

Project number: 15

Project applicant: Missouri Botanical Gardens

Project Name: Promoting ecotourism and environmental education at two priority areas for plant conservation, Madagascar

Funds provisionally allocated: €11,290

Summary

For more than a decade the Missouri Botanical Garden has been building a database on the Malagasy flora and during the last 3 years we have used this to identify Madagascar's priority areas for plant conservation. Of course, it is not enough merely to identify these areas therefore recently we began coordinating the conservation of a number of sites that are extremely threatened and likely to be lost in the near future without our intervention. At each site we aim to achieve the sustainable management of natural resources by local stakeholders so as to provide resources for the adjacent human population while retaining the full range of biological diversity. In particular, we are acting to facilitate a range of management activities by a committee composed of local stakeholders. The activities are related to five main work objectives: improving decision making; efficient administration and project management; poverty reduction; developing a conservation mentality among the local community; and the sustainable management of natural resources.

At two of our conservation sites the activities include developing ecotourism to provide funds for site management and for poverty reduction. These sites are Analalava Forest and Ankafobe Forest. Analalava Forest is a 200 ha fragment of degraded low elevation humid forest close to Foulpointe on Madagascar's east coast. Despite its poor condition, it is of high conservation importance because it is the only forest remaining in the area and supports a rich biodiversity that includes several plant species found nowhere else (e.g. *Chaetocarpus rabaraba*), five lemur species (including the threatened White-fronted Lemur, *Eulemur albifrons*), the sucker-footed bat (*Myzopoda aurita*) and apparently new species of reptiles and amphibians. Ankafobe Forest is a complex of several small and degraded forest fragments located in valleys on the Tampoketsa (high plateau savanna) of Ankazobe in Central Madagascar. It is important for supporting much of the remaining population of one of Madagascar's most threatened trees - *Schizolaena tampoketsana*. Both these sites have suffered enormously in recent years because of fire and the selective exploitation of timber and were considered likely to be totally destroyed without immediate action.

Although both Analalava Forest and Ankafobe Forest are degraded we feel that with careful interpretation they can provide much of interest for tourists. Moreover these sites, unlike many more pristine habitats in Madagascar, are close to tourist centres and have easy access. Thus, we feel ecotourism is a viable income-generating activity. Therefore, at each site we will work with their management committee to develop a modest tourism infrastructure (including interpretation centre, trails, signs, and trained guides) and to attract visitors by means of signs and posters and by hosting open days for tourism agencies. Careful consideration will be given to minimizing all possible negative impacts of tourism on ecosystems and local communities. The interpretation centres at both sites will be simple, easy and cheap to maintain, attractive, and constructed from local materials using local labour. Successful ecotourism at these sites will help enormously in convincing local stakeholders that these forests are more valuable as forests than as timber or converted to arable land or pasture.

Although our primary objective with this project is income-generation, an important secondary objective is to exploit the tourism facilities to provide environmental education for local people - in particular, school children. Thus, in addition to the signs aimed at enhancing the visit of tourists we will also include a second series of interpretive materials designed to inform this second group of people. The interpretation centres will also double as a meeting room and library for the local community and will accommodate a nature club for local children.