

Rosewood trees face extinction amid Madagascar's chaos

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Political and social chaos and a lack of international protections have put several species of rosewood trees in Madagascar in danger of becoming extinct from illegal logging, according to a policy forum paper in the latest issue of *Science*.

"Forty-seven of Madagascar's 48 species of rosewood (*Dalbergia*) are found nowhere else in the world," said Duke University graduate student Meredith Barrett, the lead author on the May 27 article.

Madagascar's military-backed change in leadership last year and a lucrative rosewood market based largely in China have created a dangerous situation for the endangered trees and the habitat that surrounds them, Barrett said.

Duke researchers performed a sophisticated mapping and modeling study with the help of a French botanist to estimate historical and current distributions of the reddish hardwood, and to support their call for greater protections and enforcement.

Barrett, whose dissertation research concerns the effects of human development on lemur health, has seen the illegal logging first-hand. "When we went there in October, it had become obvious that Madagascar's tourism had collapsed and that unrestricted logging was accelerating," she said. The market for lemur "bush meat" also has increased dramatically, particularly in the country's northeastern rainforests.

Barrett and Duke [Lemur](#) Center director Anne Yoder, who is the senior author on the policy paper, hope they can call the international attention of scientists and conservation groups to protect the rosewood trees. Ideally, this would take the form of increased public pressure on the Malagasy government to step up enforcement and a formal listing under the Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild [Fauna](#) and Flora (CITES), Barrett said.

Brazilian rosewood gained CITES protection in 1992, which is believed to have put more pressure on the forests in Madagascar.

The slow-growing rosewood trees are found in relative isolation from each other. They are too dense to float very well, so loggers will fell several trees along river banks to make skids and rafts for bringing the logs to market. Once the logs are floated and trucked to Malagasy ports, they are loaded onto container ships and hauled to China to make highly prized furniture and musical instruments. There are an estimated 10,000 to 15,000 metric tons of felled rosewood trees awaiting shipment from Madagascar's ports.

The Malagasy logger who fells the tree is paid about 50 cents for "backbreaking work," Barrett said. A Chinese rosewood armoire retails for about \$20,000.

Enforcement of the Malagasy government's on-again, off-again policy against rosewood logging is pretty much nonexistent, Barrett said. Logging interests have threatened the safety of villages and at least one park office has been burned down.

"If you protect the trees, you're also protecting habitat," Barrett said. "Seventy percent of Madagascar's species live in these forests."

Provided by Duke University

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