

Preface

Over the past 20 years, a number of monographs have been published on biodiversity inventories undertaken in different forested areas across Madagascar. In most cases, the study sites were in previously unknown or poorly known forested areas, both within and outside existing protected areas. This body of research has helped to uncover unknown species, to provide a greater understanding of biogeographic patterns, and to define priorities for protected area management and conservation programs.

The biodiversity of Madagascar is unique to our planet, but given the economic problems of this natural-resource rich island, many obstacles to conservation remain. As the biological crisis of Madagascar is rooted in socio-financial problems, new initiatives, including the rational exploitation of natural resources, are required to advance economic growth. This in turn will help advance critical aspects of Malagasy society linked to conservation, such as education, community development, and infrastructure. Herein we present a series of studies conducted in the forests of Ambatovy, near Moramanga, in the context of biodiversity research in a partially forested zone that is being impacted by mineral resource extraction, specifically the Ambatovy nickel-mining project. These studies were implemented to help advance the Ambatovy project's biodiversity policies and conservation agenda. Precise details of the project's "Biodiversity Management Plan" and associated programs are presented in the contribution by Dickinson & Berner (pp. 2-13).

This monograph has been an important opportunity for researchers, for the most part Malagasy scientists working with the Ambatovy project, to present the results of their research. In contrast to many previous biological inventory monographs on remote areas of the island, the Ambatovy forest is in close proximity to the Andasibe region, a zone that has been intensively studied for decades. The new data presented herein

concerning the Ambatovy forest on species richness across different groups of organisms, some of the exceptional biota discovered, and new insights into this supposedly "well-known zone", underlines the importance of this work. This research and associated data contribute to baseline information necessary to assess and monitor ecological and species-specific changes in local biodiversity over time, whether as a direct result of mining activities or other factors, such as climatic change. The Ambatovy project and collaborators will continue to advance these studies, which will provide important insights into the locally occurring fauna and flora, patterns of ecological systems, understanding the impact of large-scale projects on biodiversity, and allow a coherent conservation program to be advanced in a regional sense.

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