

# STATUS

CONSERVATION

A PUBLICATION  
OF THE DUKE  
LEMUR CENTER

2025



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# WELCOME

## FROM THE DUKE LEMUR CENTER DIRECTOR OF CONSERVATION

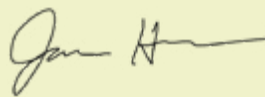
Dear Valued Friends,

It is my great pleasure to share our annual Duke Lemur Center SAVA Conservation newsletter with you, documenting our accomplishments in 2025. As we reflect on all we achieved, we celebrate a lot of wins for our efforts in northeast Madagascar, and we want to highlight these successes for you.

We can't thank you enough for all your support over the last year. Without you, our lemur conservation programs in Madagascar would not have been possible. We hope you take pride in knowing that your generous contributions are making positive impacts in the lives of thousands of people in Madagascar and helping to protect lemurs in their last wild refuges. As we look ahead to 2026, we have exciting new plans, led by the local stewards in Madagascar.

We wish you the best in 2026!

Sincerely,



**JAMES HERRERA**  
Director of Conservation  
Duke Lemur Center





# 2025 Bright Spots

## Community Power

• As we shift from community-based to community-led conservation, we are creating Community Stewardship Advisory Councils, which are thriving. Fifteen councils are already formed, bringing together representatives of all demographic groups and sectors of the communities (women's associations, elders, youths, schools, churches, vulnerable populations, and even sports teams). They meet to discuss hopes and goals for the communities, lead focus groups with their neighbors, and direct the new initiatives. They participate in professional development training to become legally recognized entities. This is true **grassroots leadership**.

• Women's associations and youth groups are forming in every community, eager to learn and lead. That's **social inclusion in action**. In each of the communities where we work, women's groups have emerged that collaborate with us, bringing innovative ideas for development to the table. Leaders at the schools want their students to engage in community development projects.



## Entrepreneurship for Conservation

- Communities are working together to earn income and end deforestation through **market vegetable farming, raising chickens, fish farming, growing tree seedlings, and beekeeping**. We've overcome numerous obstacles to advance these animal husbandry practices, and over 2,700 participants turned a pilot project into a thriving cooperative. They see that selling their agroecology products is more profitable and reliable than making charcoal or harvesting timber from forests.
- Agroecology projects are evolving into **entrepreneurship**, with plans for market stands. At several of the communities, members are producing so much, they are creating stands in their markets where the members of our co-ops can sell their crops and stand out from the rest of the market. They advertise that their produce is organic, grown without causing deforestation, and that they are a grassroots group for development and conservation. People reported to us that they can make between \$15-20 per week selling their vegetables, and even more when selling chickens and fish. One fish farming family reported earning almost \$700 in a year from selling their fish! In Madagascar, 70% of people earn less than \$2 a day, so it is tremendously advantageous to have supplemental income generated from their agroecology projects. When all the members in each cooperative put their produce together, they will be a real force in the markets.
- Almost 200 new members (70 women) made hen houses after participating in training and hands-on practice with our team. They each received three hens and a rooster to start their flock. Over 1,000 farmers now participate in our chicken husbandry program, over 700 are practicing new techniques, and close to 3,000 chickens were distributed. Using reciprocal group work advanced the program exponentially and also increased exchange among members, creating spaces for them to plan how to sell their chickens in bigger markets.





## Education Momentum

• **Four new educators** are adding value to our outreach program, significantly expanding our reach and scope. They are **future leaders in the making!** In just two months, they reached more than 300 students in five villages during multi-day sessions that mixed classroom lessons, outdoor activities, and lots of coloring. Antonia leads this team, bringing her experience in youth education to breathe new life into this program. Here is an excerpt about how she felt after one of the activities:

*"[The students] were convinced that the forest plays a vital role in the environment. This was the moment when I felt most proud of my work because the students truly understood the value of nature."*

At each school, they clean the school yard, create a rubbish pit and compost pile, and create school gardens. The program includes high school environmental clubs as well as primary schools. Five schools are engaged in projects to make gardens, fish ponds, and tree nurseries.

- Schools are reaching out to us for environmental education: **They want to be part of the change.** We usually focus on public schools, but during several outreach campaigns, private schools approached us and requested our collaboration. This confirms how much the communities want our projects to expand.
- Our team reached over 4,000 students from over 30 communities in 2025, including a trip to a nature reserve and community festivals for World Lemur Day. You can get a glimpse of World Lemur Day in action from our [YouTube livestream](#).



## Restoration Wins

- We planted more than 40,000 trees on 90 acres, engaging over 1,500 community members with the SAVA Conservation project. Beyond planting, we painstakingly care for each and every seedling by pulling the weeds, maintaining shade, and feeding with organic compost. Crucial to long-term success is maintaining **firebreaks** around the restoration zones. These are saving forests from major fires; only a few weeks after we created firebreaks in October, the neighboring lands burned right to the break and the flames would have otherwise certainly destroyed 5 years of our hard work. This is proof we **protect ecosystems**. In addition to firebreaks, we host the Ministry of Environment to teach local communities the best practices for fire management, fighting fires, and alternatives to traditional burning practices.
- Monthly patrols led by local forest guardians at one of our projects showed steady decline in illegal activities, including **no new clearing or lemur traps since October**. This shows a clear trend in increasing forest protection.
- Our project employs around **500-1,000 people per month**, creating real economic development for the local communities who participate in restoration.
- Over 150 bamboo seedlings were planted, creating designated parcels for future harvesting to produce bamboo charcoal (see below).
- We are facilitating local communities to gain legally recognized rights to manage their forests. Landholders are forging agreements with the government about the boundaries of the protected forest and their personal lands to ensure inclusive decision making, avoid restricting access to land and resources, and mitigate conflicts. In 2026, we will ensure the transfer of rights to the local communities for official protection.



Our project employs around  
**500-1000**  
people per day



## Economic Empowerment

- Village savings and loans associations (VSLAs) are a microfinance mechanism that increases financial literacy and resilience in rural communities. Over the last three years, we helped nine VSLAs start their journeys. Members are inspired with new ideas for income generation and financial security; e.g., ways of transitioning their funds from a household coffer to a registered bank account for safety, and how to make value-added products like fruit preserves and plantain chips for income generation. Some VSLAs are transferring their agroecology skills to produce tree seedlings of high-value crops like coffee, cloves, and cocoa, which they sell for added income.
- Associations are now **financing their own materials**, proving themselves to be self-sustaining. Associations save enough money throughout the year to invest in their own materials, so they no longer depend on DLC support.
- For two of the new farming associations, we provided financial management training which reached 57 women, and new VSLAs are forming.



Financial management training for  
**140 women**

## Bamboo Breakthrough

- Our partner communities are now producing sustainable charcoal from bamboo. Innovations in how we regulate the charcoal kiln that carbonizes the bamboo has dramatically increased production.
- Over **40 sacks of charcoal** — enough to sustain 30 households for one month — are ready for sale, turning restoration into revenue. Together with the community, we built a stand on the roadside in a great location near a bus stop between the big cities of Sambava and Antalaha. The revenue will go back into the project, helping to pay the local staff and build **entrepreneurial spirit**.
- We are innovating techniques to mass produce bamboo in our nursery because everyone sees the effectiveness and wants to plant bamboo, with over 500 new bamboo plants are cultivated in our nursery.



## Health & Nutrition

- Nutrition classes and food diversification training is working: Our monitoring, evaluations, and learning reveal that people are creating healthy, local dishes that include more diverse food groups and eating more vegetables and beans that they are producing. Over 200 women and children participated in cooking classes in four communities, and evaluations with more than 100 women who participated showed that their dietary diversity increased from an average of three food groups per day (e.g., rice, greens, fish) to over 4 food groups per day, adding beans and vegetables to their repertoire.
- Over 2,200 women in 30+ communities received free reproductive health care services. Increasing awareness and participation in this program takes time. At one new community, we asked the mayor for permission to host an information session, and he said, "...women should not stop giving birth. We should have big families, even if we suffer, because our children are our legacy." He ultimately overcame his hesitation and accepted our project. Our team conducted educational outreach for a week in advance, and brought highly skilled nurses to consult and offer services to 56 women. We will continue to recruit new communities in 2026, as well as follow-up visits to the network of more than 40 communities already engaged.
- The Ministry of Public Health is rolling out new HPV vaccine campaigns, and we assisted in public outreach and raising awareness, coupling outreach with our reproductive health program.





## Partnerships & Professional Networking

- University of Zurich professor Dr. Maria Santos and her team visited the SAVA region in June. We are collaborating with Dr. Santos on forest restoration practices, asking what works, and what can we improve? With funding from the Swiss National Science Foundation, we are studying over 70 restoration sites in our region and seeking new partnerships with the site stewards.



- We hosted a week-long workshop on statistics for our research team. This crash-course prepared our team to present our results at an international conference.



- Six of our SAVA Conservation researchers presented our work at the 30th Congress of the International Primatological Society in the capital of Madagascar, Antananarivo, in July. It was an amazing chance to highlight our work and network with scientists from around the world. We were inspired and returned with a newfound ambition to publish our work and forge ahead.



- Duke Global Health Director Dr. Chris Beyrer and Duke Professor Dr. Charles Nunn visited the region to engage with research ideas and areas for expanding global health research in Madagascar.

## Partnerships & Professional Networking



- In October, we hosted two representatives from the Ministry of Public Health in Antananarivo to assess our health research in SAVA. It was a positive experience and an amazing opportunity to bring together the central authorities in health with the regional authorities, our team, and the rural communities we serve. After a day of presentations at our office, two days of site visits with our partner communities, and another day of feedback and exchange, they were impressed and positive. We identified approaches to engage with the regional branch of the health ministry and local health professionals moving forward.



- In November, we hosted representatives of all environmental organizations in the region for two-day site visits at one of our partner communities. Participants included representatives from the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development, and international conservation organizations including World Wildlife Fund and Wildlife Conservation Society. The partners observed our projects, including vegetable gardening, chicken husbandry, fish farming, raising trees in nurseries, environmental education, reproductive health, and more. We had exchange meetings with the participants so all partners could hear from the grassroots actors. All were impressed and the exchange guides strategic conservation action plans for the region.

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## Sustainability

- We received grants from the McQuade Foundation, General Mills, and the Nashville Zoo. We applied for almost 20 grants this year.
- The [Charles Welch and Andrea Katz Fund](#) was created and it continues to grow! We reached and surpassed an important milestone of \$300,000 in gifts and pledges. Once all pledges are fulfilled, the fund will be a “restricted endowment,” providing an everlasting revenue source for Duke Lemur Center conservation programs in Madagascar.

## Scholarly Work

- Article published in the journal [Sustainability](#) on the regenerative agroecology project and associated press coverage.
- Two articles on lemur and tree communities and network stability published in [Global Ecology and Conservation](#) and [Biotropica](#) led by Camille DeSisto in collaboration with DLC SAVA Conservation scholars.
- DLC SAVA Conservation supports four PhD scholars to pursue their advanced degrees. 🎓



# CHARLIE WELCH

## Founder of DLC Madagascar Conservation

**IT IS WITH** great pleasure that we pay homage to Charlie Welch, who we consider one of the founders of the Lemur Center's conservation programs in Madagascar. Charlie retired from his role as the DLC's Conservation Coordinator in June 2025, after a career of nearly 40 years in conservation. Since the 1980s, Charlie Welch and Andrea Katz, his wife, worked tirelessly to modernize both in-situ and ex-situ conservation in Madagascar. Through close collaborations with Malagasy colleagues, they created the Ivoloina Zoological Park, modernizing captive management of lemurs in Madagascar.

Charlie also inspired hundreds of people by leading tours to Madagascar, speaking about conservation to broad audiences, and always keeping a piece of Madagascar in his heart. We miss Charlie's calm and reassuring demeanor, as well as his patience and sage advice. The legacy Charlie and Andrea leave behind includes a conservation endowment which is fully focused on ensuring our Madagascar Programs continue to preserve lemur habitat far into the future. We are so grateful to the people who have contributed to this new fund and are making Charlie's vision for sustainable conservation a reality. 🐼

Learn more about  
[Charlie's retirement and the  
Welch and Katz Conservation Endowment.](#)



# WELCOME

## PH.D. SCHOLAR ZANDRY ZICO

**WE ARE PLEASED** to announce that Zandry Zico was accepted to pursue his Ph.D. at the University of Mahajanga in the Doctoral School for Natural Ecosystems! With a master's degree in paleontology, Zico started collaborating with the Duke Lemur Center SAVA Conservation program in 2021, turning his attention to lemurs, forest ecology, and ecological restoration.

He will apply his years of experience to conduct a study to experimentally test the impacts of different symbiotic relationships on restoration success. He will plant different mixtures of trees that are known to have positive interactions and compare plots with low diversity and few interactions. His results will inform improved restoration strategies that boost our results. Zico knows his subject well; he and his team have cultivated over 30,000 trees already, and in his project, he will nurture another 10,000. Monthly maintenance and monitoring will truly evaluate the best practices for restoration success.

Zico is interdisciplinary, giving him the best chances for success. He recognizes the importance of social and cultural sciences to his work and has fostered strong collaborations with the local land users, ensuring his work does not restrict their access to natural resources. He employs over 400 people per month to participate in the restoration project, and the benefits people perceive from the work have created strong buy-in and cooperation. Zico even leads soccer matches on Sundays, creating solidarity outside of the daily work.

We are proud of Zico and confident in his ability to accomplish a great Ph.D. Join us in wishing Zico the best of luck in his doctoral journey! 🙌



# DLC represented

at the International Primatological Society Congress in Madagascar

**EVERY TWO YEARS**, the International Primatological Society hosts a Congress that brings together researchers, conservationists, and activists from diverse backgrounds with a common goal: to study and protect primates. In 2025, the Congress was held in Antananarivo, the capital of Madagascar. It was with great pleasure and pride that six representatives from the Duke Lemur Center SAVA Conservation program presented our work to our peers.

Starting with a flight to the capital from Sambava—the first flight for many of our team—we arrived a day early to get settled and register for the Congress. Our team shared a hotel with researchers from around the world, including the Stony Brook University team of researchers and conservation leaders who work in Ranomafana National Park. This was an excellent opportunity for exchange and learning from different parts of Madagascar.



The first day of the conference was thrilling, especially because two of our team presented their work. Edgar Rabeao, Ph.D. candidate at University of Antsiranana, gave a talk on his research studying the Critically Endangered silky sifaka, estimating their population density and sharing the dire threats to their long-term conservation. Candidier Dimbiarjaonina presented on his research regarding hunting wildlife, based on his interviews with over 4,000 community members. Many in the audience were surprised to learn that up to 50% of focus groups reported hunting lemurs is still common in their communities. Candidier's presentation was timely and was followed shortly after by Dr. Cortni Borgerson, who presented her findings on [lemur consumption](#) in urban settings. DLC Conservation Director Dr. James Herrera presented on the holistic approach to biocultural conservation, the hallmark of our institution. These talks reaffirmed the importance of lemur conservation.

During the rest of the five-day conference, our team participated in workshops, attended seminars, and presented our work. Recent Masters graduate Romeo Bezaralahy gave a talk on how people use the same trees that lemurs do for their daily lives. While logging trees is a factor in deforestation and lemur conservation, it is also a fundamental part of people's livelihoods, and we must consider sustainable solutions to meet the needs of people and conserve nature.

Romeo's talk was a perfect segue for DLC SAVA Conservation Postdoctoral Research Coordinator Dr. Marie Rolande Soazafy, who presented her work on the restoration initiatives throughout northeast Madagascar. Her findings on diverse social and ecological goals leading to different restoration trajectories sparked intense conversations and inspired many restoration actors to conceptualize a symposium focused on restoration outcomes in Madagascar.



*Candidier presents about lemur hunting*



*Romeo talks about how lemurs and people both depend on the same trees*



*Rolande shows how community goals lead to diverse restoration outcomes*



*Evrard shares our evaluations of environmental education success*



*Field trip to Ankarafantsika National Park*

Education specialist Evrard Benasoavina presented his work on behavior change inspired by our environmental education program. Evrard's evaluations showed that even one year after participating in DLC's education program, students retained information they learned during the lessons. More importantly, students, parents, and teachers confirmed evidence of behavior change. For example, over 35% of parents reported their children no longer hunt wildlife using slingshots, which is a common hobby for many children in rural settings. Over 75% of parents said their children came home sharing all they learned about lemurs, encouraging their parents not to cut down forest or hunt lemurs, and wanting to plant trees. Teachers said their students were more curious, continued to ask questions about the environment, and were encouraged to clean up the school yard, plant flowers and trees, and generally wanted to learn more. The results show that our lessons can inspire pro-environmental behavior change.

Overall, the Congress was a team-building exercise beyond compare, a learning experience without parallel, and a source of pride and inspiration that is still leading to new ideas and innovations. Beyond the presentations of our team, the conference was an amazing opportunity to learn from and exchange knowledge with hundreds of other scientists, including Madagascar leaders like Drs. Patricia Wright, Jonah Ratsimbazafy, and Jörg Ganzhorn. Numerous potential collaborative projects emerged which will expand the Duke Lemur Center's reach beyond the SAVA region. We celebrated the successful Congress with a road trip, visiting collaborators at the University of Mahajanga, the Ankarafantsika National Park, and the vast Madagascar landscape. We thank the conference organizers for putting on such an amazing conference and supporting our presenters with travel stipends. We also thank Jonathan Wilfong and Wendy Baker for their generous support in assisting our team's participation in the Congress. Now it's time to prepare for IPS 2027 in China! 🙌

# LOCAL

## STEWARDSHIP FOR SUSTAINABLE CONSERVATION

**IN THE** Duke Lemur Center's SAVA Conservation program in northeast Madagascar, we have always centered the local communities in our planning for lemur conservation. We believe community-led initiatives are fundamental to sustainable conservation and development. To actualize such grassroots efforts requires solidarity and resilience in social networks, which is also central to diverse aspects of sustainable development.

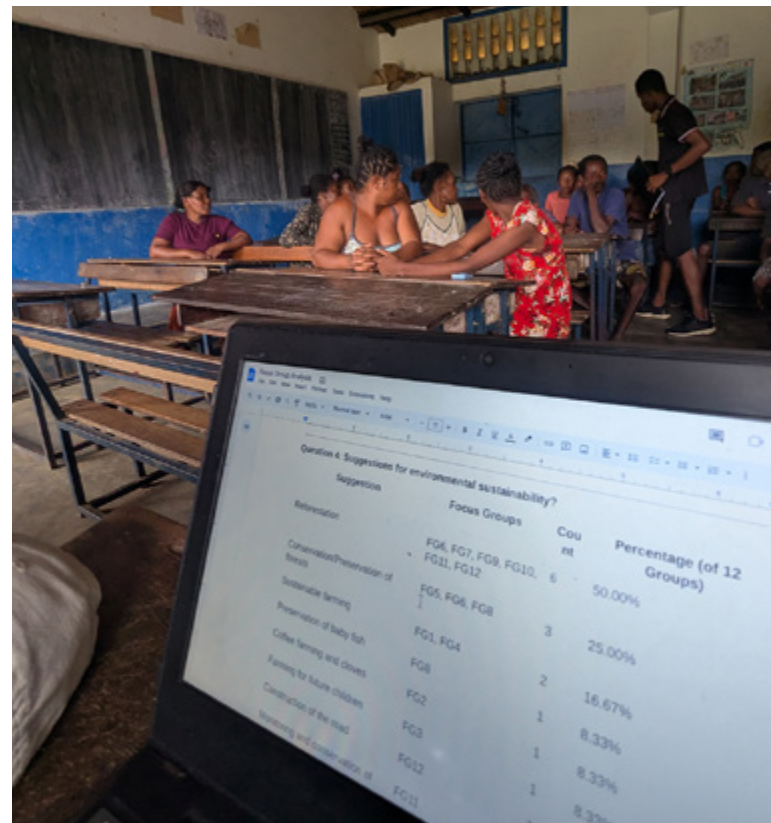


There is a growing movement towards grassroots initiatives for conservation and long-term development. Implementing social safeguards means that projects should go beyond 'do no harm' policies and ensure that local communities have an equitable and inclusive share of the benefits from interventions. International aid organizations are increasingly recognizing the importance of mobilizing the collective knowledge and skills of communities to manage their resources.

Beginning with free prior and informed consent, the importance of local stewardship cannot be overstated. Communities have the right to choose whether and how external actors should act in relation to their socio-cultural context. Many foreign organizations with conservation, research, and development programs have objectives that are externally generated, rather than locally created. Many such projects may not achieve their objectives, not because the objectives were bad, but because they were misaligned with local needs and expectations. Participatory approaches were developed to empower communities, co-create objectives, and co-design interventions that better meet the needs of the target populations.

To mobilize the collective intelligence, skills, and experience of community members in conservation planning, the DLC creates and strengthens the capacity of local stewardship advisory councils. We encourage all different demographic groups in the community to elect representatives who can advise the direction and management of our conservation projects. It is especially important to prioritize vulnerable, underrepresented, and underserved communities like women's groups because they are frequently neglected in development interventions.

After holding democratic elections, the representatives meet with their neighbors and host focus groups and interviews to learn more about what the communities do best and what they desire for their sustainable futures. They ask what kinds of development projects would be needed to enhance those strengths and improve further. The councils tabulate the results and host meetings to share this new knowledge with their constituents. Based on the ideas from the community, the councils put together proposals and create written agreements with DLC to initiate their strategic action plans.



Sharing results of committee focus groups to develop action plans



So far, over 300 individuals are participating in eight stewardship advisory councils. It's not easy: these are remote communities with villages and households distributed across a rugged landscape. We host town hall meetings and provide transportation to ensure participation of diverse groups in the most difficult areas to access; participants travel by bus, 4X4 trucks, boats, and by foot. We host lunch for all participants and have a celebratory ceremony for council members when they reach milestones.

These councils are making critical decisions and steering the direction of future conservation programs, often taking us places we never imagined. For example, in our setting, about 90% of people are farmers, so we expected to see a lot of interest in training and development in agriculture. Our predictions were verified; more than 75% of focus groups and interviews revealed their desire for training in agriculture. To our surprise, we also learned that many communities have women's weaving clubs and want to further develop their skills in crafts such as weaving baskets, mats, hats, and other artisanal products that they can make from natural materials and sell for diversified income. They expressed a need for access to markets so they can earn fair prices for their goods.

Further, we learned that community development projects were often chosen over individual-level benefits; for example, many communities expressed that their greatest challenges are a lack of basic infrastructure such as schools, health clinics, roads, bridges, and flood-control canals. While we focus on environmental issues, not construction, these basic infrastructure needs would enhance the development of the community. With no health clinics and no schools, public health and education suffer. Farmers cannot bring their products to market to earn income without roads and bridges. It's hard for people to focus on societal growth when they're worried their village will be flooded with the next rain event. That is why these basic infrastructure needs are so fundamental to development.

**8** advisory councils  
**300+** members  
Agriculturalists want  
eco-friendly approaches

What is the DLC's role in such community development? We recognize our positionality as an external and foreign organization operating in a sovereign nation. We do not push our values or our objectives; we search for locally derived solutions to community needs. Our goal is to learn from the communities about their dreams and aspirations and co-create interventions that actualize those dreams. Where we can, we will connect the communities with trainers, provide tools and materials needed to realize their dreams, and reinforce the internal regulations of the council such that they can advance to legally recognized status. In terms of infrastructure needs, we hesitate to promise building schools and bridges, but we can promise to connect the councils with the local authorities who govern their municipalities and have government funding for such initiatives. By engaging the mayor, presidents of villages, and representatives of diverse interest groups, we can lobby for funding to support these ambitions. Working together builds solidarity and empowers the community members to act collectively for the greater good, promoting long-term sustainable stewardship.

What does this have to do with lemur conservation? When the communities who protect the lemurs have a choice, have the means to meet their needs, and are empowered to lead, they have a vested interest in conservation. When they receive real, tangible benefits from conservation, they are motivated and that energy becomes self-sustaining. That is biocultural conservation. 🌱



*Basic infrastructure needs were identified as key to sustainable development, like the need for real classrooms (top) and repairs to health clinics (bottom).*





# WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS FOR THE WIN

**THERE IS** no question that women's rights and development are fundamental to societal growth. Women deserve the same benefits as men, yet we see grave disparities that continue to constrain women's development. To overcome these obstacles, the Duke Lemur Center's SAVA Conservation program collaborates closely with women's groups in Madagascar to increase inclusivity and benefit distribution, as well as develop resilience through diverse income generating opportunities.

We start by listening deeply to the communities, asking what they aspire for in the future and how to reach their dreams. Our team reaches out to local authorities and community leaders to locate women's organizations, farming cooperatives, and other existing institutions. We discuss their goals and needs, describe what we can do to help, and invite collaboration. Starting with governance structures and strategic action planning, we work with women's groups to develop the literacy necessary to lead.



Based on the interventions designed by the women's organizations, we pair them with trainers who can develop new skills and upskill those who already have experience. Market vegetable farming and poultry husbandry are top choices by women. As they describe, a small kitchen garden and a hen house can be enough to provide stable food for the household as well as ample produce to sell. Chickens become a savings account that women can draw from in times of need. Hands-on practical training is followed by group efforts to plant gardens and build chicken coops. As participants advance, they receive the tools they need to continue making progress. With the number of participants rising exponentially, we are now establishing cooperatives with our network of members.

Other women have proven their skill and motivation to plant trees. Women are creating their own tree nurseries and raising high-value trees like coffee, cloves, cocoa, and fruit trees that they can sell as well as plant themselves. After the women receive training and demonstrate their skills and motivation, our teams provide pots for seedlings, high-quality seeds, and assistance to scale up their tree planting. This effort further proves the key role women play in restoring and conserving the environment, adapting to and mitigating climate change.

After mastering skills in farming and husbandry, many women wanted to learn how to make their own soap. By doing so, they decrease household expenses and generate supplementary income. After training and practicing with locally available materials, we provide molds and other products needed for women to embark upon their new soap-making journeys.



Weaving and needlework are also important crafts women practice that increase household income. Many women's groups are already avid weavers of baskets and mats, which they make from natural products like raffia and palm fronds, using fruits for natural dyes. They are masters of their craft, but finding clients is challenging in the remote villages. We are helping by identifying markets and clients as well as transporting the woven goods to the cities, breaking down barriers of access and transportation. We provide training workshops in needlework, sewing machines, and textiles so women can make clothing for themselves, their families, and to sell. These projects were entirely derived by the choices of the women's groups, ensuring that the interventions meet the needs and interests of the participants

Financial literacy is key for successful organizations. One of the approaches we use to upskill women's groups is a community-level microfinance and microloan mechanism, or Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA). Small groups of up to 25 women meet weekly to save money in personal and collective savings accounts, request small loans for business projects, and plan social events for their collectives. Members typically save over \$1,000 USD and earn profits and interest from their small loans each year. We see the VSLAs as a powerful vehicle for women's empowerment and entrepreneurship.

Many women's groups expressed the desire and need for reproductive health care services which are otherwise unavailable to them. By collaborating with the local healthcare system, we lead a mobile clinic which can reach remote communities and provide consultations, basic checkups, perinatal care, and more. Thus far, over 9,000 women have benefited from these services in 45 communities, and everywhere we go, more and more women are requesting these services. While this subject was shrouded in taboos only 5 years ago, we see a shift in behavior and

perceptions and increasing interest and expressions of need.

Long-term development requires equity and inclusivity for women. In our conservation programs, we embody this value by strengthening the capacity of women's organizations to lead positive change. We will continue to serve the communities and monitor, evaluate, and learn from our experiences, sharing the results broadly. The average cost of supporting one women's group with 30 members is approximately \$4,500 USD a year, and we have more than 10 groups engaged so far, with more requesting our support every month. We could not do any of this work without the generous support of the Kathryn B. McQuade Foundation, the General Mills, and private philanthropic gifts, especially from Julie Harkness-Cooke, Bob and Sue Knox, Jonathan Wilfong, and Wendy Baker. With this program growing by leaps and bounds, we will continue to seek external funding, and we encourage anyone interested in this program to consider giving to the DLC Madagascar Programs. 🙏



President of woman's association showcases the newly made soap hardening in molds.



Woven mats, baskets, and hats are traditional handicrafts that preserve culture and earn income.



Increasing Inclusivity and Resilience



Listening and Developing Leadership



Training and Cooperative Development



Nurturing Tree Planting



Crafting for Income



Empowering with Financial Literacy and Healthcare

# SHOWCASING TEAM TALENT

**TEAMWORK IS** essential to diverse aspects of life, from local to global scales. What factors support healthy and flourishing teams? We asked our team to share the strengths and talents of their colleagues, highlighting each other's positive core, heart, and passion. These amazing young people are our agroecology trainers, landscape restoration leaders, environmental educators, and lemur researchers. They come from the communities in the SAVA region, earned college and graduate degrees, successfully completed rigorous internships with DLC, and are now the agents of change for our conservation efforts in Madagascar.

Here's what they had to say:

## Olivetan, speaking about his teammate Joelda's best qualities:

*Joelda and I have worked together since 2023. Joelda is a strong woman, she can do all the work, she brings positive vibes and a fun-loving attitude, she goes far into the forest and into the fields every day, even when she was nursing her baby!*



Joelda (left), Olivetan (middle), and Rostella (right)

## Judex presents about teammate Elodi's talents:

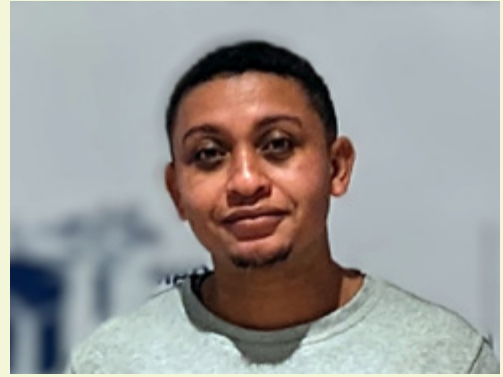
*She's a woman, and she's kind of small [which makes it difficult when working with men], but even though these things are true, she can accomplish so much. There was a time I had to go to another city and she was alone leading her team. I thought maybe the work wouldn't go well, but I was wrong. When I came back, I was so happy and surprised to see how well the work went. She can lead teams of men, she can smile and laugh when the young people are joking. She works hard in our tree nursery, she comes out to collect the bamboo, she does all the hard work men do. It makes me want to share more about her. She has so much energy.*



Elodi poses with bamboo charcoal she and Judex make

**Geraldo about Romeo and Correlian:**

*We worked together since our internship in 2023 until now. We have a really good working relationship. We are good at planning our work. We've made it a tradition that every evening we meet to discuss our plans for the next day. We accomplish so much during the group work with farmers because we know how to divide our teams, delegate responsibilities, foster respect, and everyone enjoys our time together. No one wants to go home at the end, they continue to work hard. No one gets tired. Everyone loves to continue to learn and improve their skills.*



*Romeo exhibited his characteristic stoicism while presenting at the IPS conference*

**Zico shares the talents of Telesy and Romeo:**

*Our coworking relationship is so good, we're like brothers. Each evening, we discuss our plans for the next day. We share our responsibilities. If we say, Telesy this is your job, you don't have to worry at all, it will be done. Romeo is like artificial intelligence; whenever we have a challenge, Romeo uses his mind and finds a solution.*



*Telesy smiles brightly while he puts in the work for landscape restoration*

**Antonia about new team members Garcia and Gebien:**

*They are still new, they've only been with us for three months. What I already experienced is this: when they work, they work with their whole heart. We work with children, and it's so important to have a good attitude with children to keep them in a good mood. Sometimes I saw that Gebien had something on his mind in the morning, looked a bit concerned, but as soon as we went to the school, he let go of whatever might have been bothering him before and put on his smile, had a great attitude, made the children happy and smile. Garcia works hard, she is trustworthy, nothing bad to say! I'm especially grateful to them because they help me so much. I have a young child and I bring my child to work, which would be challenging if I were alone, but they always help me with my baby. 🙏*



*Gebien animating the crowd at World Lemur Day 2025*

# DREAMING BIG

**IN MY ROLE** as the DLC SAVA Conservation Director, I encourage my team to stretch their imaginations and visualize their ideal futures. I ask, **“Close your eyes. See your goals fulfilled and the future you hope for, as if you were in it now. What do you see?”** Here are their responses.



Sylvanah

**Sylvanah:** I dream that all of SAVA region is covered in forest, full of wildlife of every kind. I dream that all the children of the farmers with whom we collaborate are prosperous.

**Rauchilla:** I dream that all participants collaborating with us have food security, health, and produce in such abundance that they have more than enough food for themselves, their families, and their neighbors, to the point that they can sell their products all the way to the big cities.

**Telesy:** If we achieve our goals, all people will be happy, with plenty of food to eat; it will be heaven on earth.

**Fabianah:** If we achieve all these goals, all the people will have more than enough food to eat, energy to learn and teach, and everyone teaches and learns from each other. The children grow healthy and strong.

**Angèle:** If we complete our goals, everyone will have enough food to eat, all women have enough food, all children are healthy.

**Esperio:** All the people who learn about DLC will want to join us.



Angèle



*Rauchilla (right) teaches how to plant banana with local farmers*



Correlian (left) and Geraldo (right)

**Francois:** I dream that the village savings and loans associations and forest management committees go beyond protecting forest: they protect household livelihoods, and that's how we protect the forest. Our actions build the solidarity needed for rural development. Everyone has equitable benefits, our incentives boost communities' skills.

**Geraldo:** We expand from the SAVA region to Diana [neighboring region]! And then, all Madagascar.

**Correlian:** My dream is that the mountain of Ambanitaza [the mountain we are restoring] has returned to the forest of the past, from the top to the bottom. I dream that everyone is independent and strong, producing everything they need.

**Jean Roméo:** I dream that in the future, all around Ambanitaza will become 'Analanjirifo' [the name of the region to the south which is famous for agroforestry, especially cloves].

**Roméo Bezaralahy:** I dream that Ambanitaza is a dark, pristine forest again that draws tourism. The tourists won't have to climb the steep mountain anymore because we'll have a cable car to bring tourists to the top.

**Eliancine:** My dream for our team is that there will never be a 'Joe Bas' again [famous lemur hunter in the village where she works], there is no need to hunt animals because they produce so much food and chickens that they can eat and sell, earn the income they need to build a good home and live a good life. Everyone sees a tangible benefit from the work.

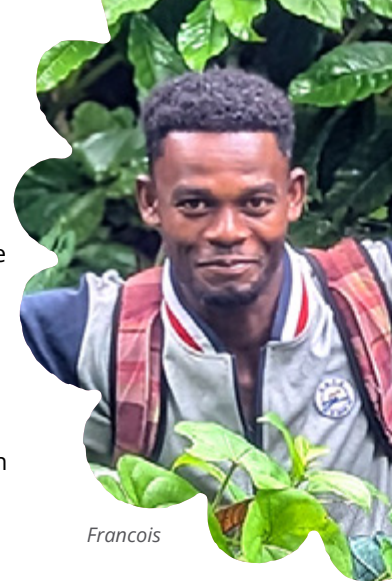
**Judex:** In 30 years, we'll see the satellite imagery of forest cover increasing. About energy innovation: my dream is that only 30% of people in Antalaha will use traditional charcoal, everyone else uses eco-friendly bamboo charcoal.

**Elodi:** I dream that our bamboo charcoal program will be a profitable enterprise that inspires bamboo charcoal innovation across the entire island.

**Joel:** I dream that in the dry lands in which we work, we will return the natural environment and ecosystem such that water resources will return, no one will need to trek for an hour to go get dirty water.

**Lanto:** I dream that one day, we will not be DLC SAVA Conservation, but we will be DLC Madagascar Conservation. We will have our conservation program in each of the 24 regions of Madagascar, bringing out sustainable development to the whole country.

**Antonia:** In my work with education, I dream that the children I teach now will grow up and protect the trees we've planted on Ambanitaza. I dream that the children of Ambanitaza will have children who don't have to go to Marojejy National Park to see lemurs, they will have the forest and lemurs in their backyard again.



Francois



Eliancine (left) and Joel (right)

## A BLUEPRINT FOR THE FUTURE

What starts as a dream for a single mountain like Ambanitaza has the power to ignite a movement. By building solidarity, empowering local farmers, and innovating sustainable solutions today, we aren't just changing one village. We are creating a model of prosperity and ecological harmony that can inspire the entire island.



Garcia

**Garcia:** I dream that roads, bridges and other infrastructure like schools are perfect; the children can study in school without a leaking roof, that we can get to the village without fording rivers up to our chests.

**Joelda:** I dream that young people will have successful jobs and income so they don't have to go to the forest for income.

**Olivetan:** I dream that we've created so many cooperatives and they are producing so much that they are just giving it away as gifts!

**Emilienne:** I dream that when we go to these villages, we no longer need to bring food from outside, we can find everything we need locally, bringing income for the community. Also, everyone will know about local wildlife, not only from pictures, but from the forest in their backyards.

**Rostella:** I see that if we achieve these goals, the entire SAVA region will be famous for our solidarity, and others will even be envious of SAVA. Everyone will be drawn to SAVA to learn from what we've done and replicate elsewhere. Our participants will build concrete homes with metal roofs, everyone improves their lives so that everyone is happy.

**Candidier:** When we achieve these goals, we can expand to cover huge areas of the SAVA region and make the region famous for our conservation.

**Asmella:** When we have achieved our goal of restoring Ambanitaza, people will not come to Ambanitaza to search for trees to cut, but will come to learn about the forest and experience what nature gives us.

**Francette:** Ambanitaza will be a pristine forest again, we produce 50,000 trees per year to cover the mountain in forest.

**Delphin:** I dream that after 30 years, the forest will return and the animals will be abundant. I dream that the people's infrastructure needs are met so the people are productive, children are healthy and can study in school.

**Clario:** I have dreams of solidarity in the communities around the forest, everyone works together such that they have the canals, roads, and infrastructure they need to produce and deliver their products.

**Prisco:** Everyone is healthy, everyone is prosperous, people are convinced to protect forest and environment. 🙏

From left to right:  
Asmella, Clario,  
Francette, Prisco,  
Adrien, Delphin



## THRIVING TOGETHER

The most sustainable ecosystems are those where people thrive alongside nature. From eco-friendly food and fuel enterprises to ensuring local food security, the goal is clear: environmental restoration and human prosperity are not competing interests, they are one and the same.




Rostella with prizes to distribute to participants like watering cans, fuel efficient stoves, and chicken feeders



# Magical Madagascar:

## AN ADVENTURE YOU'LL NEVER FORGET

**JOIN ME** on an adventure of a lifetime: Madagascar! Together, we'll spend two weeks exploring the wild and unique biodiversity, distinct ecosystems, and diverse cultures. We'll see at least 10 species of lemurs, 20 species of birds, and more chameleons than you can count. You will meet the beautiful people of Madagascar, whose warm welcome will make you feel so at home, you'll never want to leave. This will be a learning experience through immersion; allow yourself to be swept up in the moments, enjoy every sunset, and watch for shooting stars streaking through the night skies.



We will hit the ground running, with one day to overcome jet lag and get a crash course in Madagascar biology and culture. Tour the bustling capital city of Antananarivo, the city of thousands. Learn about the history of the island, from the relatively recent arrival of people to the eighth continent, through the feudal, imperial, and post-colonial eras. Enjoy fine cuisine at some of the best restaurants in the country.



We'll jump into our tour bus and take a road trip to our first park, Andasibe, famous for its lemur diversity. This rainforest is home to at least 12 lemur species, and we'll easily see five on the first day. Tour wild forests with relative ease on the well-manicured trails. And if we're lucky, catch a glimpse and listen to the haunting song of the indri, the largest living lemurs. You won't want to miss an up-close-and-personal visit to Lemur Island, where a collection of endangered species are protected on artificial islands. We'll head back out at night to search for the most elusive species, like nocturnal lemurs, sleeping chameleons, and the champions of camouflage, leaf-tailed geckos.



Don't get too attached to Andasibe, because we're already off to the distinctive high plateau forest, where you'll see some of the best protected lemurs in the country at Anja Reserve. This special nature preserve is 100% community led. The local population designated a forest refuge for the ring-tailed lemurs where they are so well preserved, there are now too many to count! All the guides are from the local community, all proceeds from tourism go directly to community development, and all the visitors are always satisfied. We'll explore the breath-taking vistas from atop granite domes and enjoy a picnic lunch in the shade of the fruit orchard. You will certainly remember the quaint mountain town of Ambalavao, even if our visit feels too brief.

Be prepared for a long drive through the seemingly barren landscapes of the highlands as we head west. These vast, open spaces are reminiscent of the American badlands, and debate still rages over the impacts of people in the resulting grasslands. While these habitats may seem impoverished compared to the rainforests of Andasibe, there are actually endemic species hidden in the dry grass. Visit us again in the rainy season to witness a dramatic shift from brown to green as the grasslands come back to life.



Next stop on our journey is the Zombitse Reserve, a unique forest refuge surrounded by a sea of grassland. The diverse composition of flora and fauna suggests relicts of past connections between eastern humid and western dry forests, often viewed as proof that there were once corridors of forest crisscrossing Madagascar's grassy highlands. The forest is a welcome reprieve from the hot sun; enjoy a relatively easy hike compared to our other forest treks. Catch a glimpse of one of the most critically endangered lemurs, the Zombitse sportive

lemur, only known from this location. Verreaux's sifaka are a highlight here, proving the adaptability of this species. Spend the night in one of the best hotels in all of Madagascar, Jardin du Roy.

Isalo is the Grand Canyon of Madagascar: massive sandstone mountains worn down by 100+ million years of winds and rains. We'll hike across the badlands in the scorching sun and trek down into the valleys, where you are transported into an oasis. Strip off those sweaty, dusty clothes and jump into spring-fed crystal-clear pools of water that immediately cool and refresh you. Relax in the dappled shade of palms, listening to the trickle of water that weeps through the cliff faces, while sifaka and ring-tailed lemurs leap among us. As the afternoon cools, we'll trek back through the badlands, where you'll have begun to appreciate the endemic plants and trees that exemplify resilience as they find purchase among the boulders and cliffs. Find the famous pachypodium festooning the stones in seemingly impossible places. Learn about the local Bara culture, who traditionally buried their ancestors in caves high up on the cliffs. Drive back to our hotel as the sunset paints the landscape in a diverse palette of pastel reds and oranges.

On our last day in Madagascar, you'll have one last relaxing morning in Isalo, your last chance to decide if you'll return to the U.S. or disappear in the vast landscape to remain in Madagascar forever. If you choose the former, we'll fly charter back to Antananarivo for one last dinner together. Some may choose to fly home that night, while others may choose to leave the following day. Either way, the new friendships we cultivate will follow us, and we'll exchange our stories, photos, and passion for Madagascar. 🐼

Learn more about [the trip on Duke Alumni Travels](#).

I look forward to getting to know you all on our journey and the lifetime of memories we'll make. See you all soon!





# WHAT'S IN STORE FOR 2026 AND BEYOND?

**THE LAST YEAR** was so successful, we are filled with ambition for the years to come! In 2026, we have big dreams and strong plans to reach them. We already have our sights set on the future, 2030 and beyond, as we continue to nurture and cultivate all the relationships in our program. Here is just a sample of the projects to come, and please stay tuned to our diverse media outlets for updates throughout the year.



## Launching a long-term lemur monitoring team

DLC SAVA Conservation employs seven talented young Malagasy scientists who will collaborate with teams of local lemur guardians to initiate a long-term monitoring program, tracking and ensuring the survival of Critically Endangered species. In collaboration with the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF), we will survey 13 different localities throughout a vast 200,000+ acre protected area home to at least nine species of lemurs, including the silky sifaka. With funding from the Nashville Zoo, our team will conduct scientific surveys and empower guards to continue monthly lemur monitoring throughout the year. By empowering participatory monitoring, we're upskilling local forest stewards via smart phones with user-friendly data collection apps. The team will photograph lemurs, and we're planning on designing AI facial recognition to identify individual lemurs for long-term tracking. Five of our new lemur monitoring team members hold master's degrees, three of which were supported by DLC scholarships, creating employment opportunities for highly educated emerging Malagasy leaders.



## Ecological restoration reaches new heights

We now have 16 exceptional youths on the SAVA Conservation team leading hundreds of community members in cultivating forests with multiple benefits for people and nature. Communities design plans for tree-based restoration, including promoting native forests and productive agroforests. The leader of the ecological restoration program, Ph.D. candidate Zico, designed a precise experiment to test the effectiveness of harnessing mutually beneficial relationships to accelerate success. Agroforestry leaders Romeo, Geraldo, Correlian, Elodi, and Judex catalyze community planting activities to enrich agricultural fields with valuable trees like coffee, cloves, fruit trees, and bamboo. Master's candidates Francette and Asmella are producing tens of thousands of tree seedlings in a half-dozen tree nurseries. This amazing team has plans to plant over 50,000 trees this year. We don't stop at planting trees; we maintain and monitor the trees, evaluating how many survive and learning how to improve. Esperio and Candidier survey these fields annually to determine survival rates, assess the return of ecosystem function, and align benefits with local people's needs. This work is supported by the General Mills and Swiss National Science Foundation.



## Empowering women through solidarity

Seven Malagasy women on our staff lead the creation and strengthen the capacity of women's groups, clubs, and formal legally recognized associations. These groups bring women together to co-create goals, identify opportunities, and forge strategic action plans to reach their dreams. These include creating tree nurseries to produce high-value seedlings like coffee trees which they can sell and building market stands in public areas to sell their goods and products, including vegetables, chickens, fish, and woven goods. Women's groups who identify needlework for sustainable revenue generation will receive start-up packages including sewing machines and basic materials to kick-start their journey. These collectives identified financial literacy as a desired outcome, and we'll expand our village savings and loans associations program to secure savings locally. Women, especially young mothers, expressed a need and desire for sexual and reproductive health consultation and services; we will answer their call with our mobile health clinic, bringing healthcare professionals to the most remote villages where they are desperately needed.



## Education for sustainable development

Our education program has proven so successful, we've brought on four new educators to expand our reach. Evaluations over the last years showed that our program inspires pro-environmental behavior change; parents report their children no longer hunt animals and the students became green ambassadors, telling their family and neighbors about the value of protecting the environment. Now, our educators stay in the communities with the students and teachers and implement microprojects like rubbish pits and compost piles, vegetable gardens, fish farms, fruit tree orchards, and more. We will lead a summer camp program, culminating in student-led community events which will include traditional song and dance, spoken-word poetry, art displays, and more. Inspiring the students to be leaders will achieve even greater results than the knowledge gained; we are instilling a love and compassion for nature that will serve them throughout their lives. We aim to reach over 5,000 students this year, bringing the most motivated school groups to the national parks and nature reserves to experience pristine forests firsthand.



## Agroecology goes mainstream

With over 2,700 members of our agroecology network, we're creating a culture where nature is valued as crucial to agricultural productivity. Supported by General Mills, people are farming vegetables, rice, and trees, raising poultry and fish, and optimizing the positive impacts of nature to increase their yields. With this growing movement, our network is ready to publicize their achievements. The farmer associations are creating their own stands in the market, setting them apart from the rest, with banners to advertise that their produce is organic and protects valuable biodiversity. They will bring their products to bigger markets where they can find clients who care about the quality of their goods, like restaurants in the cities. We're bringing journalists from the national news and radio stations to visit these projects and raise visibility and awareness of the strides these farming associations are making. Elevating local voices spreads the message across the nation so that others will be inspired to follow the lead of these exceptional innovators. We want to foster exchange programs for members across the diverse landscape of Madagascar so they can share experiences and talents and see for themselves how different the challenges and opportunities are across the island. 🗣️

# HELP US REALIZE OUR DREAMS

**THE DUKE LEMUR CENTER'S** SAVA Conservation program protects wild lemurs in their natural home: Madagascar. All our conservation achievements in Madagascar are made possible through private donations and grants. We're deeply grateful for the generosity that has fueled this program and allowed it to grow year after year.

To ensure our impact endures for generations, we are strengthening our financial foundation through a balance of annual giving, grants, and long-term investments, including legacy gifts and endowments, such as the Charles Welch and Andrea Katz Conservation Fund and the endowments supporting critical leadership roles, such as the Conservation Director.

Below is how your support brings life to our community-led conservation programs in the northeast SAVA region of Madagascar.

## Our Annual Needs



Fixed Operating Costs:  
**\$250,000**



Conservation Initiative Costs:  
**\$400,000**



Total Annual Need:  
**\$650,000**

[Support our annual needs](#)

These Conservation Initiative Costs support community-driven projects that directly benefit over **10,000 people** each year and an additional **30,000 indirect beneficiaries** whose lives are positively affected by conservation, education, health, and sustainable livelihood programs.

Your gift protects lemurs, restores forests, and strengthens communities through programs such as:

### **Conservation & Development**

*Stewardship advisory councils guide community-led projects in conservation, regenerative agriculture, income diversification, and rural development.*

### **Lemur Research & Protection**

*Population monitoring, support for local lemur guardians, and efforts to reduce hunting.*

### **Forest Restoration**

*Regenerative farming, planting, and protecting over 100,000 trees annually across more than 500 acres.*

### **Women's Reproductive Health**

*Reaching over 3,000 women every year with essential healthcare services.*

### **Environmental Education**

*Engaging 20,000 students over 5 years in conservation learning.*

### **Professional Development**

*Full-time employment and training for 40 Malagasy conservation professionals.*

### **Graduate Scholarships**

*Tuition, research support, and stipends for six Malagasy masters' and PhD students, building the next generation of conservation leaders.*

# DREAM BIG WITH US

**BELOW ARE** examples of how your support makes a significant impact, helping communities in the SAVA region:

**\$5,000**

Supports five school visits to national parks annually

**\$10,000**

Covers annual compensation for our core staff of five Malagasy professional conservationists

**\$15,000**

Provides reproductive health care services to over 4,000 women annually

**\$25,000**

Empowers local lemur guardians to monitor and protect endangered species in their natural habitats

**\$50,000+**

Cultivates over 100,000 trees on 100 acres to restore natural forests

If you are ready to make a transformative investment, please contact Mary Paisley, Development Director, at [mary.paisley@duke.edu](mailto:mary.paisley@duke.edu).

## ENDOWMENTS AND PLANNED GIFTS

**ENDOWMENTS PROVIDE** permanent, stable support, ensuring conservation work in Madagascar can continue. A named endowment can sustain the SAVA Conservation Program in perpetuity – just as the [Charles Welch and Andrea Katz Fund](#) does – or secure critical leadership positions like the Conservation Director.

[Learn more about endowments](#)

**LEGACY GIFTS**, such as naming the Duke Lemur Center's SAVA Conservation Programs in your will or retirement plan, ensure that your commitment to Madagascar's wildlife and communities continues far into the future.

[Learn more about planned gifts](#)

*Together, we are making a difference for Madagascar.*



# SAVA

## CONSERVATION

**JAMES HERRERA**

Director of Conservation,  
Duke Lemur Center

**LANTO ANDRIANANDRASANA**

SAVA Conservation Project Coordinator

**EVARD BENASOAVINA**

SAVA Conservation Environmental  
Education Specialist

**MBOLA RAMAKA**

SAVA Conservation Accountant