

# Madagascar for Real



Day Gecko in Sambava. (David Parks photo)

Amazingly, the first people to settle in Madagascar seem to have come from 4000 miles away in what is now Indonesia. They arrived no more than 2000 years ago. Except for New Zealand, Madagascar was the last large and readily habitable land mass to be discovered and settled. The Malagasy language is closely related to languages spoken in Borneo. Indonesian ancestry is visible in the faces of many of the Malagasy people.



*Oplurus cuvieri* from dry tropical forest in Ankarafatsika National Park. (David Parks photo)

The Iguanid lizards like this *Oplurus* have a strange distribution pattern related to Madagascar's long isolation: found mostly in the New World, they are also present in Madagascar, Fiji and Tonga. In North America you can find Iguanid lizards like Fence Lizards (*Sceloporus*) and the Collared Lizard (*Crotaphytus collaris*) This species has a spiny tail which may deter predators when the lizard is headed into a rock or tree crevice.