



Protecting Madagascar's Forests...
with Chocolate





PHOTO: PAUL SALAMAN

The MaMaBay landscape in northeastern Madagascar is one the country's last forest wildernesses. It is home to incredible biodiversity with more than 80% of its plants and animals found nowhere else in the world—and 20% found nowhere else in Madagascar.





PHOTO: ANDREW KIRKBY/WCS

However the forests within and around Makira Natural Park are threatened by shifting agriculture. Forests are cut and burned each year to produce food, followed by a new farm the next year. As populations grow and with little knowledge or confidence in alternative techniques, more and more forest is lost.





PHOTO: PAUL SALAMAN

WCS has been working in MaMaBay since 1993 and helped to establish and support the management of Makira and Masoala National Park as well as 80 community managed forests around the landscape. However an alternative to slash and burn agriculture needed to be developed.



CACAO



PHOTO: JOHNNAH RANARINIAINA/WCS

About 10 years ago, WCS started to promote cacao as a new sustainable source of revenue for farmers in the landscape. Communities were taught how to grow, harvest and manage cacao—and even how to make their own chocolate. Here, WCS staff member Oswald Beantanana teaches youth in MaMaBay about cacao growing and how to make chocolate.





PHOTO: ANDREW KIRKBY/WCS

Agroforestry techniques and training were integrated, helping farmers mix cacao with other local food crops and forest trees to reduce erosion and build soil fertility. Farmers were able to produce food without clearing forests and had more revenue from the cash crops.





PHOTO: ANDREW KIRKBY/WCS

Over the years the project has grown, WCS created the first-ever farmer cooperative in the region. Cacao and other products can now be processed, stored and exported to international buyers. This new system created a ripple effect with more cooperatives being established in the region. Here farmers are drying cacao seeds near Makira Natural Park.





PHOTO: ANDREW KIRKBY/WCS

In 2019, WCS started a new partnership with swiss chocolate maker Chococats Halba, which is helping to scale up the project and buying cacao at a premium price while providing their cacao experts to support WCS field staff and farmers.





PHOTO: JOHNNAH RANARINIAINA/WCS

In 2020, Madagascar's chocolate reached the shelves in Switzerland with Felestin Randroamjafy, farmer cooperative president, to help launch the event, hosted at the Masoala rainforest hall at Zurich Zoo.





PHOTO: ANDREW KIRKBY/WCS

As the project continues to grow and we help more farmers adopt sustainable farming systems that at the same time improve their family's wellbeing, we aim to continue to reduce forest loss and help protect wildlife, including this Helmet Vanga, one of the iconic species found only in the MaMaBay landscape.





PHOTO: ANDREW KIRKBY/WCS

Over the past 15 years, WCS has managed to lower deforestation rates by 25% in community areas and 84% within Makira Natural Park. We thank you for your support and helping us to this unique regions forests and wildlife. Pictured here: WCS staff members Oswald Beantanana (left) and Johnnah RANARINIAINA (right) with cooperative president Felestin Randroamjafy (center)

