of Air France had achieved positive results on the 500,000 hectares in which it has been involved in the last four years. Some 30,000 ha of degraded forest have been restored and 1,000 ha re-forested, as well as a supposed 19m tonnes of CO2 emissions over twenty years avoided. Researchers at the country's Centre National de Recherche sur l'Environnement presented a new study in September that showed how micro-organisms in the soil were crucial to the success of re-planting, which could reach 95% against the more typical 40-50% in sites which did not use a new procedure to restore the soil first.

A paper in *Biodiversity Conservation* earlier in the year reported that two surveys of Madagascar's Betampona Nature Reserve, which covers 2,228 hectares, had uncovered 76 unique frogs, 36 of which might be new to science; by comparison there are only 88 frog species in the U.S. and Canada. While the reserve faces familiar challenges from deforestation and bushmeat as well as the invasion of the alien guava species, it is regarded as well-managed. Money for Madagascar has been working with local communities bordering the park.

A study of three lemur species has established the first connection between vocal tract length and species identification in the animal kingdom. The results by team of researchers at the University of Turin were published in the *International Journal of Primatology* and an extract can be read at <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10764-012-9635-y#page-1>.

Biologists from the Open University, the Madagascar Biodiversity Partnership and Blue Ventures have identified a new population of the northern subspecies of the spider tortoise, *Pxyis arachnoides brygooi* where densities are the highest ever recorded for the species. An average of 19.8 tortoises was recorded per hectare in this new population, almost ten times the average for the species as a whole. The story is at www.bbc.co.uk/nature/19161652.

Local farmers have claimed that the use of pesticides to control mosquitoes at the Ambatovy cobalt-nickel mine had affected bees in an adjoining 20-mile strip, leading to the loss of forty tons of honey production.

A study led by researchers at the University of British Columbia and co-authored by Alisdair Harris of Blue Ventures criticized the fact that the EU paid access fees to fish off Madagascar that were 20% lower than in 1986 while quotas were 30% higher. The researchers proposed that the rate should be based on the market value of the catch not a fixed rate, which was currently equivalent to only 3% and let private operators make excessive margins. An access fee of 50% of gross revenues would generate nearly \$9m for Madagascar.

The first issue of Volume Seven of the journal *Madagascar Conservation and Development* was published in late June. It included articles on the gecko *Phelsuma serraticauda*, on toponyms for centres of endemism and bat diversity in Berenty. The full MCD archive is available for free at www.journalmcd.com/index.php/mcd/issue/archive.

Books

A book published by Indiana University Press on 25th August called *Forest and Labor in Madagascar* explored the dilemma poor rural workers faces in balancing their desire to make a living from the forest with that of the state to earn revenue from foreign tourism. Its ISBN number is 0253005779.

Charities and NGOs



Money for Madagascar will be sending out a mailing in October with details of the Christmas cards and alternative gifts it is selling this year. Their calendar is available already and features Madagascar's magnificent birdlife.