

# JAMES RENNIE BEQUEST

## REPORT ON EXPEDITION/PROJECT/CONFERENCE

**Expedition/Project/  
Conference Title:** Operation Wallacea – Madagascar South

**Travel Dates:** 6<sup>th</sup> July 2012 – 6<sup>th</sup> August 2012

**Location:** Ifotaka (Madagascar South)

**Group member(s):** Hannah Mitchell

**Aims:** To understand the conservation issues that are affecting the unique  
ecology of Madagascar.

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### OUTCOME (not less than 300 words):-

The money I received from the James Rennie Bequest was used to travel to Southern Madagascar with Operation Wallacea during July 2012. I travelled as a research assistant with the aim of assisting the staff and dissertation students with data collection whilst learning about the unique ecology of Madagascar.

Science teams were studying the birds, herpetofauna, vegetation, invasive species and lemurs in the area. The habitat in this area of Madagascar is very specific and harsh due to the extremely dry and hot climate which extends over 9 months of the year. The spiny forest we were assessing is found nowhere else in the world and has led to many of its inhabitants being unique to the area. This makes understanding the ecology more important, to help conservation and preserve species that might otherwise be lost.

The expedition began with a series of lectures to familiarize us with some of the species we would find and also the local way of life. These along with the practical work in the field has given me many new skills. Identification of birds through their calls and appearance, identification of herps, setting up pitfall traps, identification of tree species, lemur behaviour patterns and habitats as well as many more. The most important surveys undertaken were of the vegetation and invasive species. Data on the plants and trees in the area was collected to support the findings of all the other scientific teams. Invasive species are perhaps the biggest threat to the wildlife. They are prickly pear and sisal. The first of these spreads incredibly quickly and is almost impossible to stop, and the locals also use it as cattle fodder so has become a useful resource to them. The second is grown in huge plantations and sold for materials. The importance of both invasive species to the local people means that they don't want to eradicate them and cut down forest for their growth. It is this which is causing the problems for the wildlife. I learnt the key to solving the problem is to work with the people and to try to find a solution and ultimately to save species in the area.

Travelling to Madagascar has been an invaluable experience for me and one I will never forget. I would again like to thank you for helping to fund this trip.

Hannah Mitchell