

Project Update: September 2015

Since 2008, the University of Western Ontario, Canada (UWO) and the University of Antsiranana, Madagascar has a field research and students exchange program. Every 2 years, Canadians students with their professors came in Antsiranana to conduct a research in collaboration with the University of Antsiranana, the English Language studies Department in different small project existing around the region. So, from now the project site is selected as one of the priority site where students from the University of Western Ontario Canada and the students from the University of Antsiranana would carry out research on biodiversity, ecotourism and culture for their study.

In order to make the collaboration practical, the project have hosted 10 guests, six students from University of Antsiranana, two students and a professor from the University of Western Ontario, Canada.

Various activities have been done with the local community participation:

- **Incite local community involvement:** On the first day, a meeting with the community has been organised to introduce the guests and the objective of their visits. The guests stressed to local community the international importance of the ecotourism project and as always incited them to be part of it.

The chiefs of the villages and the elders gave their full support and welcome the guests and ensure them to mobilize the villagers to different activities.

The project has always incited local people to take part to the project to be absolutely certain on the villagers' willingness to switch to the different activities. Louis Phillip D'Arvisenet, from Madagascar National Park (MNP) has been invited to train young villagers to become professional guide. Three boys (Dada Joby, Jaomena and Chauffeur) were involving to the project during the biological research, the setting up of different circuits and they were the first responsible to lead the large group composed by the team of the project and the guests. There were group discussions on their guiding performance to make sure that their involvement is beneficial to them.

- **Tour planning study:** The project team took the guests to visit the three circuits of the site (Analagnana, Ratabirano and Antaravy) to discover the fauna, flora, customs and tradition to help the project to get feedback.

The aim of this visit was also to demonstrate and evaluate the site as conservation and an ecotourism project priority and to help the project to develop its capacity on hosting researchers and ecotourism visitors in the future (budgeting, circuits planning, research activities, camp duty, cleanliness). This visit was a test the capacity of the project as an ecotourism site.

- **Training on research methodology:**

There was an experience exchange on conducting scientific data, demarcation of the site (GIS map, Google earth), and marketing planning between the team of the project and the

guests. This exchange of experience was an opportunity for the project team to become local researchers and to be able to transmit that experience to the local communities.

As the next step of the project's biological study will focus on specific species such as *Eulemur coronatus* and *Chelonia mydas* which are classified Endangered in IUCN red list, and the Vulnerable *Pteropus rufus*, the project team and the local guides had the opportunity to be trained on conducting research on lemurs by the primatologist Ian Colquhoun, the Professor from the University of Western Ontario, Canada.

-Improving villagers' English Language skills: Canadian students gave basic English classes to children, young and adults in the village. This class was a great benefit for the learners to be able to communicate in English and ameliorate their pronunciation nearly native speakers. This activity was also an opportunity for the villagers to have contact, be familiar with foreigner and to minimise their shyness.

-Provide Environmental Education Program: In order to get an objective result, an environmental awareness speeches and quiz was hold by the guests to evaluate the success of the environmental education programme previously held by the project team and also assess peoples' changes in attitude after the awareness raising.

- Study of Alternative Source of income: The project have included the activity of the study in monitoring the alternative source of income to make sure that these activities such as selling honey, cassava, corn, hot sauce, even the ecotourism project really help the local communities to bring enough money to support their family and to minimise the production of charcoal.

-Interview the guest about the project: As the project received some researchers in the site (students and friends, Malagasy and foreigners), the team conducted some informal interview to have feedback on how do the guests find the access, camp site, village and people surrounding Anjiabe, and circuits.

Besides, the project has also raised interest of particular philanthropist named Christopher Sherer Clement and his friends who visited the site in order to find out the necessity of local community in terms of education, sport, and infrastructure and livelihood development. He started his help to offer to the most underprivileged local people solar lamps called **luminAID**.

Project presentation at the Alliance Française of Antsiranana

After visiting the site, there was a public conference and exhibition of the project at the Alliance Française in Antsiranana town. Different project stakeholders from Maison d'Arnaud, Mada clinic, Azimut, Jardin du Monde, Madagascar National Park, and collaborators such as local authorities, NGOs, Tour operators, researchers at the University, representatives of local community (Dada Joby and Jaofeno Marcellin), and two experts of Northern History and Tradition (CASSAM Aly Ndandahizara and VAOHITA Barthelemi) have been invited.

The conference was given to present the current status of the project and to summarise the result of the different activities students have had during their stay within the project.

In addition, as different entities were invited , the conference objectives were also to provide a forum for different stakeholders to discuss and sharing experiences and problems encountered in the conservation of the biodiversity and ecotourism at the ground level and on running out a small scale project as well as to create a great networking opportunity.

The poster of the public presentation can be found in a “dropbox” folder that you can access through the following link.

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/7s6lx89vv8uq1mi/AABEnQB7ibaYOA39D2wnfFPla?dl=0>



Left: Photo by Andrew Walsh. Right: Photo by Erika Rakotomala