

Project number: 18

Project applicant: Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust

Project Name: Developing capacity for community co-management of the new Lac Alaotra protected area, central eastern Madagascar

Funds provisionally allocated: €19,944

Summary

The Alaotran gentle lemur *Haplemur griseus alaotrensis* is found only in the marshes of Lac Alaotra, the largest lake (20,000 ha) in Madagascar located in the central eastern highlands. It is the only primate taxon in the world that lives exclusively in a wetland habitat. The species is classified as "Critically Endangered" in the 2006 IUCN Red List due to its extremely reduced geographical range (only occurring in the remaining 23,000 ha of Alaotra marshes) and the rapid decline in population. The main causes of its decline have been transformation of its marsh habitat to rice fields, widespread and repeated burning of remaining areas of marsh and hunting for local consumption. Lac Alaotra is not only a centre of great biological importance but is also the main area of rice production in the country and an important supplier of fish to the capital city and other urban centres. Around 500,000 people live around its shores placing increasing pressure on natural resources and the wetland ecosystem. Thus, the biodiversity of the lake is threatened to vanish if actions are not taken.

Alaotra has been identified as a priority for creation of a new protected area in which sustainable use for fishing and harvest of marsh products will be promoted while also protecting habitats and endangered species. Over the past two years we have facilitated a participatory process to gain support for creation of the protected area and to agree on the limits and type of management. It has been agreed that the new protected area will be managed collaboratively between community groups and government authorities. A co-management structure is being created called "Alaotra Rano Soa". The marshes are currently in the process of being divided among community associations who manage areas of marsh in their village ancestral territory according to a management contract with the State. All fishermen on the lake now belong to a village-level fishers association. These associations are grouped into a federation to agree on and monitor sustainable fishing regulations. There are currently 16 fishing associations and 9 fish traders associations grouped in 2 federations (E and W). The co-management structure will enable these community users to participate in orientation and management of the protected area through their local associations and federations.

This project aims to build capacity of community organisations and assist with their participation in a co-management structure for the protected area. This will be achieved through:

- Training of local communities, organisations and associations in:
 - Good governance
 - Ecological monitoring
- Enabling adaptive management of the protected area:
 - Meetings and workshops to present and discuss the results of the monitoring
 - Assisting partners in communicating about the protected area
 - Raising awareness through local outreach tools (posters, radio etc)
- Assisting with the development of management plans and reports.

The monitoring and evaluation of the programme will always include local communities and the results will be made known to them. The results of the ecological monitoring should show significant changes such as more gentle lemurs found during the census, more and better fish catches, fewer marsh fires etc. Through marsh and fishing associations, local communities will be involved in and benefit from the project. The creation of the protected area will maintain the biodiversity and productivity of the wetland ecosystem on which they depend for their primary sources of income.