

Madagascar – an Island to Love

Each year many students from the Faculty of Science travel abroad to collect field data and study local conditions. What is it really like – living and working in another country? The answers to that are, of course, just as varied as the people who have experienced it, but there are some common factors: the journey was eventful and full of hard work! Faculty News asked Anna Norman, who has carried out a student project at the Department of Systems Ecology, to tell us something about her experiences in Madagascar.

It's surprising how much one country can affect you. Nearly every day there's something that reminds me of Madagascar. It may be a simple drop of rain, a scent, sensation, or a certain incident. Even something as insignificant as a thorn from a barberry bush can carry my mind to the Spiny Forest, where all plants have spines and thorns, and where I spent most of my time in Madagascar.

The southern part of the island, and in



Mutual love! Photo: Jose Kenyon.

particular the Androy region, is one of the poorest of the island. Still, the local people open their hearts and their homes for travelling strangers like us. Well, most of them, anyway. That wasn't really the feeling I experienced when we were right in the middle of Androy, far from roads and towns, faced with three hostile men with spears! The men stopped our jeep, made threatening gestures and explained that we had frightened the women and children. The children – well,



Our journey took us through the Spiny Forest of Madagascar. Photo: Anna Norman.

they were playing around our jeep, and the women tried to sell us eggs! But the men were trembling, and their knuckles around the spears were white. Our guide, a prominent member of a neighbouring village, tried to ease the tension and told them that we were there to study the forest. The men didn't believe us or the guide – he might after all have been brain-washed. When we finally instead said that we were missionaries, we were immediately allowed to continue our journey.

Considering that Madagascar is an island with a profusion of exotic spices, the base materials for their food and the taste of the meals are surprisingly bland and lacking in fantasy. Rice is a staple, and is served for breakfast, lunch and dinner in the form of an enormous white mountain in a deep bowl. You have to be careful not to break a tooth on stones that are hidden in the rice. There may be chicken, zebu, fish or some form of green leaves served with the rice, to give it taste and make it less dry. Everything is simply chopped up with a hatchet and the portions placed on a tiny plate beside the bowl of rice. Without this mountain of rice, I imagine that any Malagasy would feel utterly lost.

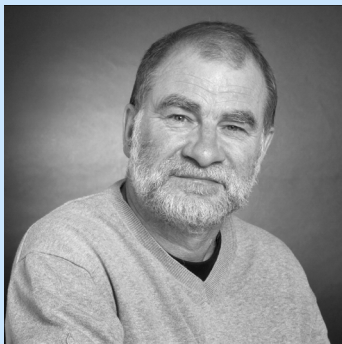
I have a sort of love-hate relationship with this fantastic island. I love its unique nature, its wonderful people, beautiful music and special culture. And there are no dangerous

animals, although it depends on how you define "dangerous". My greatest enemy was so small that it couldn't be seen with the naked eye, it showed itself in the form of an amoeba. After carrying this parasite around for more than five weeks, I just collapsed one morning. When I finally reached a doctor a week later, he put me straight onto a drop. It was two years before I was fully recovered. But despite all this I've been back to Madagascar – how would it be possible to stay away from this wonderful spot on Earth?

Anna Norman

Anna Norman has studied the distribution and ecology of two lemurs, *Lemur catta* and *Propithecus verreauxi*, that are endemic to the dry Spiny Forest of southern Madagascar. This region has been classified as one of the 200 most important eco-regions in the world. The vegetation is dominated by spiny plants from the endemic family *Didiereaceae*. Thomas Elmqvist at the Department of Systems Ecology has been working for several years on a project together with biologists and archaeologists from the Université d'Antananarivo. The research aims at studying the value and management of the flow of goods and services that the ecosystems generate for the local communities.

The Dean's Discourse



A New Year

The new academic year presents us with what may be our greatest challenges ever. This is the first year with the new degree system and the first year that we offer Master's Programmes, with all the new courses and programmes to be launched and new assessment criteria to be established. Applications to the courses and programmes for the autumn have, unfortunately, not increased, although we have received some for the new Master's Programmes. It remains, therefore, an important task for us to increase recruitment, and one method of achieving this is to ensure that the international marketing of our Master's Programmes becomes more effective.

The university will present the government with a strategic plan for both research and education in December. We have started to discuss the levels of education on which the faculty is to focus in the future – should the faculty establish a strong profile as providing Master's degrees, with an additional strong profile as providing public education through orientation courses? Should these be combined with a prominent emphasis on research education? What do you think?

A further major task is the organisation of teacher training. The two new departments must be integrated into the faculty such that we can work together to improve teacher training, and such that the pedagogic expertise in these two departments can benefit the other departments.

Research of the highest quality is a characteristic of the faculty and around 30 scientists will be working through the autumn to write the four applications for Linnaeus research grants, to be submitted in November.

Welcome to a packed academic year!

Stefan Nordlund, Dean
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Slime and Bombs Captivated Young Urbanites



"Slime is wicked" according to many of the young visitors in Kungsträdgården!

Ung-08 Festival in Kungsträdgården

Autumn-term scientific activities for the general public started with the Ung-08 Festival in Kungsträdgården. Youngsters flocked around the SU Science experiment table, to see how substances with remarkable names like polyvinyl alcohol and sodium tetraborate decahydrate become wonderful neon-green slime. The atmosphere in the tent remained at a high level throughout the day, centred on active stirring and stimulating discussions about the best viscosity and such matters. Exploding baking powder bombs also appealed to the demanding public – always on the look-out for new thrilling sensations!

The Wednesday Academy

The Wednesday Academy is a series of open seminars arranged by GeoForum in collaboration with Folkuniversitetet. The topic for the autumn will be polar research, marking the International Polar Year. The seminars are open for all, and admission is free.

Place: Aula Magna

Dates: 5 September, 3 October, 7 November, 5 December

Time: 2-3 pm

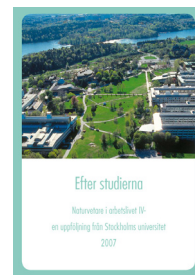
The first seminar will be held by Margareta Hansson from the Department of Physical Geography and Quaternary Geology, with the title "The Width and Depth of Climate Research – deep-core drilling and traverse drilling in Greenland and the Antarctic."

Read the Report Efter Studierna IV

What happen to our students when they finish their undergraduate studies? How do they view their education with hindsight?

The Faculty of Science regularly carries out follow-up studies in order to answer such questions. The aim has been to obtain an overall picture of the labour market for scientists and to illuminate the strong and weak aspects of scientific education in general. A new edition has been published in 2007, with roughly the same

structure as previous reports from 1996 and 2003. It is gratifying to note that most of our alumni are satisfied with their choice of education and experience it as relevant for their current employment. The report in Swedish, Efter studierna IV, can be ordered from Ylva: ylva.gyllenskold@science.su.se.



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