Bournemouth University

Camera Traps in Madagascar

Camera traps are an excellent method that is used to capture wild animals on film with minimal intrusion or disturbance. This way of observing animal species has been used for ecological and conservation studies for many years and has helped with the conservation of habitats by providing evidence of the presence of rare and illusive species. The use of camera traps can aid studies in population size estimation, species richness as well as research on habitat use and even catching poachers.

It is important to set a camera trap carefully. The area chosen must have a clear line of sight as movement from branches or trees can easily trigger the camera trap which may affect results. GPS tracking is used to relocate the camera traps.

The first location chosen to set the camera traps was in an area of protected forest in Andasibe. We set up several camera traps in this area close to trails. We were very lucky as we captured grey bamboo lemur family (*Hapalemur griseus*) on camera as shown in the photograph on the left. These lemurs are not found anywhere else in the world and are listed as vulnerable on the ICUN Red list. This is due to a decline in habitat area, habitat quality and hunting.

This was a very exciting find as the president of the Restoration Project in Andasibe told us that he did not know that they were present in this area.

The second location chosen for the camera traps was in a protected area of forest in Masuala. This location did not provide many findings and results showed that this area was used frequently by tourists and their guides. We explored deeper into the forest to find areas with minimal disturbance closer towards the boarder of the national park. As shown on the right we captured the illusive Fossa (*Cryptoprocta ferox*) on film. This was a very exciting find as this is the largest carnivore and top predator native to Madagascar. The Fossa is only found in Madagascar and listed as vulnerable on the ICUN Red List. This is due to habitat loss, habitat quality decline and hunting. The Fossa is also persecuted and feared by local people which is another factor causing decline in population size.

We also had another discovery close to the national park. The animal captured on film was moving at high speed making it difficult to identify. But we believe that this is a black forest cat known locally as a 'Fitoaty'. This species has had little research with only a few village surveys that have been carried out. It is thought to be a type of invasive feral cat which, if this is the case, must be further investigated and managed to prevent negative effects on the biodiverse and endemic wildlife of Madagascar.

Dale Coleman