

Conservation in Madagascar – 2012

Trade in rosewood has been banned since March 2010 when the "transition authority" — the group that seized control of the country in March 2009 — established a moratorium on the logging and trade of precious hardwoods in response to international outcry. (This logging had started with the fall of the legitimate government, as illegal loggers invaded the national parks in the absence of government control.) Nevertheless recent reports indicate logging continues in Masoala and Makira, rainforest areas recognized as a Global World Heritage Site.

Here is a very sad [Wikipedia article](#) detailing the problem. In short, the government is corrupt, logging continues; rosewood and ebony, which are actually a wide variety of rare forest trees, are very valuable in the international market. China consumes the majority of the illegally logged wood, but the EEC and US are also at fault. The destruction of the forests has resulted in extreme loss of habitat, and increase in illegal mining and in consumption of "bushmeat" which includes lemurs.

In 2010 the government banned trade in rosewood. But an [article](#) on the possibility of reauthorizing trade based on meetings in August 2011 was not encouraging. The World Bank is involved in supporting biodiversity conservation, which is nearly nonexistent since the 2009 government coup, and may withhold a large funding if rosewood sales are not transparent. A chronicle of of rosewood piracy is [here](#), written by Hery Randriamalala.

On January 18th, the Madagascar's Minister of the Environment and Forests re-authorized the export of "all categories of natural forest-sourced primary products" provided a trader can prove the legal origin of the product. But given the ease of acquiring proof-of-origin documents in Madagascar, the order potentially opens the door for large-scale exports of wood that were banned in an order published last August. That order prohibited the felling, transport, exploitation, and export of rosewood and ebony, and also canceled all existing export agreements.

But according to local sources, the new order is now under review. Madagascar's rosewood trade is dominated by foreign traders and a small group of local barons popularly dubbed the "timber mafia", spurring wider resentment. There is also considerable pressure from conservationists and the tourism industry, which fear that a resumption in logging will further damage the environment and undermine the country's nature-based tour industry.

Read more: http://news.mongabay.com/2012/0229-rosewood_ban_lifted.html#ixzz1yqSyLkPi

In February 2012, 7 NGO's wrote a [letter](#) (in French) to the minister of environment and forests in Madagascar, urging careful management of the sale, including transparency. The NGO's include:

Environmental Investigation Agency
Global Witness
Zoo Zurich
Missouri Botanical Garden

St. Louis Zoo
Field Museum
Madagascar Fauna Group

I was asked “How can we help” during a presentation of “Magical Madagascar” to GGAS in June 2012. It appears to me that the issue of deforestation and habitat loss is the most immediate problem, and should be stopped. But how we can impact this is a very good question. The cause of the problem is multifaceted, including government corruption, poverty in Madagascar, and international ignorance of the source and cost of rosewood and ebony (witness the Tea Party support of Gibson guitars, who were using illegally sourced woods, and were raided by the US government).

Although it is tempting to support a localized conservation project, like [those of the World Wildlife Fund](#), [Asity Madagascar](#), or the [Wildlife Conservation Society's](#) carbon offset project (how do you guarantee the survival of a “saved” forest with illegal loggers everywhere), it might be best to encourage education, in hopes that the current government doesn't last longer than the trees, and that the next generation is more able to protect their heritage. Such options include the [Duke Lemur Center](#), or Dr. Eric Patel's [SIMPONA](#), dedicated to the Silky Sifaka and preservation of its habitat. Also of interest is [WildMadagascar](#), an organization funded solely by Rhett A. Butler.

Thoughts on other strategies to support this beleaguered island's habitats are welcome.

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