

Naples Zoo Fosters Dry Spell for Education in Madagascar

While the new Petrof's Primate Pavilion interpretive display has already provided thousands of Naples Zoo guests insights into lemurs and Madagascar since it opened last summer, its biggest impact has been felt halfway around the world in Madagascar itself. One of the ongoing goals of the display is to provide zoo guests exciting opportunities to make a real difference by contributing toward specific conservation projects. Now, the first project has been completed. A much needed new leak-proof roof for an environmental education center expansion in the eastern rainforests of Madagascar has allowed a record number of children to receive vital knowledge of the land and wildlife as well as improve their overall academic success.

Operated by the Madagascar Fauna Group (MFG) at Parc Ivoloina (pronounced *eev'-uh-lah-ween*) near the city of Tamatave, the MFG Environmental Education Center offers a popular Saturday School. Malagasy children walk from miles around to the center each week to learn everything from ecology to sustainable rice farming as well as extra lessons in math and French. Passing rates on the government exam to enter secondary school increased an astronomical 1,460% for students attending the Ivoloina Saturday School. Prior to this, only one out of twenty area students moved on past elementary education. Based on this success, an extension was added which doubled the space for students. There was a problem however, as Dr. Karen Freeman, MFG Programme Manager, writes from Madagascar, "The new extension was finished in 2004 (through the kind support of the American Embassy) but sadly funds were not sufficient to buy a tin roof and we had a temporary roof made from local materials. The roof was never quite waterproof, however, and in a climate such as Tamatave's (torrential downpours being the norm) that meant the classroom was all but unusable."

As a member of the Madagascar Fauna Group, Naples Zoo became aware of the issue and, in addition to their current financial support, the Zoo took on the fundraising effort last summer to replace the leaky roof knowing the rainy season was beginning in November – and with it twelve feet of rain. Contributions to keep the children dry while they learn were collected in the Zoo's donation boxes at the Primate Pavilion and the dock of the Primate Expedition Cruise where guests take a guided tour through islands of primates including the endangered lemurs. "Over half the needed funds were raised by summer's end, but with the rains on the way, the Zoo made up the difference," reports Tim Tetzlaff, the Zoo's Director of Conservation who also serves as an advisor for the MFG.

In late October, Dr. Freeman e-mailed, "Thanks to the generous support of the Naples Zoo visitors, through the donation boxes, and the Zoo itself, I am delighted to report that the new roof is in place and the classroom is now

in full use. Not a moment too soon either as we have a record 160 children attending the Ivoloina Saturday School this year and we would be lost without the extra classroom! So, our sincere thanks go out to all of you who gave so generously and have made such a difference to our community.”

Randriambelona, the MFG Education Officer who works directly with the children, wrote in an e-mail, “I would like to warmly thank Naples Zoo who gave us the funds which allowed us to complete our second education building. This was just a dream for our staff but now it is a reality. For our part, we will make the maximum use possible of the building for training and educating the maximum number of people in the field of conservation. Thank you again Naples Zoo.”

Although slightly delayed by Hurricane Wilma and the focus on cleanup efforts, Naples Zoo is now announcing its next meaningful project for zoo guests to support. In addition to Parc Ivoloina, the MFG also works with the Malagasy government in the Betampona Reserve (pronounced *beh-tom'-poon*) about 25 miles away. The MFG has organized a new Saturday School in a village near the reserve to multiply the educational success. To get classes started last fall, Naples Zoo provided base funding. Now guests can facilitate in providing much needed supplies and ongoing support for classes through donations. According to Dr. Freeman, “It really couldn't have been better timed. The Mayor has been asking us for another school for the past year. He just helped us catching people that were illegally logging at the edge of Betampona Reserve so this is a great way to say thank you.”

Donations can be made at the Zoo and can also be mailed anytime to: Naples Zoo, Attn: MFG School, 1590 Goodlette-Frank Road, Naples FL 34102 and made payable to the *Madagascar Fauna Group*. “We pick projects that can be accomplished with about \$2,000 or so,” explains Tetzlaff. “Then someone donating \$5 can feel it’s making a real difference and for \$500, another person can be a major part of its success.” 100% of monies collected go directly to the MFG and are tax deductible.

In addition to the view of lemurs at the Zoo’s Primate Pavilion, the open-air Jungle Café offering sandwiches and drinks overlooks one of the lemur islands. Naples Zoo is one of the top 10% of American zoos accredited by the prestigious American Zoo and Aquarium Association. The 52-acre zoo is located at 1590 Goodlette-Frank Road in Naples across from the Coastland Center mall. In addition to the historic garden and rare animals, the zoo features a variety of innovative presentations including Meet the Keeper Series, Alligator Bay, and the Tropical Plant Trek. The two feature shows, *Planet Predator* and *Serpents: Fangs & Fiction*, are offered daily. Guests experience close up views of live animals as well as stunning wildlife clips on video screens. Admission (\$15.95 adult/ \$9.95 children) includes all shows and the boat ride. Visitors can also pick up a healthy lunch and snacks at the SUBWAY® Cafe and shop for wild gifts at tame prices in The ZOO Gift Shop. The zoo welcomes guests daily from 9:30 to 5:30 with the last ticket sold at 4:30. To learn more, click www.napleszoo.com or call (239) 262-5409.

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Images of Malagasy children and their teacher by the new roof, living lemurs and graphics from Petrof’s Primate Pavilion, and the overall display itself are available digitally by e-mailing tim@napleszoo.com.