

Project Update: September 2014

The fieldwork for this project was due to commence in 2013 but had to be delayed until October 2014 due to the availability of students. The project has scientific and conservation objectives, but providing opportunities for Malagasy students to work together with international students is also a very important component of the project. Therefore selecting and preparing the team of students has been a very important stage of the project and it has been worth taking time to get it right.

Dr Alison Cameron and Dr Voahangy Soarimalala met in Antananarivo in February and again in September 2014 and the following progress can be reported:

- Close examination of the data from a small feasibility study in 2012, in consultation with several experts, has resulted in some refinement of our proposed methods to ensure that they are logistically feasible in the focal habitats and should yield robust data sets.
- All field equipment purchased in the UK has been transported to Antananarivo, while some other items have been purchased or made in Madagascar. This is now all stored at Madagascar Biodiversity Partnership, ready for the team to deploy in October 2014.
- Adverts were circulated and three Malagasy students have been selected for the project.
- Two international students have been selected, and have purchased flights to arrive in Madagascar in October
- Dr Soarimalala has already secured a research permit for this project. The student names are now being added to it.
- An invoice has been prepared so that funds for stipends and field expenses can be transferred from Queen's University Belfast to Association Vahatra by international bank transfer.

Revised time-line for the project: Transport to Kianjavato and accommodation at Kianjavato Ahmason Field Station (KAFS) for the students has been booked with Madagascar Biodiversity Partnership. The team will meet in Antananarivo to prepare for field work in the last week of October, will commence field work at the start of November 2014, and will return to Antananarivo before the 21st December 2014. DNA samples (will be exported from Madagascar to the UK in December 2015 and molecular lab work to confirm species identifications should be completed by June 2015 at the latest. A report based on provisional identifications will be completed by March 2015 and the final report will be completed by August 2015.