Madagascar is one of the world’s most important hotspots for biodiversity, yet it is also one of the world’s poorest countries, with 92% of people living below the poverty line.

Local people are forced to use unsustainable livelihood practices such as slash and burn agriculture to remove the forest for cattle grazing and traditional agriculture, and illegal logging. The resultant forest destruction, degradation and fragmentation means that Madagascar suffers from extraordinarily high rates of habitat loss, with 90% of its original natural vegetation estimated to have already been destroyed. For many species, such as lemurs, the additional threat of hunting adds further pressure to their already imperilled populations. This has put incredible pressure on the island’s huge number of rare and endemic animals.

BZS has been working in northern Madagascar since 2006, and we are involved in a number of projects that are helping to safeguard the futures of wildlife on this unique island. Most of our work is focused in and around the Sahamalaza-Iles Radama National Park (SIRNP), with additional focus in human-dominated environments such as vanilla and cacao plantations. We work primarily with lemur species, such as the blue-eyed black lemur, the Sahamalaza sportive lemur and the Sambirano mouse lemur, as well as the Madagascar sacred ibis. However, the project also includes other taxa found in these habitats, such as invertebrates and the herpetofauna. To date, the scope of our involvement includes lemur behavioural ecology and conservation medicine, sacred ibis surveys, evaluation of reforestation efforts, and vegetation surveying. In addition, we have a number of Malagasy species in Bristol Zoo/Wild Place Project that are part of captive breeding programmes (e.g. European Endangered Species Programmes (EEPs)).

Our strategy is to use a series of evidence-based initiatives to monitor biodiversity and mitigate the threat of habitat loss. In order to make a real difference, we work with local people to help them to save their natural heritage. This approach will enable an organised research focus in SIRNP and other strategic sites, that generates ongoing data on the density and distribution of key taxa. These metrics will provide baseline data on populations, which can, ultimately, be used to assess the efficacy of our conservation actions aimed at improving habitat quality and connectivity.

Five year objectives:
• Develop the SIRNP research station and create a formal process to manage research projects
• Develop experimental procedures for evaluating reforestation, explore use of plantations as wildlife corridors and reservoirs of biodiversity
• Understand biodiversity present within fragments and evaluate impact of fragmentation on population density and distribution
• Work with local communities to investigate sustainable use of natural resources
• Build local capacity through research and conservation opportunities; e.g., training research station staff, field researchers, project managers and guides
• Continue to contribute to the ex-situ breeding populations of local species, including lemurs, amphibians and invertebrates at Bristol Zoo Gardens and Wild Place Project.

CONSERVATION INITIATIVES

Long-term population monitoring: Implement surveys to establish baseline biodiversity, and develop long term monitoring protocols (main photo)

Habitat restoration
Develop protocols for reforestation interventions, and evaluate their effectiveness

Captive breeding
Manage captive populations of Malagasy species to inform conservation measures in situ

Human-wildlife co-existence
Explore use of plantations as sustainably used wildlife corridors and reservoirs of biodiversity

Building capacity
Collaborate with, and train, members of local communities, conservation organisations and academic institutions

Policy, advocacy and action planning
Devise action plans for key taxa to enable evaluation and monitoring of conservation interventions