

EARTHWATCH VOLUNTEERS HAVE MADE A DIFFERENCE IN SAVING THE ENDANGERED BLACK-AND-WHITE RUFFED LEMURS OF MADAGASCAR

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From 2004-2008, research was carried out on the behaviour and ecology of the southernmost population of the Black-and-white Ruffed Lemur (*Varecia variegata*) within the coastal lowland rainforest of Manombo by Earthwatch volunteers, primarily to assess the impact of a catastrophic cyclone (1997) on the population. *V. variegata* is classified by IUCN as Endangered. Field data was collected by 84 volunteers from 25 different countries. Benefits from the involvement of the volunteers were numerous and multifaceted in terms of collecting high quality data and in emphasising the global importance and uniqueness of local endemism to local communities. The volunteers monitored the feeding behaviour of two groups of VARECIA and this was then related to food availability post-cyclone. Data collection involved focal animal sampling at five-minute intervals during daylight hours (0700-1600h). Transects and plots were also established by the volunteers to determine the distribution and abundance of *Varecia* food species. The volunteers recorded four new plant species eaten by *Varecia*, a significant addition to the database of knowledge for this species. The involvement of Earthwatch volunteers in the research had a direct benefit to local protected area managers in preserving *Varecia* and its habitat by identifying the relative importance of food species. The volunteers also assisted reforestation efforts by planting trees. Results of the research have contributed to the formulation of public policy and have significantly increased public awareness. The involvement of Earthwatch volunteers in our research and community awareness programs has contributed significantly toward conserving this highly endangered lemur of Manombo.

Keywords: Black-and-white ruffed lemurs, Conservation, Earthwatch volunteers, Madagascar