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Press release

Masoala – The Eye of the Forest massively threatened by illegal lumbering

Zurich, August 28, 2009 - Zurich Zoo is terribly concerned about current developments at Masoala National Park in the North East of Madagascar. According to a report published by its most important partners in Madagascar in the sectors ecology and finances, approx. 4,000 persons are currently lingering illegally in the National Park and felling precious rosewoods or poaching protected animals unhindered. The leaders of these groups of illegal woodcutters do not even shy away from threatening the local population and the staff of the National Park with weapons. Various international nature conservation organizations, the representatives of embassies of several countries, the World Bank, and the KfW Development Bank are working together intensively in order to assist the interim government of Madagascar in coming to terms with this crisis. Global Witness and the Environment Investigative Agency are currently investigating the circumstances in the individual national parks. The UNESCO has also been alerted.

Every day, new horrific news about the extent of the illegal felling of trees and the hunting of lemurs in Masoala National Park as well as other national parks and protected forests in Madagascar reach Zurich Zoo.

Following the overthrowing of the government in March of this year and the corresponding distress to Madagascar's civil society, the transitional government lost control of the natural resources in the national parks and reservations. The unarmed rangers of the National Park authorities are threatened, intimidated, and attacked and forced to watch, dismayed, as the nature reserves are plundered.

According to the report of the union of international partners in the field of ecology (Cercle de Concertation des Partenaires Techniques et Financiers du Secteur Environnement, CCPTF) published on August 6, 2009, it must be assumed that towards 4,000 persons are illegally camping in Masoala National Park and felling precious rosewoods there unhindered. Every day, hundreds of trees are felled and illegally removed by overland or sea route. The leaders of these wood felling troupes do not hesitate to threaten with arms, the local population attempting to protect the forests. The woodcutters also hunt and uninhibitedly shoot down lemurs in order to procure meat for food or to be sold to restaurants as delicacies.

Madagascar and Masoala are on the point of losing their unique natural heritage in only very short time and of returning to times of impoverished forests, erosion, and poverty. The rosewood barons and their allies are the only ones to profit from the current raiding of the treasures of the rainforest. Forests thus plundered always lead to an impoverishment of the local population as a consequence of erosion, the rivers filling with mud and the corals of the sea being covered with sediment.

In a cry for help to the public published in a Madagascan daily paper, citizens as well as the Association of Tourism Entrepreneurs of Maroantsetra–Masoala, the GOTMM, have pleaded for aid to prevent the potential of sustainable tourism being sacrificed to a short-lived rosewood inebriation: „Au nom des habitants de Maroantsetra, riverains du Parc national de Masoala et Makira, qui croient aux potentialités infinies, aux atouts immenses que constitue un Patrimoine naturel aussi exceptionnel et qui veulent jouer la carte tourisme nature pour le développement économique de la région. Aidez-nous!“*

Zurich Zoo is greatly concerned about the current developments and the threat of destruction of sustainable tourism and the improved protection of Masoala National Park that have been demanded since 2003. In particular in these difficult times, Masoala National Park and the park authorities of Madagascar National Park require every possible form of international support. Zurich Zoo is in close contact with its local partners, the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), Masoala National Park, and the Swiss Ambassador to Madagascar.

WCS cooperates closely with other international nature conservation organizations such as the WWF and Conservation International. The World Bank, the KfW Development Bank, the United Nations Programm for Development (UNDP), and the US Agency for International Development (USAID) are all endeavoring to support the Madagascan interim government in dealing with the current crisis in the country's national parks and reservations. The UNESCO has been alerted as to the situation in Masoala National Park that was declared a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2007.

Currently, upon request of the Madagascan National Park authorities, the Global Witness and Environment Investigative Agency (EIA), two internationally active and politically independent NPOs, are investigating the situations in the individual national parks. The corresponding report with suggestions of measures to be taken is expected to be published in the next few days. It remains to be hoped that the culprits be held responsible for their actions as soon as possible.

Zurich Zoo attaches great importance to providing continued support and assistance to Masoala National Park and the population in the surrounding areas. In particular during such difficult times, it is important to ensure that projects underway may continue to progress. The plundering of the national parks will inevitably lead to an impoverishment of the local population. The park's natural resources are the future capital of the Madagascan society.

**) In the name of the inhabitants of Maroantsetra, Masoala and Makira National Parks who believe in the infinite potential and value of this extraordinary natural heritage, we wish to foster the development of sustainable tourism in order to ensure the economic development of this region. Help us!*

For further information, please contact:

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Text and photos can be downloaded from the following site: www.zoo.ch/medien



Picture: Illegal wood cutting

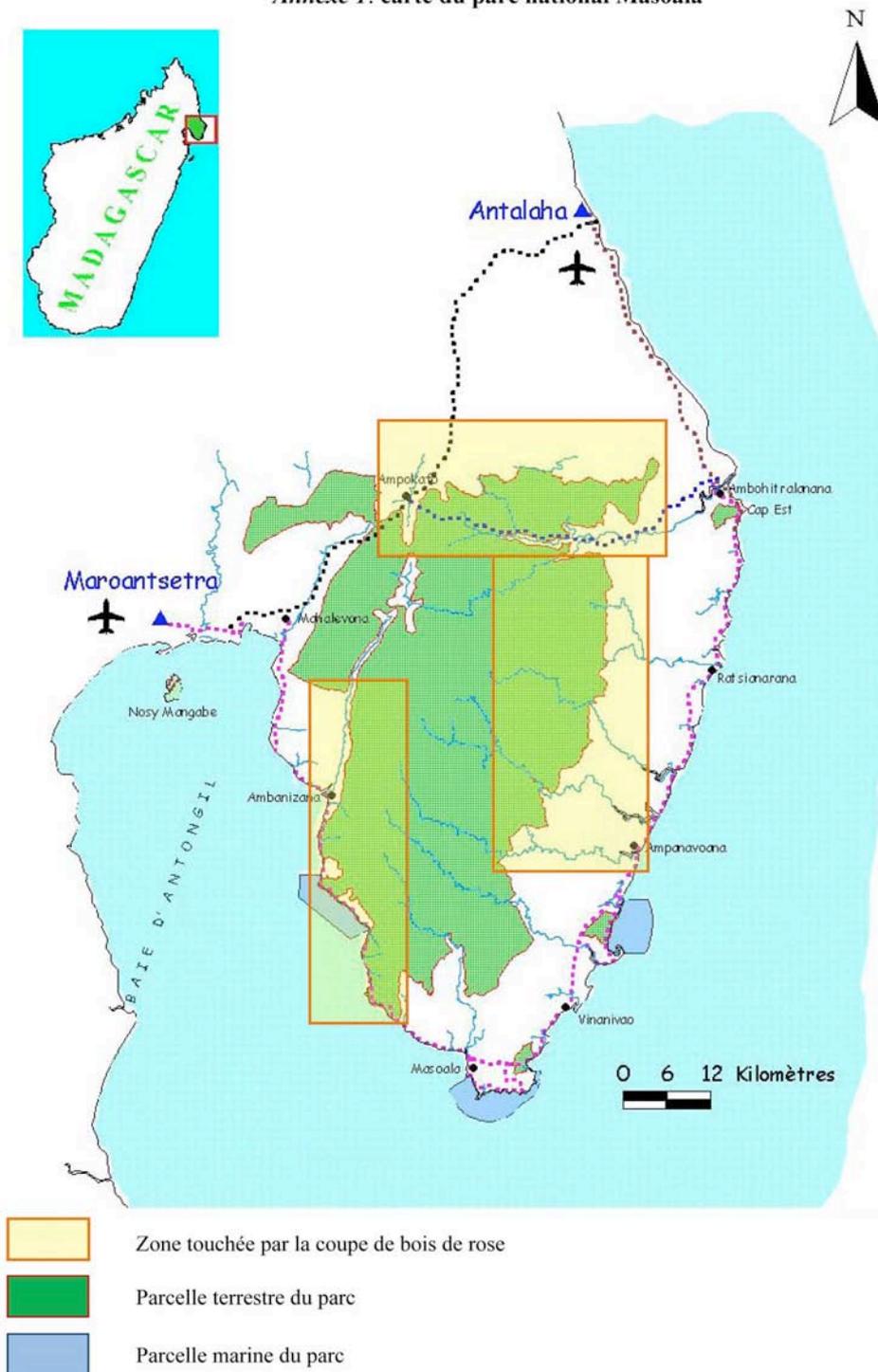
Every day, hundreds of precious rosewood trees are cut and illegally brought away by sea route



Picture: Hunting lemurs

Unhindered, the woodcutters hunt lemurs in order to procure meat for themselves or to sell the meat to restaurants as a delicacy.

Annexe I: carte du parc national Masoala



Picture: Overview

Following the overthrowing of the government in March of this year, the government has lost control over the natural treasures of the national parks and the reservations.