

**Projet Varibolomavo: Saving *Prolemur simus*
Summary report 2010**



**The Aspinall Foundation – Madagascar Programme
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Projet Varibolomavo: Saving *Prolemur simus* The Aspinall Foundation Madagascar Programme

The aim of Projet Varibolomavo is to ensure the long-term persistence of the critically endangered greater bamboo lemur *Prolemur simus*, one of the rarest primates in the world. To achieve this aim, the project has five objectives, which we will discuss in turn below.

1. To play a key role in coordinating an urgent, collaborative response to the current crisis facing the greater bamboo lemur in the wild and in captivity

We continue to facilitate communication between interested parties from our base in Antananarivo, and participated in the first international technical workshop on *Prolemur* conservation, held in Antananarivo in January 2010. We continue to raise awareness of *Prolemur* conservation both nationally and internationally through publications and organising or facilitating regional stakeholder meetings in the areas we have discovered new *Prolemur* sites. As part of our commitment to improving collaborative relationships for *Prolemur* conservation within Madagascar, we have funded the data collection and analysis phase of a research project currently being undertaken by a Malagasy vet on the intestinal parasites of *Prolemur simus* at sites in and around the Ankeniheny-Zahamena forest corridor. Preliminary results show high parasite levels in the lowland sites, and we await the first results from the rainforest sites, from where collection of fresh faecal samples was a lot more challenging.

2. To organise as a matter of urgency a rapid but extensive survey of greater bamboo lemur distribution and abundance in the wild

Following our successful surveys in 2009, we have continued to undertake collaborative surveys to ascertain the true distribution of *Prolemur simus* in the wild. Having already extended the known northern range limit by 85 km in 2009, we extended it a further 45 km in 2010 when, in partnership with GERP, Association Mitsinjo, Conservation International (CI) and Madagascar National Parks (MNP), we found feeding signs in the Zahamena National Park. We also extended the southern range limit by approximately 100 km, when old feeding signs were found during a survey in partnership with WWF-Madagascar. Additionally, in partnership with GERP, Mitsinjo and Durrell, we found three new sites approximately half way between the previously known northern and southern populations, so suggesting that in fact there is probably a fairly continuous distribution throughout the eastern forests, rather than the two distinct northern and southern distributions as previously thought. We are planning more collaborative surveys in 2011 to further complete our understanding of the species distribution.

We have also discovered several new sites in and around the Ankeniheny-Zahamena rainforest corridor (CAZ), in addition to those we found in the first surveys last year. In partnership with GERP, Mitsinjo and CI, we have now identified 23 sites in this region, several in the main forest corridor but the majority in the largely deforested lowland region to the east of the corridor. We are working with 12 community associations and one private land-owner to monitor and protect the *Prolemur* groups at many of these sites; we are currently following 14 groups at 8 sites, with a total of 132 *Prolemur simus*, including 23 babies born in October and November 2010. We have direct sightings at three additional sites, of at least eight individuals. We are therefore working with about a quarter of the known wild population of this highly secretive species.

3. To ensure that all known sites within the remaining rainforest corridors that support greater bamboo lemurs are effectively managed for their conservation

4. To develop management mechanisms for all small, isolated populations in habitat fragments outside the main rainforest corridors, for their persistence and their potential role as sources for release stock for potential future translocation, reinforcement or reintroduction strategies

Considering these two objectives together, we are working with various local partner organisations to help the community associations responsible for the management of the sites we have discovered in and around the CAZ to ensure the long-term conservation of the sites in general, and of the *Prolemur* groups within them. We have trained nine teams of a total of 24 local community members to monitor the *Prolemur* groups, collect basic information on other endangered lemurs such as black-and-white ruffed lemur, diademed sifaka and indri, identify the anthropogenic pressures threatening the sites, and undertake immediate conservation measures such as the destruction of illegal lemur traps. The information collected by these teams is then passed on to the community associations and local forestry officials within the framework of the CAZ conservation platform, to facilitate improved conservation management. We have also undertaken a socio-economic study of the community associations in the lowland region, looking at their capacities, organisation, and needs, and proposing areas for improving their functioning and efficacy.

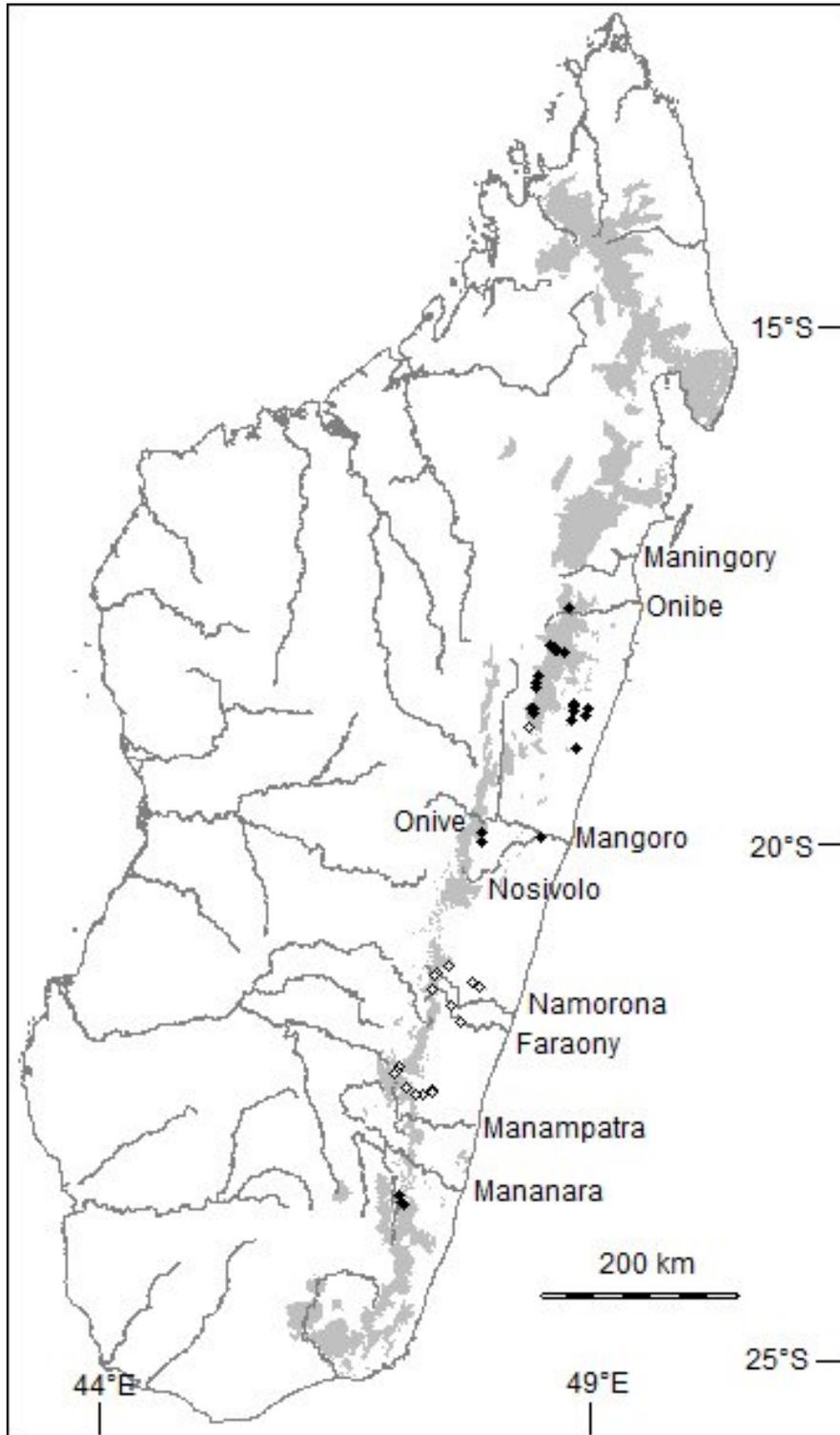
In addition to improving conservation management of the sites, we need to measure the degree of isolation of these populations and their associated levels of inbreeding, with the aim of proposing the measures necessary to ensure their persistence. We are discussing with various research organisations how best to do this.

5. To ensure the survival of any greater bamboo lemur groups or individuals restricted to sites or habitats that can not be protected

We have no plans to undertake this in the immediate future.

Publications

- King, T. & Chamberlan, C. 2010. Conserving the Critically Endangered greater bamboo lemur. *Oryx* 44 (2): 167.
- Rajaonson, A., Ratolojanahary, M., Ratsimbazafy, J., Feistner, A. & King, T. 2010. Enquête préliminaire de la distribution des lémuriers de bambou dans et autour du Corridor forestier Fandriana-Vondrozo, Madagascar. *Lemur News* in press.
- Ravaloharimanitra, M., Ratolojanahary, T., Rafalimandimby, J., Rajaonson, A., Rakotonirina, L., Rasolofoharivelo, T., Ndriamiary, J.N., Andriambololona, J., Nasoavina, C., Fanomezantsoa, P., Rakotoarisoa, J.C., Youssouf, Ratsimbazafy, J., Dolch, R. & King, T. 2011. Gathering local knowledge in Madagascar results in a major increase in the known range and number of sites for the critically endangered greater bamboo lemur (*Prolemur simus*). *International Journal of Primatology*, in press.



Map showing localities where we have discovered *P. simus* during our collaborative surveys (black diamonds), previously known *P. simus* sites (white diamonds), approximate remaining rainforest cover (light grey), and major rivers (dark grey, with some named).