

Project: Plants and animals evolution in Madagascar

Summary

The island of Madagascar is characterized by an exceptional evolutionary history. The isolation of the island, the topographic and environmental variation, as well as the large variety of rocks and types of soils, has had a fundamental role in the plants and animals evolution. The aim of this project is to encourage the children in the Malagasy communities to know the evolutionary history of the island. A one-day session has been carried out in the Tulear district where 300 children participated. Furthermore, a tutoring guide for teachers has been elaborated, along with a poster distributed to schools in the island. Students and teachers have welcomed this project with enthusiasm.

Introduction

Madagascar is the fourth largest island in the world and is home to 5% of the world's plant and animal species, with the majority of species being endemics, which occurs nowhere else on the planet. The Madagascar's endemic groups are ancient and evolved from their closest relatives many million years ago. The long isolation of the island from neighbouring landmasses, topographic and climatic variations, and a wide variety of rock and soil types has played a major evolutionary role.

Despite its rich evolutionary history, Madagascar remains one of the world's poorest nations. Within the educational sphere much work remains. Even though the 89.3% of the children studies the primary level, only a 76% assists regularly to school, and in 2006, a 48% of the population under 15 years old and a 29% over 15 was illiterate. Moreover, we can recognise important level differences depending on the socio-economic origin and the urban or rural zones: in rural zones 1 out of 2 persons (over 15) is illiterate, compared to 1 out of 5 persons in cities.

The main objective of the project "Plants and animals evolution in Madagascar" is to transmit plants and animals evolution knowledge of the island to children in the Malagasy communities. In order to do so, within this project, three tasks have been carried out:

Task 1: One-day session about plants and animals' evolution in Madagascar.

A one-day session about evolution was given the 12th April 2014 in Tulear (Madagascar). This activity was organized by E. Carrió and E. Barona (Yelcho Foundation and University of Valencia) with NGO Bel Avenir's collaboration. This entity has its headquarters in Tulear and five educative centres in the district. The activities were directed by 17 teachers and 9 volunteers of Bel Avenir, and 2 partners of our group. These activities were previously discussed and prepared, in order to adapt them to the educational level of each group of students, with Bel Avenir's aid. During the day different activities were carried out (between 8:00 and 16:00h) in which 300 children between 5-16 years and linked to one of the five centres participated. The activities tried to explain the content of evolution in Madagascar; they consisted of lessons taught in the classrooms, in the field and in the laboratories, together with games and workshops. Photographs of this day are attached in appendix I.

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Task 2: A teacher guide book and a poster about plants and animals' evolution in Madagascar.

A guide book for teachers has been elaborated in order to gather the outstanding contents of the plants and animals' evolution in Madagascar, as well as a poster to hand in classrooms. The guide book was directed for teacher's use and for adapting it to the students' level. The guide book and poster contents have been elaborated by A. Donnellan, I. Gutiérrez, V. Cuesta and E. Carrió (Yelcho Foundation, University of Valencia, University of Auckland). The guide book has 12 pages in A4 size, and the poster has a size of 120 x 50 cm. Both materials have been laid out by E. Barona.

200 guide books and 250 posters have been printed and distributed by the collaborators of Bel Avenir to the teachers in Madagascar. Both the guide book and the poster can be found in Yelcho Foundation's web page (fundacionyelcho.org) and nowadays they are already used by both organizations as reference material for volunteers in the preparation of workshops about the evolution in Madagascar. We plan to make the guide book and the poster available through the ESEB web page. Our next step is to create a campaign to spread these materials in Malagasy language with the collaboration of public entities and other Malagasy ONG's in order to distribute these materials to hidden populations.

Appendix I: Photographs of the evolution day (Tulear, 12th April 2014).

Appendix II: Receipts

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Appendix I



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