

Project Update: September 2002

After arriving in Tana on the 27th of August the project quickly received the official permissions necessary to carry out the work, thanks to help from our partner organisations: ANGAP (the National Parks Agency), the Ministry of Water and Forests, and my collaborators in the Dept of Water and Forests, at Tana University: Drs Gabriel Rajoelison and Daniel Razakanirina. Just ten days after arriving I was able to leave Tana and head back to Bevoahazo, the village which will be my main base for this year.

I was pleased to find that everybody was still very keen to be involved in the work, and the same was true of people in Vohiparara, which will be the project's other main centre of work this year. I was able to discuss the project with the Ray aman-dreny (village elders) in the two villages, the local national park agents, local government representatives (Fokontany presidents and Commune mayors) and the honey collectors themselves. This was important as honey collecting is a sensitive activity around the National Park, and it is vital that the project should have the backing and guidance of all involved. I therefore have been able to quickly start fieldwork, in the forests around both Bevoahazo and Vohiparara. So far I have been working with two honey hunters in each village: Ra-Lordy, and Rakoto in Bevoahazo and Jean-ra-Biby and Ndriamena in Vohiparara, as well as other villagers from time to time. As time goes on I hope to involve more honey hunters in Vohiparara to ensure the work is truly representative of the situation in the village. I will also start working with stall holders who sell the honey on to passers-by on the road.

In Vohiparara, Ratsimba Modeste, a carpenter, has started work on the second generation of trial 'forest honey' hives, the first to be entirely built in the village, as well as making modifications to the first seven hives we put in place last year, and in which we have discovered a number of problems. By carrying out the work locally, we hope to have reduced the cost of producing the hives to well below that which other apicultural development projects have previously sold hives for, despite their subsidising the hives. If all goes well, we hope the hives will be affordable to local people as well as improving the sustainability and productivity of forest honey production. One area where action at a larger scale is required is in marketing honey - this is a real limiting factor, and a prime reason for failure of most apicultural projects. To this end the project is collaborating with LDI a USAID funded agro-environment project operating in the area. They have established contacts with industrial buyers of honey, which will allow us to put villagers with honey to sell, but no telephone line or transport, in touch with buyers in the large towns. So far one producer in Vohiparara has had a sample of his honey analysed by an industrial honey user in Tana, who found the honey to be of acceptable quality for sale. Hopefully this collaboration will bear fruit, particularly for those with larger quantities of honey to sell.

Shortly we will be joined in the field by Mijasoa Andriamarovolona, a fifth year student from the University of Tana, who will prepare her dissertation on the subject of honey bee exploitation in the eastern rainforests. Her work will directly contribute to answering the question of the sustainability and productivity of forest honey in the area.

So far my emphasis has been on getting the ecological fieldwork on forest honey collection started, since this is a critical time when things start moving in the forests. However, we

have started to put together the team who will carry out the socio-economic study of forest product use in the corridor of forest between Ranomafana and Andringitra National Parks. We have met up again with Fanomezantsoa Rakoto, with whom we worked last year, when we carried out a Rapid Rural Appraisal of forest product use in Vohiparara. I am pleased to be able to confirm that he will work with the project this year and he will bring valuable experience of socio-economic techniques to the project, improving study design, and providing training to project members. In addition we hope that he will be able to use his involvement in the project towards the final year of his degree in Mathematics for the Social Sciences, at the University of Fianarantsoa. It is great that a 'by product' of the project will be providing research opportunities for Mijasoa and Fano as they pursue their studies.