

News from the Field:

Natasha Howard

Madagascar, Wild Harvested Products

Natasha Howard explored the value of different land use types in providing wild harvested products to local communities in Madagascar as part of her MSc in Conservation Science at Imperial College

Rural people in many parts of the world depend on products harvested from the wild for their livelihoods. Most of the literature focuses on the importance of forest in providing these products, but I wanted to focus on the role that other land uses including agricultural land (such as fallows in the swidden cycle) play in providing these valued products.

My project was a mixed methods study based in the Ankeniheny-Zahamena Corridor (CAZ) region of Madagascar's Eastern Mountains rainforest and was done in association with the Malagasy NGO Madagasikara Voakajy (linked to a larger project called p4ges: www.p4ges.org). I have produced a thesis from this work and am now working with my collaborators to write this up into a paper. My colleague from Madagasikara Voakajy Njaka Randrianarisoa will be returning to the villages early in the New Year to disseminate the results (along with other results from a related project I was linked to). This information will also be disseminated to national scale policy makers interested in how conservation and other land management decisions influence local livelihoods.

We found that forest closed canopy is essential for products used in construction, but that other land uses play important roles in providing food and other products that are used on a more daily basis. All products are not available from simply one land use: a mosaic is needed to meet the communities' requirements. As pressure from deforestation and protection rises on the remaining forest fragments, alternatives to wild products harvested wherever they can be found need to be developed.

I really enjoyed the three months I spent in Madagascar collecting data with Madagasikara Voakajy. I learnt how data for such an extensive project is collected and managed as well as meeting so many dedicated and hardworking

conservationists. This project also brought home to me just how complex a field situation can be, and how vital it is to combine local knowledge and opinions with quantitative data to generate a true understanding of the situation on the ground.

(Natasha Howard)

Charcoal for sale on the roadside

