Conservation contracts: direct incentives for biodiversity conservation in Madagascar

Joanna Durbin
Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust - Madagascar Programme

Abstract

There is substantial international interest in conserving Madagascar's unique biodiversity, which is threatened by high rates of habitat loss mostly through slash-and-burn agriculture. Conservation efforts have largely focused on protected areas and provision of alternatives with recent emphasis on community forest management. Under new legislation, communities can enter into a contract with the State to manage a forest area, which seems to be effective against deforestation and logging but often continues to erode biodiversity through hunting and small-scale forest use. In a new initiative, conservation contracts are offered to communities to protect strict conservation areas at sites that are strategically important for biodiversity, areas containing endangered species, adjacent to protected areas and maintaining corridors and connectivity between habitats. Annual incentive payments will follow monitoring of mutually agreed parameters such as forest cover and presence of target species. Eight villages in the Menabe region of Madagascar have been targeted to protect 10,000 ha, adding 30% to a new protected area containing the only habitat of four endemic vertebrate species. These conservation contracts need long-term funding sources, ideally by continually capturing the conservation interest of the public abroad, so that those who value biodiversity pay direct benefits to those who own it. Zoos provide a good potential marketing mechanism as they can connect the public to animals and their conservation. A number of zoos have expressed interest in marketing and funding conservation contracts as a direct contribution to biodiversity conservation.