

New book reveals natural wealth of remarkable forest

Title

The biodiversity of Madagascar is legendary. Many animal and plant groups are exceptionally rich in species, and in natural forest areas the great majority of all animals and plants are endemic - found only in Madagascar, and often only in a specific small part of Madagascar. This extraordinary biodiversity is also well known to be extremely highly threatened. BirdLife has contributed much to knowledge of where the key sites for conservation, through its Important Bird Areas survey programme and the resulting books and information made publicly available. Now, through the work of Asity Madagascar (BirdLife in Madagascar), working with national and international partners, a much more detailed account is available of the biodiversity of one of the most remarkable forests of all: Tsitongambarika, in the far south-east. The book *Tsitongambarika Forest: Biological and socio-economic surveys, with conservation recommendations* (with a French version also available) has been published in collaboration between BirdLife, Asity Madagascar and Rio Tinto.

It has been launched in Fort Dauphin, the town in Madagascar closest to the forest. “Asity Madagascar is strongly committed to the conservation of the whole of Tsitongambarika Forest. We have been carrying out pilot activities for several years, and helping to create a new protected area. This book will help us and our partners to promote the site and show the need to conserve it”, said Vony Raminoarisoa of Asity Madagascar. The surveys reported in the book clearly demonstrate the very great importance of this site, and point towards approaches needed to conserve it. Tsitongambarika turns out to have fauna and flora surprisingly unlike other similar-looking forest areas, with several species of amphibian, reptile and plant new to science, and confirmation of the presence of a number of other globally threatened and restricted-range species. It is truly a unique forest. The birds include an impressive community of the lowland rainforest species of Madagascar, with good populations of the threatened Brown Mesite *Mesitornis unicolor*, Short-legged Ground-roller *Brachypteracias leptosomus*, Scaly Ground-roller *Brachypteracias squamiger* and Red-tailed Newtonia *Newtonia fanovanae*.

Many organisations and individuals specialising in different disciplines and taxa contributed to the biological surveys and socio-economic studies that the book summarises. Fieldwork was coordinated by Asity Madagascar, with primary support and funding from the Rio Tinto - BirdLife International Programme and Rio Tinto QMM, the company developing an ilmenite mine in the local area. Technical partners for surveys of vegetation, bats and ants were the Missouri Botanical Garden, Madagasikara Voakajy and California Academy of Sciences, respectively. Tsitongambarika is also one of the key forests in BirdLife’s [Forests of Hope programme](#)

: conserving and restoring tropical forest and combating climate change. Asity Madagascar has been implementing a conservation programme there for several years, resulting in the protection of Tsitongambarika through an effective partnership, led by Asity Madagascar and also involving local communities, Government and the private sector. One of the highlights has been the [seizure of trucks and timber from illegal loggers earlier in 2011](#).

“Tsitongambarika is truly a Forest of Hope. It has extraordinary biological diversity, and is vital to the regional economy through the ecosystem services it provides. By working in partnership with Government, local communities and the private sector, there is an exceptional opportunity to conserve it in perpetuity”, said Dr Roger Safford, Senior Programme Manager at BirdLife International.

The surveys reported in the book have informed the design of this programme, support for which has come from several organisations, most notably Rio Tinto and Rio Tinto QMM through its partnership programme with BirdLife International. Rio Tinto has long-term interests in safeguarding this critical area of humid forest, recognising that it provides essential ecosystem services to the area, and that it is vulnerable to various indirect impacts associated with mine development. Rio Tinto recognises that Tsitongambarika forms a vitally important contribution to their overall commitment to minimising and potentially offsetting the biodiversity impacts of its activities in the region. Highly valued support has also been received from Conservation International, the Waterloo Foundation, the Wetland Trust, the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria and the MAVA Foundation, all recognising the enormous biodiversity value of Tsitongambarika forest. Download an electronic version of the book in [English](#) and [French](#).