Foreword

Any mention of Madagascar conjures up images of its unique and in many cases rare wildlife and flora. One of the primary reasons many tourists visit the island each year is to see firsthand the wonderful lemurs, colorful chameleons, and other endemic animal species, alongside plant species like the mighty baobabs and majestic orchids that exist nowhere else outside this island country.

These special natural treasures bear witness to Madagascar's natural patrimony, and the history of how they came to be present only on the island, a subject which has been and continues to be studied. Madagascar is not home to any internationally famous man-made wonders, such as France's Eiffel Tower, the USA's Statue of Liberty, China's Great Wall, or Egypt's pyramids. For Madagascar, it is the endemic wildlife and plant species that have been here for millions of years that have garnered the island its reputation as such a special and unique place.

Madagascar's natural wealth goes far beyond its living biodiversity, and includes the long-gone animal species that existed on the island in the past, the remains of which are now subfossils (i.e., fossils that are sufficiently recent that they have not yet fossilized) that few people know about. For many, natural resources are only precious stones and metals like gold and silver, but we must also consider these fossils, which give us a picture of the island's ancient landscapes and the associated organisms and provide insights to the evolution of this biodiversity and the impacts of climate change during the course of Earth's history. It has been centuries and, in a few cases, perhaps millennia since certain extinct species of Madagascar's recent geological past disappeared, but they nonetheless remain an important part of what makes Madagascar unique. There are still several things nobody really knows about these animals or why they disappeared. Compared to the number of animal and plant researchers working on Madagascar today, those focusing on fossils, archaeology, and ancient climates are few and far between. Such research programs generally require special skills and cross numerous disciplines.

The studies of ancient species and fossils, as well as human geography and anthropology, shared in this special issue of *Malagasy Nature* focus on advancing our knowledge of recent research on these extinct plants and animals, their relationships with the environment, and the climate during their existence. One aspect of this special issue that needs to be underlined is that the research presented herein has been largely under the direction of Malagasy researchers, in some cases in collaboration with colleagues from overseas. The themes presented will motivate junior researchers to study, and everyday people to learn, about the secrets of extinct species and fossils, as well as the full range of research topics covered herein. There are still untold opportunities for research on Madagascar in the paleosciences, particularly as scientists explore new techniques and discover new sites, and sharing recent findings will open the door for others to pursue their interests.

It is a great pleasure for me to congratulate and thank all of the scientists and researchers who devoted themselves to produce this special issue. As a researcher myself, I understand the many challenges faced by scientists in different areas of study, but your efforts have resulted in an important update, which I appreciate greatly. I trust that you will continue to pursue the research you have commenced with high levels of excellence, as it is a responsibility for researchers working in an international framework to share their findings and results with all.

With deep appreciation,
Professor Jonah Ratsimbazafy
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