Our Planet Reviewed
Return from the Mozambique and Madagascar missions

The scientists who had set off to explore the unknown biodiversity in the coastal forests of Mozambique and the sea bed around Madagascar have returned after a 145-day operation between April 2009 and June 2010. Their mission was to make an inventory of the biodiversity in these regions, which have not been studied much up to now.

Our Planet Reviewed, a revival of the great naturalist expeditions
In 2009, the Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle and the NGO Pro–Natura International, in partnership with the International Union for Conservation of Nature, launched “Our Planet Reviewed”, a major 10–year naturalist expedition programme, with the unprecedented aim of making a massive inventory of biodiversity in geographical areas that had previously been little explored and up accelerating the discovery of species new to science. Mozambique and Madagascar were identified as priority nature conservation regions and were the bases for the first stage in this special programme, which was organised into two parts: land and sea.

The land expedition
From November to December 2009, a team led by Olivier Pascal (Pro–Natura International) travelled through the dry forests of Northern Mozambique, in Cabo Delgado Province. The exploration campaign was based on 2 components, “Vegetation & Flora” and “Zoology”, taking samples of fauna (small vertebrates, small mammals, bats, birds, amphibians, insects…) and flora (ligneous species) in these remains of forests which are among the 10 most threatened ecosystems on the African continent. A thorough exploration also enabled scientists to carry out a health check on these areas in order to draw up future conservation measures.
After nearly 6 weeks in the field, the scientists were able to observe that there were fewer unspoiled forests in Mozambique than was thought. However, the variety of species that they found there was in line with their expectations. They have brought back a large number of outstanding samples, including trees and bushes, that have never been reported in Mozambique before.

**The marine expeditions**
Between April 2009 and June 2010, 3 marine exploration campaigns were carried out in the southern half of Mozambique, north-western Madagascar and southern Madagascar. These expeditions, directed by Professor Philippe Bouchet (Muséum national d’Histoire naturelle) were used to make an inventory of marine flora and fauna (fish, algae, macrobenthos), and describe the great biogeographical units and populations of these areas, which have been little explored due to the difficult weather conditions, particularly in southern Madagascar.

This great inventory revealed a surprising characteristic for the scientists: the south-western Indian Ocean cannot be compared in terms of biodiversity with other regions in the Indo-Pacific biogeographical province. Indeed, nearly half of the species sampled are, although less numerous than in New Caledonia or the Philippines, for example, are thought to be unknown. The scientists have therefore returned from the field confident of having made discoveries that now need to be confirmed.

**What next?**
Now that the scientists have returned from their missions in Mozambique and Madagascar, we now need to process and analyse the thousands of specimens of flora and fauna collected, which will form an outstanding database in terms of both quantity and quality.

The systematicians can now start their identification work, and although most of the samples won’t be giving up their secrets for several years to come, some have already been examined in depth and identified and described for science. For example, the gastropod Bolma mainbaza Alf (Maestrati & Bouchet, 2010), a description of which has just been published in the American scientific journal Nautilus, had been netted during the first campaign in southern Mozambique, on a ledge off Maputo. Many other descriptions should follow...

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**Scientific Partners:**

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**Madagascar:** The Spanish Institute of Oceanography; The University of Tuléar Fish and Marine Sciences Institute (IH.SM); Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS)