

New population of highly threatened greater bamboo lemur found in Madagascar

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Researchers in Madagascar have confirmed the existence of a population of greater bamboo lemurs more than 400 kilometers (240 miles) from the only other place where the Critically Endangered species is known to live, raising hopes for its survival.

The discovery of the distinctive lemurs with jaws powerful enough to crack giant bamboo, their favorite food, occurred in 2007 in the Torotorofotsy wetlands of east central Madagascar, which is designated a Ramsar site of international importance under the 1971 Convention on Wetlands.

Updated information on the species will be presented at the upcoming International Primatological Society 2008 Congress in Edinburgh, Scotland, on Aug. 3-8, as part of a new assessment of the world's primates that shows the state of mankind's closest living relatives.

For years, scientists believed but were unable to prove that greater bamboo lemurs (*Prolemur simus*) lived in the Torotorofotsy area. A collaborative effort between the Malagasy non-government organization MITSINJO and the Henry Doorly Zoo in the United States supported by the Margot Marsh Biodiversity Foundation and Conservation International (CI) resulted in researchers finding and immobilizing several to attach radio collars for further monitoring.

The researchers believe there are 30-40 greater bamboo lemurs in the Torotorofotsy wetland, which is far to the north of the isolated pockets

of bamboo forest where the rest of the known populations of the species live. Habitat destruction from slash-and-burn agriculture and illegal logging threatens the previously known populations that total about 100 individuals, making the existence of the newly found lemurs in a distinct region especially valuable.

"This finding confirmed what we knew before but couldn't prove," said Rainer Dolch of MITSINJO, which manages the Torotorofotsy site.

"Our hope is that the presence of these critically threatened creatures will increase efforts to protect their habitat and keep them alive."

"Finding the extremely rare *Prolemur simus* in a place where nobody expected it was probably more exciting than discovering a new lemur species," said conservation geneticist Edward Louis of Henry Doorly Zoo, who coordinated the joint research mission that found the new population.

The scientists will publish their discovery in *Lemur News*, the newsletter of the Primate Specialist Group of the IUCN Species Survival Commission.

"The greater bamboo lemur is a unique species and the only member of an entire primate genus, making it probably the most endangered primate genus in the world, so this discovery is a real blessing for our efforts to save it from extinction," said CI President Russell A. Mittermeier, the long-time chairman of the Primate Specialist Group. "It also shows the importance for conservation of collaboration between local villagers, local organizations such as MITSINJO and international groups like the Henry Doorly Zoo."

Source: Conservation International

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