

Project number: 19

Project applicant: Madagascar Fauna Group

Project Name: Betampona forest protection programme

Funds provisionally allocated: €15,610

Summary

MFG has worked since 1988 in association with ANGAP (the National Protected Areas Association for Madagascar) to protect the Betampona Natural Reserve. Despite its small size (2227 ha) Betampona is home to at least 89 species of bird, 80 amphibian species, 71 species of reptiles and has also been recognised as one of the most biodiverse of Madagascar's ecosystems for its plant species (Chris Birkenshaw, Missouri Botanical Gardens, pers. comm.). The value of the reserve is immeasurable in terms of a last refuge for many species and one of the last areas of pristine lowland rainforest in Madagascar. Several of these flora and fauna species are new to science and as yet undescribed, others are known only from Betampona and many are critically endangered.

Tavy and deforestation for timber and firewood have caused the relatively large tracts of forest surrounding Betampona to disappear over the past 20 years and the villagers are left with few alternatives other than illegally cutting wood within the reserve limits. The reserve is reaching a critical stage where it could very quickly disappear if it is not properly protected. The reserve itself is nominally surrounded by a "Zone of Protection" that is supposed to buffer the reserve against the encroaching tavy. In effect the Zone of Protection is not respected and the land is burnt and cultivated up to the very limit of the reserve and, in some cases, beyond. Tavy and illegal wood cutting is eating away at the reserve and, if left unchecked, will eventually destroy this last vestige of beautiful lowland forest in the region. The proposed project aims to address this worrying situation by encouraging reforestation of the Zone of Protection and communal areas within the village to provide a sustainable supply of construction timber and firewood as well as providing greater food security for the villagers or means for becoming more financially independent through sale of crops. Subsidised plants will be provided to villagers at minimal cost to encourage adoption of the scheme and training will also be provided by the MFG Education and Agro forestry teams to encourage the adoption of more sustainable farming techniques: simple methods such as soil stabilisation and composting can significantly increase the lifetime of a cultivated area of land thereby reducing the new areas of pristine forest needing to be cleared each year.

The proposed activities will not only reduce the need for villagers to illegally cut timber within the reserve and provide them with an alternative income but will also provide a physical buffer against cyclone damage to the forest edge. Sustainable methods of income generation such as beekeeping will also be encouraged and small grants (micro-credit) will be available to villagers to start up such initiatives. Villages will be assessed on an annual basis following the "Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust" model of competitive reward to encourage ongoing participation and "prize money" will be awarded to fund communal projects such as school improvements or installation of irrigation systems.

The specific project aims are to:

- Increase surface area of forested land in the Betampona Reserve Zone of Protection: area of reforestation will be measured directly by GPS mapping before and after the completion of this project;
- Increase surface area of forested land in the villages and immediate surroundings of the Betampona Reserve;
- Increase the financial security of villagers participating in the programme;
- Increase awareness of the need to sustainably manage resources such as timber and firewood and provide advice and training to allow villagers to meet that need;
- Improve and increase the MFG's relationship with ANGAP and all seven villages bordering the Betampona Reserve to help valorise the reserve in the eyes of locals and ensure that the villages are directly benefiting from its presence.