

Project Update: September 2003

The first phase of my project took place during July and August this year (2003) in Bemaraha National Park. Bats were surveyed at night with mist nets and during the day inside their cave roosts.

Preliminary results are very exciting, with three new bat species recorded for the park. Of even more interest was the capture of a small *Scotophilus* bat on the forest-farmland interface; this bat represents a species new to Madagascar and the specimen is currently being prepared for formal description. Comparisons between habitat types revealed highest species diversity in the agricultural areas outside of the park, but capture rates were highest in the protected forest. I also caught over 90 of the rare, endemic *Otomops madagascariensis*, leading to the first investigation of its breeding ecology in Madagascar.

Also, I found no conflict between bat conservation and tourism because tourists rarely visit the caves that contain the most important bat populations. Two national park guides worked with me throughout the six-week period and I trained them in bat identification and bat handling techniques. Two indicators of the success of the project so far are the incorporation of monthly Microchiroptera counts into the park's ecological monitoring programme and the request for me to return next year to survey the northern section of Bemaraha