

Project Update: August 2002

The importance of crayfish to the economy of villages in the Ranomafana area varies widely with certain villages (particularly Vohiparara, Sahavondrona and Ambalavao-Tsararano) relying heavily on crayfish harvesting.

Other villages may contain certain individuals for whom crayfish harvesting is vitally important – these tend to be the poorer, often female headed households. Harvesting may have decreased in importance in the last 10 years since the park was established with fewer families carrying out crayfish harvesting commercially.

The most likely reason for this general decrease in reliance is the increase in alternative economic activities provided through the development of the area, particularly to those villages close to the town of Ranomafana. However, the markets for crayfish appear to have grown over the last 10 years and it is very difficult to estimate whether total number being taken has increase, decreased or stayed the same.

The key question is whether the current harvest is sustainable. The evidence obtained from interviews with villages and from the study in Vohiparara provided an interesting mix of rather contradictory evidence. A number of villages particularly those to whom crayfish harvesting is important, reported that there have been trends in availability and size of crayfish which indicate over-harvesting. However these same villages reported similar trends in the early 1990's yet they continue to extract many 100's of crayfish every week and travel times reported are not longer than those reported in the early 1990's.

However one subject on which interviewees were in unanimous agreement was the decimation of crayfish stocks in the Reny'rano in Vohiparara. This was blamed on a combination of overharvesting, harvesting gravid females but overwhelmingly on the effects of introduced fish species fibata and bilakibasy.

The ecological evidence gathered so far is inconclusive, and further research is needed over the coming months.