

7. **FORESTS: Illegal rosewood trade leads to extinctions and more emissions in Madagascar** (05/28/2010)

Dina Fine Maron, E&E reporter

Three years ago, the allure of the lemur brought Meredith Barrett to Madagascar.

The Duke University doctoral student was fascinated by the island, one of the world's most threatened biodiversity hot spots, and wanted to look at the impact of human development on the endangered primates that reside there.

But then political turmoil and deforestation got in her way. Though the island is home to thousands of unique species that are not found elsewhere in the world, the lemurs do not live in a vacuum. A political coup that took place in March 2009 led to spotty safeguards to protect the island's rosewood trees, which are sought after to make high-end furniture and musical instruments. And the deforestation, in turn, fueled the bush-meat trade, which meant lemurs were killed in ever-increasing numbers.

In the most recent issue of *Science* magazine, Barrett and a team of researchers penned a call for action -- pressing for the protection of Madagascar's endangered rosewood trees under the United Nations' Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Currently, Malagasy loggers are robbing the island of its rosewood tree bounty, she says, felling the trees that grow in poorly protected national parks and exporting most of the valuable logs to China.

Though the Malagasy government, likely bowing to international pressure, prohibited rosewood logging and export earlier this year, Barrett's article argues that the enforceability of this two- to five-year ban is unclear.

Further, "The fate of 10-15 thousand metric tons of felled rosewood waiting in ports remain uncertain," she writes.

With as much as 90 percent of the country's primary forest cleared, continuing to plunder the remaining rosewood forests could push the trees into extinction and further endanger crucial habitat for native creatures, like the lemur. In total, about 70 percent of Madagascar's species call these forests home, Barrett said. The rosewood logging practices also contribute to harmful greenhouse gas emissions, with deforestation globally accounting for 15 percent of all such emissions.

Other trees sacrificed by loggers

Ultimately, the rosewood market puts other trees at risk, too, the Barrett team finds. Rosewood is a dense tree, and in order for it to be brought downstream to market, large swaths of more buoyant riverbed trees are chopped down and thatched together to make rafts for the valuable rosewood. Four to five "lighter trees are cut to raft each rosewood log," Barrett writes, noting that the combined deforestation amounts to "hundreds" of additional trees daily.

Though humans have only been present on the African island for some 2,000 years, according to the Duke Lemur Center, their heavy environmental footprint has left a sizable dent: Only some 17 percent of the original vegetation remains, and one-third of lemur species are on the cusp of extinction.

Though the illicit Malagasy rosewood trade pre-dated the government change, under the current regime the pace of the trade has rapidly accelerated, according to environmental groups and researchers who follow the issue.

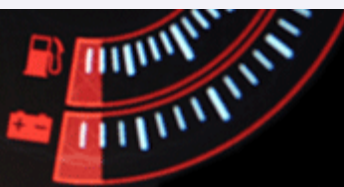
The director of Duke's Lemur Center and a co-author of the *Science* paper, Anne Yoder, explained that obtaining CITES listing is crucial to saving the trees and local creatures. Though the tree did not make it onto the agenda for the latest round of voting for CITES status earlier this year, the group of researchers are pushing for the tree to be listed under Appendix III, a status that the government could unilaterally declare without having to wait the additional three years for the next CITES conference.

If the tree is formally listed, "It becomes a two-sided accountability. It would not just be the Malagasy government anymore; it would become illegal to import the wood," she said. "If we can't rely on the self-governance of Madagascar to protect these trees, then we need to enforce it internationally so there are consequences for them, as well." That listing would also be a key steppingstone to getting the trees bumped up to an Appendix II or I status, which would afford the trees even greater protection, said Barrett.

Madagascar is home to 47 species of rosewood that are found nowhere else in the world. "The urgency of illegal rosewood logging demands national and international action to conserve both rural livelihoods and remaining biodiversity habitats," the report reads.

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