ONJA RAZAFINDRATSIMA • MADAGASCAR

Doctorate in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology

The first student from Madagascar ("the real country, not the movie") to study at Rice University, Razafindratsima comes from a family that puts a premium on education.

"My dad was a tailor," she said, "and my parents worked hard to put their five children through school, which is not free in my country."

After completing her undergraduate studies and diplôme d'études approfondies at the University of Antananarivo in Madagascar, Razafindratsima decided to pursue her graduate education at Rice due to the expertise of the university's faculty members.

"Amy Dunham [assistant professor of ecology and evolutionary biology] conducts research in Madagascar, and I started to read some of her publications," she said. "I found that we share the same research interests, so I knew she would be a great adviser throughout my graduate studies."

For her dissertation, Razafindratsima plans to return to Madagascar to research the role of lemurs in forest regeneration and seed dispersal. She expects her experiences in Rice's Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology to train her well not only for her dissertational research, but also for a career in conservation biology, where she hopes to use her knowledge and experiences to help prevent the extinction of lemurs in Madagascar.

"I would like to assist in the creation and management of protected areas and help establish new governmental policies for biodiversity protection in Madagascar," she said. "In addition, I hope to teach at the University of Antananarivo or at other local institutions so that I can share my knowledge with future researchers and enhance the scientific capacity of women in my home country."

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