A special colour of Parex mineral render has been developed to provide part of the backdrop for the unique new Madagascar feature at Chester Zoo.

Madagascar is the zoo’s first ever “walk-through” primate experience which allows visitors to experience endangered species at close quarters.

The new feature is home to critically endangered red ruffed lemurs, endangered ring-tailed lemurs and Madagascar’s top predator and largest carnivore, the fossa, a new species never before seen at Chester Zoo.

Parex Monorex GM render was used in the creation of artificial but life-like baobab trees which form part of the new Madagascar habitat. Following consultation with Parex a special colour of light green (V66) was developed specifically for the application featuring a number of “trees” created by forming expanded metal lath frames which were then rendered to create the final shape of the trees.

The Chester Zoo Horticulture and Botany department which was responsible for the work specified the Monorex mineral render after a recommendation from a contractor working on another part of the Madagascar project who had used the product before.
The department’s own team created the baobab trees by applying the Parex render to the metal frames, then sculpting it to form the shape of the trees. Mark Hargreaves, head of the team explained: “The material sets so hard it will last for a long time and we were able to use some artistic flair to create a realistic appearance which compares well with the natural trees.”

Curator of Horticulture, Phil Esseen, outlined the reason why green is a natural choice for the trees: “The interesting thing about why the baobabs trunks are so unusual and coloured green is that they contain chlorophyll – this means that the trees can shed their leaves when it is very hot and dry, thereby reducing the water lost through evaporation, but can still photosynthesize – ie use the sun’s energy to make food. Normally plants just photosynthesize through their leaves, and so their trunks are brown in colour!”

The artificial elements have been carefully designed and created to blend in with natural planting throughout the site. More than 1,100 shrubs, 50 trees and 360 different grasses – predominantly dry forest plants with small leaves, silvery foliage and spines – have been specially grown and planted by the zoo’s botany and horticulture experts. The environment has been created to provide world-class habitats for the animals living there, while also creating a true-to-life experience for nature lovers.

In all, the new zone occupies around 6,000 square metres and brings a taste of the world’s most diverse island to the UK as well as highlighting the zoo’s global conservation work and the campaign by the conservation and education charity to raise awareness of the threats faced by wildlife.

The lemur of Madagascar are the planet’s single highest primate conservation priority. Chester Zoo’s conservationists have been fighting to protect habitats and species in Madagascar for nearly ten years.

Selection of the Parex product continues a link with the zoo first forged several years ago when a high strength Parex resin anchor material was used to secure the steel frames of “trees” created for a new elephant compound.

**Client:**
Chester Zoo, Upton-by Chester, Cheshire

**Applicator:**
Chester Zoo Horticulture and Botany Department

**PAREX MATERIALS USED**
Parex Monorex GM mineral render in special colour Light Green (V66)