

Madagascar



11 Dec

We arrived in Antananarivo, Madagascar and took the five-hour drive down to Andasibe. We stayed in Marie Lodge beside Andasibe-Montadia national park and forest restoration project. We took a short trip to the local village to experience the local culture.



12 Dec

We attempted a trial transect along the road from Marie Lodge. This was to assess the effects of invasive plant species, such as desmodium, and its effects on the native wildlife. We discovered that due to the lack of rain, as the rain season was late, we did not observe the death rate which was expected. However, this destructive plant had still a surprising amount of mortality due to its sticky surface trapping the wildlife. Even large mammals including a bat had fallen captive to the plant.

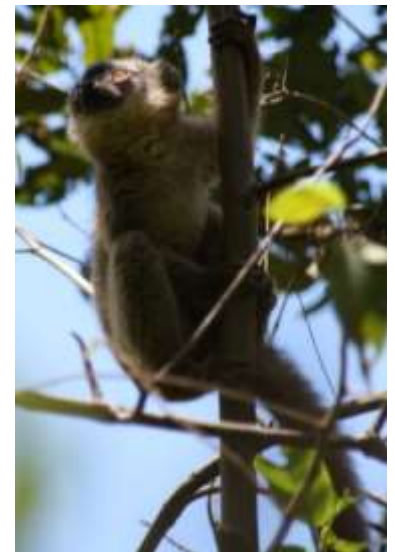


13- 15 Dec

For the following few days here we carried out some research comparing successful and unsuccessful forest restoration based around the analysis of both managed and unmanaged areas. This was done by collecting data in two quadrats for six different areas in order to analyse any differences in the abundance of invasive species, and the vegetation structure.

16 Dec

Exploring the Andasibe-Montadia national park and taking part in the forest restoration trial gave us an insight into the abundance of wildlife which needs protecting. So many endemic species which will be lost with the degrading forest. The cut and burn rate all over the country is continuing at a rapid rate and this experience opened my eyes to how fragile the habitat is for so many species and how drastically they are affected. The forest restoration trial gave us an opportunity to learn how they try to restore lost forest. The immense time and effort to re plant the native trees which are quickly outcompeted by the rapid growing invasive species



17 Dec -20 Dec



The three-day journey to Maroantsetra was definitely an experience. Travelling with the locals for the last leg of the journey consisted of a 7-hour bus journey to the port packed in like sardines on a hot sweaty bus. We arrived in a remote small village in the early afternoon on the 19th Dec. The river boat which we were to take up north across the choppy sea was due to leave at 3am to reduce the likelihood of getting caught in a storm. Fortunately, a kind local girl invited us to stay in her hut while we waited for the boat after watching the sun set across the river.



The boat the following day took 10 hours across choppy waters till we arrived just after mid-day at Maroantsetra. This town was by far the most surprising cultural change, with only dirt tracks for roads and small wooden structures selling fruits all down the streets. Despite it being far less developed than other areas of the country, the community were friendly and happy much like our experience elsewhere.



21 Dec

We arrived on the beautiful island of Masuala, the island is both protected forest and partly National Park. The national park consists of 240,000 hectares of primary, secondary and mangrove forest. This great diversity makes it home to several endemic species to the island including the Helmet Vargar and the Red Raft lemurs. It has a total of 11 different species of lemur and full of countless medicinal sources from plants, roots and flowers. Our guide, Oliver, took us for a short walk to set up a few of our camera traps.



22 Dec

The following morning, we woke at 5am to set off before 6am for an early jungle walk. We walked up into the national park to set up our remaining 10 camera traps. We decided to bait the traps with raw meat, bananas and bread in hope to attract as many different species as possible. The structure of the jungle here was incredible, amazing diversity of life and Olivia's knowledge on the medicinal properties of almost every plant was astounding. After torrential downpour seven hours into the jungle we were soaked through, we finished setting up the last few traps and headed back to camp. The rain caught on the webs of spiders and allowed us to observe some incredible species.



23 Dec

Doing the moths traps every evening gave Dale and I the idea to attempt a butterfly trap. We spent the day constructing one out of our mosquito net, sticks, leaves and palms around camp. We hung this and baited it with rotting bananas. Oliver showed us a good spot to leave it and would be able to help us with the identification of any we might catch. He also took us on a short walk through the village and we observed the local catch of octopus being prepared by children batting them with sticks!



Dec

After bringing in our camera traps on Christmas day we discovered evidence of one of the most famous carnivores of Madagascar! It was an amazing reward ,and perfect end to the trip, for the long trail up which took deep into undisturbed areas of the forest.



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Camera trap evidence and vegetation photos...











WILDVIEW

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Madagascar SERT 2016

Madagascar SERT consisted of 3 weeks travelling across the country from the forest in Andasibe, to the north-east coast, the island Masuala. The experience was extremely broad from adjusting to a different culture, communicating in a foreign language, learning and developing scientific skills and being flexible in working hours. The physical strain of some activities required motivation and consistent determination even in harsh weather conditions. The trip was both fascinating and incredibly educational. I had the opportunity to work alongside experts in their field, gaining invaluable knowledge and skills, and the privilege to explore the tropical forests of Madagascar.

The project in Andasibe was based around forest restoration. Much of the forest outside the National Park was part of a restoration project for areas that had been lost. We did an investigation to evaluate successful and unsuccessful restoration areas. To carry out this research we assessed six different areas of vegetation from the year they were planted and whether they were managed. We did a control for each area A-F and used quadrants marked by a GPS to record co-ordinates. Using a compass, we marked North, East, South and West and 10m by 10m strings on sticks to lay out the quadrants. We were a small team consisting of Anita and two guides, to measure and record species of trees, and myself and Dale to record abundance of invasive species and % vegetation from 25cm up to 200cm. There was a fairly strong correlation between fewer native trees, unmanaged areas, less canopy cover and higher abundance of invasive plants. I learnt new skills in assessing vegetation and how to identify a wide variety of invasive species which were all new to me. This improved my ability to carry out repeat recordings of data, and often in difficult terrain.

I felt this project was a brilliant opportunity to be involved in a useful contribution to the restoration project, whilst developing my own skills for the future. I learnt how to construct a simple research method and how to record data effectively consistently. The days were often long and it was difficult to adjust to the extreme temperatures whilst carrying out field work. I learnt that I can find the motivation to persevere, despite discomfort and physical strain, with the goal of completing the data in a limited time period. I think the project is beneficial to the community as in the area as without the jungle there is less attraction to tourists. Tourism is a key income to the town as it provides jobs for many of the locals as guides and the forest itself plays a major

role in climate control and weather management. Therefore, the long term success of the project and its goal of achieving government funding is important to everyone. However, for myself, I feel that conservation is important. Therefore, I am likely to find reasons prioritising conservation and restoration which others may not agree with. Perhaps using the resources of the forest is far more beneficial to many individuals than the restoration of it.

Working in a small group for many hours in the day can be tough. It's important to be patient and work as effectively as possible in order to equally contribute to the task. The heat can be exhausting and often the terrain was difficult to work in which made tensions rise at times. It was important to be understanding of people in a new and sometimes uncomfortable situation. Working with others who speak a little English meant a lot of the communication was in half French. This was something that I had to be aware of when working with new people in a foreign country, as it required more patience and awareness of foreign customs.

In Masuala on the North-East coast we explored both the protected forest of the island and the National Park. Our guide, Olivia, introduced us to the multiple medicinal properties of roots, flowers and plants in the forest. We observed several of the endemic species to the island including the Helmet Vargar and Red Raft lemur. I developed my skills of setting up camera traps and learnt about the structure of vegetation in the varying environments of mangrove, primary and secondary jungle on the island. The history involved much destruction such as the over exploitation on rose wood in 2009. The tree is a native species which grows extremely slowly, taking 200 years to grow a diameter of 40cm. The tree can not spread seeds till 80 years of age which makes the species extremely vulnerable to extinction. Other major observations on the island was the devastating amount of dead coral observed on the beaches. A cyclone which hit the island in 2008 destroyed the majority of the reefs which had a knock on effect to much of the aquatic wildlife. What is left of the reef is disturbed further by the hunting of octopus.

The ecolodge in which we stayed provides fresh bottled water to the local village and built a primary school in the area. This would suggest that the locals would be supportive of tourism in the area as it provides these benefits including jobs, such as guides. This would be a source of income and security for the village. I like to believe that there is a positive effect of my visit to the island and that I am contributing in a positive way. However, there are many

negative aspects of tourism in the area. Not only will too much tourism disturb the wildlife and cause habituation of many species, but the majority of income brought in from tourism does not go directly to the guides and locals on the island, but the National Park itself. This makes me feel slightly uncomfortable as I felt the locals were not reaping the benefits which they are due. With the influx of tourists on the island I felt it could disturb their close community of 140 individuals with little to gain from our presence.

I have no understanding of the views of the locals themselves, however, I learnt from Olivia that in order to claim the land as a National Park, many people living in the forest were asked to leave their home. This was done under false pretence and empty promises made by the Government. Although hydroelectricity from the river provides some electricity for everyone, much promised was never provided. This could cause a lot of resentment to both the Government and tourists themselves, as they sacrificed not only their home but perhaps partly their heritage too. This is then fuelled by the money brought in by tourists of which mostly goes directly back to the Government.

I had some incredible experiences during my time in Madagascar. I developed and learnt a variety of skills working along side experts in their field. This has broadened my knowledge and skills for the future. I have learnt a lot about myself and my ability to remain professional in testing situations. I have gained invaluable knowledge which I could not have obtained elsewhere and had the privilege to experience such a multicultural world.

