

impressed with the personal attention we received during our stay and by the knowledge and keenness of the staff at both camps.

*Andrew Sloan.*

## New lemur discovered on Madagascar

A West German biologist has set the world of zoology buzzing by accidentally finding a new species of lemur on Madagascar. Bernhard Meier, who does post-graduate research at the Ruhr University in Bochum, told Reuters he was looking for another, rare species of the furry tree-dwellers when he came across the hitherto unknown golden bamboo lemur. Even then, weeks passed before he realised his luck.

The university called his find a zoological sensation, marking the first identification of a new primate in almost 60 years. Primates, the highest order of mammals, include humans. Lemurs resemble monkeys but have more pointed muzzles and long, soft fur. The golden bamboo lemur is about 80 centimetres (26 inches) long, including tail, and weighs just over one kilo.

Meier, 37, told Reuters that he went to Madagascar in an attempt to confirm a report that the greater bamboo lemur had been seen in thick forest around Ramonafana. Originally thought to have died out early this century, the greater bamboo lemur resurfaced in 1972 in a piece of isolated woodland bordering a coffee plantation, far from Ramonafana.

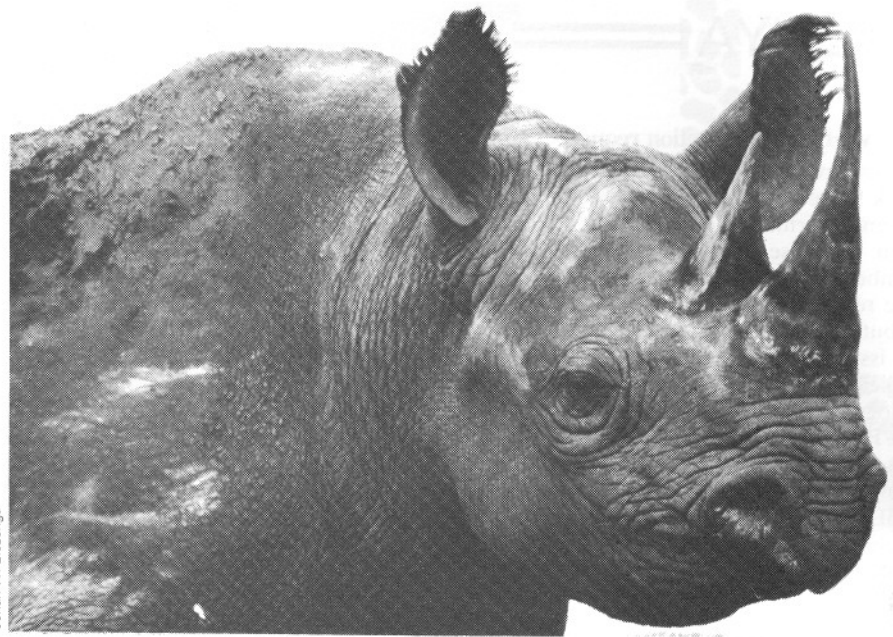
Meier said his only means of identifying the greater bamboo lemur was a small black and white illustration he had cut from a book. He had no way of knowing that the larger mammal lacked the gold and red-brown fur of the new lemur.

Madagascar was thought to have only two types of lemur, including the fairly common grey bamboo lemur. So when Meier saw the non-grey lemurs soon after his arrival at Ramonafana he felt sure it was only confirmation that the greater bamboo lemur was more widespread than had been thought.

A team of scientists from Duke University in North Carolina, working separately on the same quest, also took the animals to be greater bamboo lemurs and hurried off to tell the world of the rarity's presence.

Since he had time to spare, Meier said he decided to look up the original colony, which had been found by a team of French scientists including Professor Andre Peyrieras from the university in Tananarive, Madagascar's capital. But when he saw the lemurs there he could hardly believe his eyes. 'I saw an animal that I had never seen before,' he said. 'It was twice as large, the colour was different and the noise it made was unlike any I had heard.'

Then, said Meier, it dawned on him that there must be a third species of lemur in Madagascar. It took much longer to con-



Johan W. Elezenga

*Black rhino.*

vince his colleagues at home and sponsor Yves Rumpler of the Louis Pasteur University in Strasbourg, France. His 'Come quickly, have found new lemur' message met blank disbelief. Tired of waiting, he left for home with photographs of his new discovery.

Meier said that confronted with these, his zoology teacher at Bochum, Professor Holger Preuschoft, admitted: 'It's impossible Meier, but you're right.'

Last April he returned to Ranomafana with Rumpler and Peyrieras. They used recordings of the species' calls to lure the new lemurs so that Peyrieras could dope them with narcotic darts fired from a blowpipe. Before being given to Tananarive Zoo, the scientists took tiny skin samples from the animals, which were later grown in culture in Strasbourg for a thorough analysis. A chromosome count and other tests confirmed the official debut of a new species, *Hapalemur aureus*, the golden bamboo lemur.

Last summer, the Duke University team under Patricia White went back to Ranomafana, and confirmed the presence in the region's forests of the greater bamboo lemur. Now Meier, White and the World Wildlife Fund are working with the government in Tananarive in an effort to create a 70,000-hectare (173,000-acre) protected area around Ranomafana.

*Stanley Parker, courtesy of Reuters*

## Rhino exchange

Six black, and four white, rhinos have been given an unusual send-off as part of a rhino swap between Zimbabwe and Swaziland. The swap, funded by WWF, is intended to help protect the endangered black rhino by reintroducing it to Swaziland and to

increase the population of white rhino in Zimbabwe.

Six black rhinos captured in the Zambezi Valley were transported to Swaziland on 29 December last year, putting them out of the reach of poachers who have killed at least 250 rhinos in the space of 40 months. The swap brings the animal back to a country where it was once indigenous. The black rhinos have been given sanctuary in the newly-declared Mkhaya Nature Reserve, protected by an electrified fence.

In return, Swaziland sent four white rhinos to Zimbabwe the next day. WWF hopes other operations can be arranged to protect the black rhino by dispersing the vulnerable populations.

Zimbabwe has an estimated 500 black rhinos in the Lower Zambezi Valley, the largest contiguous group in Africa. But raiding gangs of poachers armed with automatic weapons shoot the animal for its horn, worth as much as US\$11,629 per kilo in Thailand. The horn is used to make dagger handles and traditional medicines. In less than two decades, the world's rhino population has declined by 85 per cent. Black rhinos, numbering 65,000 only 18 years ago, are now down to 4,000.

Charles de Haes, Director-General of WWF International, who helped arrange and witnessed the exchange in Swaziland, said 'This is an important example of international co-operation to save an endangered species; we shall continue our efforts to ensure that viable populations of black rhino are protected from the ruthless onslaught of gangs of murderous criminals who kill the rhinos to derive profits from their horns which are sold for ineffective medicinal purposes.'

*WWF News*