

## **Project Update: March 2014**

### **Field activities**

In order to determine the identity of rodent species that are potentially removing dispersed seeds from the seed bank, which might affect seed distribution and plant recruitment, we conducted seed removal experiment in the primary forest of Valohoaka, Ranomafana National Park. We set up camera traps near seeds in several locations, and tagged some seeds with microchips (Passive Integrated Transponders) for tracking and identification if removed. Only the native rodent species, *Nesomys rufus*, was seen removing seeds from their initial location during this period; however, unlike in previous years, seed removal was not observed in all locations. We suspected the use of PIT tags may have led to this change, thus we did not use tagged seeds in some experimental plots; however, we did not observe any change in seed removal rate even with the untagged seeds. We thus suggest the low removal rate observed might be due to the presence of fruit available in high abundance during this period. We were unable to recover removed seeds yet.

### **Workshop**

The workshop was held at the Institut de Formation Technique (IFT) in Antananarivo for college students in environmental science (20 participants in their 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year of college). It was mainly focused on learning methodologies in designing and conducting conservation-related research, and the use of some research equipment and tools related to this project, followed by a session of activities and discussion to engage students in critical thinking. One of the students is currently involved in this project in collecting data while getting in-depth research training and I am mentoring her in her independent degree-seeking project.

### **Next steps**

I will continue fieldwork in May 2014 and run the experiment in several sites spanning the primary and secondary forest at different seasons.

I will also organise a second workshop for students at the University of Antananarivo; and currently working closely with the department chair of the environmental science programme at IFT in organising a field trip with the students for more hands-on and in-depth learning activities and practice.



Pictures of *Nesomys rufus* captured by camera traps near our seed removal experiments



Workshop held for college students in environmental science at the Institut de Fomation Technique in Antananarivo