

Project Update: January 2017

During the third phase of this project we focused the biodiversity study on lemurs. We have decided to focus on lemurs' study because lemurs are a major tourism attraction in Madagascar with most of the protected area focused on habitats supporting lemurs' populations (Frontier Madagascar 2007). The methodology used during this study was mainly casual observations.

The main objective of the lemurs' study was to describe the habitat, to get knowledge on the trees used as Food, to know approximately the different place where to find them, to record the threats to be able to undertake it, to understand the local community conception concerning the conservation species.

In addition to these, all of this information are crucial for the project as it will be not only used as a reference to guide visitors but also to undertake the project conservation strategies.

Regarding the habitat survey, the site is composed by primary dry deciduous forest, coastal dry deciduous forest, secondary dry deciduous forest, mangrove and grasslands. Concerning their distribution, Lemurs were spotted in all habitat types except for open highly degraded areas and each troop consisted of approximately 10 to 15 individuals.

The crowned lemurs of Ampombofofo are unique as they are semi-habituated as a result of cultural taboo of the region preventing hunting. Though lemurs surrounding the village of Anjiabe are wild as they were faces occasional hunting made by outsiders coming to work in the village as a house construction so that they run away once we observed them closely. Anthropogenic activities were observed including some trees cut down for plank making and charcoal burn.

The favourable time for activities related to Lemurs in the area is during the dry season from May to late November where they can be found nearby the village of Anjiabe which is the season of mangoes and nearby the village of Ampombofofo when they eat the *Ficus*. This is also the time where they are present on the (Tamarin and Konokono); and on November is the time to observe them with their babies. Thanks to all of these information, we are now able to satisfy tourist or research for lemurs study or Lemurs' watch, according to their interest.

During the survey, we recorded only crowned lemur species, no other species of lemurs were observed and according to the villagers' knowledge only crowned lemurs exist in the forest of the site. This is odd the tendencies for this species to be known to coexist with mouse lemurs.

We have carried out an "ethno-ornithological" data that have complement and supplement data collected on the ecological study and useful for the improvement of the environmental education activity.

We gathered a semi-structured interview to the elders, young, students of the communities regarding their traditional knowledge of crowned lemur behaviour and ecology and of human

activities in the forest that may threaten local crowned lemur groups. The interviews were informal and open-ended but guided by a checklist of questions.

From this study, we recorded that villagers have great traditional knowledge on lemur population and we found also that there is a significant understanding of the impact that people have on their environment. People know the importance of the forest habitat and their reliance on it (Frontier Madagascar 2007).

The local community are aware on what happening to their biodiversity and how the animals live in the forest. For example, they said that lemurs are suffering from insufficient of food during the rainy season from January to April. As we always mentioned, the area is extremely traditional and live by their taboos and eating lemurs is one of the major Fady (taboo) of the community. As in other village of Madagascar, the reason of the taboos is mainly a result of a fact that have been happen to their ancestor so the Fady is resulted from a particular situation and stories.

Following are a sample of some story on why the project local communities do not kill /eat lemurs.

These two first samples are also found in the Frontier Madagascar report in Ampombofofo in 2007:

- 1- *Lemurs are recognized as very similar to humans e.g. they pass around babies like humans after birth. In history, it was 'babakoto' (monkey ancestor of human) that was naughty and got hit by a big spoon and turned into a lemur, it is also Fady to hit people with a big spoon. Also, the village uses the lemurs as an alarm to tell the time, e.g. they know it is time to get up when the lemurs call in the morning.*
- 2- *One story as to how the lemurs came about was that long time ago there was a beautiful girl in the village and all the men wanted her. When men came to visit the beautiful girl she run up a tree and laugh at them. Her mother said 'Fine stay up there'. So, she did and became a lemur. This is also the reason given as to why most people accept marriage proposal, or will become lemur if you refuse.*

We have also interviewed Silasy 'Rangahy ', the representative of their king in the village of Antaravy. We asked him about the change, the traditional believe and taboos of the community. We have also especially interested on the story that related to Lemurs. He has extremely affirmed that eating or killing lemurs is a great taboo for the community and following is the story to answer the reason that result that Taboos.

Long time ago, the Anjoaty navigated from Africa to Madagascar to find shelter. After their departure Zanahary "God" told them not to load the boat with too many people with them to avoid accident in the sea. The Anjoaty wanted to bring their family as many as possible with them so that they lied to their God in hiding some of their people in the big boxes. When God appeared, and found the big boxes, then he questioned them what is in these boxes and they answered him that these were 'Lemurs and Pigs "which they will eat once they will be arrive to their destination. God let them continue their trip and they were happy that God did not

know that hide people in that suite case. However, once they reached the coast of the south of Tulear, they opened the boxes and surprisingly found that all the people in that boxes were changed into Lemurs and Pigs. From that time, the Anjoaty tribe made a vow and transmitted the message to their descendant to never eat Pigs and Lemurs because for them these animals are still part of their families. In brief Anjoaty considered lemurs as their ancestors so that it is “Fady” strictly prohibited to eat lemurs.



Crowned lemurs



Project team with Silasy , the Rangahy