



One of the most

# Madagascar

Author:

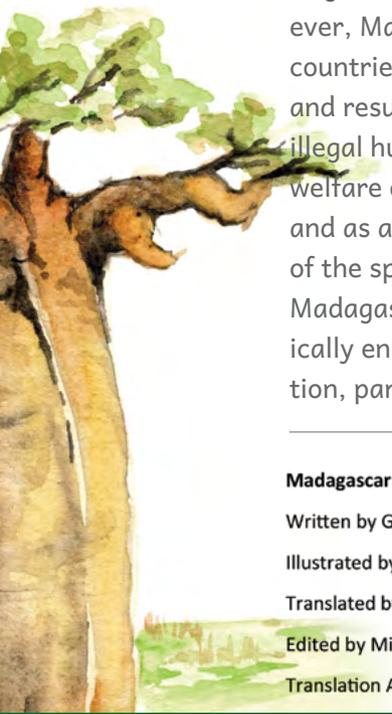
**Michele R. Tennant**, *Head of the Smathers Libraries’ Academic Research Consulting and Services (ARCS) Team*

**I**t is the only place to find lemurs, and about half of all known chameleon species live on this island nation.

Most species in Madagascar are endemic (found nowhere else), and the country is fortunate to house rainforests, coral reefs, and unique habitats such as the spiny forest and amazing geologic formations known as tsingy. The people of Madagascar are equally fascinating, comprising 18 ethnic groups with origins in Indonesia and Africa. However, Madagascar is one of the poorest countries in the world; food insecurity and resultant agricultural practices and illegal hunting endanger the health and welfare of the wildlife and environment, and as a result the people as well. Many of the species that we associate with Madagascar, including lemurs, are critically endangered. Conservation education, particularly for children, has been

found to be an effective means to sensitize local communities to the importance of conserving biodiversity. From the summer of 2016 through the spring of 2018, an international team worked to transform a University of Florida class project into a published work with a conservation message, and with the hope that it would make a difference to the children of Madagascar.

Each spring semester I teach a one-credit (Un)Common Read course on the book *Thank You, Madagascar: The Conservation Diaries of Alison Jolly*. As part of the course, students complete a creative or academic project of their choosing, with the only requirement being that the final product be related



## Madagascar from A to Z

Written by Grace L. Gibson

Illustrated by Soleil T. Nguyen

Translated by Michel Andriamihajirinina

Edited by Michele R. Tennant

Translation Assistance: Jill and Victor Ranaivoson

## Madagasikara, A ka hatramin'ny Z

Nosoratan'i Grace L. GIBSON

Sary nataon'i Soleil T. NGUYEN

Nadikan'i Michel ANDRIAMIHAJANIRINA

Narindran'i Michele R. TENNANT

Mpanдика teny Mpanampy: Jill sy Victor RANAIVOSON



# biodiverse countries in the world.



Madagascar Mobile Library patrons reading book in the village of Manankasina.



The kingfisher has a long thin beak.  
Lava sy manify ny vavan'ny vintsy.



In 2018 - Michel Andriamihanirina (translator), Jean-Jacques Rafenomahazomanana (director mobile library), and Michele Tennant (editor) in the village of Manankasina.



Illustrator Soleil Nguyen and author Grace Gibson see printed book for first time at the Medical Library Association Annual Conference, May 2018, Atlanta.



The panther chameleon shows off rainbow scales.

Miloko toy ny havana ny tana.



to biodiversity and/or conservation in Madagascar. Inspired by course readings on conservation education projects in Madagascar and the wonderful Ako book series created by Alison Jolly and her colleagues, two undergraduate students, Grace Gibson and Soleil Nguyen, teamed up to develop as their class project a children's alphabet book and an activity book. When the books were revealed on the last day of the semester, the quality of the work actually brought tears to the eyes of a few students and left many others speechless! The activity book following a blue coua (bird) named Jolly was adorable, but the A-Z book's engaging text and gorgeous watercolor illustrations surpassed all expectations. Entitled *Madagascar from A to Z*, the book highlighted the unique fauna and flora of Madagascar, and had a strong conservation message. While American children were the intended audience for the book, it was clear that such a book could be enjoyed by Malagasy children as well, if we could make the book accessible and available to them.

With the support of our Dean of Libraries Judith Russell, and the LibraryPress@UF, our team did exactly that. Soleil and Grace committed to this long-term project without reservation. The book quickly became an international collaboration with the addition

of Michel Andriamihajanirina, a Malagasy colleague located in Madagascar. For the next two years, Michel acted as our expert in Malagasy culture as well as translator. On my trip to Madagascar about halfway through the publication process, we worked together to solve the thorny problem of rewriting the text such that it could be easily translated—Malagasy has five fewer letters than English, and words rarely begin with the same letter in both English and Malagasy. Translating “C is for Comet Moth, with bright yellow wings” just doesn't work when “comet moth” is “lolo fito rambo” in Malagasy. Following translation, Grace and Soleil turned the book into a professional-looking product by adding borders and artistic accents throughout. Jill (UF International Center) and Victor Ranaivoson contributed the final proofreading piece by back-translating the text from Malagasy to English to ensure that the initial translation was correct. Finally, Soleil's cover illustrations provided a colorful and inviting entrée to the unique wildlife inside. In the summer of 2018 *Madagascar from A to Z* was finally published with 400 copies donated by Smathers Libraries distributed by our study abroad cohort in Madagascar.

Distribution was strategic in that we targeted non-governmental agencies that already had strong educational





# The weevil is red and black. Mena sy mainty ny lokon'ny lavatenda.



programs, particularly those related to conservation or language/reading skills, in disparate parts of the country. Books went to Association Mitsinjo in Andasibe, Centre ValBio near Ranomafana National Park, and Blue Ventures and Steph'Andava in the fishing village of Andavadoaka. We developed a partnership with the Madagascar Mobile Library, providing them with books and funds raised by the study abroad students and librarians. In the capital city of Antananarivo, we gave a copy of the book to each child who attended the Sisters' of the Good Shepherds Centre Fihavanana; most of these children had never owned their own book. Our study abroad cohorts in Madagascar have used the books to teach reading and English to children and adults at many of these locations, and at Steph'Andava, engaged the students through drawing and play-acting the animals found within. In addition to introducing Malagasy children to the unique critters in their own backyards, these activities have strengthened the university's ties to Madagascar, and have provided powerful learning experiences for our study abroad students. We are especially proud of our collaboration with the Mobile Library, and expect to work with them in the future to gain a greater understanding of how the books are used, and to develop training materials to help teachers include the books in the curriculum. Hundreds of children have been touched by the books via the Mobile Library alone, and we are anxious to learn more about if and how *Madagascar from A to Z* is successful in delivering its conservation message.



*Children engaged with book at NGO Steph'Andava, in the village of Andavadoaka.*

*2018 UF study abroad student Tommy Soto using book to teach children at NGO Steph'Andava, in village of Andavadoaka.*

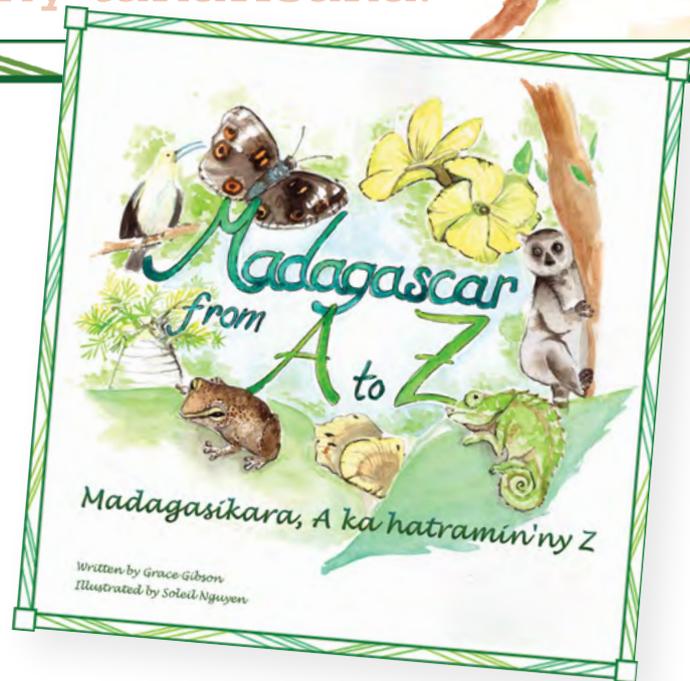


The leaf-tailed gecko hides in the forest.

Miafina anaty ala ny tanafisaka.



The LibraryPress@UF was awarded a 2019 LoPresti Award in the Children's Book category for *Madagascar from A to Z*. The awarding committee of the Southeast Chapter of the Art Libraries Society of North America noted that the book is "educational and beautifully illustrated," "a group effort," and "an excellent source for libraries with a Children's Lit collection." Our team is thrilled that the book has been so well received here and in Madagascar. There is nothing more gratifying to us than seeing children engaged by *Madagascar from A to Z*, reading aloud in Malagasy, and trying to sound out the English. The project continues to grow as we collaborate with the Mobile Library and others. Although they have graduated and moved on, Soleil, Grace, and I are currently working with Blue Ventures and Steph'Andava to create a new version of the book, highlighting the wildlife of the west and south. This book will be translated into both the Vezo dialect and French. According to our colleagues at Steph'Andava, very few books are written in both languages (and there is probably nothing that includes both plus English), so we look forward to filling this gap in the children's literature of Madagascar.



### Further reading:

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