

A WORD FROM THE PRESIDENT OF CETAMADA



Tongasoa everyone to the Humpback Whale World Congress
on Ile Sainte Marie!

Nosy Boraha, in Malagasy, is known for being the haven for pirates in the XVIIIth century, but today it is renowned across the Indian Ocean for its Humpback whale watching between June and October.

The last "industrial" hunting season to take place in the area was in 1951. A moratorium, initiated by the Seychelles in 1979 and imposed since 1986 in the Indian Ocean, and Whale Watching activities, has been gradually put in place for the last 25 years around the island of Sainte Marie.

The humpback whale, or Trozona as it is known here, is a sacred animal that villagers also call Zagnahary-be, "the great ancestor".

An ancient belief tells of a story that when people were hungry (after the destruction of crops by a cyclone), a mother-whale offered her calf to the villagers, dropping it on the reef.

Today, humpback whale strandings are always regarded by the villagers (Fokonolona) as a gift from the gods. During this time the Tangalamena (Masters of Tradition) are always there to enact the ancestral rites (Fomba) so as not to provoke anger from the ancestors.

Each year during the austral winter, the presence of whales in the Sainte Marie Canal is a major economic engine for the entire population. In fact, many tourists come to watch the spectacular behaviour of these giants of the seas generating significant revenue for the survival of tourism; the main job-creator on the island.

In anticipation of this time, to avoid anarchic development of whale watching activities and the disturbance of whales in their breeding cycle, a ministerial decree governing the observation of marine mammals in Madagascar was set-out and initiated in 2000.

Thus, Cetamada association was given the task of propagating the document and setting up a code of conduct.

Specialized eco-volunteer guides are trained each year by the association as the guarantors of these rules of conduct for boat observations.

They are, like the Tangalamena for the traditions, those who convey the rules for respectful observation of animals in their natural environment. Cetamada is committed to advocacy (environmental education), training (community development) and a scientific research program.

At Cetamada, we are convinced that better knowledge of these whales is a recourse for better protection. Our commitment to scientific research and the organization of the World Congress are concrete acts motivated by the realization of this principle.

It is with this aim that the HWWC project was constructed by integrating an important dimension of sharing work on humpback whales between scientists worldwide.

Joining forces, our knowledge, our resources and our passion for advancing faster and better conservation of Humpback whales, our great heritage. They are certainly the best ambassadors for the marine environment and as they are so strongly threatened it is our duty to support all initiatives that can be taken to strengthen marine protected areas, marine parks and sanctuaries.

Once the "Whale Route" in the Indian Ocean will be classified as a UNESCO World Heritage, no longer will this be a topic of discussion for hunters, and it would most likely open the way for classifying other migratory routes on our planet.

Thank you all for your presence, an honour not only for the HWWC and its organizers but also for Madagascar.

Long live whales and long life to those who protect them !



HENRY BELLON
PRESIDENT CETAMADA

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