



# CPALI/SEPALI Madagascar Newsletter

February 2012

## A WHOLE LOT TO SHOUT ABOUT

2012 is going to be a great year for the CPALI/SEPALI Madagascar project! Starting off, Mamy is traveling to South Africa to accept a SEED Initiative Award (consortium founded by UN, UNDP, IUCN). The award provides coaching and business training to SEPALI Madagascar environmental entrepreneurs. Specifically, the SEED program will hold a two day, partner's workshop in Maroantsetra with the SEPALI team, lead farmers and lead artisans to outline their action plan for the next 3 years. The second day is devoted to helping SEPALI extend partnerships with local NGO's. Learning to work cooperatively will



A whole lot to shout about- Bertrand gives a cheer!

greatly enhance silk production efficiencies, better distribute partner program benefits, and enhance our environmental teaching programs. Farmer partnering will allow farmers to better integrate the silk program into their daily lives. All of this could not have come at a better time as most of the farmers have trees that are big enough to support larvae and they are just beginning to rear. The workshops will give them a tremendous boost of confidence in the program.

In June, Mamy will travel (again) but this time to the US to undergo training on how to lead a successful NGO. That program is organized by the US embassy in Madagascar and it is a tremendous honor that he was selected to participate.

Finally, we are looking forward to initiating our first soil monitoring program. There are many possible effects that planting silk moth host trees might have on soils - decrease erosion, affect nutrient inputs/out

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takes, pH, soil carbon. We are very fortunate that the Atkinson Center for a Sustainable Future at Cornell University is supporting a soils graduate student to help us set up a long term monitoring program.

Despite the continued political problems in Madagascar, the SEPALI Madagascar team, farmers and partners are pulling together to find a better ways to support the Makira Protected Area and improving the lives of local communities. In case you missed CPALI/SEPALI in the conservation news, check out: [http://news.mongabay.com/2012/0220-hance\\_interview\\_sepali.html](http://news.mongabay.com/2012/0220-hance_interview_sepali.html)

## News from the Field

The SEPALI Madagascar team has been able to begin to train farmers to rear larvae on inter-cropped larval host trees. So far 31 farmers have received training in the past month and Kerry, Lalaina and Mario are in Marovovonna training at least 10 more as we speak. The farmers have joined the training groups with great enthusiasm and are even collecting and sharing chrysalides from which adult moths will soon emerge to produce eggs - a big step forward from the days when farmers demanded that all chrysalides be given to them by SEPALI Madagascar. We have seen that one farmer willing to share can start a movement.



Other news, while it is not surprising that all the trees planted for the t-shirt competition did not survive (too hot, not enough water, etc), farmers are replacing them . . .on their own. About 12 months ago Mamy wrote "all the plantings done in the villages have been done by the SEPALI team" . Hence, the fact that trees planted 8 months ago during the farmer competition were planted by the farmers alone AND that they are being replanted on farmer initiative, is another HUGE step forward for the program.

Finally, while we have not yet identified the host tree of *Ceranchia* or *Argema*, we are making progress. Many *Ceranchia* cocoons have been found by farmers at the northwestern edge of Makira and Rafanoely (our newest team member) is hot on the trail to identify the *Ceranchia* host plant. Marie Jean, a farmer to the south who has been featured many times in our newsletters, once again found *Argema* cocoons in a tree on her farm - now if we could only catch the larvae munching!

## Marketing update - Spin and Twist

CPALI/SEPALI Madagacar has purchased a spinning wheel and we are now SPINNING wild silk fibers. It is an electric wheel and so easy to use that even I can spin silk. It also allows one to easily add **a lot of twist** to the thread which is important when fibers are relatively short. So far I have produced beautiful yarns (well, the material is beautiful but the number slubs they contain indicate my beginner status as a spinner) from *Ceranchia appolina*, *Argema mittrei* and *Antherina suraka*. Spun silk will allow us to diversify our products.

Spinning the silk , however, is not the starting place. The cocoons need to be "de-gummed" meaning the sericin that coats the threads needs to be removed before the silk fibers can be wrested free. Not surprisingly, some of the cocoons have more sericin than others - a reflection on the degree of protection they must provide? For example, to remove the sericin from *A. suraka* cocoons, the cocoon is "simmered" just below boiling point in a 1% solution of baking soda for an hour - minimum. What results is a beautiful, deep brown liquor (the sericin, that in itself, might be a useful product), and a cocoon whose fibers are *slightly* loosened.



*C. appolina*, like *A. suraka*, produces a two layer cocoon but its components are much more differentiated than those of *A. suraka*. The inner cocoon feels like paper and is made up of extremely fine and very soft threads that are bound together with super gluey sericin. The outer cocoon is a reticulated and very strong silk "cage". We have been able to "relax" both inner and outer cocoons by simmering them in a 2% solution of baking soda.

*Argema mittrei* is the very easiest to work with. The fibers are very, very long, and silvery. In fact the silk can be spun directly from the cocoon after a little boiling with baking soda. My colleagues tell me that it is possible to reel the silk which would give processing an industrial advantage but may not be as advantageous for our project. Spinning the silks takes some practice and different species produce cocoons with different types of fibers. Thank goodness for the Roberta spinner -- that helps a beginner achieve better results -- just like a good camera that adjusts the light to give better pictures.

Ok - enough about spinning and threads - stay tuned for the next team update from SEPALI Madagascar that will be posted on [www.cpali.org](http://www.cpali.org) in about two weeks.

Thank you for your continued interest and support --- Let the adventure continue!

All the best,



Catherine Craig, PhD  
CPALI CEO

We welcome your suggestions and comments - please contact me at: or suggest additional products or markets, please contact craig "at" cpali "." org or Mamy Ratsimbazafy at Mamycpali.gmail.com.

Donations can also be gratefully accepted and acknowledged through Global Giving ([http://www.globalgiving.org/projects/help-farmers-rear-silk-moths-to-restore-forests/?RF=widget\\_small2650](http://www.globalgiving.org/projects/help-farmers-rear-silk-moths-to-restore-forests/?RF=widget_small2650)) but if you would like a special piece of our silk be sent as a gift, please make a donation of \$100 or more by sending a check to: CPALI, 221 Lincoln Road, Lincoln, MA 01773.

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