

RECOVERING THE WILD SILK PRODUCTION IN MADAGASCAR FOR BIODIVERSITY AND LOCAL ECONOMY PROMOTION

The [Ny Tanintsika organization](#) works in the Ambohimahazo District of the Amoron'i Mania Region of Madagascar to support local actors in recovering the ancient practices of wild silk production. By the years, this production chain has become the second most important economic activity in the area.

Ny Tanintsika is a non-profit organization founded in 2002 with the support of the British NGO [Feedback Madagascar](#) which since 1995 has been a pioneer in recovering wild silk production practices in Madagascar.

In the country, the cultivated silk from breeding silkworms (*Bombyx mori*) was introduced in around 1850. Mulberry growth in regions of Madagascar is continuous and silkworm rearing can be done during a period of eight months in the year. Thanks to the favorable climatic conditions in the country, the sericulture using bred silkworms has shown its great potential and the Government of Madagascar is committed to expand this sector to diversify the national economy.

This industrial activity has replaced a long tradition of producing wild silk from the native silkworm [Borocera Madagascariensis](#), which lives in wild [Tapia trees](#). This wild silk moth (Landibe), endemic to Madagascar, is distributed throughout the island and in particular colonizes the Tapia forest of the central highlands.

The leaves of the Tapia tree provide food for the wild silk moth. Nonetheless, the Tapia tree and its natural habitat are threatened by human destruction, such as bush fires, firewood collection and charcoal production. Wild silk production largely disappeared also because the cultivated silk industry started employing many people to transform the silk into clothes, accessories, and objects.

Many national and international actors are currently highlighting the importance of revitalizing silk production in a way that helps preserve this local species and the Tapia forest, recovering the knowledge of wild silk that Malagasy people used since a long time.

Since 2002 the [Malagasy organization Ny Tanintsika](#) has been working in the village of Soatanana, in the Ambohimahazo district (Amoron'i Mania Region) to develop the entire production chain of wild silk. [Ny Tanintsika began to reproduce the Tapia in breeding nurseries](#), with successful results. Trees



that were planted in 2002 now measure 2 metres in height and every year more than 100,000 feet of Tapia are planted as part of the forest's restoration. Women collaborate with the *Community forest management associations* (COBA) in the Tapia forests to source silk cocoons. Some women also breed silkworms on mulberry trees, combining bred silk with wild silk to produce their textiles.

All the local women work with silk, transforming silk cocoons into silk floss, and are in charge of spinning, dyeing and weaving the silk. This is a traditional practice which has been passed down from generation to generation. The complex manufacturing process is described in detail on the Ny Tanintsika website.

Two artisan cooperatives have been formed in Soatanana village: Tambatra and Firaisankina, involving more than 300 women weavers. Many activities have been realized to improve and develop the silk products, such as training programs, the provision of spinning equipment and weaving pedals, as well as strengthening the organization of workshop management. Ny Tanintsika has introduced spinning wheels and pedal looms that allow women to create new and original designs for their products. Currently they are able to produce an average of 200 scarves per month and fabrics sold by the meter.

To add value to fabrics, the artisan cooperatives use natural dyes for their silk products. The leaves, bark and roots of over 20 different plant species are used to create different colours, the main ones being dark red, yellow, brown, green, orange and black. Each different colour requires a different process; for example, mixing eucalyptus with soil makes black and passion flower is used to make green.

The Tambatra and Firaisankina cooperatives have become major suppliers for silk stores in Ambositra, Antsirabe and in Antananarivo, the capital city of Madagascar. Ny Tanintsika and Feedback Madagascar helped set up the Voajanahary shop in Ambositra, which only sells silk products produced in Soatanana and the surrounding region. With their work, the Ny Tanintsika and Feedback Madagascar organizations also help the cooperatives to publicize the craft products in international markets.

The approach adopted by Ny Tanintsika to work on the entire production chain of wild silk, recovering the wild silk moth and the ancient practices, allows to reach an important social, economic and environmental impact. Silk production represents a labor-intensive activity at the rural community level, employing both women and men at all stages of the production chain.

According to data from [studies on sericulture](#) in several African countries, about 60 species of wild silk-moths are known alone in East Africa. The recovery of these species, often endangered, represents a great potential to relaunch the wild silk production for enhancing local economies while protecting biodiversity. Recent initiatives such as the [United Nations Alliance for Sustainable Fashion](#) represent today a new international scenario for the promotion of ecological fabrics such as wild silk.



To know more

[Ni Tanitsika website](#)

[Feedback Madagascar in Artformadagascar.blogspot.com](#)

[Feedback Madagascar](#)

[International Sericultural Commission/Madagascar](#)

[Article in makiandmpho.comblog](#)

[Article in mongobay.com](#)

[Article in culturalsurvival.org](#)

[Article in enviroreach.com](#)

[Article in orbi.uliege.be](#)

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[Article in garlandmag.com](#)

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[Article in World Rainforest Movement website](#)

[Article in fibre2fashion.com](#)

[Article in ipsnews.net 1998](#)

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