News
Centre ValBio (CVB) continues to grow, through the expansion of our community outreach program to the literal expansion of our campus. This season, CVB was awarded funding to double the size of the mobile health team, as well as to construct several new buildings. The SOS Biodiversity Center will house collections, offer more lab space and office space for researchers and staff. The Lemur Education Center will replace the outdoor classroom with a more inviting and versatile educational space for the community, and the Holtzman Wildlife Center will be developed on our upper campus.

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Dear readers

It is my pleasure to share with you another edition of VaoVao ValBio. From conservation, to social research in a Tanala community, to conservation education and our CVB Mobile Health Team, this edition of the VaoVao ValBio features the work that CVB does as part of our Community Outreach Program. Since the very beginning, CVB has recognized the importance of understanding the needs of local people and involving communities in conservation initiatives.

This season, we have worked hard to forge new partnerships, through our active participation in the Madagascar Population-Health-Environment Network, collaborating with Rotary Club-New Jersey and Ny Tanintsika in Fianarantsoa to bring clean drinking water to Savondronana, and exploring ways to make family planning more accessible to communities around Ranomafana National Park with Marie Stopes.

We also have a new exciting endeavour that is spearheaded by the CVB Biodiversity Team. In January, twenty villagers from the Ivohibory region came to be trained at CVB to monitor their forest. Rainforest Trust has funded this community project to support the protection of this isolated 1,400ha forest south of Ihosy.

We are proud of the work that we are doing, and grateful for strong community partnerships that allow us to continue to listen to each other, learn from one another, and protect the forest together.

Dr. Patricia Wright
Founder and Executive Director, CVB
Conservation

Celebrating One Year of the Reforestation, Education and Community Development (RECD) Project

RECD is a project funded by Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and USAID with the main goal of restoring the forest surrounding Ranomafana National Park with native tree species. During the first year of the project, RECD worked in 13 villages in two communes. Community-run tree nurseries were established in each of the villages and over 16,000 trees were planted in February.

In addition, 18 Conservation Clubs were formally registered. Nine of the clubs decided to focus their activities on health and sanitation, and with the help of CVB, 74 latrines were built!

Three clubs focused their activities on the implementation of clean drinking water. To this end, three improved drinking-water sources were constructed to protect from outside contamination, in particular from contamination with fecal matter.

Sustainable agricultural was also a focus of the project. Ten fish ponds were dug, and a wild-pepper domestication project was initiated in two villages. Nine nurseries of wild pepper were established and 1,624 saplings of wild pepper are ready for transplant.

Many thanks to CRS and USAID for their support, and to everyone at CVB and in the communities who worked so hard to make this project a success. We hope that with future funding, we will be able to continue this project for many years to come and realize our dream of reforesting from Ranomafana to the coast.

Amphibian Conservation

With support from Rainforest Trust, this project aims to identify priority sites for amphibians not in current Protected Areas. Two key activities were carried out in the field: confirming the presence of the target species, and discussing with the local communities and authorities on the options for protecting the sites.

While Madagasikara Voakajy focused on areas in the north of the country, CVB looked at areas south of Tana and carried out surveys in three areas: 1) Ambodivoangy-Bevoahazo, 2) Ivato Karianga, and 3) Tsinjoarivo.

Three of CVB’s biodiversity technicians Solo Justin, Lovasoa Justin & Randriamanantena François led the project. Through direct observation and searching through known amphibian hiding spots, the team worked day and night to inventory the amphibian species found at each site.
Research
*Tales of a Lemur Researcher*
Excerpt from Amanda Mancini’s Blog, amandanmancini.wixsite.com

*Tsyo hisa ny varijatsy* (Malagasy for “we did not find the Varecia”) was unfortunately the daily mantra of my recent expedition. Recently my team and I visited the site of Miaranony which is located in the northern parcel of Ranomafana National Park. Previous long term researchers at this site informed me that in the past they have occasionally (although rarely) seen ruffed lemurs in the area, so my team and I made the trip with the hope that we might find some ruffed lemurs.

Our trip to Miaranony started with a bumpy two hour drive to the village of Vohitrarivo, approximately 10 km east of the national park. From Vohitrarivo, we hiked to the village of Miaranony and met with the ampanjaka (“king” in Malagasy) to discuss my research objectives and request their approval to work in the forest. From there we headed up into the forest with our local guides (Rakoto and Sambatra) and our porters, and after over an hour or so of walking up a very steep slope we arrived at our campsite.

The following day was the first of many days spent searching the forest from dawn until dusk for any sign of ruffed lemurs. We began each day with our usual bowl of rice topped with eggs or strips of beef, plus some black coffee for me.

Although there have been occasional sightings in the past by older researchers and local villagers, we did not hear or see them, and concluded that there were no ruffed lemurs in the forest at the time of our trip.
This was definitely a disappointing conclusion to draw but as any researcher knows, things don’t always go according to plan and we are bound to experience bumps along the road. Even though we were not able to find any ruffed lemurs while in Miaranony, our team did have the opportunity to collect many plant samples for a complimentary project so we did not walk out of the forest completely empty handed. Additionally, we saw several other lemur species: varika mena (red-bellied lemur), varika mavo (brown lemur), and sifaka, and a tenrec, Rowland Streaked Tenrec (which was my first time ever seeing one!), and had several ring-tailed mongoose hanging out in camp with us.

After ten days in the forest we headed back to CVB which with its ample internet, hot showers, and comfy beds, always a welcome sight after a stint in the forest.

New Publication by CVB Researcher


A new publication led by Dr. Zach Farris examines how protected areas mitigate threats to habitat and biodiversity. From 2010 to 2015, the team photographically sampled with camera traps within Ranomafana National Park (RNP) as well as in degraded forests around the park to understand the effects of invasive predators, the presence of local people, and habitat quality on the endemic carnivore community, including fosa (Cryptoprocta ferox) and vontsira (Galidia elegans). What they found was that native carnivores were either absent or had a low probability of occurrence in degraded forest areas, while local people and dogs (Canis familiaris) had high occurrence. Fosa and the ring-tailed vontsira’s occurrence in RNP was shown to decline rapidly over the study period; their strong co-occurrence with dogs suggests interspecific competition, direct aggression/mortality, or disease as the cause.
Conservation Education
Lemur Radio and Training for Student Teachers

The much anticipated episodes of the SOS (Saving Our Species) Lemur Radio Project have been completed and will soon be aired on the local Ranomafana radio station as well as be distributed to partners throughout Madagascar. Each episode highlights a different lemur species living in Ranomafana forest.

The 10 “My Rainforest, My World” (MRMW) student teachers came in from their remote village postings to attend a training on how to use the Lemur Radio episodes in the classroom. They were then equipped with radios, memory cards and an education pack to take back with them.

The training workshop, held over four days in April, was led by Lova Rakotoarisoa and her team from the Yes Tafita NGO based in Tamatave. In addition to Lemur Radio curriculum, sessions focused on water, sanitation and hygiene, as well as human rights.

Improving Education Project Monitoring and Evaluation

Israel and Stephanie Catz, former Education Volunteers with the U.S. Peace Corps and PIVOT employees, are current CVB education consultants, working with the CVB education team on professional development as well as improving the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of CVB education projects.

They first introduced the team to M&E through an online course offered by Poverty Action Lab. From there, a theory of action was discussed for each program. Using each theory of action, they then showed how to develop and use M&E tools to assess project outcomes and improve project management.
Along with working on M&E protocols, the team has improved on their use of Excel, statistics, and crafting executive summaries for report writing.

Israel and Stephanie will continue to work with the education team through May on creating ways to document their impact and improve data collection for the “My Rainforest My World” (MRMW) and Conservation Club programs. They have recently started aligning the MRMW curriculum with the national curriculum in order for it to be used in a broader context.

Rethinking Sustainability by Listening to Children
By Daniella Rabino, Center for International Education at the University of Sussex, UK

By listening to perceptions of environmental identity in a rural Tanala village, visible narratives begin to challenge discursive assumptions on what drives sustainability. The involvement of a remote Tanala community is helping us think differently about inclusion, and how identity and agency are being expressed and created in everyday lives.

My PhD study invites young people to take the paintbrush to dramas of daily lives and environments, taking us into the unpredictable web of encounters of these interactions. Beginning with listening to the families, and then moving into creative spaces with children and youth, we join in mud-slinging walls, or steering their cattle through the village commotion, and begin to notice ways that concerns, desires, and agency are expressed, pushing against the collective society to question and explore new places.

Making visible these narratives is not at all a straight line, but filled with surprises. Just the idea of working with a small group seemed near an impossible feat, so we began with playing, drawing and gardening every afternoon with the village. Only after a few months did
Being open to not-knowing requires rigorous attendance to research-driven filters for notes, methodology, and interpretation; though, coming in as the ‘all-knowing’ superior may prove as easier to take seriously. The feminine and unpredictable nature of listening, instead, means that finding our way into relationships is entangled in a tiring pursuit of respect and interest. Yet, it’s in the nervous comradery of the perceptive schoolkid, enthusiastic gold-miner, and rebellious zebu-herding pre-teen, ready to dive into living worlds, where evidence emerges to disrupt fixed narratives of rural poor.

So, to think about inclusion of young people, we move outside the plight of lemurs, to listen to those whose vulnerabilities coexist, and examine challenges for embodying sustainability. Rural poor know some things about their lives and concerns, too, and its research accounts are pertinent for rethinking inclusion in learning and sustainability. This project is a small attempt at listening, and a bigger attempt to consider shifting identity and hope with real people.

We manage to familiarize with different characters well enough to invite a diverse mix of young people to work with us more seriously, entering into mapping, photo-voice, and child-led tours to illustrate thoughts on home, the village, and the forest.
Study Abroad  
*Experiential Learning Program - Winter 2017*

During three weeks in January, 14 students from Stony Brook University and two students from the South University of Science and Technology of Shenzhen in Guangdong, China, traveled to Madagascar and CVB to participate in the second Winter Experiential Learning Program. In Madagascar, the program personnel included Dr. Patricia Wright (Program Director), Dr. Tharcisse Ukizintambara (Resident Coordinator), and Ms. Mariah Donohue and Mr. Franck Rabenahy (Teaching Assistants). In the USA, Jeanne O’Neil and Alison Becker provided all necessary support including orientation, logistic and information to parents, students and the program staff.

Project focus areas included herpetology, community health, engineering sciences and environmental education. These projects focused mostly on studying amphibian diversity of Ranomafana National Park and surrounding areas, accompanying the CVB health team on their field expeditions to remote villages (and getting to see a baby be born!), assisting in the organization of an environmental education workshop at CVB, and participating in innovative health and technology projects connected with the Global Health Institute at Stony Brook University. As part of a new initiative called BeLocal (formally Xchange), students took GoPros to the field to capture footage of the daily lives of local people in order to brainstorm potential engineering solutions to some of their everyday problems.

Having American, Chinese and Malagasy students together made this program the most cosmopolitan of all. Everyone learned a lot from each other: culturally, linguistically and scientifically.

*Study Abroad News*

Carla Rodriguez, former study abroad student, has had a poster about her research on the progress of the ValBio reforestation program accepted for the prestigious Student Conference on Conservation Science hosted by the Center for Biodiversity and Conservation at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. Congratulations Carla!
Ivohibory Research Technician Training

In September of 2016, CVB started the first biological inventory of Ivohibory Forest. This incredible forest, isolated for hundreds of years from the main spine of rainforest in the east, provides evolutionary answers to questions about the composition of the central forest that once covered Madagascr. This will be the first conservation project in the entire Hirombe Region.

We are collaborating with three different villages on a community management project to protect this forest of 1,400 ha. This was the first time local residents worked on any kind of research activity. Working side by side as apprentices to our expert CVB biologists, they expressed an interest in becoming research technicians themselves, and Dr. Patricia Wright invited them to a two week training at CVB on biodiversity research methods.

Senior CVB research technicians trained the participants in different methods:
- Plants (Key of Identification, Plot botany, Voucher specimen collection)
- Lemur Behavior and Ecology (Identification and survey method)
- Birds (Origin, Classification, Survey method)
- Reptiles and Amphibians (Method of survey and identification)
- Insects (Classification, survey method and specimen collection method)
- Camera trapping (different steps for setting up and picking up the cameras)
- Climate (General observation)
- GIS (How to collect data points using GPS units)

Participants also visited RNP. Experiences were shared and knowledge gained. We look forward to working with these newly trained technicians at Ivohibory for years to come.

Thanks to funding from Rainforest Trust, 23 people from villages surrounding the Ivohibory Forest traveled to CVB to attend the training from January 16 to 25, 2017.

We also invited 10 local people from villages surrounding Ranomafana National Park (RNP) to attend.
Health Outreach

CVB Community Health Team
By Alexandra Payan, Health Peace Corps Volunteer 2016-2017

Centre Valbio’s Mobile Health Team currently works in 20 rural communities around Ranomafana National Park which are not accessible by vehicle (often 5 km or more from the nearest road). Receiving medical treatment is often difficult and expensive. The health team spends three days in each village providing free clinic services while also teaching about health, hygiene, nutrition, and malaria prevention. Luckily for us, we have received a new grant to hire additional health team members and buy new equipment and supplies.

The team has already been off to a busy start this year. In February, the team went to the Tsaratanana region for two weeks, where roughly 80% of the patients who were tested for malaria were positive. The team also held town meetings stressing the importance of building latrines and using mosquito nets. In March, the team hiked to the Mangevo region where they provided medical treatment and also gave trainings on handwashing, malaria prevention and treatment, nutrition and safe motherhood.

CVB also partners with the Global Health Institute at Stony Brook University. This March, the team collected stool samples from villagers for researchers testing for taeniasis, a parasitic disease due to infection with tapeworms. The samples were brought back to the lab for further testing. Researchers are aiming to understand the relationship between pathogen exchange among humans, livestock, and wildlife.

Currently, the health team consists of one midwife and four nurses. CVB is excited to announce that in early May, the Mobile Health Team will welcome the addition of a doctor. Also Dr. Tom Gillespie’s team from Emory University will be joining the CVB health team to do research. We are looking forward to the busy months ahead providing treatment, trainings, and facilitating human health-related
Madaworks’ Scholarship and Economic Growth Successes!
By Diane Powers, Madaworks Founder

Madaworks, based on Long Island, is a recently launched nonprofit working in the Ranomafana region, providing funds for high school education for village girls and economic empowerment for women. In continuing its partnership with Centre ValBio, Madaworks distributed its second year of high school scholarship applications and continued to support two women’s weaving cooperatives, Maeva and Famiova.

Madaworks is improving development in the Ranomafana region through: access to secondary education for girls from rural villages and economic empowerment of women. Madaworks aims to alleviate poverty and empower women and girls. By increasing the number of girls attending high school and strengthening the independence of the women’s weaving cooperatives, we will impact the trajectory of chronic poverty. To date we have graduated one student (Julie Rakotozafy) from Sahavondronona.

Her achieving a high school diploma inspired her to begin university studies in nursing. In the fall of 2016 Madaworks funded two girls (Avontriniana Louise Sarah and Ravosolo Paquerette) on the path to a fully funded three-year high school education. Two more students will be selected to receive scholarships September 2017. Next year we hope to achieve funding to support at least 10 more girls.

Centre ValBio staff provide support and logistical assistance in distribution of scholarship applications and disbursement of funds to the schools and the students. They also organize and oversee the production of the weaving cooperatives in advance of purchasing trips from representatives of Madaworks.

With increased sales due to Madaworks support, the Maeva cooperative has invested some of their earnings to start an aquaculture program. The Famiova cooperative continues to reap the rewards of increased economic growth due to Madaworks’ support and the growth of eco-tourism in the region.
Claude Jacquot RALAZAMPIRENENA
(Called Laza)

Having a keen interest in ecology and conservation biology, I am an environmentalist with a strong desire to build a career within the biodiversity conservation field. Since 2012, I have worked with the Tropical Ecology Assessment and Monitoring (TEAM), a project in collaboration with Conservation International, and in 2014, I became the TEAM Site Manager. I love the activities that TEAM is doing.

Ranomafana is one of 17 TEAM sites located around the world at biodiversity hotspots. Fieldwork is conducted in six locations within Ranomafana National Park, and I prefer to stay with the team in the field until the end of the expedition. We generally spend 26 to 30 days per year in each site.

TEAM works on three standard protocols: Terrestrial Vertebrate, Vegetation, and Climate. For the Terrestrial Vertebrate Protocol, we have 60 different locations where we set out camera traps for 30 days, and we occasionally detect rare species such as *Daubentonia madagascariensis* (Aye-Aye), *Eupleres goudotii* and *Galidictis fasciata*. As part of the Vegetation Protocol, we have one hectare permanent plots divided into 25 sub-plots. Every year, we measure all trees and liana which have a DBH of more than 10 cm. In order to understand the dynamic of the forest, we record the number of dead trees, number of trees having a DBH less than 10 cm, ground cover, canopy cover, phenology, etc. We also collect a voucher specimen for the unknown species. For the Climate Protocol, we have an automatic climatology station based just a few minutes from CVB which provides us with real-time data about the climate.

TEAM is only for eight months per year. During the rest of the year, I help oversee some other projects at Centre ValBio, such as the Participatory Ecological Monitoring (PEM) Program. Now, I am working to further safeguard Ranomafana’s Biodiversity by sharing my knowledge with school children.