



Extinct Madagascar: Picturing the Island's Past

By Steven M. Goodman, William L. Jungers

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The landscapes of Madagascar have long delighted zoologists, who have discovered, in and among the island's baobab trees and thickets, a dizzying array of animals, including something approaching one hundred species of lemur. Madagascar's mammal fauna, for example, is far more diverse, and more endemic, than early explorers and naturalists ever dreamed of. But in the past 2,500 or so years—a period associated with natural climatic shifts and ecological change, as well as partially coinciding with the arrival of the island's first human settlers—a considerable proportion of Madagascar's forests have disappeared; and in the wake of this loss, a number of species unique to Madagascar have vanished forever into extinction.

In *Extinct Madagascar*, noted scientists Steven M. Goodman and William L. Jungers explore the recent past of these land animal extinctions. Beginning with an introduction to the geologic and ecological history of Madagascar that provides context for the evolution, diversification, and, in some cases, rapid decline of the Malagasy fauna, Goodman and Jungers then seek to recapture these extinct mammals in their environs. Aided in their quest by artist Velizar Simeonovski's beautiful and haunting digital paintings—images of both individual species and ecosystem assemblages reproduced here in full color—Goodman and Jungers reconstruct the lives of these lost animals and trace their relationships to those still living.

Published in conjunction with an exhibition of Simeonovski's artwork set to open at the Field Museum, Chicago, in the fall of 2014, Goodman and Jungers's awe-inspiring book will serve not only as a sobering reminder of the very real threat of extinction, but also as a stunning tribute to Madagascar's biodiversity and a catalyst for further research and conservation.

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Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Review

“Goodman and Jungers’s book is a comprehensive work, bringing to a general audience an overview of ecological change and animal extinction on Madagascar in the Holocene. While not a technical summary, it cites close to four hundred scientific papers which can lead the interested reader further on his quest for information. Especially interesting is also the first part of the book, which gives a thorough general introduction to Madagascar starting with the breaking up of the supercontinent Gondwana some 165 million years ago. Several aspects are discussed: geography, geology, vegetation types, etc., all in an easy-to-read language and documented with well-chosen pictures. I highly recommend this authoritative and thoroughly enjoyable book!”

(Petra De Block, Botanic Garden Meise, Belgium *Biological Conservation*)

“*Extinct Madagascar* invites us to explore that world and to probe the circumstances surrounding its demise. Understanding Madagascar’s recent past is critically important because many of its remaining endemic vertebrates are highly endangered and could face a similar fate. The authors are two of the top scholars in this field, whose wealth of knowledge about extinct Madagascar is delightfully displayed in this book. . . . Anyone interested in Madagascar’s recent past must read Goodman and Jungers’s book.”

(*Journal of Vertebrate Paleontology*)

"A hauntingly beautiful book."

(Oliver Sacks)

"The modern fauna of Madagascar reflects the country’s long history of isolation from Africa (and Eurasia), despite its relatively close proximity. All its primates, for example, are in the broad ‘lemur’ category, found nowhere else today. Its mammalian fossil record is very short, almost all within the last 5,000 years. But the diversity is high, with seventeen species of extinct ‘lemur,’ including many far larger in size than their extant cousins. In this volume, zoologist Goodman and paleoanthropologist Jungers present these past denizens of Madagascar to a wide audience. . . . A superb book for all readers, including those for whom Madagascar is unknown. Highly recommended.”

(E. Delson, CUNY Herbert H. Lehman College *Choice*)

“Large faunal species disappeared from Madagascar at a time when humans were certainly present on the island. A deduction, though not a parsimonious one, purported by many scholars is to attribute these extinctions to the hands of man, whether as a primary or contributory factor. . . . By contrast, in *Extinct Madagascar*, Steven M. Goodman and William L. Jungers explore in greater depth than the current literature presently offers the recent past of these animals through specific case studies presented by sites and by species. Each site is splendidly illustrated by the artist Velizar Simeonovski in arresting artworks, depicting how some of these animals may have lived or gone extinct based on available palaeontological evidence. These plates allow the reader a pictorial (though still speculative) glance of the past. . . . *Extinct Madagascar* provides superb information on a large number of palaeontological sites, contextualising the ecological uniqueness of each site. . . . The material presented should certainly provide more ‘meat’ to pursue research on the elusive nature of past extinction processes in Madagascar, especially if the past is to be used as a guide to conservation of biodiversity. This is more relevant than ever, with the huge challenge facing biodiversity in Madagascar today with continuing climate change and increasing human population impacts.”

(Malika Virah-Sawmy, University of New South Wales, Australia *Holocene*)

“*Extinct Madagascar* is an excellent and comprehensive work with a broad appeal across many disciplines. For those interested in Madagascar and rigorously testing hypotheses regarding paleoenvironment, community ecology, and extinction, this book is invaluable and represents a comprehensive synthesis of what is known about the island’s past environments, the role of humans in environmental change, and the mechanisms of extinction. This glimpse back in time constitutes an impressive tribute to Madagascar’s biodiversity as well as a reminder of the reality and threat of extinction. With a devastating extinction event occurring right before our eyes, the island’s future relies on whether or not we choose to act, and the actions taken will likely be more effective if they begin with an understanding of the environmental change that has already occurred.”

(Karen E. Samonds, Northern Illinois University *Journal of Mammalogy*)

“Goodman and Jungers have carefully discussed each subfossil site and its community. . . . Extremely useful to both biologists and policy makers to have these two volumes [*Extinct Madagascar* and the *Atlas of Selected Land Vertebrates of Madagascar*] published and easily accessible. Not only are sighting, trapping, and paleontological sites labeled and mapped, but the type of forest and ecosystem is also clear. Current threats to the fauna are also outlined. Recent renaming of taxonomic groups based on molecular evidence is also clarified, making this information very useful to young scientists. The authors, well-known, seasoned scientists, are praised for excellent fieldwork and thorough scholarship in presenting these data of Malagasy fauna past and present.”

(Patricia Chapple Wright, Stony Brook University *Quarterly Review of Biology*)

“Another masterpiece from Steve Goodman, this time in partnership with Bill Jungers (who brings his palaeontology and eco-morphology expertise to the fore), that provides fascinating reconstructions of the fate of some of the extraordinary fauna of Madagascar. Throughout, the exquisite plates by Velizar Simeonovski, which combine superb artistic work with anatomical understanding, underpin the work. The book is extremely accessible for non-academic readers, who will gain a clear picture of the widespread changes to the Malagasy flora and fauna and how these changes occurred, and yet will satisfy the scientific community because it provides a comprehensive set of references that can be used as a guide to further in-depth research.”

(Clive Nuttman, University of Cambridge *Conservation Biology*)

“*Extinct Madagascar* is original; there is no other like it. It is data-rich, fabulously illustrated, and has just enough humor to make it fun to read as well as intellectually stimulating. It is not a review of the anatomy or taxonomy of the various taxa, yet it presents sufficient amounts of detail in this regard to make visualization possible. The book also provides a very nice synthesis of cultural, genetic, and paleontological evidence for human arrival—I think the best out there.”

(Laurie Godfrey *University of Massachusetts Amherst*)

“The extinction (and its causes) of the many subfossil organisms described in *Extinct Madagascar* is one of biodiversity science’s great unsolved mysteries. Goodman and Jungers summarize and present a monumental amount of information pertaining to these species, combining storytelling (descriptive accounts of the scientists involved, of various events and adventures) and marvelous plates with exquisite details of the subfossils and associated metadata to illustrate both the landscape and the organisms of the Holocene epoch in Madagascar. Their literary approach as well as the data reviewed and assembled make for a wonderful addition to the literature. *Extinct Madagascar* will have broad appeal across disciplines and will be a priceless book for graduate seminar work. I can’t wait.”

(Anne Yoder *Duke University*)

“An authoritative and fascinating exploration of one of Nature's greatest evolutionary experiments.”
(Ian Tattersall, American Museum of Natural History *author of "Masters of the Planet: The Search for Our Human Origins"*)

About the Author

Steven M. Goodman is the MacArthur Field Biologist at the Field Museum, Chicago, and based in Antananarivo, Madagascar. He is coeditor of *The Natural History of Madagascar* and *Atlas of Selected Land Vertebrates of Madagascar*, the former published and the latter distributed by the University of Chicago Press. **William L. Jungers** is distinguished teaching professor and chair of anatomical sciences at Stony Brook University School of Medicine. **Velizar Simeonovski** is an artist based in Chicago who specializes in reconstructions of extinct species and prehistoric landscapes. He often works with Field Museum scientists.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Edward Stewart:

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Suzanne Brooke:

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Cassandra Sanderson:

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