

## STUDENT GUIDE FOR FIELDWORK AT BERENTY RESERVE

By Amber Walker-Bolton

The following instructions are meant to act as a guideline in helping you prepare for living and conducting fieldwork at Berenty Reserve, Madagascar.



View of Naturaliste from the road. The building shown contains a common room, a student room with single bed, desk, shower and sink, a kitchen and a second bathroom with shower.

### How to Apply

It is important that as a first step you make sure you have the permission of the de Heaulme family to live at Naturaliste, the residence for researchers at Berenty reserve. The de Heaulme family generously provide these accommodations free of charge to researchers conducting fieldwork within their nature preserve. Prepare a letter in French including a brief outline of your project and the proposed dates of residence at Berenty. Also please include the number of staff (such as Malagasy field assistants) that you will be employing and the proposed dates they will need accommodation at Berenty. Send this letter to Claire Foulon who manages the forest and Naturaliste at the email address [ClaireFoulon@moov.mg](mailto:ClaireFoulon@moov.mg). Be as precise as you can about dates, even if you have to change them later.

## Living Conditions

Naturaliste is an exceptionally well appointed field station within Berenty Reserve in remote Southern Madagascar. You will be living in one of four buildings reserved for visiting researchers beside the gallery forest and within the lemurs' habitat. Troops of verreaux's sifakas, brown lemurs, and ring-tailed lemurs will be travelling through your backyard every day. Tourists occasionally visit Naturalist but it is a separate area from the "tourist front" giving you more privacy.

### Sleeping

Single beds with foam mattresses, complete with pillows, sheets, blankets and mosquito netting are provided. Laundering of bed linens, changing of your sheets and even occasional sweeping of your room is provided by housekeeping staff so remember to save some extra Malagasy funds to tip your housekeepers regularly! Most rooms have two single beds.



one of the 'delux' student accommodations



view of the gardien's home with verrieux's sifaka resting

### Showers and Laundry

There are cold water showers in each of the four student buildings. However, occasionally a shower will be out of order. If this is the case, the gardien will bring extra water in buckets for your shower each day. Laundry is done by hand and soap can be bought in Fort Dauphin or in Berenty village. You can hire the gardien's wife (the gardienne) to do your laundry very inexpensively (100 MGA per item). Just remember to provide her with soap and to tip well.

### Safety

Naturaliste is considered a safe place to live by past researchers. However, it is wise to use certain precautions. If you have valuable equipment it is



better to keep this in your room (rather than the common room which is not secure) and lock your door when you will be away from camp. It is safer to visit Berenty village before it gets dark. Don't leave your equipment or personal items outside unattended, especially close to the forest. Extra security for researchers is provided by the de Heaulme family by employing a guardian to live alongside the researchers.

The guardian (gardien) and his family will work closely with you to make sure life runs smoothly at Naturaliste.

Some of his many duties include: patrolling the area at night to make sure everything is safe, retrieving water from the well, sweeping the area around the Naturaliste buildings, and occasionally buying supplies for the researchers in Berenty village such as eggs or milk. It is important to remember that you don't need to sweep or retrieve water from the well, as this service is provided! Your only job in this regard will be to learn how to say "more water please" in Malagasy.

### Cooking

Even a fully appointed kitchen is provided at Naturaliste (although if you are not used to living at a remote field station it may have less than what you expect). You have the option of cooking on either a gas stove or by using a traditional Malagasy stove which uses charcoal bought in the local village.

If you want to be "cooking with gas" you need to plan ahead, and have the propane tanks filled in Fort Dauphin.



view of the kitchen showing sink, dishes and water purifier

Many researchers at Berenty find life much easier with the help of a Malagasy cook. You should ask the gardien's wife on your first day if she would like to be employed as your cook, if this is the option you choose. Make sure you have enough money to pay your cook promptly each week since if you enter a verbal contract, for a certain number of months for example, the family will most likely depend on this weekly income. If she is too busy the wife of the gardien will most likely be able to recommend an excellent cook to come from

Berenty village. Ask the current researchers at Berenty about their cooking arrangements, maybe you could share a cook with another researcher for awhile.

Just remember a few kitchen tips:

Always make sure you wash your own dishes ASAP, this is not considered part of your cook's job. If dishes are left in the kitchen unclean this attracts insects and other wildlife.

Make sure the fridge is cleaned out regularly and no food is ever let "go to waste". If you ever cook too much food one night (rice for example) take it to the gardien's house that night and ask if they would like this gift. Never throw out food unless absolutely necessary!

Keep in mind the power is out most Sundays. That means food left in the fridge on Sunday will most likely go bad while you are away in the forest.

Keep the kitchen as clean as possible. Defrost the fridge every few days, otherwise it will leak water. Remember this is everyone's job to share.

Fill and clean the water purifier on a daily and weekly schedule following the instructions printed on the front. Keep this up daily so that other researchers are not preparing clean water for you.

Most luxury items provided in the kitchen (kettle, water purifier, pots and pans etc.) have been donated by researchers and repaired over time. Treat everything carefully and even donate your own equipment to the cause if you are able to.

NEVER leave the doors open to the kitchen and dining area if you go away because lemurs will sneak in and steal food and garbage! This can be as harmful to them as direct feeding so please be careful to protect the lemurs. Likewise, make sure the heavy lids to the garbage bins are always secure; sometimes they are left open by others so stop and close the lids.



Typical market stall selling vegetables in Fort Dauphin

### **Shopping in the Markets**

On your first trip from Fort Dauphin to Berenty it is important to budget time to visit the outdoor market and the French supermarket (owned by the de Heulme family) in order to

stock up on food for the next month. Although you will be able to purchase many necessary items in Berenty or in Amboasary, some items are only found in Fort Dauphin.

If you are buying a large quantity of rice it is better to use a woven basket to transport it, the plastic bags most vendors provide are really flimsy. There is also an excellent fruit stand approximately 30 minutes outside of Fort Dauphin, if you have hired a driver it is a good idea to stop here. Rice and beans are priced and measured by the cup and vegetables are priced by weight. One cup of rice costs roughly 400 MGA (20 cents US) and one cup of beans is roughly 600 MGA. One quick



Scales and weights for pricing vegetables in the market

piece of rice advice: all rice is not the same and you probably want to buy the newest rice you can. Rice from the previous season will be broken and not as tasty. Also, some rice has more rocks in it than others. All rice you buy you will have to sift, or have your cook sift, or you can expect a few rocks in your dinner!



Something that is likely to cause you a great deal of confusion is that at many outdoor markets, merchants will often quote you a price in Francs rather than Ariary (MGA). A Franc is actually about 1\5 of an Ariary (look for this on the Ariary bills). One way of avoiding some confusion is to ask merchants in Malagasy how much in Ariary it costs for one cup and then multiply by the

number of cups you need. For example, 10 cups of rice at 400 MGA each will be 4,000 MGA (roughly two US dollars). Even so, it is likely that you will be overcharged because you are a



“Vazaha” (foreigner). The only real protection against this type of discrimination is to be patient and to use as much of the Malagasy you have learned to negotiate a “fair” price. See the Malagasy phrases section at the end of this guide and start practicing today!

### Stuff to Bring

As you can see, much is provided for you at Naturaliste, but you still need to bring everything you would expect to need for living in a remote site. Here is a rough guideline of what to bring and what not to bring to the field site.

#### Bring

Extra Malagasy money

Movies on your hard drive

A lap-top, all your equipment for fieldwork

A surge protector for battery charger

Other: high powered flashlights and/or headlamps including at least one that does not require batteries (hand crank type), one small camping pot for boiling water, a sun hat or bandanas, light blanket, lots of durable food containers to bring your lunch to the field. You will need a cell phone that is not locked (they can be bought cheap in FD for about 10 USD). You will need to be able to put one of the Malagasy phone company chips in the back (you can buy these anywhere, but if your French is bad you can buy one at the airport in English).

#### Etiquette

As soon as you know you will be heading to Berenty, try to contact the current researchers at Berenty (if any) who will be there when you arrive if at all possible. This way, you can make a good impression by asking if there is anything that they need from Fort Dauphin. At the very least if you do not get in touch you can bring some fresh fruit as a gift.

Always hire at least one Malagasy field assistant and pay them as well as you can afford to. Try to bring extra equipment of your own that you are able to donate to your assistant at the

#### Don't Bring

US or UK pounds (no one at Berenty will exchange it, in fact they will frequently hope you will exchange US dollars to Malagasy funds for them)

lots of books (too heavy, and a nice library exists at Berenty)

equipment without checking that all of the batteries are new

electronic equipment without enough African converters to operate them



end of your fieldwork. Chances are without an assistant your data collection would be of much poorer quality.

Please consider incorporating volunteer work at the Berenty schools into your work schedule - a very rewarding experience!



Children at one of the Berenty village schools

If other researchers are ending their fieldwork it is a nice idea to cook them a desert and throw them a party.

When you leave Berenty you will most likely be inspired to give gifts to the many people who have helped you. One way to plan ahead is to bring gift bags and cards with you and to bring as many good quality clothes as possible that you can part with at the end of your fieldwork.

### Health

Be aware of malaria, don't get dehydrated or sun burnt, sterilize the water you drink

### Travel to Fort Dauphin

Depending on how adventurous you are, you may be able to save a great deal of money on travel to Berenty. Hiring a car and driver can be expensive, and taking a taxi bus can be intimidating...check with former researchers to see what you



Fine dining at the "le Dauphin" hotel in Fort Dauphin

feel comfortable with.

Whenever possible, carpool with others travelling to and from Berenty. The fastest way to arrive at Berenty is to fly to Fort Dauphin and hire a car from Fort Dauphin to Berenty. A round trip flight from Tana to Fort Dauphin costs roughly 470 USD. To hire a driver and car for a day you will need to pay a base fee plus the cost of gas. In 2009, a car and driver was



Budget room at the "Mahavoky" hotel in Fort Dauphin

approximately 180,000 MGA per day, plus the cost of gas which was about 60,000 MGA. Since 2009, the cost of gas has gone up and the price of a rental car may be more expensive. Also, it is often expected that you pay for water and one meal for your driver. It is important to know that it is dangerous to travel from Tana to Berenty after dark and many drivers will ask to leave Fort Dauphin as early as possible to decrease their risk. The de Heaulme family owns the hotel

"le Dauphin" in Fort Dauphin and offers assistance and discounts to students who will be working at Berenty. This is a very comfortable and well appointed hotel but accommodation here may be outside of your student budget. If you stay at the le Dauphin you can use the internet at la Croix du Sud hotel for free.

### **Monthly Expenses**

Everyone's monthly expenses will be different, but the following figures are meant to help you budget for your fieldwork. These costs reflect 2009/2010 figures, so for 2011 or later you may wish to add 10% for inflation. The following figures are for one researcher and one field assistant for one month. Visit a currency conversion website such as XE- Universal currency converter to learn conversion rates for the Malagasy Ariary (MGA) and your home currency.

### **Supplies to buy in Fort Dauphin**

To buy everything you need for a month in Fort Dauphin, you should budget between 70-100 US dollars (USD). This includes items such as toilet paper, candles, matches, dish soap, laundry soap, dish towels and sponges, as well as canned food, noodles, salt etc. at the supermarket and fresh food at the open air market such as cooking oil, rice, vegetables, beans and fruit.



### Food while in Berenty

It is not likely that you will be able to buy enough food to last one month in Fort Dauphin without topping up with fresh veggies and rice etc. in Berenty market. 35 USD should cover costs of rice, beans and vegetables in the open air Berenty market for one month. Budget extra money if you want to buy snacks at Jean Paul's shop or if you plan to dine at the restaurant or cafeteria in the reserve.

### Cook

The minimum cost for a cook in 2009 was 10,000 MGA a week. This would calculate to roughly 20 USD a month for one meal to be cooked daily.

### Laundry

To have your laundry done usually costs around 100 MGA per item. Considering 10 items a week for you and your assistant, this would cost only 2 USD a month.

### Field assistant

It is difficult to estimate these costs since every person will certainly have a different job description and expectations for their assistant. This information is provided so that you have a rough guideline of what to expect. The minimum monthly wage for a field assistant in 2009 was roughly 25 USD. This wage is based on the assumption that you have some experience with fieldwork in Madagascar and are willing to provide extensive training for your field assistant. If you are not experienced in fieldwork in Madagascar and therefore will need extra assistance or will expect to receive specialized training from your assistant (such as ID's of individual lemurs, plant identification etc.) you may expect to pay more as a wage per month. It is a good idea to ask advice from a researcher who has recently worked at Berenty and to negotiate a wage with your field assistant that you are both happy with. Keep in mind that in addition to having extensive fieldwork experience, your assistant may already have the academic credentials you are working to attain (such as a master's degree).

In addition to paying your assistant a monthly wage it is often expected that you cover their living and travel expenses and you loan all equipment they will need in the field such as a watch, binoculars, flashlight etc. and that you would give them a gift at the end of fieldwork.

For round trip travel by taxi bus to Berenty from Tana (including cost of food and accommodation) this costs approximately 90 USD. This trip takes roughly 2-3 days.

### **Make a Budget**

When you are making your budget for fieldwork, remember to factor in the costs described above as well as extras such as travel insurance, transportation costs (flights, taxis, rental car and taxi bus), hotel stays, and phone credit.

## Plan Ahead

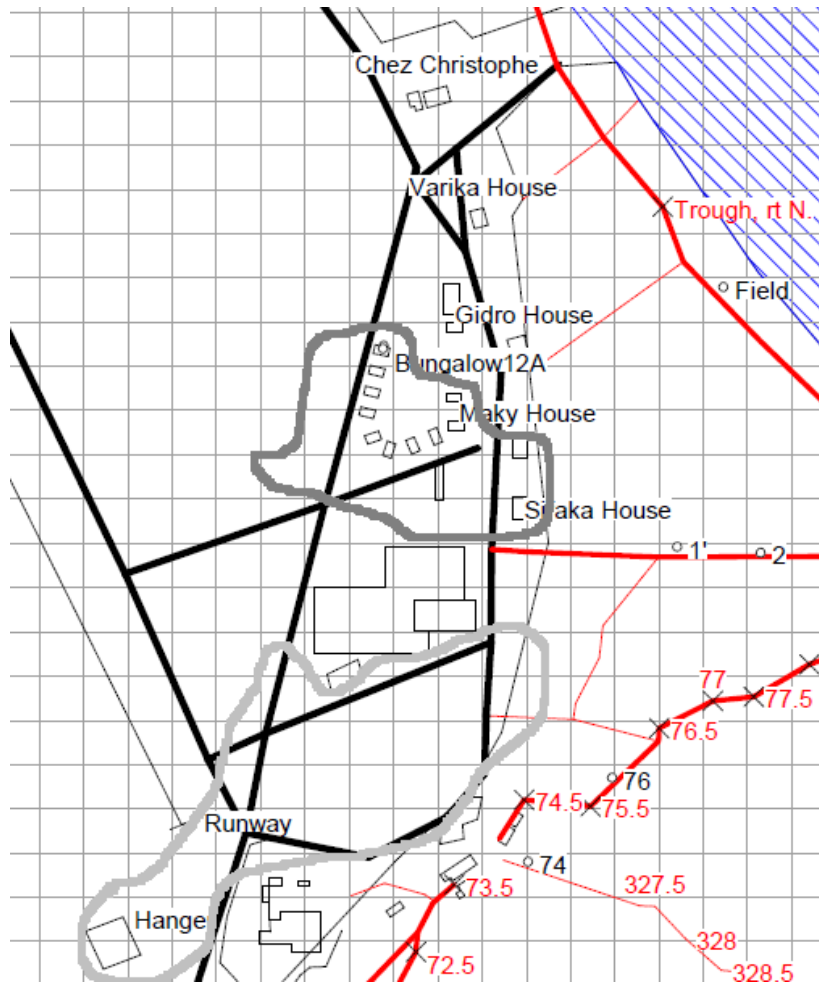
Register with your country's embassy

Check all travel advisories for Madagascar before travel

Make sure your travel insurance is up to date and pre-program the insurance number into your Malagasy cell phone. You need to call this number if you are headed to the hospital. Always make sure you have emergency phone credit saved away.

Learn the conversion rates for Malagasy funds to your home currency before arrival. Don't get overcharged on your first taxi ride from the airport!

## Map of the Tourist Area of Berenty "Tourist Front" (courtesy of George Williams)



This is a partial map of the tourist area adapted to show the range of C1 group (in dark grey) and A1 group (in lighter grey) from 2009. Naturaliste is not shown on the map but is roughly

a 10 minute walk to the north. Buildings are shown as boxes, paths are red, roads are black and the gallery forest is shown in blue.

### Learn Some Malagasy Words and Phrases

Remember that o is pronounced “u”. For example, fossa is pronounced “fussa” in Madagascar but most people pronounce it “fossa” in England. Rano (water) is pronounced “ranu”.

<b>English</b>	<b>Malagasy</b>
This	ty
Here	eto
Hello, how are you?	Salama
Bye	Veloma
Need	mila
Please	azafady
Water	rano
Can you (or “I am free”)	afaka
To cook	mahandro
Food or meal	sakafo
These	ireto
Tonight	anio alina
Afternoon\evening	hariva
Morning	maraina
Thank-you	misa-otra
Hot	mafana
Too much\many\very much	betsaka
Have you got	manana
No	tsia
Yes	eny
Doing laundry	Manasa lamba
Can you give me...	afaka manome
Large	lehibe
Small	kely
Vary	rice
I need water, please	Azafady, mila rano aho

### Numbers

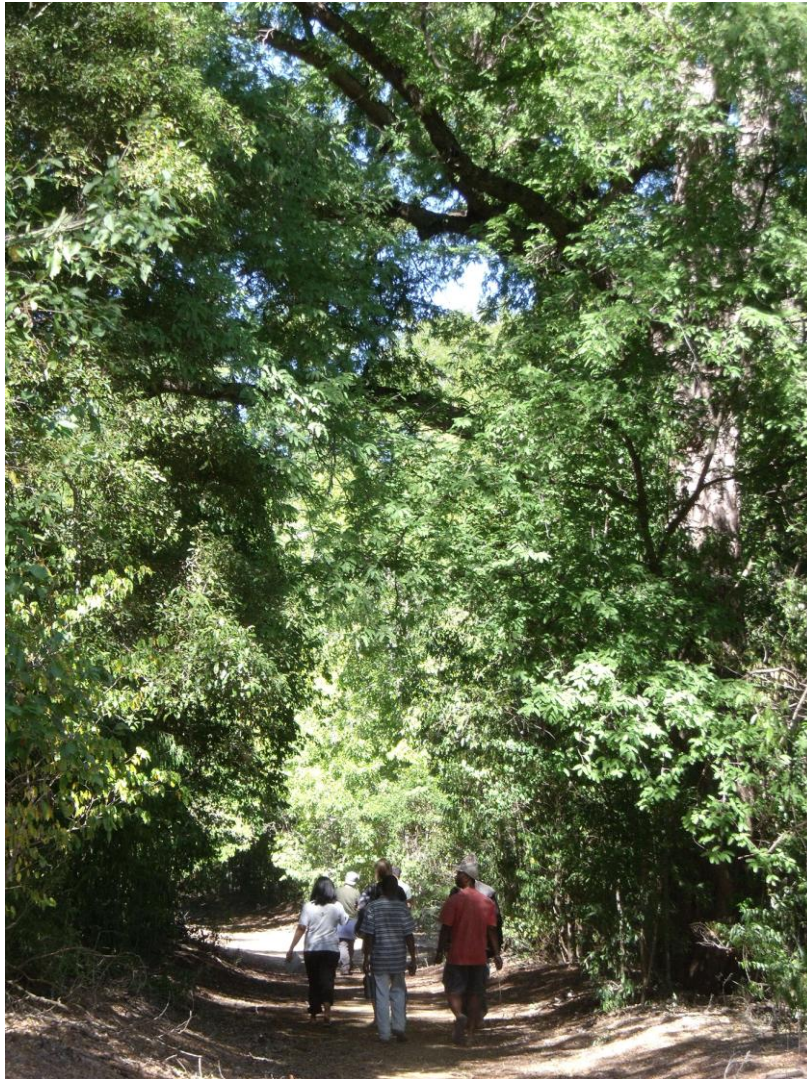
1	iray	6	anina	100	zato
2	roa	7	fito	1,000	arivo
3	telo	8	valo		
4	efatra	9	sivy		
5	dimy	10	folo		





**Ask a former researcher**

If you have any questions about life at Naturaliste, please contact Amber Walker-Bolton at [amberw-b@hotmail.com](mailto:amberw-b@hotmail.com) or Jen Crick at [jcrick1@swarthmore.edu](mailto:jcrick1@swarthmore.edu).



Created February 13<sup>th</sup>, 2011