

Project Update: August 2005

The work has been going really well. We have extended our ecological work on the rare and less commonly harvested species which has been really interesting. We have also extended the geographical extent of our work, working in Bevoahazo and Vohiparara, Andemoka (a small slash and burn community deep in the forest who depend heavily on crayfish for subsistence use) and Sahavondrona (a village for who, like Vohiparara, selling crayfish to passersby on the road is a major part of their economy).

The population dynamics work continues, we now have 62 sites where we are carrying out mark and recapture on the most commonly harvested species (Oranbato, *A. granulimanus*) as well as sites for Orannsatria (*A. betsiloensis*) and Orapotika (*A. crosneri*). We have also started visiting Tanala villages to the east of the park where slash and burn has reduced the forest to tiny patches or completely removed it. The aim of this work is to demonstrate the simple fact that way beyond any effect of harvesting on crayfish, is the simple effect of habitat loss.

Our work strongly suggests, so far, that as long as there is forest there are crayfish (though heavy harvesting of course affects populations), however once the forest goes the crayfish go too. Rosa (a team member from Bevoahazo) and I have so far visited nine villages and had meetings with elders and young people to ask about what crayfish species are around, what species were present in the past, how populations may have changed and how important crayfish are to them. This work has been really interesting.

Many of these villages lost the forest from the surrounding hills (and the crayfish) in the last 10-20 years. Over and over again the link between crayfish and forest was spelt out to us by the elders. I asked if people missed the crayfish or if it made no difference as they were never an important economic resource (crayfish selling is 'fady' or taboo to most Tanala people). I was told 'we miss the Crayfish, Crayfish are very good food.' Before you could always get loaka (sauce to eat with rice), if you were willing to collect but now there are no more'. The socio-economic work in Vohiparara and Sahavondrona is also going well. We have been working with the harvesters in these villages to map their use of the forest, seeing how far people are travelling, where they are collecting and how this overlaps with other communities.

This data is essential both to inform our ecological work on crayfish (we can only correctly understand our work on the population dynamics if we know the level of harvesting in these sites) and also to help understand the economic importance of crayfish and other forest products. Particularly in Vohiparara we have had wonderful cooperation with the harvesters for this work. People bring us their catches every day and take part in a small interview about where they went, for how long etc. The next day they tell us how much they earned from the honey/crayfish/frogs or whatever they had collected.