



Joint statement from IPS, coming out of the IPS Congress in Antananarivo, and the IUCN SSC PSG (represented by Vice-Chairs)

New Research Reveals Urban Luxury Trade of Threatened Lemurs; Conservationists at World Congress Call for Two-Front Strategy

ANTANANARIVO, MADAGASCAR – July 26, 2025 – Research presented at the International Primatological Society’s 2025 World Congress reveals a widespread urban trade in lemur meat, a previously hidden economy driven by affluent consumption rather than rural poverty. The findings expose a critical new front in the fight to save Madagascar's iconic and endangered primates, demanding an urgent and strategic conservation policy and investment.

The research, a four-year national assessment led by Prof. Cortni Borgerson, shows that while subsistence lemur hunting by food-insecure rural communities remains the largest threat to lemurs, a parallel crisis has emerged in Madagascar's cities. Here, lemur meat is a luxury product, commanding the highest price on the market. The trade specifically targets threatened lemur species.

“We are now facing two challenges: one to reduce the food insecurity that drives subsistence hunting near our last remaining forests, and another to address a crisis of affluent desire in our cities. Crucially, we have a clear strategy which supports people and addresses the fundamental needs that drive both economies,” said Cortni Borgerson of Montclair State University.

The study, based on interviews with over 2,600 participants across 17 Malagasy cities, highlights a profound risk imbalance: economically struggling peri-urban suppliers face the threat of imprisonment to earn a reliable cash income, while the affluent urban buyers who create the demand feel immune to consequences. By addressing the fundamental human needs driving both the rural and urban trades—food security in villages, stable incomes in towns, and consumer preferences in cities—we can forge a partnership that improves lives and Madagascar's unique natural heritage.

We call for a multi-pronged, two-front strategy:

1. To the Government of Madagascar: We applaud the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development for its commitment to science-based policymaking and offer these data in the spirit of partnership. We urge the rapid development and enforcement of national policies that disrupt the urban luxury trade by:

1a. Strengthening Firearms Regulations: Implementing stricter national controls on the sale and possession of shotguns and ammunition used in the illegal commercial trade, supported by incentivized buyback programs to permanently (and humanely) remove these weapons from circulation.

2b. Focusing Enforcement on Urban Demand: Shifting strategic law enforcement focus from rural poor to the affluent urban consumers who create the market for this illegal trade.

2. To the International Community, Businesses, and Donors: A strategy targeting the urban trade must be built upon a renewed and expanded foundation of support for rural communities. This is a matter of "and," not "either/or." We call for direct investment and partnership with the Government of Madagascar, Universities, and civil society organizations to:

2a. Invest in Rural Food Security: Redouble long-term investment in initiatives that bolster rural food systems against inflation and increase sustainable access to diverse, affordable, and safe sources of meat and produce for the most vulnerable communities near protected areas.

2b. Fund Non-Land-Based Skilled-Job Creation: Make at-scale investments in skilled job development that is not dependent on land use, particularly in the growing peri-urban regions near critical protected areas. This provides alternative, sustainable livelihoods for those who might otherwise supply the illegal trade.

2c. Support the Science that Underpins Policy: Sustain funding for the long-term field research required to monitor these complex threats, adapt strategies, and ensure all lemur conservation action is guided by the best scientific data.

The research previewed at the IPS Congress presents shocking evidence of an urban lemur trade, but it also provides the clarity needed to confront this crisis. The full findings are forthcoming in a peer-reviewed scientific publication.

The IUCN SSC Primate Specialist Group, the International Primatological Society, and Prof. Borgerson are committed to working alongside the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development and all stakeholders to turn these findings into effective, compassionate, on-the-ground action. We have a data-driven strategy. The time to act is now.