

# Newsletter

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Anglo-Malagasy  
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Society • Politics • Economics • Tourism • Minerals • Wildlife • Events • Society • Politics • Economics • Tourism • Minerals • Wildlife • Events

## Society activities

The Society's meeting in June, as part of the celebration of the Malagasy Independence Day, provided an insight from Donna Kurtz into the little-known history of the country's national dog, the Coton de Tulear, its evolution from the Bichon Frise and plans to re-establish the breed in Madagascar. The meeting included a star turn from one such dog, Buddy Holly, with his owner Cathy Clarke.

There will be a daytime gathering on 28<sup>th</sup> October with three talks on different topics. Dr Alison Leaf and Dr Emily Clark will describe their training programme Helping Babies Breathe for health-care workers involved with new-born children; Jackie Sutter Randriantsoa will speak about her charity Education for Madagascar with its focus on child poverty; and Sam Rowley will present a short film called *Madagascar's Last Paradise* about six endemic species in Masoala.

The dates for meetings in 2018 are Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> March and Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> June in the evening and Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> October during the day.

The details will be on Facebook and our website at [www.anglo-malagasy.com](http://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 December 2017. 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](mailto:juliancooke@yahoo.co.uk).

Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> September saw the welcome re-opening of the Madagascar Embassy in London, which is in a building in Victoria; the new ambassador is yet to be announced. A number of the Society's members attended the opening and the subsequent thanksgiving service which commemorated the bicentenary of the London Missionary Society's initial work in Madagascar

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and was hosted by its successor, the Council for World Mission. At the opening President Hery Rajaonarimampianina spoke of the long history between the two nations and received a copy of the latest Bradt travel guide to the country from Hilary Bradt and Daniel Austin.

The President and his delegation visited The National Archives on 5<sup>th</sup> August to view the 1817 'Treaty of Friendship' as well as the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew (covered under Wildlife) while also participating in the second UK-Madagascar Trade and Investment forum (covered under Economy) on 6<sup>th</sup> August.

On Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> the President, the Malagasy Minister of Foreign Affairs Henry Rabary-Njaka and the Minister of the Economy Herilanto Ravelharison met the Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson for talks; it was announced that a British delegation would visit Madagascar to mark the bicentenary of diplomatic relations.

## Politics in Madagascar

There have been a number of developments in the country since June, when the celebration of the country's National Day was noted for the absence of the three former presidents Albert Zafy, Marc Ravalomanana (who was in Quebec) and Andry Rajoelina (in France), likely rivals in the elections planned for a date between 25<sup>th</sup> November and 25<sup>th</sup> December in 2018. Their candidature received the support of the United Nations' country representative, Violette Kakyomya.

In early July the commission set up to review the electoral process provided its initial report which included recommendations for greater independence for and better financing of the electoral commission CENI, which itself proposed a limit to campaign funding in part to avoid money-laundering. Tim Smart, the British ambassador to Madagascar, called with his American colleague Robert Yamate for the elections to be transparent, credible, fair and inclusive which was echoed by the French ambassador, Véronique Vouland-Aneini, each reflecting concerns among the international community over the growing tension in the country. On 5<sup>th</sup> July the President he appointed Professor Alain Tehindrazanarivelo, a former health minister under the Transition regime, as ambassador to Ethiopia and also to represent Madagascar at the African Union, the first nomination for some time.

This tension included the dispersal on 7<sup>th</sup> July of a gathering commemorating the fifteenth anniversary of the founding of Ravalomanana's party TIM, which had been banned by the security forces who took substantial measures to stop the party meeting at the Mahamasina stadium. Ravalomanana said that while he would not retreat he would respect the law. He addressed a letter to the international community and said he would lodge a complaint, while the prime minister Olivier Mahafaly Solonandrasana countered by saying that the state would take certain measures as a consequence of what it saw as an illegal gathering and announced new guidance to deal with any attempts to destabilise the state. Ravalomanana said he was not afraid of being arrested as he had done nothing wrong. The matter went to the Conseil d'Etat

and on 21<sup>st</sup> July TIM proposed a new 'cultural and celebratory' gathering for the 29<sup>th</sup> of the month, which was also refused permission.

The affair of Claudine Razaimamonjy, a businesswoman and special adviser to the president, continued in July with the publication of a transcript of an incriminating telephone call in December 2016 with a member of the anti-corruption body BIANCO, which had issued a summons, although its release was seen as an awkward breach given the matter was sub judice. BIANCO at the end of the month moved to arrest three people over the use of illegal funds at the commune of Ambohimahasina in a related case.

The position of the Minister of Finance, Gervais Rakotoarimanana, was reported in mid-July to be under pressure and he formally resigned on 16<sup>th</sup> July, citing a lack of support and a difference in views which apparently included issues over the container port at Toamasina. The move was seen as a blow to President Rajaonarimampianina, given their close links since studying together in Canada; he appeared to have been surprised by it. It might also threaten the recent financial orthodoxy he had imposed although the new minister, Vonintsalama Andriambololona, the first woman to hold the post, has forty years of experience and had been secretary-general at the ministry from 2009 to 2015 when she had been dismissed by the president for her support of Orlando Robimanana, the director-general who had raised concerns over financial transactions with the president's party HVM.

On 1<sup>st</sup> August Mamy Rakotoarivelo was found dead at his home after a suspected suicide. He had been a former head of Congress under the Transition and director of the newspaper *Midi Madagasikara* as well as leader of the Ravalomanana movement until distanced from it after the return from exile of the former president. The suicide motive was called into question in particular when linked to the murder at home of Jacky Tsiandopy the previous night; he had been a former minister, was head of the union for Inspector-Generals and was reported to have revealed the illegal subsidies at Ambohimahasina in the Razaimamonjy affair.

There were 218 candidates chosen out of 50 applications for the 22 positions available on the new Conseil du Fampihavanana Malagasy (CFM), the Council for National Reconciliation, including several former ministers, generals and journalists as well as representatives of the various former presidents. The candidates underwent a form of public interview as well as enquiries into their background and moral standing, while a further eleven members of the council were to be appointed by the current President. The members were announced on 25<sup>th</sup> August. The CFM will have three commissions with mandates on Truth and Forgiveness, Reparations and the Refoundation of the Republic.

There was a visit to Madagascar in mid-August by six members of the US Congress who met the President, members of the government and the heads of the army and BIANCO, for which they confirmed their country's support.

In mid-August attempts to celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of the founding of TIM in Toamasina were thwarted. Ravalomanana said that given the pressures he had no intention of participating in a proposed meeting with Rajaonarimampianina designed to ease tension between their two parties, TIM and HVM. An example of the tension arose when Lalao

Ravalomanana was reportedly forced by the military to vacate the presidential suite she had reserved at the Grand Hotel Antsiranana so that the president himself could take it, an incident which was denied, as he was also in town for the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Protestant Reform Church FJKM as well as the bicentenary of the arrival of members of the London Missionary Society.

The new opposition movement DFP (*Dinika ho an'ny Fanavotam-pirenena* or Forces of Change) announced plans to arrange a demonstration on 22<sup>nd</sup> August to demand greater respect for freedom of expression. The plan was later amended to a meeting in the Mahamasina stadium but that was banned by the police hours before it was due to start; the DFP's appeal to a tribunal was rejected as it said the movement had no official capacity.

A summit of the Southern African Development Community in Pretoria on 20<sup>th</sup> August was focussed on the industrialisation of the region but also accorded a positive opinion on the evolution of the state of affairs in Madagascar since 2013, although there was some dispute over the right of the prime minister's family to join the party.

On 25<sup>th</sup> August Rajaonarimampianina announced a further cabinet shuffle, the second such partial one under the current prime minister. The six new ministers included Henry Rabary-Njaka in place of Béatrice Attallah at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who seemed to have fallen out of favour; Rabary-Njaka had been head of the presidential office and of Air Madagascar until the troublesome strike there in 2015. Another minister to depart was Charles Andriamisa as Minister of Justice given some issues with the illegal rosewood trade and continued disputes with the body representing magistrates, the SMM; as his replacement Elise Rasolo was herself a magistrate the SMM understandably welcomed her appointment and held an initial meeting on 1<sup>st</sup> September to address their concerns. Ralava Beboarimisa, a former Minister of the Environment, returned to the cabinet.

There was some debate over the murder in the capital of the former honorary consul for Malaysia, Raza Zahid, on 24<sup>th</sup> August; he had been implicated previously in the kidnapping of *karana* or businessmen from the Indo-Pakistani community and his death prompted various conspiracy theories over the missing Malaysian Airlines aircraft MH370, some debris from which had been found on Madagascar.

At the end of August an inter-ministerial committee started a two-month review of the electoral law, a revision of which is due to be in place by the end of 2017.

In early September Rivo Rakotovo, the leader of the presidential party HVM, said he would press for Rajaonarimampianina to stand in the 2018 elections and said that the President remained popular in the country, even if some polls suggested otherwise. In a press interview in the UK Rajaonarimampianina indicated that he would take part touching on a proposal to reform the clause of the constitution which would require him to hand over the reins to the head of the Senate sixty days before the poll. The electoral commission CENI said it was not aware of a proposed reform but had the means to handle it, while civil society bodies such as SeFaFi and the election observers KMF/CNOE opposed any such move ahead of the poll. The US ambassador Robert Yamate, was among those who said that the election, which he judged

the most important in the country's history, should not be deferred to allow for a referendum on the constitution. The Haute Cour Constitutionnelle (HCC) was expected to judge whether there was a sufficient imperative in place and the proposal met extensive criticism from other political parties. The international community, which had provided the bulk of \$12m in funds to cover the electoral cycle, also expressed some reservations. Other potential candidates were said to include Didier Ratsiraka, although there were social media reports of his death (again), and André Mailhol, who headed both the well-funded Church of the Apocalypse and the party GFFM (Gideon's Victory over Poverty in Madagascar). The deposit required to stand was reported to be rising from 50m ariary to 70m (c. £17,500).

The Council for National Reconciliation CFM convened in mid-September with thirty-three members. Antonio Guterres, the United Nations secretary-general, expressed his hopes to see progress in such reconciliation in a meeting he had with Rajaonarimampianina during the UN's annual General Assembly on 21<sup>st</sup> September. While he did not raise the matter of the disputed Iles Eparses in his own speech to the Assembly, the President did raise the matter in a press conference.

There appeared to be little reconciliation with the Ministry of Justice and the magistrates' union, the SMM, which together with the legal clerks' union announced plans on 22<sup>nd</sup> September for another strike.

## Economic and social matters

### Finance and aid

The International Monetary Fund, after a visit to Madagascar from 7<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> September, reported on a favourable development in the country's economy in spite of the impact of the cyclone season and the drought in the south; the Fund forecast a growth rate of 4.1% in 2017 and then 5.1% in 2018 with greater public investment and a recovery in the agricultural sector. The Fund expressed concern over the rate of inflation which had risen but was forecast to fall back to 8% at the end of 2017; it also called for greater efforts to fight corruption including money-laundering.

In late June the IMF had agreed after a positive review of its funding to date to provide a second tranche of credit equivalent to \$85m, which was an amount higher than first proposed given the costs of Cyclone Enawo. In August it offered a further loan of \$50m to clear the debts of Air Madagascar and to help to deal with the impact of the cyclone. In August the World Bank provided \$250m for social projects in the south of Madagascar and committed to provide support of \$1.3bn for the period 2017-21 to promote economic resilience and growth.

President Hery Rajaonarimampianina said at a four-day international agricultural fair in September that he wanted to see a transformation in the agricultural sector to help to secure food security in Madagascar. He said that there were 30m hectares of arable land untapped and noted the potential market of 500m consumers in sub-Saharan Africa and the Indian Ocean,

although the issue of foreign ownership of land has remained a concern. The Ministry of Livestock reported that the zebu herd in the country had fallen by a third since 2012.

The budget for the state utility JIRAMA set out a 7.5% increase in tariffs as of 1<sup>st</sup> July and a gradual reduction in the state subsidy to zero by 2021. State support for Air Madagascar is due to end in 2018.

At the second UK-Madagascar Trade and Investment forum held in London on 6<sup>th</sup> August the President outlined the opportunities in the country and emphasised an improved investment climate, citing twenty reforms in 2016 in areas such as setting up companies, obtaining construction permits and tax administration. The changes also included Public Private Partnerships as pioneered in the UK and the framework for the extension and renovation of the country's main airports. In the current year he cited reforms in tax payment, a credit bureau and a proposed new law on Special Economic Zones with scope for textiles, food processing and technology. He emphasised the potential in energy and mining while saying this would be done in full respect of the environment.

The Minister of Economy and Planning, Herlanto Ravaloharison, set out the challenges the country faces and the basis for the National Development Plan with its five pillars: good governance, the rule of law, security, decentralisation, democracy and solidarity; macroeconomic stability; inclusive growth; human capital; and natural capital with resilience to disasters. He noted the improved economic position as recorded by the IMF, citing an expected average inflation rate over the year of 6.7%, an investment rate of 15.5% of GDP and a 5.6% increase in the level of exports. He anticipated growth in GDP of 5.3% in 2018 and 5.9% in 2019 driven by agriculture, major mining projects, energy production, infrastructure development, tourism and higher investment at some 20% of GDP, especially in agribusiness and special economic zones. He did raise the need for further financial support for priority projects including health and water.



The President and a Malagasy delegation also visited the London Stock Exchange where he opened the day's trading and held talks on potential collaboration on the development of capital markets. The President said that he was well aware of the contribution they can make from his time as Minister of Finance while the LSE has formed several partnerships with African exchanges; there are 106 African companies listed or traded on the exchange, as well as ten African sovereign bonds.

The Malagasy government took out a loan of €51m from Deutsche Bank in June, an amount which was part of an allowance for such loans of up to \$100m and was used for the energy sector; the terms were reported to be advantageous. In that month the country also joined first the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank as a non-regional prospective member and then became the 41<sup>st</sup> member of the African Afreximbank. In September the African Development Bank released a proposal to be confirmed in October to allocate \$2bn to Madagascar over five years with a focus on infrastructure, energy, transport and agriculture.

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## Business

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In the first half of 2017 652 new businesses were set up in Madagascar, nearly one hundred more than in the same period in 2016. The largest number was in services and the main participants were Malagasy, Chinese and French. Madagascar improved by thirteen places to 113<sup>th</sup> in the *Doing Business 2017* report published in July although the country ranked only 128<sup>th</sup> of 138 nations in the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness index for 2016/17, compared to 130<sup>th</sup> of 144 nations the previous year.

In July the French group Rubis, which has a dominant share in gas distribution in Madagascar through Vitogaz, bought Galana, the leading distributor of petroleum products in the country and a principal supplier to Jirama. Galana had revenue of \$215m in 2016 and will complement the Rubis business in La Réunion.

Xavier Niel, the owner of the hugely successful Free telephone company in France, visited Madagascar in July and is expected to invest in businesses there in association with Telma. The country was ranked in August at 36<sup>th</sup> of 41 African countries in terms of mobile connectivity and 130<sup>th</sup> of 150 countries globally.

In August Deliveroo was reported to have contracted some of its call centre work to Vivetic in Madagascar. The world's largest call centre business, Teleperformance of France, opened a site in the capital Antananarivo in 2016.

The level of exports from Madagascar to the UK was \$40m in 2016 of which textiles accounted for 86%, followed by agricultural and animal products. Equipment and vehicle products made up over half of the \$24m of imports from the UK followed by textiles, food and beverages and chemicals.

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## Health

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In late July the Malagasy Ministry of Health estimated that 23% of the population was affected by Hepatitis B or C. The ministry announced a vaccination plan to tackle what it saw as one of four key diseases (with tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and malaria). A report in August indicated that 35% of the population suffered from anaemia, a cause of death for infants and pregnant women.

While a report in May indicated that there had been a notable reduction in the incidence of plague in the country there has been another outbreak of the disease, the start of which was identified in Toamasina in late August. As of 28<sup>th</sup> September there had been 51 cases of pneumonic plague, which had caused twelve deaths, according to the WHO, and a further seven deaths from 53 cases of bubonic plague. Bubonic disease is the most common variant of the disease, and is caused by the bite of an infected flea, whereas pneumonic plague is the most virulent form and can be passed to other humans by coughing at close range. This was the first incidence in a non-endemic area in Madagascar and in cities, which has raised concerns that it may spread further. The prime minister announced plans on 30<sup>th</sup> September to suspend all meetings or demonstrations in the capital where six people had died. The WHO released an initial \$300,000 of emergency funding.

An update in late July from the UN indicated that the situation in southern Madagascar had improved markedly since March due to better rainfall and the major humanitarian response, although the plan was still only two-thirds funded and a quarter of people in the eight affected districts (equivalent to some 400,000) were still deemed to be in a state of Crisis or Emergency.

The Malagasy Minister of Health Mamy Lalatiana Andriamanarivo showed her ability as a paediatric surgeon as well as a politician in performing an operation in September to separate conjoined Siamese twins, the first such surgery within the country.

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## Education

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A report in July indicated that pass rates on school exams in Madagascar were low and still falling: in the BEPC the rate was 34% and the Baccalauréat had been abandoned by many. The low success rate of 40% in the exam was blamed in part on the distraction of Facebook while the poor results overall have also been attributed to the impact of insecurity in the country, the costs of schooling and the low calibre of teachers.

In September the Ministry of Education signed 21 agreements with 73 organisations to work to reduce illiteracy from the current level of 28% for those over fifteen to a target of nil by 2030. The country was ranked 184 of 215 states for literacy by Index Mundi.

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## Agriculture

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Imports of rice into Madagascar in the first half of 2017 were given as 247,207 tonnes which was more than in the whole of 2016 when in the first half they were 86,000 tonnes.

A report in August re-assessed the impact of Cyclone Enawo on the vanilla harvest, which was predicted to be modest at 1,300 to 1,500 tonnes but of a better quality than previously expected as only a fifth of the crop would be the green beans blown off the vine three months before maturity. Prices have been more stable.

In September there was reported to have been good progress in the United Nations Development Plan project to improve resilience against drought in the south of Madagascar, which envisages the spending of \$150m over three years. An agreement between the EU and UNICEF covered the use of satellite photography to detect underground sources of water.

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## Insecurity

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On 10<sup>th</sup> July Amnesty International issued a communiqué that called on the Malagasy government to end the cycle of violations of human rights, citing in particular the need for enquiries into incidents of security forces carrying out summary justice such as in the expedition by police in which five villages were burnt at Antsakabary. On the same day the Malagasy Minister of Justice, Charles Andriamizeza, appeared before the United Nations' Committee on Human Rights in Geneva which discussed inter alia this topic and the case of the 'militant ecologist' Clovis Razafimalala. Various court proceedings related to the Antsakabary incidents took place in July while on 25<sup>th</sup> July Razafimalala was given a five-year suspended sentence and a fine of 50m ariary by a court in Toamasina, against which he appealed. The UN's proposals were adopted later in July.

The problematic insecurity in the country has persisted including a series of hold-ups by bandits (*dahalo*) or other criminals on several Routes Nationales, which led to a number of deaths in July. The same month saw attacks by *dahalo* on Gendarmerie camps and raids on vanilla plantations. Summary justice included the lynching at end June of a man accused of stealing a mobile phone on a university campus in Mahajunga and others in July, when the victims had their hands cut off before being killed.

On 11<sup>th</sup> August a new National Security Plan was announced which was designed to set out the basis over the long-term (up to twenty years) for better utilisation of the security forces. A new commando of 300 men with air support was set up to operate in reconnaissance from the start of 2018. At the beginning of September, President Rajaonarimampianina gave a two-month ultimatum to the army, Gendarmerie and police to re-establish law and order. A national plan later that month set out at a cost of \$900m an ambition to reduce paedophilia and drug trafficking by 80%, to reduce by half the incidents on roads and to increase by half the prosecution of arms dealers. Part of the challenge remains corruption in the security forces: the head of the Gendarmerie Jean Ramiandriso announced that 300 of its members had been dismissed for a range of offences.

An unrelated if terrible road accident in August, when a crash near Ankazobe killed some thirty people, prompted a revision of regulations given that there had been no check on the vehicle since October 2014 instead of every six months as required. The vehicle was a converted lorry.

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## Energy

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In June Lemur Resources was reported to be developing a power station with an initial capacity of 60MW fuelled from the coal mine it manages with estimated reserves of 136m tonnes.

On 29<sup>th</sup> September Siemens signed a memorandum of understanding with Madagascar to identify the means to increase generating capacity by 300 megawatts (MW) by 2019; the country's current installed capacity is put at 676MW with only a fifth of the population at most having access.

The Ministry of Water, Energy and Hydrocarbons in August put the national access rate at 15% split as to 84% in urban areas and 6% in rural areas. The installed capacity was given as 446MW of thermal power (with only 3MW in rural areas) and 162 MW of hydro-electric power, with minimal amounts of solar (33 kilowatts or kW), wind (177kW) and biomass (234kW). The government's target by 2030 is to have an access rate of 70% and to generate 7.9 gigawatts of which 85% would come from renewable sources, mainly hydro. The budget for current proposed projects is \$2.9bn and the government has offered tax incentives such as a waiver of VAT on imported equipments and a reduction in tax equivalent to half of the investment made in renewable energy.

In late September the US Trade and Development Agency provided a grant to the Malagasy energy company Henry Fraise to develop solar photovoltaic mini-grids; when implemented the project would provide 10MW of peak solar power and 88MW of battery capacity.

## Tourism

Madagascar saw the twelfth-largest increase in tourism numbers in 2016 according to the United Nations World Travel Organisation with a rise of 20%, similar to that for Kiribati, Kuwait and Liechtenstein if some way below Sierra Leone's 310% increase in visitors.

In July it was reported that the consortium Ravinala Airports comprising Aéroports de Paris (ADP), Bouygues, Colas and Meridiam Africa would start works as agreed for its new concession set up at the end of 2016 to manage the airports of Antananarivo-Ivato and Nosy Be. The new terminal at the capital is now expected to cost \$200m, an increase of one third on the original estimate. The projects will receive \$25m of support from the EAIF.

The plan for Air Austral of Mauritius to become the strategic partner for Air Madagascar and to take a minority stake of 49% appears to have stalled in part over the issue of the debt levels in the national carrier.

## Minerals

In August the Singaporean firm ISR Capital was placed under investigation for financial misconduct. It had been involved in a convoluted process to buy Tantalus Rare Earths, which had itself been in the spotlight over plans to mine in the protected Apasindava peninsula. ISR admitted in a release that the value of the concession was much lower than two previous estimates which had been in the order of \$1bn.

In early September President Rajaonarimampianina opened a new Mining Business Centre. He took the opportunity to propose greater investment rather than just speculation, which he said had accounted for 90% of mining permits in recent years. He indicated that the government would take a prudent approach to a proposed new mining code.

Later in September the Australian company Bass Metals announced that it had raised some A\$3.8m of the A\$6m it needed for a final payment on the Graphmada mine to re-commission it later in 2017 after an upgrade to produce 6,000 tonnes of graphite p.a. On 25<sup>th</sup> September Global Li-Ion Graphite announced that it had secured more data to help to develop the three mining licences it has near Toamasina (20km from Sherritt International's nickel and cobalt mine); there had been graphite produced there for a century from 1910.

In late September an appeal court in South Korea upheld the acquittal of Kim Shin-jong, a former CEO of the state-owned Korea Resources Corp. who had been accused of incurring losses of some \$19m by ordering the purchase at an excessive valuation of Keangnam Enterprise's stake in the Ambatovy project run by Sherritt.

Official exports of gold were 1,300 kg in the first half of 2017 which was double the level the previous year. However, unofficial exports continue to be much higher even with a record seizure of 32kg in the year to date. The Canadian company Prophecy Development Corp. set out plans in August to acquire the Dabolava gold project west of Antsirabe for an initial C\$1m; the assets were previously owned by Pan African Mining.

## Wildlife and conservation

### Forests and protected areas

The continued illegal exploitation and export of rosewood remains a feature. In August the Minister of the Environment, Johanita Ndahimananjara, revealed that of 270,000 logs that had been seized initially only 27,000 were accounted for and announced plans to account for at least a third prior to arranging their sale. At the end of September the anti-corruption body BIANCO issued an arrest warrant for three individuals suspected of profiting from illegal exports in the years 2014-15.

The protected area of the Ambositra-Vondozo forest corridor, which was created in July 2015 to safeguard 314,000 hectares of land, was reported in July to have suffered massive degradation from illegal felling of ebony, artisanal mining, charcoal burning and bush fires.

A study by Durrell and WWT which was published in *PLOS One* in August described a profound state of decline in Madagascar's wetlands that risked their complete loss without intervention. In the areas covered by the study 82% of marshes had been cleared for agriculture and it found few of the 37 lakes it assessed to be free of human intervention. There are details at <https://www.durrell.org/wildlife/news/madagascars-wetlands-brink-destruction-says-first-ever-survey/>.



On 5<sup>th</sup> September the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew hosted a roundtable discussion with President Rajaonarimampianina who said his mission was to protect, conserve and add value on a sustainable basis to the natural resources in his country. He noted that the greatest challenge was the poverty of the people who were the ultimate guardians and indicated that the goals were to promote scientific research, to increase the coverage of protected areas, to invest more in marine protection and to do more to prevent illegal trafficking. The President honoured Sir David Attenborough with an award.

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## Species

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A paper by Society member Paul Racey et al published in September in *PLOS One* evaluated the importance of the Madagascan flying fox *Pteropus rufus* in the regeneration of forests given the enhanced germination potential of fig seeds when they had passed through the bats' digestive tract.

A paper by Tim Epley et al published at end August in the *International Journal of Primatology* postulated that high protein content enabled bamboo lemurs to eat toxic plants such as bamboo with a concentration of cyanide up to fifty times the lethal dose for mammals.

Lemurs were exported to the US for the first time in twenty years when a five-year old male and three-year old female black lemur were taken in August to the Duke Lemur Centre.

An article in *Science* in August presented a theory by scientists from the Smithsonian Institute that poisonous algae might have prompted the demise of dinosaurs based on the analysis of remains in north-west Madagascar from 70 million years ago, which were mainly near rivers.

## Events



In July an American professional climber Sasha DiGiulian and the Spaniard Edu Marin made what was said to be only the second free ascent of the challenging blank 700m face Mora Mora on Tsaranoro Atsimo.

## Books



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### Guide

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The twelfth edition of the Bradt guide to Madagascar runs to 516 pages including 60 detailed maps, 90 colour photos and over 100 special information boxes written by a broad range of experts in their fields while authors Daniel Austin and Hilary Bradt have now visited Madagascar more than fifty times. You can buy printed and eBooks at [www.bradtguides.com](http://www.bradtguides.com) (with a current 10% discount and a bundled offer), Amazon and book stores.