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ACSAM2 participants who helped develop the New Sahonagasy Action Plan. Photo: ACSAM2.

A Conservation Strategy for the Amphibians of Madagascar: Where are we now?

By Serge Ndriantsoa, Andolalao Rakotoarison, Tsanta Rakotonanahary, Franco Andreone, Angelica Crottini & Jeff Dawson

Researchers have been working to protect the amphibians of Madagascar for a number of decades though often independently and with no formal coordination. Following the development of the global Amphibian Conservation Action Plan in 2006 the IUCN Species Survival Commission Amphibian Specialist Group Madagascar was formed. Shortly after, a first meeting to develop A Conservation Strategy for the Amphibians of Madagascar (ACSAM) was held in Antananarivo. Bringing together experts from across the country and globally, the first national amphibian action plan, the Sahonagasy Action Plan was developed and accepted by the Malagasy authorities and several the proposed actions have been implemented contributing to the effective conservation of this vulnerable biodiversity.

Six years later in 2014 a second ACSAM meeting was held in Ranomafana to review the progress of the first action plan and produce an updated one - the [New Sahonagasy Action Plan 2016-2020](#) (NSAP). Since the publication of the first action plan many progresses has been made. Those include the establishment of the country's first amphibian captive breeding centre at Andasibe; the formation of the national Chytrid Emergency Cell and the establishment of the pre-emptive national chytrid monitoring programme, among others. However, despite the many improvements and investment by several international NGOs and conservation funders the conservation situation for Madagascar's amphibians remains critical.

Following the indications of the NSAP a multitude of different activities have been promoted by the Amphibian Specialist Group (ASG)-Madagascar in the last two years. Both local and international groups, agreed that a lack of coordination and local capacity is limited the implementation of the first Action Plan. To address this lack of national coordination the Amphibian Survival Alliance together with Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, IUCN Amphibian Specialist Group Madagascar and Global Wildlife Conservation secured a three year grant from the Critical Ecosystem Partnership

Fund (CEPF), with the project entitled "Building a Future for the Amphibians of Madagascar". This has enabled the hiring until mid-2019 of two Malagasy staff: Tsanta Rakotonanahary (Amphibian Programme Lead, APL) and Serge H. Ndriantsoa (Amphibian Programme Officer, APO).

These two roles principle aim is to act focal point for amphibian conservation activities in Madagascar, and to coordinate the overall implementation of the main themes of the NSAP 2016-2020 which are:

Theme 1: Coordination of research and conservation activities. Overall delivery of the action plan including coordination, communication and fundraising. It also includes many crosscutting actions such as education and awareness-raising relating to amphibians; collection and export permits; in-country molecular laboratory development and in-country amphibian museum collections.

Theme 2: Monitoring Madagascar's amphibians and their environment. Includes identifying and monitoring key species and sites; developing monitoring capacity within Madagascar and climate change research to improve our knowledge of amphibians in Madagascar, their environment and threats, monitoring the spread and impacts of invasive Asian toad

Theme 3: Emerging infectious diseases. Includes monitoring and research into disease threats; strategic planning for mitigating potential future disease outbreaks and disease-specific education, awareness-raising and communication.

Theme 4: Site management for the conservation of amphibians. Includes developing new Protected Areas and Key Biodiversity Areas for amphibians and integrating amphibian conservation more into existing Protected Area management plans.

Theme 5: Harvesting and trade of amphibians. Relates to the research and monitoring of amphibian species within both the international and domestic trade.

Theme 6: Captive breeding and zoo actions. Relates to the captive breeding of Malagasy amphibians' in-country and overseas

and includes captive capacity development in Madagascar and associated captive breeding awareness raising and research.

In collaboration with national government agencies, national and international NGOs, and researchers, the APL and APO have been working to facilitate the achievement of some important key actions including:

- facilitating the implementation of the National Chytrid Monitoring Program;
- facilitating expeditions and surveys for amphibians and Bd-chytrid research;
- identifying potential new Protected Areas for amphibians in the country;
- producing draft biosecurity and reporting protocols for people;
- producing draft response plan in the event of mass mortality events;
- producing draft instructions for amphibian monitoring protocols and standardized recording sheets.

Within these activities, strengthening the capacity of coordination and contact in the conservation community in Madagascar is a key component of the CEPF funded work, so as to aid the implementation of the NSAP. Work began on identifying and developing national network of groups and organization engaged in amphibian conservation, with the aim of increase their amphibian conservation effectiveness through identifying capacity development needs, promoting their stories and assisting in identifying funds to support their work. Over the last year the APL and APO have provided assistance to Vondron'Ivon'ny Fampanandrosoana (VIF) in funding applications and capacity assessment activities for the implementation of conservation activities on the Ankaratra Massif. They have also supported Madakasikara Voakajy and Centre Val-Bio, with funding from Rainforest Trust, in identifying sites with high species richness in amphibians that are located outside protected areas for future conservation work.

The 2018 work plan has identified a number of key objectives to be achieved this year including:

Increase the development of national networks for amphibian conservation and identify a strategy to synergise their work to promote the identification of capacity development areas and engage other groups in amphibian conservation;

Continue supporting the Chytrid Emergency Cell in implementing their actions to maximize results including national monitoring programme and finalising various protocols;

Develop and provide environmental education, information and awareness campaigns to Malagasy society on issues related to amphibian conservation and disseminate information on amphibians in Madagascar and their conservation to national and international audiences.

Madagascar is one of the only countries to have both a national amphibian action plan and positions to help coordinate delivery of it in place. The NSAP represents a unique opportunity for driving forward amphibian conservation at a national level in one of the world most important and threatened amphibian regions. To ensure amphibians of Madagascar have a bright future requires proactive engagement from both the national and international communities. If you are interested in engaging in amphibian conservation activities in Madagascar or want to know more contact Tsanta or Serge at trakotonanhary@amphibians.org and sndriantsoa@amphibians.org or the ASG-Madagascar co-chairs Franco Andreone (franco.andreone@gmail.com) and Andolalao Rakotoarison (andomailaka@gmail.com)



VIF members undertaking knowledge. Photo: Serge Ndriantsoa.