



Sangihe Island tarsier
(*T. sangirensis*)
Photo by M. Shekelle

Primate Conservation Inc. UPDATE

2004

Director's Report

At the beginning of 2004, PCI celebrated its 10th year of awarding grants for the conservation and study of the least known and most endangered primates. We would like to thank all the people on this newsletters mailing list who have generously donated money or appreciated stock to PCI to make all this possible. With your support PCI was able to fund projects such as Jill D. Pruetz who found chimpanzees still living in a savannah habitat in Senegal; Ernest Nwufoh's research and conservation project on the new subspecies of western lowland gorilla in Nigeria; several ecological studies and conservation projects by Dilip Chetry, Pranjal Bezbarua and Jihusuo Biswas on the golden langur which is found in India; and any of the 230 other projects in 27 different habitat countries. PCI has been steadfast in its mission of helping the next generation of primatologists and conservationists to get into the field to do research and conservation. The Board of Directors has had to make many difficult funding choices over the years between equally worthwhile projects. The most difficult part of my job as director is writing the letters that say PCI is sorry we can't fund your project because we do not have anymore money this granting period. Your support is important.

Myron Shekelle was one of PCI's first cohort of grantees in the fall of 1993. A masters degree student, his grant included a plane ticket and \$1,000 from PCI for the first of his expeditions to Indonesia to study tarsiers. He went on to document several new taxa of tarsiers for his Ph.D. thesis "The Taxonomy and Biogeography of Eastern

Tarsiers". Recently PCI awarded Myron another small grant for a project to find and study the pygmy tarsier (*Tarsius pumilus*). At least 6 other people have tried to find it in the last 20 years. This tarsier is from the highlands of Sulawesi, Indonesia, and is known only from 3 museum specimens. Myron's has many years of experience in the field studying tarsiers. PCI believes that he will do a through job with his search and educate the local people, but we realize success is not guaranteed when searching for small nocturnal primates. As director of PCI, I am proud of the fact we helped him get into the field ten years ago and that he is still working in the field to protect and study these fascinating faunivores.



The golden langur (*Trachipithecus geei*) is found only in northern India and Bhutan. Photo N. Rowe

When I reflect on ten years of conservation work, I find that the threats to primates have not decreased in most habitat countries. The increasing human population exerts an ever-increasing demand for natural resources, which destroy the habitats that prosimians, monkeys and apes need to survive. Hunting is the worst threat to primates in most countries. More access to guns, more roads cut deeper into untouched forest, more people hungry for “bushmeat” and more people willing to pay a premium for it are driving our closest biological relatives the great apes to extinction as you read this. A new book by Dale Peterson and Karl Amman entitled Eating Apes (University of California Press, Berkley CA., 2003) documents the killing of apes, the people involved, and the failure of conservation groups to publicize and effectively mitigate this terrible problem. Unfortunately even national parks and other protected areas are not safe havens for apes. The trees may be protected but the wildlife and especially the larger primates are being shot out. I highly recommend this book which conveys the unvarnished truth about how extinction is going to take place unless more people, more money and more political will are involved in protecting apes in their natural environment.



Female gorillas with infants are targeted by hunters because they get meat and a cute baby to sell. This “bushmeat” hunting is decimating gorilla, bonobo, chimpanzee and orangutan populations.

Photo N. Rowe

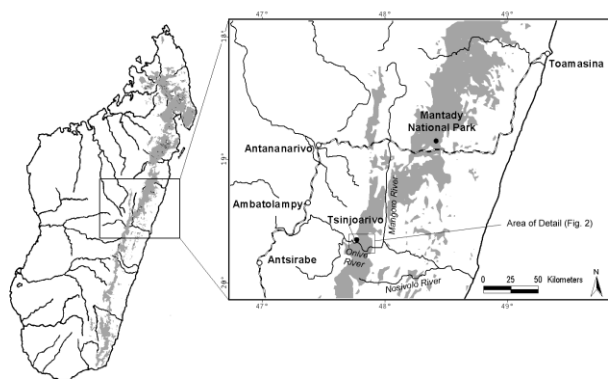
It is heartening to see that over the last 10 years the number of proposals PCI receives has continued to increase. I interpret this as an encouraging sign that more people want to be

directly involved in protecting and studying primates in their natural habitat. The most noticeable increase has been the number of people from habitat countries that are applying to PCI. In part this is due to the internet that has helped speed up communication. It has allowed people from developing countries to apply for funding from the United States. We currently have 2 proposals from two Vietnamese researchers wanting to study the Tonkin snub nosed monkey in two different forests in Vietnam. Please help us with a generous contribution so that PCI can fund both important projects and help to save this critically endangered monkey.

This is our annual funding request. We won't bother you with mail every month like some organizations. We respect our contributors, assume they will save this request, and give when they can. If you want a reminder, please let me know.

Notes From the Field

The following has been excerpted from an informal report that Mitch Irwin, a Ph.D. student at SUNY Stony Brook, sent to his friends, family and, kindly, to PCI. I hope it will give you a feeling of the joys, difficulties, and hard work that fieldwork entails. Mitch received a grant of \$2000.00 from PCI in 2002 for this project entitled, “The ecological and anthropogenic effects of forest fragmentation on the lemur community of Tsinioarivo, Eastern Central Madagascar.” He received a renewal grant of \$1,000.00 in 2003.



Map of Madagascar and Mitch's study area

March 27, 2003

Hello everyone,

I'm watching the sunrise over Tana {short for Antananarivo, which is the capital of

Madagascar} after indulging in the hotel Colbert's breakfast buffet, where for a mere 36,500 FMG (about USD\$ 7) you can eat your fill of croissants, pastries, yogurt, juice and coffee. After two months of consistently having rice and beans for breakfast (there is some variety, though - 5 types of bean!) I was ready for a little indulgence.

February and March both passed fairly smoothly in the forest and I am happy to report that the research is on track and all team members are in good health apart from a few recurring cases of giardia, which have provided the usual intestinal unrest.

We collected quite adequate amounts of data on lemur diet, movement, and behavior and are already starting to detect seasonal changes in the foods they are eating. We also spent some additional days taking microclimate measurements (soil moisture, air temperature and humidity) inside and outside the forest fragments.

One day in February deserves special mention. Group 1 at Vatateza had slept the previous day in a part of their forest we had not seen them use before, far to the southeast of our previous observations. I set out at the usual time (6 am) to locate the group. In this area, and when we arrived, we were a bit dismayed to see some animals at the very top of a monstrous Voamboana tree, almost impossible to see clearly. Only when these 2 animals moved down closer to us after an hour, did we realize that Purple-Green {named after the color of her collar} was hanging about with an adult male which was definitely not part of the study group. We discerned this by simple reasoning: 1) he had no collar, as does the adult male in that group, and 2) the poor guy had only one eye. This development was quite surprising but we quickly started collecting data. Purple-Green spent the whole day with this new male until we lost them at 4:30. Although we had seen our groups split up for a few hours in the past, we had never caught one consorting with another and I don't think this kind of thing is all that common in other studies either. Purple-Green is quite a large subadult, almost fully grown, and if the study group is the group that she was born into she is looking for an opportunity to transfer into another group in which she can breed (in the study group, the adult male may well be her dad).

Our four study groups are all doing very well and continually tolerant of our haranguing presence. Although it was the heart of the rainy season (February is almost always the rainiest

month - 800 mm or more), we got off fairly easy until the last 10 days or so in March, when we had a constant on-and-off drizzle. I will definitely not say we're out of trouble yet, though, as cyclones have been known to hit in April and May.

I still think it's amazing to see the sifakas at close quarters living their daily lives, seeing their feeding and their rapid-fire locomotion, which even now, still causes us to momentarily lose our focal animals (though we usually relocate them).



Diadem sifaka, one of Mitch's study animals

Photo by M. Irwin

One aspect of the project which has been very rewarding is the continuing training of the local guides. All five of them have been working very hard keeping lemurs in sight since the habituation began, but in the last couple of months have made great strides in learning English. One of my goals for April is to train them in the collection of data - all can write but are afraid that they can't do so quickly enough. I am hoping to leave them next December with the maximum number of marketable skills for working with future researchers in the area, or perhaps working for the Park Service in ecological monitoring of the forest.

It is bringing me very mixed feelings to have finished the first three months of what was intended to be a 12-month study (first 5 months of 14 if you count the capture and habituation). Having a quarter of the data collected feels like a lot some days and such a little on others. I guess when I think about it, it feels like I'm finally on the scoreboard (i.e. a significant percentage of the work is done) but I definitely have a long way to go. 9 months is no insignificant amount of time to have between today and coming home for good. For example, my very good friend Meg is expecting a baby which will be 3 months old when I get home,

As usual, I am always thinking of all of you and send you all my best wishes. Mitch

3 June 2003

Hello everyone,

April and May have gone well in the forest and the data are safely sequestered in yellow write-in-the-rain books, and the write-in-the-rain books are safely sequestered in my locked crate

Having Karen {his wife} at the field site for most of April, needless to say, lifted my spirits and brought me back to life. We had a lot to catch up on after 4 full months of being apart. When I met her in Tana, I was a little rough around the edges, and she was coming straight from New York. She wouldn't admit it, but I think I scared her a little with my seemingly endless cravings for dairy products and ability to eat upwards of 20 cheese sambos at a sitting. We'd be in the middle of some philosophical discussion, one of us would say how great it was to be together again, and then I'd see an ice cream stand and blow it: "sorry to interrupt, but let's get some ice cream, it's already been over an hour since the last one!" She has been the sole breadwinner in the family, covering not only her own expenses but also paying the minimum credit card payments for me off in the forest communing with lemurs.

In May we were able to do a little more multitasking, such as collecting behavioral data and GPS data at the same time. I'm actually learning a lot more 'interesting' Malagasy vocabulary though, it turns out the guides were a little restrained so long as we were a co-ed camp, but have relaxed a little now that it is all guys.

May was also a month of rewarded nervousness. Ever since learning that I didn't get a major grant I had applied for. I knew my money was going to run well short of the year's research I had planned. I put together a last-minute plea for additional funding from Primate Conservation Inc and Margot Marsh Biodiversity Foundation. I was nervous about asking but the funding came through, ulcers have abated and a general happy feeling prevailed at camp. We would finish what we had started, salaries would be paid in full, and what the hell, canned sardines all round. We were celebrating!

The lemurs themselves are preparing for winter, which is no small undertaking at our forest perched atop Madagascar's eastern escarpment at 1600 m (5250 feet) altitude. On a previous trip, I had argued with the guides - they insisted that their region gets snowfalls, not regularly but once or twice a year. I had started insisting that they must be mistaken, I was from Canada and knew snow,

this was a tropical country after all. However, I quickly started to lose my nerve when I paused to remember that, whenever I'd entered an argument like this, foolishly pretending to know more about the place than these guys who'd lived there all their lives, they'd invariably turned out to be right. It was not long after the argument that we had our coldest night on record, low of minus 1.4 centigrade. I emerged from my tent and saw that the grass was coated in a thick, clingy white frost. The guides said, "See, see this is the snow we told you about!" We happily realized that we were both right.

Anyway, I can't escape thinking sometimes that it must be tough to be a lemur out sleeping in a tree on those nights without our -10 degree sleeping bags and long underwear. If we were to switch places, it would be hard to predict what would do me in first - exposure, or clumsily tumbling out of the sleep tree on account of not having grasping feet. It's amazing, that these little 20-pound sifakas get through temperatures like that, acting as if nothing was the matter. And not only do they get through, they choose just about the coldest month (July) to have their babies.

I continue to miss you all, the recipients of these sporadic and wandering emails, and wish you well. Best, Mitch

How to Support PCI

PCI is an all-volunteer, tax deductible private operating 501 (c) (3) foundation. Since our first grant in 1993 we have supported with full or partial or renewal funding 235 projects in 27 countries with primate habitats. Projects in Asia have received 40% of our funding, African projects 30%, Madagascar 19%, and South America 11%.

Grants have gone to study leaf monkeys (25%), apes (21%), lemurs (19%), cheek pouch monkeys (16%), new world monkeys (11%), prosimians (5%), and tarsiers (3%).

We appreciate your support and hope you will continue to give generously to support the conservation projects that we fund. If you would like to contribute cash, stock or real estate to PCI or would like more information on a specific project please contact me at the address below.

Sincerely,

Noel Rowe