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DOT EARTH
Nine Billion People. One Planet.

March 30, 2009, *12:17 pm*

Madagascar Forest Defenders Send S.O.S.

By Andrew C. Revkin

Eleven groups doing conservation work or biological research in Madagascar have issued a joint statement decrying a surge in raids on the country's national parks for valuable timber, smuggling of rare wildlife and other activities abetted by the unrest and political instability there. There is some awkward phrasing in the document, which is pasted below, but the sense of deep concern is clear. Many species in the extraordinary ecosystems of Madagscar, which evolved in isolation for tens of millions of years, are found only in small numbers there, or in zoos — as with the fossa in this video.

The world faces severe challenges at the moment, both immediate (economic) and longer-term (the entwined energy and climate challenges). But, as Edward O. Wilson of Harvard has repeatedly warned, a substantial portion of the planet's irreplaceable and still largely unstudied biological patrimony is poised to vanish in real time without more attention.

Madagascar's lemurs and other astounding species might be seen as little more than an endearing oddity — one of nature's endless chain of experiments, with more to come. But does the current human generation have the right to conclude, consciously or through inaction, that they are disposable?

Here is the conservationists' statement:

The Trees Must Not Hide the Forest: the Loss of Malagasy Heritage

Andrew Henderson/The New York Times Will Madagscar's wildlife be restricted increasingly to zoos? Ring-tailed lemurs in a simulated habitat, part of the exhibition "Madagascar!" in the Lion House at the Bronx Zoo.

During the last 20 years, Madagascar has undertaken significant and exemplary efforts to stop environmental degradation, effectively manage natural resources and preserve its unique biodiversity in the pursuit of sustainable development.

Beyond their inherent value, these natural riches –- which are a source of national pride -– also guarantee the benefits and services that are essential to the daily lives of the rural majority of the population, providing them among other things with water, food and energy. These natural resources also guarantee the development of the agriculture, fisheries and tourism sectors.

We, nongovernmental organizations working to conserve these natural resources for the long term well being of local communities, hereby express our deep concern at the current devastation occurring to the country's natural resources:

– Open and organized plundering, sometimes using firearms, of precious wood from several natural forests, including national parks such as Marojejy and Masoala, which have been declared World Heritage Sites.

Heritage Sites.
– Intensified smuggling of wild species, especially reptiles such as tortoises, to the national and international markets.
– Proliferation, due to the current impunity, of destructive practices such as illegal mining and slash-and-burn agriculture within protected areas and environmentally sensitive areas.

These deplorable acts will only further impoverish the country and deprive future generations of the Malagasy people from their unique natural heritage.

This situation once again compromises the efforts that have been achieved up until now to help local communities to preserve their resources from individuals attempting to plunder the national heritage for their own short term benefits.

We hereby call upon the competent authorities and all Malagasy citizens to urgently take action to stop and punish such acts so that natural resources are no longer held hostage to political crises and post-cyclone emergencies.

Through this appeal, we confirm our commitment to work for the biodiversity of Madagascar and for the well-being of the local communities, who are the stewards of this natural heritage. We invite each citizen to recognize that the sustainability of the development of the country depends upon its natural resources and we call on every individual to take responsibility.

Antananarivo, March 27, 2009

World Wide Fund for Nature, Madagascar et Océan Indien Occidental
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- Environmental Journalism Today (SEJ.org)
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- New Scientist Environment Blog
- Physics Today News Picks
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- Environmental Capital (WSJ)
- Energy Outlook
- The Oil Drum

- Planet DFW (Dallas/Ft. Worth)
- PDX Green (Portland, Ore.)

Earth and Environmental Science and Engineering

- ScienceBlogs : Planet Earth
- Realclimate.org
- Resilience Science
- Discover Magazine Blogs (4)
- The Academy of Sciences for the Developing World

- Science and Innovation for Sustainable Development
- The Pimm Group
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Poverty, Development, and Design

- Consilience Journal (Columbia U., student-edited)
- Squatter City
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- NextBillion.net
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- Design that Matters
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- Environmental Journalism Today
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- Electronic Journal of Sustainable Development
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