

Saving *Prolemur simus*: Summary report 2011



The Aspinall Foundation – Madagascar Programme December 2011

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Saving *Prolemur simus*The Aspinall Foundation Madagascar Programme

The aim of the "Saving *Prolemur simus*" project 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

From our office in Antananarivo, we created an interactive facebook webpage and established various email lists to continue to facilitate communication between everyone interested in the conservation of *Prolemur simus*, and to raise awareness of *Prolemur* conservation both nationally and internationally. We published three articles in English in major international scientific journals, and four more in French in the IUCN Madagascar Specialist Group journal Lemur News. Seven project representatives, including six Malagasy nationals, participated in the second international technical workshop on *Prolemur* conservation, held in Andasibe in February 2011, giving four presentations regarding the project. We facilitated and participated in several regional meetings and workshops concerning conservation in and around the Ankeniheny-Zahamena Corridor, ensuring Prolemur sites received priority attention, and signed an agreement with the Forestry office in Toamasina officialising our support of three community associations in the Brickaville District. Our team of national primatologists collected 166 Prolemur faecal samples from 11 sites during 2011, for genetic analysis by a research team from Henry Dorly Zoo. The results of this analysis will give valuable insights into *Prolemur* taxonomy and population parameters, including levels of connectivity between sites and population viability estimates which will aid conservation-management decisionmaking concerning Prolemur sites.

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 collaborative surveys in 2009 and 2010, we undertook fewer distribution surveys in 2011, concentrating mainly on trying to establish the northern and southern limits of the species range. In the south of the range, we again partnered with WWF-Madagascar to survey the Midongy-Vondrozo Corridor, but as in 2010, our team found feeding signs but failed to obtain direct sightings. We therefore recommend another mission in early 2012. Similarly, in partnership with Simpona and Mitsinjo, we found feeding signs to the north-east of the Makira new protected area well to the north of the known-range of the species, but failed to obtain direct sightings.

We continued our efforts to provide abundance data from the majority of the sites we discovered during previous years' distribution surveys. We tried but failed to get direct sightings in the Zahamena National Park (with GERP and Mitsinjo, funded by Help Simus), but did succeed in locating four *Prolemur* groups at Vohibe at the confluence of the Mangoro and Nosivolo rivers, the first confirmed direct sightings at the site (with GERP, funded by Help Simus). Our main focus remains the Ankeniheny-Zahamena Corridor (CAZ), where we have now found seven groups within the main forest corridor containing approximately 60 individuals, another seven groups of approximately 40 individuals in secondary lowland bamboo thickets surrounding the Andriantantely forest fragment to the east of the corridor,

and nine groups comprising at least 120 individuals at three isolated lowland sites to the south-east of the CAZ. Comprising approximately 220 individuals, these 23 groups in and around the CAZ therefore represent at least half the currently known population of *Prolemur simus*.

- 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 currently fund nine teams of a total of 25 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 to facilitate improved conservation management.

In addition to funding and supervising the patrol teams at each site, we are working with the community associations (COBAs) to legalise their status and their management transfer agreements. Inside the CAZ corridor, we have started the process of creating a COBA for the Ranomainty site in the Didy Commune, and have facilitated the evaluation of the Mamelontsoa COBA and the subsequent renewal of their management agreement in the Morarano Commune. For the sites around Andriantantely, we are working on the creation of the Soafaniry COBA at Ambinanifanasana, and the evaluation and renewal of the Dimbiazanjafy COBA at Lanonana. For the isolated sites to the south-east of CAZ, we have facilitated the creation of the Aingo Vao COBA at Mangabe and their management transfer contract for the Ambalafary site, and are trying to officialise the Tsiriniala COBA at the Vohiposa site – however the process for Tsiriniala is proving particularly challenging due to the complexity of the social context of this site.

Once the management transfer contracts are completed, our support of each COBA can become more regulated, with incentive-based contracts linked to conservation performance. In the mean time, we have tried to improve environmental and conservation awareness at the sites through the placement of information signs at each site, the distribution of 500 calendars, 200 posters and 3000 "Saving *Prolemur simus*" writing books for school children, and the organisation of several information and communication missions to local communities. We have also funded the rehabilitation of the public primary school at Lanonana, and organised a 3-day trip for 40 school children from near the Ambalafary site to Andasibe to see the indris and learn about the forest.

Outside the CAZ, with funding from Help Simus we have begun conservation activities at the Vohibe site, principally through education and communication sessions, which should facilitate the development of a more complete conservation programme in 2012. We are also

looking at possibilities of facilitating conservation activities in the Marolambo and Midongy-Vondrozo forest corridors.

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

We continue to try to protect all known *Prolemur* sites, although prioritisation may be necessary by the end of 2012.

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