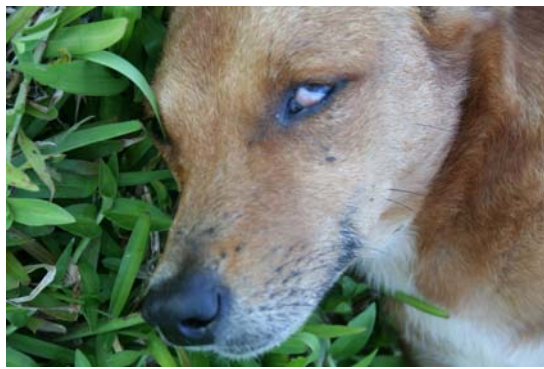


At the end of November, I went to Fampotobe to finish up some phenology work. I had two guys monitoring trees for about a year and needed to retrieve the data and supplies I left with them. My favorite dog of all time lives there, the Wonder-Dog Boks. We arrived at our old camp and I said to Paul, my guide, I wonder if Boks is still alive. Five minutes later, Boks comes running into camp tail wagging! He looked so healthy and fat and his eye that was gouged out in a wild boar chase wasn't all puffy. He could close his eyelid. We knew, however, that his owner



The eye that is no longer puffy.



A healthy looking Boks asking me to scratch his fat belly.

had moved about 10 km inland from the river we came up (He used to live along the river). Boks hung out with us and ate lots of chicken bones and red beans. The dogs here can handle the chicken bones. The next day, his owner showed up and looked very surprised to see him in our camp...we figured maybe he heard the motor on the boat and identifies that sound with our camp full of food-a-plenty for doggies named Boks. He went with us into the forest and was so cute. His owner told me I can bring him home, but I know that wouldn't go over well with some peeps.

I love the people in the Fampotobe region and the forest is really beautiful there, despite its unprotected status, however, it is so difficult to *physically* leave when I want to. I finished up the work in 3 days and then was stuck in the village of Fampotobe for 5 days waiting for a boat to take us across the Antongil Bay to Maroantsetra. The people I stay with are great, but I get antsy when there is no field work because then I start to fantasize about electricity and running water and ice cream. I did manage my time well, I must say, by reading a lot of scientific papers I have been carrying around with me. They had thus far been ignored in favor of fiction, but, I only brought 1 book and finished it, so the papers finally got my attention.

The family I stay with has a really "mean" zebu and they wanted me to take a picture of the patriarch with it. I always laugh when they tell me a zebu is mean because



The mean zebu, look at the steam coming from his nostrils.

they just eat grass, have bowel movements, chew cud, and they always move away from me or anyone who tries to approach them. They are so docile and dumb looking. But apparently there are mean zebus. We went to the pasture of the “mean” zebu and it did nothing but eat grass while I took pictures. They want me to send them multiple copies to show everyone how close he got to the mean zebu and they told me I can have one as a souvenir.

A typical day in Fampotobe: wake up with the roosters and women pounding rice at 430 AM. Hide in my room until about 600 AM, eat a breakfast of wet rice and honey. Retire to my room and read. I emerge when the heat is too much (the tin roofs make it unbearable around 1000 AM) and find a cool place outside to read. I try to avoid the roving hordes of kids whose favorite

pastime is “let’s go stare at Babala¹ while she does ordinary things like eat and talk and read.” It’s fun for them, but I get tired of it when they try to get my attention so I will look in their direction so they can scream and laugh and run away. At some point during the day someone offers me a giant bunch of litchis and I eat these in the shade almost as fast as the Malagasy, spitting seeds at the chickens. Noon, we eat lunch of rice and red beans. I bought too many red beans early in the field season and we were still trying to finish them. We never did, I gave away a lot as “gifts” to the folks of Fampotobe. 1300-1430 is nap time despite the heat in my room. 1430-1800, same as morning although maybe I go fetch water from the well because



Chickens, litchis, and a duck.

it’s fun to do. Or I might chase the gang of ducks that hang out near the house. Ducks look really funny when they run. 1800 we eat a dinner of rice and red beans. Afterwards I take a bucket bath in a really indiscrete “shower” and I am so paranoid that the kids will try to watch me. Then it gets dark and I sleep. Everyday, all day, we all listen for a boat to whisk us off to the electricity and ice cream heaven that is Maroantsetra—I had three others with me also anxiously awaiting a boat.

When a boat finally did arrive, it was a relatively small fishing boat with a small engine. My camera battery was dead so unfortunately no snaps of it. It was by far the most eventful boat ride for me in Antongil Bay. We set off at 6AM for a nice 8 hour journey with 2 stops before Maroantsetra. There were more chickens than human passengers. My cook was partly to blame for this. She kept buying up chickens in Fampotobe because they are 2000 Ar less (1\$ = 1700 Ar) than those of the same size in Maroantsetra. She left the town with 15 chickens and 1 duck. Other passengers had the same idea. It was a wooden boat with a small raised cabin in the front. We sat/slept on all the baggage on the bottom of the boat, and at least 4 guys sat at the back near the little 30 horsepower engine and jerry cans of fuel. The top of the cabin was for the chickens and they were upwind, so the ride smelled like chicken droppings. That was until the first stop where we picked up about 200 kilos of dried fish. Yack. Anyone who knows me knows that this is pretty close to my idea of hell on Earth...being surrounded by smelly dried fish for an extended period of time. I am way too sensitive to smells. All I needed was the woman next to

¹ My name is pronounced with an “L” and no “R”s here. I think it is cute coming from the kids but I correct the adults.

me to be seasick and puke every 10 minutes. Lucky for me, she was there, doing just that. Perhaps to add to the experience someone should get severe GI distress and need to relieve themselves on the boat. She was there, too. I felt really bad for her. She suddenly announced she was sick and had diarrhea. Usually on these public boats the guys at the engine move towards the front and let the person do their business off the back of the boat, but the 4 guys refused to move. Everyone on the boat started discussing her situation, where should she go? They suggested she move to the front of the boat and lean over the edge, but she was afraid of falling off the side of the boat because of course the snickering guys refused to slow the boat down. Someone held up a bucket, but someone else said, no, not that one, use this bucket. She said, after much discussion by everyone, that perhaps she can wait the hour to the next stop. She sat with a very pained look on her face for about 20 minutes then said she could not wait. So, she went with the bucket option. All of the guys at the back of the boat started laughing, and I taught Paul a new English word, "jerks." There was no where to go for privacy so we all just turned our heads and hummed to ourselves so as not to hear anything. But then, she emptied the bucket in the wake that would occasionally splash me, yuck, and it did when she stuck the bucket in the wake. Could anything be more offensive to my nose and sense of cleanliness? I doubt it.

Also, two guys almost blew up the boat. At the second stop the two potential arsonists crowded in the back so now there were 6 snickering men by the fuel and engine. These two new guys are smoking. I said to Paul, um, can you ask those guys not to smoke next to the fuel? Paul got very angry and started yelling at them. Others on the boat nodded in agreement and added to the discussion. The guys continued puffing away ignoring my "look of death" and Paul's derisions. Then the captain started to remove the cap to a can of fuel to refuel!!! Paul raised his voice to a very un-Malagasy level and reminded everyone of the boat that blew up under similar circumstances about 3 months ago. The captain at least waited until the two smokers threw their cigs into the ocean to refuel.

I love it here.



Think, think, think the sound of pounding rice early in the morning. These three young girls had to pound rice for their grandmother. I couldn't do it for a minute, I am such a weakling.