

Project Update: May 2007

The taxonomy of cheirogaleids is currently under revision and newly described species of mouse and dwarf lemurs have been proposed recently. During our study in two eastern rainforests of Madagascar, we were able to (1) collect crucial information bearing on that taxonomy that could be compared to data from other wild populations of cheirogaleids; and (2) enhance our basic knowledge on the population and reproductive biology of these species that have been intensely studied under laboratory conditions but little in the wild.

We conducted field work at Ranomafana National Park (RNP) between October 1st - November 15th 2006 and between December 6th 2006 – January 22nd 2007. It took about 6-7 hours to get there by car, driving south from Antananarivo. RNP is located in a montane rain forest with altitudes ranging between 500 m to 1400 m. There is a distinguishable rainy season between December and March, where rainfall is mostly concentrated (annual range between 2300-4000mm); that period coincides with the birth and lactation season in cheirogaleids. During our study, we set up traps ~6 days a week to capture mouse and dwarf lemurs. Trapped lemurs were brought back to a research station (ValBio) situated about 300m south of the Ranomafana National Park entrance for further identification/marketing, collection of morphometric and reproductive data as well as fecal samples for hormonal tests; animals were released at the site of capture later the same day.

Between November 17th and December 4th we conducted an expedition to Tsinjoarivo, collecting preliminary data on cheirogaleids in a primary, high-altitude forest, (~1400-1650 m elevation, Vatateza) and one of the more “marginal”, fragmented forests only several kilometres away from the pristine forests at Tsinjoarivo (Andasivodihazo) at a slightly lower elevation. After a ~5-hour drive traveling east of Antananarivo, we arrived to the first campsite in the fragmented forests of Tsinjoarivo (Mahatsinjo), where we spent the first night. We hiked for about 6 hours the following day to reach the campsite in the continuous forest (Vatateza). We spent our first week there conducting intense trapping and nocturnal walks and went back to one of the fragments (Andasivodihazo) where we continued the survey during our last week of the expedition. We trapped and observed cheirogaleids prior to the beginning of the rainy season; that period proved to be a good time for trapping both mouse and dwarf lemurs, especially the latter as they had come out of hibernation and were beginning their reproductive season.

Preliminary analysis on the morphometric data of mouse lemurs suggest that the same species (*Microcebus rufus*) may be present at both locations (but see final report); conversely, comparisons of dwarf lemurs (also from morphometric but also dental data) corroborated previous suspicions that they may be more than one species of *Cheirogaleus* at Tsinjoarivo, different from *Cheirogaleus major* present at Ranomafana National Park. I am planning to submit a new ANGAP research proposal to conduct further sampling of cheirogaleids at Tsinjoarivo and Ranomafana during the 2007-2008 reproductive seasons; the study will be funded to a great extent by the Rufford Small Grant for Nature Conservation.