



Step one of the project was to exhume the skeletons.

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT



I'M A TACTILE LEARNER. Being able to touch, feel, and inspect what we discuss in class makes it all real. Given this, it's no surprise that Human Osteology and Primate Field Biology (which included observations of lemurs at the DLC) have been my favorite classes in Duke's Department of Evolutionary Anthropology. This thread of hands-on learning also strings together why I started working at the DLC Museum of Natural History (DLCMNH) my junior year and how I ended up in Madagascar in August 2024.

At the DLCMNH, I've been learning the foundations of fossil preparation and have been involved in rehousing the DLC's osteological collection. In May 2024, I was offered the opportunity to travel to Madagascar to be part of the Beza-Mahafaly osteological collection team. The team's goal was to update the Beza osteological collection by exhuming and cataloging the bones of deceased lemurs. It was possibly the fastest "YES" I have ever given!

I flew to Madagascar with Karie Whitman, fossil preparator and researcher at the DLCMNH, by way of New York and Nairobi. We landed in Madagascar's capital city, Antananarivo, slightly ahead of the rest of the team. We had just enough time for quick 4:00 AM showers before boarding a bus to Andasibe-Mantadia National Park, about 90 miles (four hours) east of the capital.

Straight off the bus, Karie and I hiked into the rainforest for my crash course in Malagasy wildlife. We saw all kinds of chameleons, insects, and

lemurs, and most notably we heard the indri sing! After our field trip, we headed back to Antananarivo to meet the rest of the team.

The Beza-Mahafaly Special Reserve is a longstanding research site in southwestern Madagascar. The resident ring-tailed lemurs (*Lemur catta*) and Verreaux's sifakas (*Propithecus verreauxi*) have been monitored since the reserve's inception, making it a hub for researchers from around the world. All it took was two days, a plane ride, and a lot of four-wheel drive to get us there! After setting up our campsite, we sat down to a family-style dinner to meet all the other people working at the reserve. We were also welcomed by a group of ring-tails wandering through the camp.

I spent the first part of the project falling halfway into holes trying find each and every bone. After exhuming the skeletons, we cleaned and labelled them with unique numbers prior to adding them to the catalogue. In all, we added 50 specimens to the collection. However, this number doesn't include all our additional reorganizing and labelling so that the collection can remain an invaluable resource for years to come.

Outside of the project, I learned so much just being in Madagascar—especially since our travels took us to different regions of the country. We spent a day in the port city of Toliara and toured the Rova in Antananarivo, where I learned more about the history of Madagascar. Most important were all the moments in between: trying foods like mofo

Our campsite was tucked away behind the rest and was a well-trafficked area for the resident sifakas.



gasy and ravitoto, learning Malagasy words, and listening to "Mipaipay marigny," which quickly became our anthem—or earworm, depending on who you ask.

The trip was full of academic discoveries, and for me, there was also a personal one. Going into the trip, I hoped that I would find out if I truly enjoyed being in the field, and it's safe to say I adored it. 🥰



Sitting on the ground for hours digging up bones allowed the opportunity for curious ring-tails to drop by and investigate our activities!