

Et le massacre continue.... Nouvelle découverte d'une dépouille d'Aye-aye (*Daubentonia madagascariensis*) dans le nord de Madagascar

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Il est des jours où il vaudrait mieux ne pas se lever. Surtout lorsque ce jour là on découvre à nouveau une dépouille de Aye-aye (*Daubentonia madagascariensis*). De plus il s'agit de la 4^{ème} dépouille trouvée en un peu moins de 2 ans. Et toutes ces dépouilles sont dues à des légendes d'un autre âge perpétuées par les populations locales qui veulent que la rencontre avec cette espèce porte malheur (Koenig 2005). Ce dernier animal a été trouvé à Djangoa, une commune située à 15 km au sud-ouest de la ville d'Ambanja dans la province d'Antsiranana (Diego-Suarez) en pleine région du Sambirano. Le cadavre était suspendu au bout d'un bâton au bord de la RN 6 à 13°15S et 48°20 E. Aussi malheureuse soit-elle cette découverte nous permet pourtant de confirmer la présence de l'espèce dans le nord-ouest de Madagascar. La région de Djangoa se trouve à 120 km au nord de la réserve spéciale de Bora (province de Mahajanga) dans laquelle deux dépouilles ont été trouvées (Koenig et Zavasoa 2006) et à environ 140 km au sud de la réserve des Tsingy de l'Ankarana (Rahajanirina et Dollar 2004). Le milieu où l'animal a été trouvé est assez dégradé et principalement peuplé d'arbres du voyageur (*Ravenala madagascariensis*). Même si nous aurions préféré trouver des animaux vivants, cette dernière découverte montre que la présence de l'espèce est géographiquement relativement continue.

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Killed aye-aye (*Daubentonia madagascariensis*) exposed on the gallows in northeastern Madagascar

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The aye-aye (*Daubentonia madagascariensis*) was considered as almost extinct some decades ago, but was recently recorded at many localities in eastern and even western forests though at rather low densities. Because of their nocturnal, cryptic habits and the inability to assess density from secondary signs such as feeding remains or nests, there is a paucity of accurate records on the abundance and distribution of *Daubentonia* in the wild (Sterling 2003). Due to its grotesque appear-

ance the aye-aye is strongly affected by local taboos (fady) of native people in Madagascar. These "fady" vary from village to village, even within the same geographic region, and range from having to kill an aye-aye, burn down the village, and move when one is sighted, to believing that aye-ayes are embodiments of ancestral spirits accorded all the rites of a grand chieftain at death (Sterling 2003). Other authors describe the situation as follows: If it appears in a village, it is killed, exposed, but never eaten (Paulian 1981). Garbutt (1999) noted that in some areas they are thought to embody ancestral spirits and bring good luck. However, elsewhere they are considered as ill omens and may be killed, villagers sometimes then erect the tails of slaughtered aye-ayes on poles outside their dwellings (Koenig 2005; Koenig and Zavasoa this volume). According to Mittermeier *et al.* (2006) *Daubentonia* is still killed on sight in some areas as a harbinger of evil and also killed as a crop pest in coconut and lychee plantations, but, fortunately, is rarely hunted for food because of its evil reputation (Albignac 1987; Simons 1993; Simons and Meyers 2001). Habitat destruction and killing by humans are the primary threats to *Daubentonia* populations.

On Sunday, 20 February 2005, 15:45 pm, returning from an expedition to Marojejy National Park, we saw a killed adult male aye-aye exposed on the right border of the street Route Nationale west of Sambava. The lemur was hanging on the gallows with a rope around the neck that was fixed with a pole. The face was "looking" to the direction of Andapa, so that the animal was hardly to be overlooked by cars driving to Sambava. A part of the posterior skull was lacking which might indicate that the animal was killed by using a "coup-coup", a Malagasy bush knife. The injury of the skull was apparently rather fresh, indicating that the specimen was dead only since several hours (and clearly no longer than one day). We therefore assume that the aye-aye was killed in the region where it was exposed. The wider surroundings of the dead lemur were a mosaic of secondary forest, remains of primary forests, bush areas, agricultural fields and human settlements. About 100-200 m apart a soccer match with many spectators was just running. When we stopped our cars to photograph the dead lemur several people (the region is apparently dominated by the Betsimisaraka tribe) gathered around the location but none of them was able or willing to tell us the meaning or the reasons for killing the aye-aye. It is not clear if there was any relation with the soccer match (e. g. that the animal was used to bring bad luck to one of the teams). Our driver returned to Andapa in the morning of the 21. February and informed us later that the dead lemur had disappeared by then.

Our observations provide a new locality record for this species and the associated ritual killing of aye-ayes by Malagasy people. More efforts to sensitize the natives for the protection of the aye-aye would be desirable to reduce the threatening of this exceptional primate species.

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Transfert de gestion: Benana, Tsinjoarivo

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Background

The rural commune of Tsinjoarivo, 45 km southeast of Ambatolampy, contains the most intact and continuous eastern rainforest remaining in Antananarivo province (Fig. 1). Very few biological surveys have been conducted in the Tsinjoarivo region, but considerable biological biodiversity has already been documented with at least: 9-10 primates, 17 insectivores (including 16 endemic lipotyphlans), 7 rodents (including 5 endemic nesomyines), 5 carnivores (4 of which are endemic), 92 birds, 24 reptiles and 30 amphibians, and more than

200 species of flowering plants (Angiospermae). In 1999, a previously unknown local variant of *Propithecus diadema* (known as "sadabe") was discovered by K. Glander and colleagues (Fig. 2). Although morphologically distinct from other *P. diadema* populations, it is unclear whether this population is separated from *P. d. diadema* at the subspecific and possibly the species level. At the 2001 IUCN CAMP meeting in Madagascar, the Tsinjoarivo sifaka was recognized as a distinct taxon, and classified as critically endangered. Subsequently, the broader species *Propithecus diadema* (including the Tsinjoarivo variant) was also classified as critically endangered by the IUCN Redlist.



Fig. 2: Normal (left) and melanistic (right) forms of the critically endangered lemur species *Propithecus diadema* (diademed sifaka). Photos from Tsinjoarivo Forest.

Management Transfer ("Transfert de Gestion")

On August 28 2006, an association based in Beanana (Fokontany Ankazomena, Commune Rurale de Tsinjoarivo) was awarded a management transfer agreement by the Ministry of the Environment, Water and Forests (Antananarivo). In early 2007, the agreement was amended to include four associations – the one original association (based locally at Beanana) and three others (including one association based in Antananarivo). The decision to grant the transfer came from the Ministry in Antananarivo rather than the local water and forest offices in Antsirabe and Ambatolampy. The local government of Tsinjoarivo Commune had been working with biological researchers since 2000 and advocated

the continuing protection of the Commune's forests, but lacked the authority to block the management transfer. The original agreement covered 800 hectares within Tsinjoarivo Commune, 20 km southeast of the town of Tsinjoarivo. The agreement was later amended to include 900 hectares. The eastern boundary of the area coincides with the administrative limit between Antananarivo and Toamasina provinces, and the area enclosed includes the most intact and undisturbed forest remaining in both Tsinjoarivo Commune and Antananarivo Province. The area was divided into three approximately equal-sized zones: a conservation area, an area of exploitation, and previously-cleared areas (cultivated or secondary forest). The agreement for the management of the three areas is as follows:

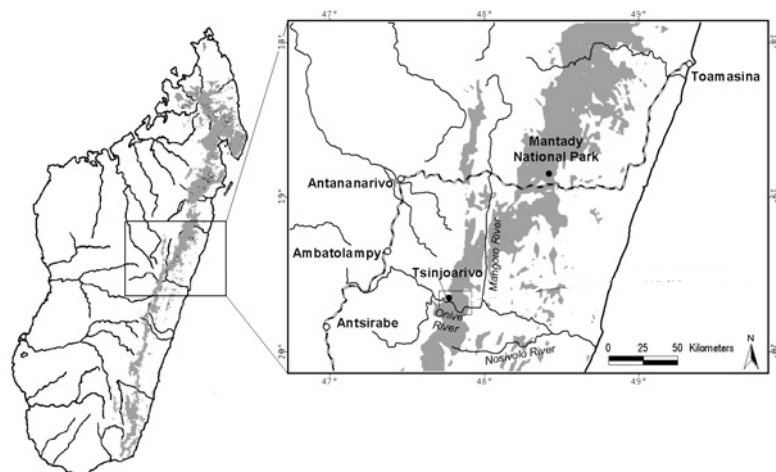


Fig. 1: Location of Tsinjoarivo forest within Madagascar. Forest cover after Green and Sussman (1990).