



First Quarterly Report

January - March 2020



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AEECL Programme Director

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Zoological Society of East Anglia



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A message from the AEECL President, Gary Batters

Dear friends,

The first quarter of 2020 has definitely not turned out like anyone had hoped. In January, after setting out our work plan for 2020, the AEECL were full of hope and drive for another productive and successful year, working towards the aims and objectives of our charity and continuing to save and protect the unique ecosystem of the Sahamalaza National Park. The arrival of COVID-19 within the human population certainly slowed our pace on the work front and the terrible cost to human life and the uncertainty this terrible virus has brought to the world has been felt by everyone globally.

Madagascar has always faced many challenges, having one of the highest poverty rates in the world does mean that many people do not have access to the medical resources we have in Europe. The country responded to the outbreak of COVID-19 in a similar way to much of the world by introducing lockdown measures, closing schools and public services and social distancing.

This did mean that our Programme Director, Guy Randriatahina could not leave the capital city of Antananarivo and be at the research and tourists camps where AEECL are based but had to monitor the situation and keep in contact with AEECL staff from afar.

Towards the end of April the Malagasy President has started to ease these lockdown restrictions and we are hopeful that as the country has seen a relatively low infection rate and thankfully as I write this, no deaths from COVID-19, that free movement will start again soon.

The staff members based on site have continued their work in the Ankarafa, keeping everything ticking over and preparing for new researchers to come in once restrictions have been lifted, and have also continued to monitor the lemur populations in and around the local area. Life still goes on in the forests and our work is continuing within the 'new normal' of daily life.

As you are all aware, AEECL is run by a consortium of European zoos and our funding comes directly from our members, many of which are also from the zoo community and we are all acutely aware of the financial struggles every one of you are facing currently. With this in mind, we are so incredibly grateful to you all for continuing to support the AEECL, without your membership the charity would no longer be able to operate and it would be heartbreaking to see the work from the past 30 years flounder. At a recent Zoom enabled Board meeting we reviewed our budgets for 2020 and 2021. We know that in the coming months we will have a short term reduction in membership fees and donations and will be reducing our operating costs to ensure that the community work commitments can be met.

We expect that construction work on the research centre will resume in July which is exciting.

My heartfelt thanks go out to all of you and I hope you and your loved ones stay safe and well.

Best wishes

Gary.

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* Please note, this report contains information from activities that took place prior to the COVID-19 lockdown in Madagascar.

1. Education Support

In March, the AEECL distributed the subsidy funding for community teachers and the scholarship for students at the high school in Maromandia in order to stabilize the education system. Local education officials found this action very encouraging because many community teachers have earned nothing from their salaries since September 2019. The grant that the AEECL offers allows teachers to cover expenses and to satisfy their families' need during these hard times.



Photo 1: Guy Randriatahina meeting with teachers.



Photo 2: Distribution of subsidy for teachers.



Photo 3: Distribution of scholarship for student

2. Forest Monitoring

The field team in Ankarafa continue to patrol and to monitor the forest every day. During the patrol, the team observed cut trees. A report is sent to MNP based on this finding as it is important that any illegal forest activity is reported.



Photo 4: Forest monitoring



Photo 5: Cut tree

3. Reforestation

3.1 In the Sofia region

The reforestation launch for the Sofia region took place on January 19th, 2020 in the Andrafialava fokontany in Ambodimandresy municipality located about 45km from Antsohihy. The Regional Directorate of Environment and Sustainable Development organized the reforestation. Some regional authorities such as the Regional Prefect, the Mayor of Antsohihy, the Mayor of Ambodimandresy, some of the Heads of Civil and Military services came from Antsohihy and local authorities represented by Heads of local villages, the villagers of Andrafialava and population surrounding the area were also present during the reforestation. Many NGOs from Antsohihy including the AEECL were also present.



Photo 6: AEECL team present at the reforestation event.



Photo 7: AEECL team

The goal of the reforestation programme is to make the Sofia region green again and to stop the bush fires. This reforestation was carried out in a savannah terrain. A total of 11,000 trees were reforested over an area of 8ha. Seedlings were made up of Acacia, khaia, Bonara, Ceiba pentadra and Morenga propagated by the Regional Directorate for the Environment and Sustainable Development.

3.2 In Analamanga region - Antananarivo

To further the presidential vision to green up Madagascar, on the 28th February the Ministry of Foreign Affairs organized a reforestation event in Imerintsiasosika which is near the Madagascan capital of Antananarivo. All foreign NGO's that are established in Madagascar were invited to take part in this essential reforestation work. A total of 30 of these invited NGO's were present, including the AEECL. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs were represented by its Secretary General, Mr Tahirimiakadaza Ratsimandao. Before the work began he gave a short speech of welcome and thanks. In total, 1500 seedlings were reforested.



Photo 8: Participants in the reforestation



Photo 9: AEECL staff planting during reforestation event.

4. Rescue action by the AEECL team

During 4 days in January, heavy rain fell everywhere in Madagascar. This bad weather led to catastrophic flooding. Water flooded entire villages, fields and roads. Following this flood, the Governor of Antsohihy, General Lylison, asked us for help to evacuate those who were trapped by the flood. All available boats were mobilized. On January 21st, 2020, with the cart, we pulled the boat towards Tanetilava which is located on the National Road 6 about 170km south of Antsohihy. Our skippers Andry and Yvess travelled with the boat.



Photo 10: Flooded village



Photo 11: Flood waters submerged trees and roads.



Photo 12: Transporting flood victims to safety.

When we arrived the village was already submerged in water. People had to climb up into the trees or onto their rooftops to stay safe. The height of the water was estimated to be at 3m.

As soon as we arrived, the rescue began. It was coordinated by the Governor. In total, we evacuated 150 people and placed them in dry and secure locations. The rescue action lasted 4 days. Despite the rescue efforts, the situation isn't good with sadly at least a dozen deaths confirmed. Many roads have been severely damaged and cut off, fields and rice fields have been sanded and crops ravaged by the floodwater and livestock washed away.

As soon as the water level started to decrease and the villagers were safe, we brought the boat back to Antsohihy, very grateful that we play a part in the rescue operation.



Photo 13: Villagers affected by the flooding.

5. Celebration of World Women's Day in Antsohihy

As in all Madagascan cities, Antsohihy celebrated the World Women's Day on March 8th, 2020. The chosen theme was: " I'm from Generation Equality: Stand Up for Women's Rights".

The celebration started with a carnival which processed up to the place of ceremony. Many associations and institutions took part in the carnival.

To maintain solidarity and socio-professional inclusion with the other associations and institutions existing in the Sofia region, the AEECL participated in the celebration of the world day. As the number of staff is small, Holy, the AEECL Human Resources Manager spread the word about the World's Women's Day celebrations to get more people to participate.

Because of this communication 20 neighborhood women came to help celebrate. Some of them wore AEECL uniforms while others wore T-shirts with lemurs pictures on. Before the carnival, some of the women had their faces painted with lemurs to stand out.

Photo 14: Face Painting



Photo 15: During the carnival

During the speech, the women's representative paid tribute to all the Malagasy women who, despite the obstacles, had worked hard in order to move forward on a daily basis. She emphasized that there are still big challenges to be addressed, among them, the fight against violence against women in all its forms, respect for the rights of young girls and the improvement of the health conditions of mothers and children.



Photo 16: Carnival Procession



Photo 17: Speech by Women's Representative

The participants greatly enhanced the image of the AEECL and they were happy to have been involved. To thank them we organized a friendship meal at the AEECL office, prepared and served by the men.

The participation of the neighbours is positive because first of all it improves socialization between the local people and the AEECL team which helps to encourage more participation from them when we run activities that require a fairly large workforce.



Photo 18: Preparing food for the AEECL participants of Women's Day 2020



Photo 19: Meal with the participants

6. New Mayor

The rural municipality of Amboloboza now has a new Mayor. His name is Tsarazara. He is the former Head of Administration and Education Area in Amboloboza and has worked closely with AEECL on education.

We congratulated the Mayor for his new position and we told him that we are ready to work with him going forward.

The Mayor knows AEECL and its activities well and is aware of the AEECL project. He would like better collaboration not only for the protection of lemurs but also for the development of the municipality, which is often forgotten by other leaders. The improvement of the dirt road from the national road to Amboloboza was the first point he wanted to make and asked for AEECL assistance to carry it out.