

Conserving the critically endangered greater bamboo lemur

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Edited version published in: [Oryx, Vol. 44 \(2010\), p. 167.](#)

The greater bamboo lemur *Prolemur simus* is the only recognized species in its genus. It is considered one of the most endangered primates and is probably the most endangered lemur. It is endemic to Madagascar and, although subfossil records show it was once widely distributed across the island, it is now believed to be restricted to a small part of the remaining eastern rainforest and a few outlying degraded forest fragments. In 2007 only 60 individuals were known in the wild and 22 in captivity (Wright *et al.* 2008). In June 2009 an agreement was signed with the Malagasy government creating The Aspinall Foundation's Madagascar Programme, with the mission to work with local partners for the conservation of threatened species and their habitats. The initial focus of the programme has been to play a key role in ensuring that effective actions are implemented urgently to assure the long-term persistence of the greater bamboo lemur. Five objectives were identified: facilitating communication and collaboration, surveying for new sites supporting the species, ensuring effective conservation management of known sites in both the remaining forest corridors and in isolated habitats, and, when appropriate, ensuring the survival of individuals in sites that can not be protected through translocation or captive breeding.

Progress so far has been in the surveying of new sites. Previous surveys, between 1986 and 2007, had confirmed the presence of greater bamboo lemurs at only 11 of 70 sites surveyed (Wright *et al.* 2008). However, it appeared that large areas within the species range had not been surveyed, so some of these were targeted for rapid collaborative surveys. The first was undertaken between November 2008 and May 2009 within the Fandriana-Vondrozo Corridor, the southern portion of the eastern rainforest belt, with GERP (the Madagascar Primate Group) and Centre ValBio (Rajaonson *et al.* 2010). Only a single *Prolemur* feeding sign was found and there was one potential but unconfirmed sighting of the species. In the second survey, undertaken between May and September 2009 in partnership with GERP, Conservation International and Association Mitsinjo (a local community-based conservation organization), evidence of greater bamboo lemurs was found at several sites in the Ankeniheny-Zahamena Corridor, in the central region of the eastern rainforest (Ravaloharimanitra *et al.* 2011). The success of this survey was probably due to the fact that many local communities there are organized into associations and have management responsibility for forests in this region, and thus community members most likely to have knowledge of bamboo lemurs could be targeted for information gathering in a way that was not feasible in the first survey. We would now like to search further north, to try to find the northern limit of the species' range, and also in the region connecting the areas of the first two surveys, from where no *Prolemur* site has yet been confirmed, but from where we have convincing information from local people about their probable presence.

Although clearly we still have a lot to learn about the distribution and abundance of this species, the second survey has demonstrated that the Ankeniheny-Zahamena Corridor can now be considered a priority area for the conservation of the species, in addition to the southern Fandriana-Vondrozo Corridor. Both Corridors are in the process of being established

as protected areas for which local communities will take on an important management role. Various organizations are now developing strategies to ensure the conservation of the greater bamboo lemur within and around both corridors.

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