



Lemurs of Madagascar

A Strategy for their Conservation 2013-2016

Edited by Christoph Schwitzer, Russell A. Mittermeier, Nicola Davies, Steig Johnson,
Jonah Ratsimbazafy, Josia Razafindramanana, Edward E. Louis Jr. and Serge Rajaobelina



Lemur Conservation Success Stories

There is a growing number of very positive examples where community-based forest conservation, combined with (eco)tourism and research, is working well in Madagascar and making a difference to the conservation of lemurs. We are highlighting two such examples here.

Maromizaha: Conservation and Community Involvement

Marco Gamba, Rose Marie Randrianarison, Valeria Torti, Giancarlo Bounous, Cesare Avesani Zaborra, Jonah Ratsimbazafy & Cristina Giacoma

The primary forest of Maromizaha or “rainforest of the Dragon trees” (150 km east of Antananarivo on Route Nationale 2, 6.5 km from the Analamazaotra Reserve), at an altitude of between 890 and 1,210 m asl, harbours a unique community of highland and lowland species: 13 lemurs, 77 birds, 60 amphibians and 20 reptile species have been counted so far. This area represents an important link between the last remaining rainforests in the north and the south and is located within the Ankeniheny–Zahamena Corridor (CAZ). Maromizaha is home to the Critically Endangered indri (*Indri indri*), diademed sifaka (*Propithecus diadema*), southern black-and-white ruffed lemur (*Varecia variegata editorum*), the Endangered small-toothed sportive lemur (*Lepilemur microdon*), the Vulnerable eastern woolly lemur (*Avahi laniger*), red-bellied lemur (*Eulemur rubriventer*), grey bamboo lemur (*Hapalemur griseus*), red mouse lemur (*Microcebus rufus*), hairy-eared dwarf lemur (*Allocebus trichotis*), the Near Threatened common brown lemur (*Eulemur fulvus*), and the Data Deficient greater dwarf lemur (*Cheirogaleus major*).

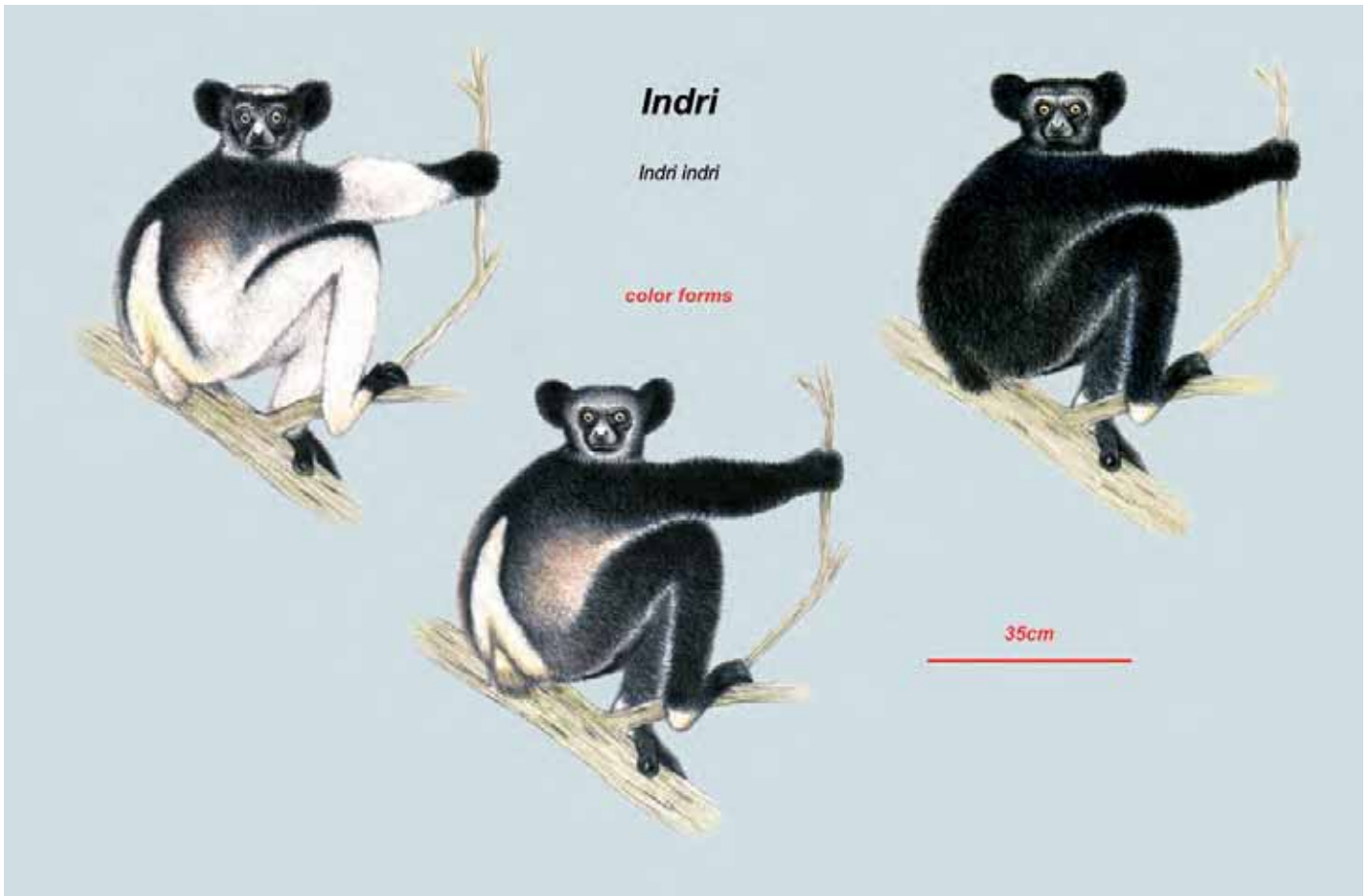


Diademed sifaka (*Propithecus diadema*), Critically Endangered. (Photo: Russell A. Mittermeier)

The forest was put under protection in 2001, deforestation was stopped, agricultural exploitation limited, and an area of approximately 1,600 ha has been preserved. But at the edge of the protected area, trees are exploited for charcoal production, construction and burned for agriculture. The Maromizaha Forest is now managed by GERP (Groupe d’Etude et de Recherche sur les Primates de Madagascar). Understanding that conservation must have the participation and support of local people in order to be effective, we have

considered issues of development of the local communities, together with community involvement and awareness, general education outreach, as well as the need to enhance the capacity of local conservation managers and guides. To provide adequate resources for the effective management of the protected area, we focused on developing positive and sustainable societal attitudes towards wildlife in the local communities, both establishing small infrastructures and implementing capacity-building activities. To increase awareness and develop education outreach programmes in the Anevoka community, in close proximity with the forest of Maromizaha, a multi-purpose centre was built at 40 minutes walking distance from the Route Nationale 2 that links Antananarivo to Toamasina. The centre was built with substantial financial contribution from Parco Natura Viva – Breeding Centre for Endangered Species (Bussolengo, Italy). It became a pivotal point of the subsequent BIRD project (Biodiversity Integration and Rural Development), which has received financial support by an ACP-UE cooperation agreement to operate in Madagascar and the Comoro Islands (Contract FED/2009/217077). The project reflects a strong international partnership led by the Department of Life Sciences and Systems Biology in collaboration with the Department of Arboriculture and Pomology, both at the University of Torino, Italy, the University of Antananarivo (Ecole Supérieure des Sciences Agronomiques), the Groupe d'Etude et de Recherche sur les Primates de Madagascar (GERP), the University of Toamasina (Gestion des Ressources Naturelles et Environnement - GRENE), the University of the Comoros, and the Zoological Society of San Diego.

The project is centred on the valorisation of biodiversity and the development of initiatives to empower communities to increase control over their lives and take a leading role in conservation of local biodiversity. As the development of sustainable ecotourism activities has been seen to be an affordable way to generate an increase in the income of the villagers, a lot of effort was put into the training of tourist and research guides and the process of enabling the community to welcome tourists in Maromizaha. We trained four research guides and 10 tourist guides (of which three (former students of the University of Toamasina) have received specific training to become international guides), and 183 villagers (children and adults) attended English and French courses to improve their linguistic abilities. Three Malagasy managers have received training to supervise the research activities, to manage the research station and to overlook the development process. They were trained in Madagascar and Europe to acquire knowledge about data gathering and management, tourism attraction, research planning and biodiversity valorisation. At the same time we worked at the local schools to encourage a new sensibility towards nature and suggested the use of new experimental agricultural techniques and of new methods of crop production. The community was very receptive towards these alternative methods, which resulted in improving the quality of their lives. While Malagasy operators are now planning to develop small hosting opportunities for tourists visiting Maromizaha, the number of visitors in the forest (including students and researchers) has increased from 8 in 2009 to 208 in 2011. The presence of researchers generated an important income for the local community. We have now plans for new surveys on the biodiversity of Maromizaha Forest and its surroundings, and we keep on disseminating affordable policies for villagers to improve their health, conserve biodiversity and increase their income.



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**INTERNATIONAL UNION
FOR CONSERVATION OF NATURE**

WORLD HEADQUARTERS
Rue Mauverney 28
1196 Gland, Switzerland
mail@iucn.org
Tel +41 22 999 0000
Fax +41 22 999 0002
www.iucn.org

