

Project number: 7

Project applicant: Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust

Project Name: Conservation of endangered lemur species and biodiversity of Manombo lowland rainforest, southeast Madagascar

Funds provisionally allocated: €19,944

Summary

Manombo forest is one of the last remaining lowland rainforests on the eastern coast Madagascar, ranging in elevation between 0 and 137 m, and covering 15,730 hectares in total and composed of the Manombo Special Reserve and the Manombo Classified Forest. Manombo forest is home to eight sympatric species of prosimian primates, black-and-white ruffed lemur (*Varecia variegata editorium*), white-collared brown lemur (*Eulemur albocollaris*), lesser bamboo lemur (*Haplemur griseus*), aye-aye (*Daubentonia madagascariensis*), sportive lemur (*Lepilemur* sp.), eastern woolly lemur (*Avahi laniger*), mouse lemur (*Microcebus rufus*) and greater dwarf lemur (*Cheirogaleus major*). Manombo also has the most diverse species assemblage of snails of any lowland rainforest, including one of the largest land snails in the world. Recent studies revealed that 90% of the flora in Manombo is endemic to Madagascar of which 13 species are only known from Manombo. The recent discovery of a new endemic freshwater fish in the reserve in the genus *Pantanodon* (Poeciliidae) indicates the importance of the Manombo wetlands.

Significant threats to Manombo's unique biodiversity are related to its relatively small size and human activities in and around the park. The combined effects of anthropogenic threats and natural disasters such as cyclones increase the pressures on the endemic and rare species of the Manombo forest. Both *Eulemur albocollaris* and *Varecia variegata* are Critically Endangered and *Daubentonia madagascariensis* is Endangered according to the IUCN 2006 Red List. *E. albocollaris* is among the 25 most endangered primates in the world. All the larger bodied lemurs are targeted by hunting for human consumption, largely for subsistence. Manombo forest and the threatened species found there are threatened by illegal logging, slash and burn agriculture and cattle pasture. The small lemur populations are also threatened because of the impacts of cyclones.

Manombo Special Reserve is administered by the National Park Authority (ANGAP), while the Classified Forest is administered by the Direction of Waters and Forests (DGEF). Both these organisations are struggling with low levels of resources, both human (only one Water and Forests agent for the entire District of Farafangana) and financial. Jonah Ratsimbazafy, the Scientific Coordinator of Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust Madagascar programme has conducted research on the *Varecia* population at Manombo since 1997. Research has covered studies on the behavioural ecology of this species with emphasis on the feeding strategies of this southernmost population of black-and-white ruffed lemurs, recovery of the lemur populations and their habitat following the 1997 cyclone and the impact of invasive plant species. While conducting research, the team has sought to develop a trusting relationship with local communities and with the authorities to encourage and assist them with conservation of the protected area. For example, we have supported the creation of 5 villager associations for the conservation of the endangered biodiversity of Manombo. We have also trained five local people to help monitor and study the lemurs and their habitats. Outreach activities have included environmental festivals in 5 villages and environmental education in local schools. These conservation activities were reinforced and integrated into the Durrell Wildlife Madagascar Programme since Jonah joined our team in 2002. We are seeking funding to further develop activities to support the effective conservation of Manombo forest, through collaboration with local villages, with ANGAP, with Water and Forests and with the local commune.

This project will develop activities to support the effective conservation of Manombo forest. This will include completing inventories, censuses of primate populations, mapping habitats, working with local stakeholders and authorities, developing local capacity, developing participatory monitoring and building capacity to encourage local community participation.