

## Protecting Living Species and Teaching the Importance of the Environment —Cooperation for Environmental Education in Madagascar—



Training by storyteller volunteers of Yagiyama (Ms. Tanaka, front row center) (Photo: Ms. Tanaka)

Madagascar is an island country, inhabited by different species of animals and plants from the African continent across the channel. There are many living species unique to this island, and valuable nature remains. However, the habitats of animals and plants are being destroyed, due to deforestation and other factors spurred by a growing population and development. There is a need to protect living species on Earth and to know the importance of the environment. The Tsimbazaza Botanical and Zoological Park located in Madagascar's capital city, Antananarivo, one of the centers of environmental education, has many of the unique animals and plants of the country, such as the aye-aye, lemur, and baobab tree.

"I believe a zoo can play a large role in promoting environmental education and preserving biodiversity, as a place where people come to like animals by interacting with them at close distance," says Ms. Chihiro Tanaka, who used to work at Tsimbazaza Botanical and Zoological Park as a Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteer (JOCV) and now is working at Yagiyama Zoological Park in Sendai City, Miyagi Prefecture.

Ms. Tanaka said she realized the importance of zoos when she heard people ask, "What is aye-aye?" in Madagascar. She thought that zoos are important for providing many people with opportunities to learn about animals and to think about how to protect living species.

Ms. Tanaka has loved gorillas since her childhood. While dreaming of becoming a primate researcher after graduating from university, she was exploring her career options. At that time, her application to the JOCV program was accepted and she was dispatched to Madagascar.

When Ms. Tanaka began her work at Tsimbazaza Botanical and Zoological Park as an zookeeper, she said she faced many difficulties at first, not knowing the local language and the ins and outs of the job. Her working partner, Ms. Claudine, told her, "You should work with as many people as possible besides

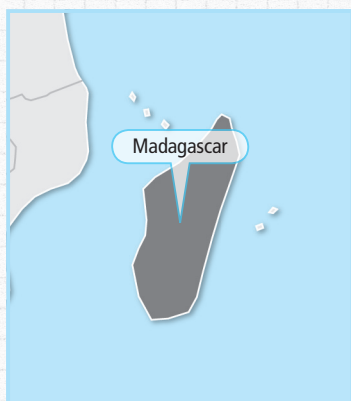
me." Although Ms. Tanaka was shocked, she took her word for it and worked with as many staff members as possible. In turn, she made many friends and met many sympathetic colleagues. Ms. Tanaka reflected, "Meeting different people made me think over what I can do from a broad perspective." She also said, "I had much to learn from my colleagues who were, given the limitations that existed, using their creative ideas, such as catching an eagle without using equipment."

After her two-year term ended, Ms. Tanaka returned to Japan and was hired by Yagiyama Zoological Park in Sendai City. In 2008, the Zoological Park and Miyagi University of Education decided to cooperate with Tsimbazaza Botanical and Zoological Park in the area of nature conservation<sup>(\*)</sup>. Japanese experts are dispatched to Madagascar, and Tsimbazaza staff come to Sendai to receive training. In addition, Ms. Tanaka is involved with the development of teaching materials for environmental education for Madagascar. Through this cooperation program, Ms. Tanaka met with Ms. Claudine again.

In early summer 2010, Tsimbazaza staff revisited Japan and participated in training at Miyagi University of Education. Also, at Yagiyama Zoological Park of Sendai city, they learned from its staff, including Ms. Tanaka, practical exercises on the breeding of wild animals and about conducting environmental education in the field. This partnership has been useful for promoting environmental education in Madagascar, which is rich in biodiversity.

On future cooperation, Ms. Tanaka noted, "I hope to build our cooperative ties around our shared objectives which draw on each others' skills and to strive towards the solution of problems. The stories that between people developed over a long time will be transmitted, and motivate people to think about others living in distant countries. They also encourage people to think about animals other than humans and about nature... It will be ideal if such strong ties will be developed in Japan and Madagascar."

Note: In Madagascar, in March 2009, "the High Authority of the Transition" was established by non-constitutional means. In response, Japan suspended, in principle, new bilateral aid to Madagascar, excluding projects which are already being implemented. For new projects with emergency or humanitarian elements and new projects to support the democratization process, Japan will make individual considerations to decide if such a project should be implemented or not. The program introduced in this column was launched as a JICA Partnership Program in October 2008 and continues to be implemented for this reason (the program is expected to end in March 2011).



Training on display method (Photo: Ms. Tanaka)

\*1 Practical Program of Environmental Education for Conservation (JICA Partnership Program [local government type])