

Newsletter

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Society activities

The Society's latest event was a daytime event on Saturday 24th October which presented the research behind two new books with a conservation theme on the south of Madagascar. Louise Jasper and Charlie Gardner talked on *Life amongst the thorns: biodiversity & conservation of Madagascar's spiny forest* with spectacular photography while Garth Cripps told the tale of *To live with the sea: the modern life of Vezo traditional fishers in southwest Madagascar*, with equally striking images. Rindra Rakotoarinjatovo provided a range of insights into the benefits of ecotourism in the country.

The first meeting in 2016 will be on 30th March with a talk by Stephen Spencer, Hannah Russell, James Penney and Anthony Howe on their medical expedition to Madagascar where they ran a programme screening for schistosomiasis (bilharzia) in the remote district of Marolambo. The dates for later in the year are 22nd June in the evening, an event to commemorate the country's Independence Day on 26th June, and a daytime gathering on 22nd October.

There will be further details on our website at www.anglo-malagasy.com, which also has a summary of some of the previous talks for those unable to attend, together with much other useful information. This includes directions to the venue for our meetings, which is the Upper Vestry Hall of St George's Church, Bloomsbury, London WC1A 2HR, two minutes' walk from the British Museum.

The next newsletter will be published in March 2016. 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 last three months have not seen any particularly positive political developments in Madagascar, which is due to hold senatorial elections at the end of December.

On 1st October President Hery Rajaonarimampianina gave a speech at the 70th session of the General Assembly of the United Nations in which he supported the Sustainable Development Goals and said that his nation was following its own path to sustainability and development.

A special session of the country's National Assembly was convened to consider the proposal for the new electoral commission which was passed swiftly by those deputies present, although MAPAR, the party supporting former president Andry Rajoelina, boycotted the sitting. On 16th October the Haute Cour Constitutionnelle (HCC) confirmed the legitimacy of the new body, which will have greater powers to investigate anomalies and be more independent of other state bodies. The nine new members of the commission were mostly in place by the end of October; its president will be Hery Rakotomanana, a lawyer who was involved in arranging the constitutional referendum in 2010.

When the Assembly's ordinary session opened on 19th October there was a move by supporters of the President to remove the permanent bureau of Jean-Max Rakotomamonjy, the Assembly's president, for which they would have needed an elusive two-thirds majority. The deputies were as before concerned to secure the 4x4 vehicles promised to them. There was also some debate on Rajaonarimampianina's earlier proposal of a Memorandum for Stability, the need for which the Assembly appeared to accept. On this Marc Ravalomanana called on the deputies in his Tiako-i-Madagasikara (TIM) to support the plan, although the former president was preoccupied with his own plans for the family's TIKO business including the development of new abattoirs at Andohatapenaka (a site he claimed to own but which the government sold in mid-October under a new contract for building work to help host the summit of Francophone countries in 2016). He said that he was ready to work with the presidential party HVM, which had done relatively well in the municipal elections held on 31st July in winning 42% of the seats although not in the larger cities including Antananarivo, which had been won for TIM by Lalao Ravalomanana, thus adding a further twist to the dispute over the land. HVM won nine of the 19 seats that were contested again in November after the previous results were annulled.

Lalao Ravalomanana did not formally take over from her predecessor Col. Ramiaramanana, the Président de la Délégation Spéciale (PDS), until 6th October. One of her first acts when installed as mayor was to suspend any building projects that destroyed the rice paddies around the capital, which had been blamed for recent flooding and had been opposed by her husband Marc, who went to Germany in search of investors into the capital. Ramiaramanana later in the month took up a new role as secretary-general at the Ministry of Presidential Projects which was expected to engender some further tension. Ravalomanana met the ambassadors of the EU, France and the US amongst others to secure financial support for the city to make necessary improvements ahead of the rainy season.

Comments after her meeting by Véronique Vouland-Anein, the new French ambassador, on the ownership of the Iles Eparses in the Mozambique Channel prompted a *Front Patriotique* to call

on the Malagasy government to live up to its responsibilities, although ministers stressed the need for diplomacy. Béatrice Atallah, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, said in November that the matter would be considered by the United Nations in September 2016. Professor Raymond Ranjeva advocated diplomacy but said that doing so in secrecy would not advance the country's interests. The movement of those claiming the islands planned a demonstration for 12th December, which is the anniversary of a United Nations resolution in 1979 that said the islands belonged to Madagascar and called on France to pursue negotiations.

Rajaonarimampianina's HVM had high expectations of securing control of the Senate, for which elections are due at the end of December and for which the President has the right to appoint one-third of the members. There was some debate over what would be an appropriate number of senators which was settled at the end of October as being 63, a figure between the 33 established by Ravalomanana in 2008 and the 90 in place under the rule of Didier Ratsiraka.

In November there was a further dispute in the Assembly over the affair of Niarisy Mara, the deputy for Ankazoabo Atsimo, who was implicated in the theft of cattle and was denied immunity. A parliamentary commission comprising nineteen deputies went to Ankazoabo-Sud on 18th November in an atmosphere of considerable tension.

The President and his wife attended an economic forum for Francophone countries in Paris in late October, on which there was criticism for the lack of communication and apparent excess at a Parisian restaurant. The President also led a delegation to the India-Africa forum in New Delhi in late October and in November attended in turn with an impressive delegation the first UK-Madagascar Trade and Investment Forum which was held at Lancaster House and was accompanied by a number of other meetings.

Jean Ravelonarivo, who has been prime minister since January, left for treatment in Paris on 14th November after he suffered a mild heart attack. His departure prompted a series of rumours before his return a fortnight later; he said that the costs of his treatment had been met by Rotary International and not by the state. His (political) position remains fragile.

The preparations for the senatorial elections continued against a background, as often, of criticism of the amount of planning, the nature of the ballot papers and possible interference. In the region of Atsimo Andrefana two former prime ministers, Roger Kolo and Monja Roindefo, will contest the seat while three regional chiefs are standing for HVM. Another former prime minister, Omer Beriziky, a candidate in the Antsiranana region, accused his rivals from HVM on the list as having been on the list published in 2014 of people involved in illegal rosewood exports.

The electoral campaign started formally on 8th December and will run for three weeks until the polls on 29th December, at which 12,560 mayors and municipal councillors will vote.

Economic and social matters

Finance and aid

In early November the government said that it expected Madagascar's economy to expand by 3.2% in 2015 and by 4.5% in 2016 due to a better-than-expected performance in the agricultural and construction sectors. The annual rate of inflation is forecast to be 7.9% this year dropping to 7.2% in 2016 while public spending would see an increase next year of nearly 10% over 2015 to \$1.78 billion. The Loi des Finances 2016 also anticipates that only 14% of the budget will be covered by external funding and that reductions in the rates of VAT will be offset by tighter customs controls and fewer exemptions. Civic society organisations said that the budget for education, health and rural development was below the targets the government had set earlier.

The International Monetary Fund had said in July that 2015 growth would be 3.5% having adjusted its forecasts (all of which are prone to revision) following a slowdown in the mining sector and poor weather after cyclones hit the island, as well as structural problems. At their annual meeting in October, held in Peru, the IMF and World Bank declined to commit to a date for renewed aid nor to an amount. In mid-November the Fund did provide a further \$42m under its Rapid Credit Facility to meet urgent balance of payments needs and to act, it hoped, as a catalyst for further donor support. The IMF praised the government's handling of the economy in the past six months, saying it had maintained macroeconomic stability and debt sustainability.

The World Bank ranked Madagascar alongside the DRC and Liberia as the poorest countries in the world. It has calculated GDP per capita at \$271, only 1% higher over the period 2009-14 and still some way below the level of \$501 in 1971. The World Bank also indicated that remittances from Malagasy abroad amounted to \$432m in 2014 equivalent to 4% of the country's GDP.

In November in Brussels the European Commission announced as expected that it would provide €518m to Madagascar under its 11th Fonds Européens de Développement (FED) programme covering the period 2014-2020 to help reduce poverty in the country. The European Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development, Neven Mimica, who signed the programme with President Rajaonarimampianina, called for bold reforms. The aid is targeted specifically at three sectors: governance and the strengthening of public policies, infrastructure and rural development. A World Bank diagnostic report in November identified a number of historical and structural impediments to good governance in the country including the role of an élite and the army, which had been exacerbated by the recent political crisis.

When on his trade visits Rajaonarimampianina acknowledged that the country's economy had been hit by low commodity prices and poor weather, but said that he expected an expansion in GDP of 5% in 2016: "We have some other promising sectors, like energy, infrastructure, tourism and services and I believe those together with traditional ones like agriculture are where we can increase our productivity and ramp up growth".

The President called at a workshop on good governance in October for an improvement in the country's public administration which he said should be a driver of social and economic development instead of being a nightmare of bureaucracy and corruption. The result of an Afrobaromètre poll announced later in the month indicated that 73% of those polled believed the level of corruption had increased in 2014 and 90% saw the government's actions as ineffective.

The President said in October that the state would continue to subsidise the utility company JIRAMA although the IMF and international donors have called for such subsidies to cease. The anti-corruption body BIANCO said that years of corruption, favouritism and conflicts of interest had left a liability of 30bn ariary (£6m) at the utility and said that it had never been able to succeed in the prosecution of those accused of milking it as a cash cow.

At Air Madagascar, the other troubled state entity, the government appointed a new director-general in Gilles Filiatreault, a Canadian who took radical and at time unpopular measures when he turned round the Cape Verde airline prior to privatisation in 2008. His main tasks at Air Madagascar will be to have it removed from Annex B of the EU's black list for operators and to restore the company to profitability, which is likely to meet some resistance.

USAID promised \$4.5m of aid at end October to help some of those affected by the drought in the south. The UN FAO has estimated that the country will need to import 551,000 tonnes of grains in 2015-16, up from 437,000 in 2014-15 and including 331,000t of rice.

A UNICEF report in November indicated that some 9.5m Malagasy did not have access to toilets, representing 65% of inhabitants in rural areas and 45% of those living in urban areas.

Crops



Cold and wet weather is reported to have restricted the production of cloves and is expected to lead to higher prices.

Business

Forbes magazine, in its November edition, published a list of its ranking of the richest people in sub-Saharan Africa and identified 24 families credited with fortunes of over \$200m of which four were from Madagascar, if of French or Indian origin. Ylias Akbaraly was fifth on the list with his family's diverse industrial business valued at \$710m; Hassanein Hiridjee, with \$705m according to Forbes, is a French national who owns Telma and has bought the bank BNI; Iqbal Rahim, the founder of the Galana oil company, was said to be worth \$419m; and the French Fraise family was reported to have \$208m of wealth from businesses such as energy and vanilla. Separately Hiridjee was named by the Choiseul Institute as one of ten young business leaders expected to have a significant impact in the future.

Madagascar moved up two places to a rank of 164th out of 189 countries in the World Bank's survey Doing Business 2016. It was unchanged at 130th out of 140 countries in the World

Economic Forum's 2015-16 on global competitiveness scoring poorly on public institutions, infrastructure and education inter alia.

Security

The campaign against cattle-rustlers and bandits continued. By October *Fahalemana 2015* had resulted in the deaths of nine gendarmes and ninety-one *dahalo*. In November the armed forces established further special anti-*dahalo* squads, the Gendarmerie one being based at Betroka. A joint communiqué from forty-two civil society organisations in November condemned a number of actions by the armed forces including summary execution, torture and racketeering as well as suggesting that economic operators or politicians were using the campaign to eliminate competition. The prime minister Jean Ravelonarivo said in an interview on 12th November that these were only rumours and that Madagascar respected the state of law and human rights.

There have been a number of further incidents of popular justice with various lynchings.

Tourism

The government has taken some steps to liberalise air transport. A new airline Madagascar Airways will compete on domestic routes, starting with Sainte-Marie and Toamasina; its principal is Raobelina Manankasina, a former pilot at Air Madagascar with political links (the minister Rivo Rakotovoao was reported to be a shareholder). Ulrich Andriantiana, the Minister of Transport, signed an accord in October with the UAE to open a route to Dubai while Turkish Airlines is expected to do the same to Istanbul and South African Air Link is expected to increase the number of its flights. Air Madagascar has said it will end its twice-weekly flight to Guangzhou via Bangkok by early January following a review of its operations, which found the flights to Asia have never been profitable (except perhaps for the smugglers of wildlife).

Two tourists, a German man and his French companion, escaped an attempt to kidnap them in October when there were also attacks on tourists by armed gangs at Belo and Antsiranana. A Madagascar court sentenced four men to hard labour for life over the mob lynching on Nosy Be in October 2013 of two Europeans, French tourist Sebastien Judalet and Franco-Italian resident Roberto Gianfalla, who were beaten and then burned on a beach by a mob acting on false rumours of foreign involvement in the death of an eight-year-old local boy; the uncle of the boy was also killed later. There were lesser sentences for a number of others on trial, one of whom was acquitted.



The *Daily Telegraph* published an article by Nick Matthews on a cycle holiday of sorts in Madagascar that won its competition in November; the story can be read at:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/travel-writing-competition/11951006/Just-Back-A-lesson-in-cycling-the-Madagascan-way.html>. The newspaper also had an article by Mike Unwin on his recent trip to Madagascar with Rainbow Tours, which is at:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/africaandindianocean/madagascar/12003519/Family-holidays-in-Madagascar-the-call-of-the-weird.html>.

Minerals

President Hery Rajaonarimampianina told the UK Trade & Investment forum in November that the revised mining and petroleum codes would be finalised by the beginning of 2016.

Tantalus Rare Earths AG announced in October that it had decided to file an application for insolvency proceedings in Munich after the non-payment by an investor during a private placement in April 2015 left it short of funds. The company said that the group's subsidiaries and especially the operations in Madagascar would not be directly affected. However, in November there were renewed concerns over the potential environmental impact of the company's operations in the Ampasindava peninsula.

StratMin Global Resources PLC has reported progress on its exploration programmes at the Loharano and Mahefadok projects in Madagascar, which had identified significant new anomalous zones and will underpin plans to accelerate the development of the flake graphite concentration plant adjacent to the prospect area.

A contentious project to export 10m tonnes of granite from Madagascar to Réunion was reported to have been cancelled just before the first shipment in October, but to have then gone ahead through the French company Colas.

Wildlife and conservation

Forests



The Honko Mangrove Conservation & Education scheme has won the gold award for a tourism business or initiative that preserves and carefully manages habitat and wildlife species. It operates in the Ambondrolava mangrove complex in south-west Madagascar that is home to five communities that depend on the mangroves for wood, fish and other animals. A Belgian-registered charity founded in 2007 works with the communities and also with visitors to inform and educate them about the importance of the

mangroves. The creation of a community association, VOI Mamelolo Honko, has led to the restoration of 18ha of mangrove and Honko also runs training in sustainable fishing practices.

In December during the COP 21 meeting the Malagasy Minister of the Environment, Ecology, the Sea and the Forests, Ralava Beboarimisa, met Edmond Moukala, Chief of the Africa Unit of the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, to discuss recommendations on the conservation of the Atsinanana rainforests. The Minister said the National Assembly would be considering on 17th December a law governing the management of rosewood logging and the progress undertaken in the implementation of CITES recommendations. It is due to report by late January 2016.

In October over 7,000 rosewood logs with an estimated value of \$5m were seized in Hong Kong. At end November the Singaporean authorities were reported to have lifted the embargo of 30,000 rosewood logs with a reported value of \$50m that had been intercepted in March 2014 from the Kong Hoo company; the release was attributed in part to the role of Anthelme Ramparany, a Minister of the Environment under the Transition regime.

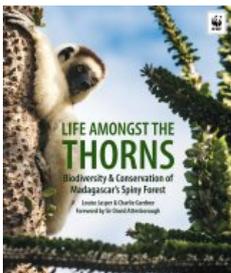
Species

The latest edition in November of the biennial *Primates in Peril: The world's 25 most endangered primates* compiled by the Primate Specialist Group of IUCN's Species Survival Commission, Bristol Zoological Society, the International Primatological Society and Conservation International included as a new addition the Lavasoa Mountains dwarf lemur (*Cheirogaleus lavasoensis*) which was identified only two years ago. There were five lemurs in total in the list.

There have been two significant seizures by customs officials in Madagascar, one in October of 419 radiated tortoises in two suitcases of a Chinese citizen due to fly to Guangzhou and another in late September of 770 baby tortoises hidden in socks and destined for Malaysia.

Publications

The December edition of Words without Borders presents a set of fiction from Madagascar comprising modern fables by Iharilanto Patrick Andriamangatiana and David Jaomanoro, a portrait by Magali Nirina Marson of a teenager reclaiming her identity, a look at economic injustice by Bao Ralambo and Charlotte-Arrisoa Rafenomanjato, a village tale of love and war by Cyprienne Toazara and one on bureaucracy by Naivo as well as a first translation from the Malagasy of Andry Andraina's documentation of the aftermath of World War II. It was edited by Allison M. Charette and is at <http://www.wordswithoutborders.org/current-issue/>.



Louise Jasper and Charlie Gardner's book *Life Amongst the Thorns: Biodiversity and Conservation of Madagascar's Spiny Forest*, has now been published in hardback (ISBN-13 9781909612679) and is available at [Life Amongst the Thorns](#) (2015) or by writing to louisedjasper@gmail.com. The book describes the fascinating history, landscapes, wildlife and culture of the Spiny Forest and explores the challenges faced by conservationists

working to protect its fragile ecosystems.

In November Friends of the Earth UK published *Why Women Will Save The Planet* through Zed Books. The Andrew Lees Trust (ALT) contributed a chapter to the book reflecting on the role that its media projects had played in empowering women in southern Madagascar. It was written by director Yvonne Orenge, a member of the Society, in consultation with her Malagasy colleagues Mme Hanitra Raharimanana (Director of Andry Lalana Tohana - ALT Mg) and Mme Charlotte (Radio Producer ALT Mg).