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Taking the first steps to save our disappearing Pacific birds

Greg Sherley *Project Officer, Avifauna Conservation and Invasive Species*



It is sad but true - and has been acknowledged and recognised for a long time - the birds of the Pacific are disappearing, and at an alarming rate. Recently, a group of people with different backgrounds but all with the common thread of knowledge, interest and commitment to saving the birds, met to address the myriad of problems facing Polynesian birds. This was in the form of a sub-regional avifauna conservation workshop for Polynesia, held in Rarotonga, on 26-30 April, 1999. It was the first of three planned for SPREP Pacific island member countries, convened by SPREP. Future workshops are planned for the Micronesian and Melanesian sub-regions in the Year 2000.

Twenty five people attended, with one representative each from most of the 10 Polynesian countries, as well as representatives from NGOs in the sub-region with interest in bird conservation. Four Polynesian ornithologist specialists were invited to provide advice and assist with facilitation. This group included Drs' Rod Hay and Hugh Robertson of New Zealand Department of Conservation; Dr Dick Watling from Fiji and Dr David Baker-Gabb from Australia. NZ's Department of Conservation generously allowed the workshop time free of charge as did the others. BirdLife International sent two representatives and funded the fares of the specialists

and the Non governmental organisation representatives involved.

A stimulating field trip was held in the Takitumu Conservation Area whose focus is the conservation of the Rarotongan Flycatcher (see picture below). This project exemplifies good species recovery practice in the Pacific.

The workshop was opened by Dorice Reid, Te Tika Mataiapo, who gave an inspiring speech relating spirituality and traditions of Cook Island people and their birds to modern day conservation issues and techniques.

A mature Kakerori, found only on Rarotonga, like many polynesian birds this species is unique but endangered



The aims of the Polynesian Avifauna Workshop

- 1 To review the 1991 South Pacific Regional Bird Conservation Programme Plan for Action.
- 2 Other main topics covered involved discussions on criteria for assessing the importance of avifauna conservation projects, and deciding on priority avifauna conservation projects on the basis of species, localities and processes (threats, generic issues).

1

South Pacific Regional Bird Conservation Programme Plan for Action

This plan was **originally developed** by the Avifauna Working Group at the SPREP Biodiversity Workshop held in Port Vila, Vanuatu on 24-28 October 1991. This plan was reviewed and **updated** at this workshop. Three groups reviewed the first two pages of the existing plan then submitted their improvements to the whole workshop. Changes were agreed and compiled for future submission to the other workshops (Melanesia and Micronesia). The work programme described in the 1991 plan was not reviewed because, in effect, this was going to be done by the workshop in establishing priorities. These priorities have been included for your information later, as they are relevant for the whole Pacific situation - not just the Polynesian countries.

The Goal

The goal of the 1991 Regional Bird Conservation Programme Plan for Action is:

To ensure the appropriate management of birds and their habitats in order to recover threatened species and to conserve all other indigenous bird species.

The Objectives

- 1 **Information**
To compile and obtain information on birds, their habitats and conservation status, and make it available in appropriate forms.
- 2 **Bird Surveys**
To identify priority species and, where necessary, to carry out surveys to assess and monitor their conservation status.
- 3 **Species Management**
To develop and implement species recovery and management plans for those species and areas whose conservation or management is a priority.
- 4 **Public Education and Publicity**
To develop and implement an education and publicity programme which promotes public

understanding of the needs and benefits of conserving birds and their habitats.

5 **Capacity building and involvement**

To provide training and support for communities and other stakeholders to implement the strategy.

6 **Legal Framework**

To provide models of appropriate policies and legislation that take into account traditional customs and international agreements.

2

Priority Avifauna Conservation Projects decided by the workshop

The workshop was divided into the same three groups as reviewed the Regional Bird Conservation Programme Plan for Action (it was discussed whether to regroup but the consensus was to stick to the *status quo*) and priority topics were identified based on the following categories:

- 1 single species,
- 2 important bird localities, and
- 3 processes, threats and regional topics.

The groups reported their topics to the workshop which reviewed and ranked them subjectively (high, medium and low). As a second tier of recording importance the workshop noted whether a high priority project was "urgent" or "less urgent".

Priority projects for species and locations were grouped for each country while projects in the third category above were listed separately. The projects were presented as short "project briefs" which included statements answering the following questions:

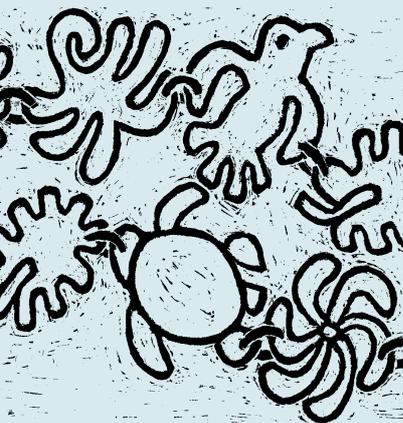
- 1 What is the problem,
- 2 What is the justification for the project, and
- 3 What are the immediate actions required to redress the problem.

Ranking Criteria

The workshop discussed criteria which they considered important in assessing the importance of a conservation project for funding. The following criteria are singly or in combination essential and must be addressed by any project:

- Cultural significance, and/or
- Conservation or scientific status.

Discussions were held that identified and specified further details (that fell into the above required criteria) needed for funding, this also included discussing the pros and cons of flagship species. Overall, it was decided that funding should always ensure some funds went to single species, individual locations and generic issues such as rat





Participants from the Rarotonga Bird Workshop



If readers would like copies of the Issues and Options Paper for the conservation of birds in Polynesia or the workshop proceedings, these are available from the author.

(greg@sprep.org.ws)

Many of the topics covered are relevant to Melanesia and Micronesia. Proceedings of the Workshop will be published on SPREP's website.

(<http://www.sprep.org.ws>).

eradication methods. The project briefs for bird conservation projects are recorded in the workshop proceedings which are available from the author.

Summary

Judging by the questionnaires, the workshop was considered a success by participants. Improvements for the future will include better direction in setting ranking criteria and more disciplined timetabling. From my point of view I was delighted with the outcomes: I learnt more about how Polynesian coun-

tries feel about conserving their birds and what were their issues; and I was left with a clear mandate of priority projects for funding. Since the workshop, comments on the proceedings have been received, improvements made, and the revised version distributed to participating countries. Also three projects have received funding : Kakerori in Rarotonga, Tahitian Flycatcher in Tahiti and Kaka in Tonga. Others likely to receive assistance include Nina Fo'ou megapode education and monitoring and a Polynesian bird guide.

The Kakerori Recovery Programme

Greg Sherley took the following photographs during the workshop field trip. They are pictures of the endangered Kakerori or Rarotongan Flycatcher which is unique to the Rarotonga Cook Islands. The Kakerori recovery Programme had brought the population back from 29 birds in 1989 to 181 in 1999. The successful programme includes:

- controlling the main predator of the birds - Ship Rats,
- colour banding birds during the annual Kakerori census, and
- monitoring and recording nesting success of the birds.

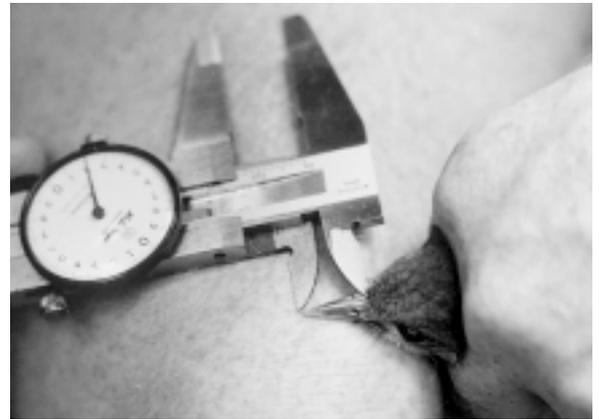
Other research activities include testing for bird disease.



Weighing the bird with a Pesola scale, the condition of the bird may be assessed



Colour-banding allows individual recognition and gathering quality information on demography in the future



Standard measurements such as bill length may allow sexing individuals on the basis of these measurements



Blood samples from the brachial artery. Tests for parasites and disease will allow assessments of the risk of translocating if birds are moved to form a new population



Data collection complete: colour banded, blood sampled and measurements taken

Setting the scene - bird conservation status in Polynesia



The following rankings of Polynesian species are likely to be reported in *Birds to Watch 3* (Bird Life International, in preparation) and are defined using IUCN 'threatened' categories. The lack of accurate survey information means these rankings are probably conservative estimates, unfortunately the real situation is probably much worse.

Island Group/Species	Status	Summary (IUCN categories)
Pitcairn Island/Henderson Island		
Henderson Petrel (<i>Pterodroma atrata</i>)	Vulnerable	Henderson Island - 5 vulnerable species
Henderson crake (<i>Porzana atra</i>)	Vulnerable	Pitcairn Island - 1 vulnerable species
Henderson fruit-dove (<i>Ptilinopus insularis</i>)	Vulnerable	Pitcairn Group - 6 vulnerable species
Henderson lorikeet (<i>Vini stepheni</i>)	Vulnerable	
Henderson reed warbler (<i>Acrocephalus taiti</i>)	Vulnerable	
Pitcairn reed warbler (<i>Acrocephalus vaughani</i>)	Vulnerable	
Tonga, Niufo'ou Island		
Malau Niufo'ou Scrubfowl	Endangered	Niufo'ou Island/Tonga - 1 endangered species
Samoa		
Savai'i Island Samoan Moorhen (<i>Gallinula pacifica</i>)	Critical, possibly extinct	Savai'i Island 1 critical, 1 endangered, 3 vulnerable
Tooth-billed pigeon (<i>Didunculus strigirostris</i>)	Endangered	Upolu Island - 1 endangered, 3 vulnerable
Samoa flycatcher (<i>Myiagra albiventris</i>)	Vulnerable	Various islands - 1 vulnerable
Samoa white eye (<i>Zosterops samoensis</i>)	Vulnerable	
Mao (<i>Gymnomyza samoensis</i>)	Vulnerable	
Seu-ta-peau (Samoa storm petrel, <i>Nesofregatta moestissima</i>)	Probably vulnerable	Samoa 1 critical, 1 endangered, 4 vulnerable
American Samoa		
<i>Gallicolumba stairi</i> , <i>Vini australis</i> , <i>Porzana tabuensis</i> and <i>Clytorhynchus vitiensis</i> Seabirds nesting in the montane forest may be threatened as well.	All at least locally vulnerable (not at a global level <i>sensu</i> , <i>Birds to Watch 3</i>) with the exception of <i>P. tabuensis</i> which may be extinct in American Samoa but not elsewhere in the Pacific.	Manu'a Group 3 at least locally vulnerable, 1 locally critical
Tuamotu archipelago (French Polynesia)		
Tuamotu sandpiper (<i>Prosobonia cancellata</i>)	Endangered	Makatea Island - 1 critical, 2 vulnerable
Polynesian ground-dove (<i>Gallicolumba e. erythroptera</i> ; <i>G.e. pectoralis</i>)	Critical	Tuamotu 1 endangered, 1 critical, 1 vulnerable
Makatea fruit-dove (<i>Ptilinopus chalcurus</i>)	Vulnerable	Niau Island - 1 vulnerable



Island Group/Species	Status	Summary (IUCN categories)
Polynesian imperial pigeon (<i>Ducula aurorae</i>)	Vulnerable	Northern atolls - 1 <i>vulnerable</i>
Blue lorikeet (<i>Vini peruviana</i>)	Vulnerable	Tuamotu archipelago 1 <i>critical</i> , 1 <i>endangered</i> , 4 <i>vulnerable</i>
Tuamotu kingfisher (<i>Todirhamphus gambieri</i>)	Vulnerable	
Society Islands (French Polynesia)		
Polynesian ground-dove (<i>Gallicolumba e. erythroptera</i> ; <i>G.e. pectoralis</i>)	Critical	Tahiti Island 1 <i>critical</i> , 1 <i>endangered</i> , 2 <i>vulnerable</i>
Polynesian imperial pigeon (<i>Ducula aurorae</i>)	Vulnerable	Motu One Island - 1 <i>vulnerable</i>
Blue lorikeet (<i>Vini peruviana</i>)	Vulnerable	Manuae Island - 1 <i>vulnerable</i>
Tahiti swiftlet (<i>Collocalia leucophaeus</i>)	Endangered	Society Islands 1 <i>critical</i> , 1 <i>endangered</i> , 3 <i>vulnerable</i>
Tahiti reed warbler (<i>Acrocephalus caffer</i>)	Vulnerable	
Tahiti monarch (<i>Pomarea nigra</i>)	Critical	
Marquesas Islands (French Polynesia)		
Marquesan ground-dove (<i>Gallicolumba rubescens</i>)	Endangered	Hatuta'a Island - 1 <i>endangered</i>
Marquesan imperial pigeon (<i>Ducula galeata</i>)	Critical	Fatu Huku Island - 1 <i>endangered</i>
Ultramarine lorikeet (<i>Vini ultramarina</i>)	Endangered	Nuku Hiva Island - 1 <i>critical</i> , 1 <i>endangered</i>
Iphis monarch (<i>Pomarea iphis</i>)	Vulnerable	
Marquesan Monarch (<i>Pomarea mendozae</i>)	Endangered	Ua Pou Island - 1 <i>endangered</i>
Fatuhiva monarch (<i>Pomarea whitneyi</i>)	Vulnerable	Ua Huka Island 1 <i>endangered</i> , 1 <i>vulnerable</i> Fatu Hiva Island 1 <i>endangered</i> , 1 <i>vulnerable</i> Mohotani Island - 1 <i>endangered</i> Marquesas Islands 1 <i>critical</i> , 3 <i>endangered</i> , 2 <i>vulnerable</i>
Austral Islands (French Polynesia)		
Rimatara - Kuhl's Lorikeet (<i>Vini kuhlii</i>)	Endangered	Rapa Island - 1 <i>vulnerable/ endangered</i>
Rapa fruit-dove (<i>Ptilinopus huttoni</i>) (Rapa Island)	Vulnerable, poss. endangered	
Rimatara Island reed warbler (<i>Acrocephalus rimatarae</i>)	Vulnerable	Austral Islands 1 <i>endangered</i> , 1 <i>vulnerable</i>
Cook Islands		
Cook Islands fruit dove (<i>Ptilinopus rarotongensis</i>)	Vulnerable	Rarotonga Island 1 <i>endangered</i> , 2 <i>vulnerable</i>
Blue lorikeet (<i>Vini peruviana</i>)	Vulnerable	
Atui swiftlet (<i>Collocalia sawtelli</i>)	Vulnerable	Atui Island - 2 <i>vulnerable</i>
Mangaia kingfisher (<i>Todirhamphus ruficollaris</i>)	Vulnerable	Aitutaki Island - 1 <i>vulnerable</i>
Rarotonga monarch (<i>Pomarea dimidiata</i>)	Endangered	Mangaia Island - 1 <i>vulnerable</i>
Rarotonga starling (<i>Aplonis cinerascens</i>)	Vulnerable	Cook Islands - 1 <i>endangered</i> , 5 <i>vulnerable</i>
Totals for Polynesia		Critical - 5 Endangered - 9 Vulnerable - 29

Acknowledgements

Joanna Sim helped with the article

Anna Tiraa and Ruta Couper (SPREP) with organising the workshop

Rod Hay, Hugh Robertson, David Baker-Gabb and Dick Watling helped (free of charge) with their expertise during the workshop

Greetings and welcome to the first issue of the CALL

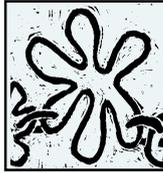
For those of you who have been regular recipients of the CASOLink, CALL now replaces the CASOLink but with a much wider circulation. In other words, CALL is not restricted to conservation area officers under the SPBCP but is also available to others who are working in conservation programmes especially within the Pacific region. And if you are wondering what CALL stands for, it is:

Conservation Area Live Link

It is the "living link" between all those who are working on conservation issues in the Pacific region. For those of you who are not already on our mailing list, send us your postal address now together with any news or information on your projects and you will receive a free copy of future issues.

From the Manager's Desk

Joe Reti *SPBCP Programme Manager*



I said in the last issue of CASOLink that this was going to be a busy year for all of us in the SPBCP, and how true that has already turned out to be? I could hardly find time to write this brief report let alone take my much needed and long overdue leave! In any case, I do not think the situation is any different for most of you and... Did I hear anyone complaining?

Progress for Conservation Areas

It is encouraging to hear of impressive progress being made by a number of CAs. Visitation to the Takitumu CA in the past few months have exceeded expectations by an incredible margin, and the CACC has taken necessary steps to ensure self-reliance for the project past the SPBCP era. In the meantime, kakerori populations continue to increase pointing to the success of the rat eradication programme.

The Komarindi Eco-trek project is continuing to make steady progress with the backing of the communities and the Department of Forests, Environment and Conservation. A number of tour guides from the communities have been selected and trained and an Eco-tourism Management Plan for the CA is being prepared.

Despite the resignation of the CASO, Semi Lotawa, the Koroyanitu CA continues to make progress particularly in its eco-tourism component with guidance and support from the Tourism Resource Consultants (TRC) under contract to NZODA. New signs and other necessary infrastructure have been set up thereby achieving a "new look" for the CA. Ms. Unaisi Tawake has now been appointed as the new CASO and we look forward to working with and supporting her in her work.

The Vatthe CA has been quick to recover from the damage caused by cyclones Danny and Hella a few months ago. Except for the fallen trees, the forest is reported to have regained its lush, green appearance. Visitation is now back to normal and the communities are again showing great optimism about the CA.

There are of course many other developments that I have not listed here as you would see from the summary of CA achievements reported elsewhere in this issue. These achievements are being recorded by the SPBCP Secretariat and will come in handy when we carry out evaluation of your projects later this year.

Conservation area award

In 1997, the then Deputy Director of SPREP, Mr. Don Stewart announced a Conservation Area Award under the SPBCP. Unfortunately, we were unable to follow up on this initiative due to our extremely busy workload. However, I am pleased to say that we have been able to revive the idea and will be giving away the first award at the end of this year. For this year, the award will be based on progress

achieved during the last six months of 1999 due to our late announcement of this initiative. So, if you want to compete for this inaugural award, get on to implementing those work plans on time and tell us what you have achieved through your quarterly reports. And don't forget to send those reports in on time.

Pacific Conservation Network

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to issue an open invitation to all our colleagues who, like us, are working hard to protect and conserve natural resources in the Pacific island countries to join us in the Pacific Conservation Network we have now launched.

The Pacific Conservation Network idea was adopted by resolution of the 1997 Conference on Nature Conservation (Pohnpei, FSM) which called on SPREP "to develop and service a Pacific Conservation Network to facilitate the sharing of information, experiences and resources amongst all conservation area projects and organisations active in the field of community-based conservation in the Pacific region".

As a first step in the establishment of the network, we have decided to change the name of the CASOLink (to avoid misconception that this is a newsletter for CASOs only) and to expand its distribution to all others who are active in nature conservation in the Pacific region.

Expansion of this newsletter

Closer co-operation between those of us working in the field of conservation in the Pacific is enshrined in Objective 6 of the Action Strategy for Nature Conservation in the Pacific Region, and the urgency of the need has been reiterated at successive conferences and meetings on nature conservation. However, while we all agree that it is in our interest to work together more closely and share resources, facilitating this process has been problematic. The time is now ripe to rejuvenate the idea and the expansion of this newsletter is a first step in that direction. The success of the Network is dependent on your active participation and support, so please register your interest to participate by writing to us now.

I look forward to your participation and support for the Pacific Conservation Network and to your sharing experiences and lessons learned through the CALL newsletter.

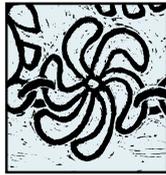
How to join the Pacific Conservation Network

In order to join the Pacific Conservation Network, all you need to do is provide the following information to the SPREP Secretariat.

1. Name of organisation
2. Type of organisation (government agency; NGO; regional; international; community group; other)
3. Country
4. Nature of work carried out in Pacific
5. Name of contact person in organisation
6. Postal address of your organisation (include phone, fax and email)
7. Are you on the SPREP mailing list for the CASOLink?
8. Are you willing to share experiences and knowledge with other members of the Network?

Working together on Crown-of-Thorns eradication project

Charlene Mersai Conservation Area Officer, Rock Islands, Palau



Just when we thought the Rock Islands Conservation Area has had enough of its share of natural disasters, another one comes along. Concerned dive guides and general community members have brought their concerns to Palau Conservation Society (PCS) regarding the unusual abundance of crown-of-thorns starfish (COTS) seen in the Rock Islands area.

In February PCS and Koror State conducted quick reconnaissance surveys in a variety of sites among the Rock Islands to gauge the extent of damage to corals from the recent bleaching event, which resulted from the recent El Nino incident. In addition, we wanted to see if and how badly COTS are threatening the corals in the area. It was found that the number of COTS on a given reef was strongly correlated with the amount of live coral - the more live coral, the more COTS. This is not surprising, given that COTS rely solely on live corals for food. While the healthy reefs had high numbers of COTS, it does not appear to be an "outbreak" of COTS - that is a situation where there is a population explosion. Rather, it appears that COTS are congregating at the reefs with more corals. Since there are few reefs with healthy corals, the number of COTS at healthy reefs is quite high in some cases, and they therefore pose a strong threat to the live corals on those reefs.

In an attempt to save what live coral we have remaining in the Rock Islands Conservation Area, PCS and Koror State have enlisted the assistance of lo-

cal dive guides to initiate a COTS eradication project. We are also recruiting volunteers from the community and so far several individuals have already approached us to offer their assistance

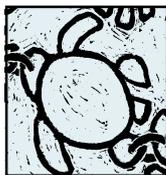
The objective of this project is to remove COTS from high-value areas, where "value" is a function of the amount and types of live corals present plus the value of the area for tourism, recreation, etc. The two main actions for this project include:

1. Gather and manage information on locations and sizes of COTS aggregation.
 - Gather information from dive guides through survey cards
 - Gather information from PCS and other observers using uniform survey methods; do both before- and after-control surveys
 - Maintain data, including a list of surveyed sites prioritized for control
2. Remove COTS
 - Organize and conduct COTS killing trips with trained people
 - Maintain data on numbers of COTS killed, by area and effort

Thus far, PCS and Koror State have surveyed 27 sites in the Rock Islands area and have identified priority sites. With assistance from dive guides and community volunteers we are now able to survey more sites and remove COTS from specific sites in the Rock Islands Conservation Area much quicker.

Turtles in Vanuatu: Wan Smol Bag play tours 1996-99

Peter Walker Director, Wan Smol Bag Theatre



The gateway waters to Vanuatu, Banks & Torres in the north and Aniwa/Aneityum in the south; these were the targets of the two turtle play tours this year. Both areas, especially Banks & Torres are important marine resources in Vanuatu.

Health Force Theatre spent 2 weeks in the Banks & Torres with Efate turtle monitors, Joseph Kaloran, accompanying them. The people of these islands admitted to the group that they ate many turtles & turtles eggs. They also, the group discovered, take turtles as hatchlings and keep them in containers. After seeing the play & talking with the turtle monitor, the people on the island of Hiu were willing to release the turtles.

The larger ones were tagged. On another island ten turtles were released but they were too small to be tagged. It was clear in both Banks & Torres that people had no idea of the breeding cycle of a turtle and they said that now they knew the situation, they would attempt to change their turtle eating habits. The group found audiences very responsive and interested in the work of the North Efate monitors work; they were quick to choose their own monitors and their willingness to return the captive turtles showed their enthusiasm to participate in the project.

They say they are not the only creatures eating turtles on their island; there is the small problem of marine crocodiles and they wanted advice from fisheries department on how to handle this problem!

Ha'apai (Tonga)

Organising painting competitions for schools in Ha'apai to produce a wall mural

Working closely with 'Uiha Youth concerning using empty drums for rubbish bins and establishing a village nursery to be jointly run by 'Uiha Youth and 'Uiha Women in Development

People are beginning to fence off their pigs, and some wandering pigs have been shot by police to enforce this

A workshop was held by project staff with the Ministry of Agriculture & Forestry on nursery development and management

Komarindi (Solomon Islands)

A cross-island tour leadership training was conducted by *terra firma* and was attended by 10 guides from Kusumba and 6 from Veraboli. This involved the guides spending 4 nights in the bush working out the logistics of the trek, which included deciding on interpretational and operational plans as well as meal, evacuation and emergency plans

A community tourism awareness workshop was held at Kusumba in March for one day which was conducted by *terra firma* Associates, Solomon Islands visitors Bureau, a travel agent and the CASO. It helped give everyone a better idea of how the tourism industry operates in the Solomon Islands

There has been ethnic tension in the Guadalcanal Province which has caused fear amongst people on both sides and adversely affected implementation of some of the projects activities. Tourism

will be affected negatively, especially in regard to ecotours - people have shown interest in the tours but the project has advised to wait until the situation calms down and safety is guaranteed

Funafuti (Tuvalu)

The project received a new air compressor from the Canada Fund

Regular patrols of the Conservation Area are continuing, a good sign is that no one was caught this quarter

A new CO was employed to replace one who resigned last year

Seven fact sheets have been completed in English and Tuvaluan, concerning the Conservation Area, turtles, biodiversity, coconut crabs, fish, corals and community conservation and planning

Radio programme every week on biodiversity conservation

A CACC member from the tourism department gave a talk on the importance of the Conservation Area to a youth group, discussing rules and aims of the project at the latest Youth Workshop

Held discussions with professor of Law from Victoria University New Zealand about setting up a trust fund for the Conservation Area

The AVA biodiversity officer has extended her contract for a further 7 months

Community fisherman have reported increased numbers of seabirds on the fishing grounds beyond the Conservation Area and also complained that the Tuvalu national Fishing corpora-

tion has not been respecting the Conservation Area who were in turn reprimanded by the CAP and the law

An increase in advertising (the hotel and local newspaper) has resulted in most of the visitors to Tuvalu visiting the Conservation Area

Research work in the lagoon has been hindered by the boat proving to be inadequate - poor steering and draining which making it unsafe in rough weather

Takitumu (Rarotonga)

A tour guide workshop was held in February which had emphasis on bird watching, with participants from different islands of Rarotonga attending

Three articles on the Takitumu Conservation Area were produced for the newspaper

Takitumu Conservation Area staff conducted a public survey to see if people supported pearl farming development on Suvarrow Atoll or if they preferred to maintain it as a National Wildlife Reserve. Of the people surveyed, the vast majority wish to leave it as a reserve. A submission was presented to the Cook Island Investment Corporation based on their survey results

Nature tours were busy this quarter, especially in comparison to the same time last year. A part time guide started working and is paid from funds generated from the tours

Huvalu (Niue)

An awareness programme was prepared by the Hakupu Village Committee and Taskforce, with information provided by the Conservation Officers, for school children. This involved declaring a

Hakupu Litter Free Day, and a study tour to part of the Conservation Area for the students

Students from the Niue High School carried out a coconut crab study, which was aided by Conservation Area staff

Both village communities of Liku-Hakupu have agreed to have their Information kiosks constructed at the main village centres, with the Hakupu Committee already starting working on a room for the kiosk

Uafato (Samoa)

In February after SPBCP visited Uafato and a subsequent CACC meeting, to discuss the pig problem, it was decided to implement the Pig Fencing Program immediately. This was followed by a 3 days survey of the village and quotes obtained for associated costs

An avifauna survey was carried out by visiting ornithologist Dr. Ulf Beichle over a 3 day period - the results are yet to be published

Area was cleared on land for construction of a green house nursery

Discussions were held with Forestry personnel to discuss assisting with tree nursery construction

Sa'anapu/Sataoa (Samoa)

The Conservation Area office was officially opened in March, which was started with a kava greeting by the village chiefs, followed by a religious speech, then the keynote address by the Director of the Lands, Survey and Environment Department. The SPBCP representative, Francois Martel, cut the ribbon which marked the official opening of the office. This event was covered by Televisé Samoa

and also reported in several local newspapers

A project Office sign was completed and posted in front of the office

CASO attended a video training workshop in January which aimed to enhance the quality of videos produced for its public awareness campaign

Another workshop attended was "Learning by Doing" run by the Visitors Bureau, which dealt with Attraction Site problems - how tourist operators can maintain their long term sustainability and what activities should not be done

In March, a Conservation Area evaluation exercise was undertaken with SPBCP staff and key people involved in the Conservation Area from the villages, talks discussed the continuation of the project in future when the funding is eventually phased out. Possible Income generating activities were also discussed and prioritised

In January, the CASO accompanied, and talked to visitors to the Conservation Area -these included school children, a film crew, and members of the UNDP office

Vatthe (Vanuatu)

Promotion of Vatthe Lodge with Island Safaris Vanuatu and Destination Vanuatu, both of which, are Vanuatu based promoters. Island Safaris is a Tour Operator which provide marketing services for Vanuatu Island Bungalow Association (VIBA)

In March, Francois Martel and Sue Maturin assessed the damage caused by cyclones Hella and Danny. They also

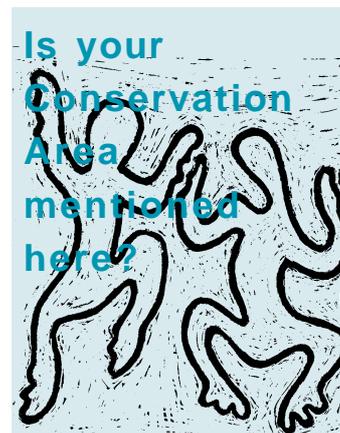
introduced themselves to the CACC and gave a presentation of their work

CASO attended meetings to resolve land issues and allegations of mismanaging the tourism business, between villagers

An officer from the department of Water Resources carried out a feasibility study on the different options for a water supply system for Vatthe Lodge. The viable option identified is to use the rain water. We are waiting a written report and costs

As part of developing Sara Tours, Nelson began working on organising the communities and came up with a 1999 tourism workplan for Sara. Bill Tavue and his brothers cleared the tracks and made them accessible again, within two weeks after the cyclones

Being member of Vanuatu Island Bungalow Association, Nelson attended the first VIBA management meeting for 1999 early in January



'Well, its up to you! To make this newsletter more useful and interesting, we need input from you. Contributions to this newsletter are always welcome. Any one of the SPBCP staff at SPREP would be grateful to receive an article from you.

Staff changes in Takitumu Conservation Area

Ian Karika Conservation Area Support Officer, Takitumu Conservation Area

The first quarter of 1999 was a period of much personnel movement in the TCA which affected both the project staff and the CACC.

Rebecca Blackburn - Australian Volunteer

Firstly on the 5th of January Rebecca Blackburn our AVA (Australian Volunteer) completed her 18-month term with us. Her innovative contribution to the TCA will be greatly missed as she was instrumental in the setting up of our Ecotours i.e. track design, marketing research, price structure and the setting up of transportation and lunch suppliers from within the community. She was also very active in 'Awareness' by featuring the TCA in the local Environment Exhibition in 1998 by speaking at schools and to community groups and she also produced a children's tape for radio. She gave invaluable assistance to Anna Tiraa our CASO and was also a very keen competitive sportswoman in the Takitumu district. She was well liked by the CACC and the community as a whole, *kia manuia* (good luck) Rebecca.

Philomena Williams Chairperson of the CACC

My appointment as CASO commencing at the beginning of the year meant I stepped down as Chairman of the CACC and a new member from my family, Tukurangi Hosking Jr, was elected to the committee. The CACC subsequently elected Mrs. Philomena Williams to the position of Chairperson as she had been involved with the project from 1995 well before it being part of the SPBCP. Her social involvement in the community will play an important part with organizing activities within the TCA. I understand that she is the only woman chairperson amongst all the SPBCP Conservation areas.

Anna Tiraa leaves the TCA

I worked along side Anna all January and February to familiarize myself with the CASO's position before she quietly made an exit from the project. The TCA is not going to be the same without her, in fact, I'm not so sure if she is going to cope with not being involved with the project. Anna has spent 10 years within the area initially as conservation officer with the Kakerori Recovery Program in 1989 and then as CASO for the TCA in 1996. She has seen the area slowly transform under the guidance of the SPBCP, a program she worked hard to get the TCA to be a part of. Her regular articles in the Cook Islands News and many other publications have made many people aware of the TCA locally, regionally and further afield. Anna has been able to take ideas suggested by the CACC and implement them but at the same time been able to speak out against an issue if she thought it not appropriate, sometimes not without a few tears. She has served the Takitumu Conservation Area admirably and leaves behind a project that has been very efficiently established and ready to move confidently into the new millenium. Anna's genuine concern for the wellbeing of our environment has meant she has been very active with our local conservation organizations such as Taporoporo Ipukarea Society, PICCAP and WWF. Her zealous campaign for the preservation of the national park status of Suwarrow during the release of the EIA for the Development of Pearl Farming on Suwarrow in my opinion came second to none. Not only are we going to miss Anna in the TCA but she will be missed by the nation. The Staff & Management of the TCA wish her every success in her new ventures in Samoa.

Tamari'i Tutangata *Director, SPREP (Reprinted from Islands Business)*



Where there's land, there are boundaries, and where there are boundaries, there are disputes. But a pioneering programme set up to conserve the Pacific's biodiversity has seen boundary disputes dissolve as previously warring communities discovered they shared a common desire to protect their natural heritage for future generations.

Conservation of valued resources

In Vanuatu, on the island of Espiritu Santo, the villages of Sara and Matantas had for decades disputed ownership of parts of the Big Bay forest. The dispute periodically erupted into raids, one of which resulted in Vanuatu's Supreme Court being asked to rule on which village had legal rights to the forest's resources. But then, with the support of SPREP's South Pacific Biodiversity Conservation Programme (SPBCP), working through the Government of Vanuatu, both villages decided they wanted to protect the resources in the forest, which by then was the only remaining extensive lowland alluvial and limestone forest in Vanuatu that had not been logged. Their decades-old differences became irrelevant: instead of arguing boundaries and ownership of resources, both villages found they were in full agreement on the importance of conserving a mutually-valued resource.

To symbolise this new accord, Chief Lus of Sara and Chief Moses of Matantas planted a cycad tree in Matantas village. That tree still stands, and today, members of those communities can sleep in each others' villages – something they were never before able to do. They work together in what is now the Vatthe Conservation Area, establishing an ecotourism venture which includes six bungalows and a small restaurant for tourists. Young men and women from both villages have been trained to guide tourists through the forest, and other community members are building up a market for vegetables, forest and craft products, and transport services.

Community owned the resources

Vatthe is only one of many examples where concern for protecting a precious environment eventually overrode age-old community rivalries. To date, funding from the Global Environment Facility, the United Nations Development Programme and AusAID has made it possible for the SPBCP to help Pacific island communities establish 17 conservation areas in 12 Pacific island countries. Other organisations have established a further 17. In all cases, the first principle has been that the communities own the resources and must always be the ones who make the decisions about using those resources.

The emphasis on a community-based approach arose out of earlier failed efforts to conserve the

Pacific's natural resources. Five years ago, SPREP, the World-Wide Fund for Nature and The Nature Conservancy designed the programme, basing that design on the recognition that in the Pacific, attempts to lock away valuable areas of biodiversity by declaring them national parks or nature reserves were unlikely to work.

Setting up conservation areas

In the Pacific, the communities which own 80 – 90 percent of land and coastal resources will not accept that they should be forbidden access to natural resources that have nurtured their families for generations. They do, however, have a strong interest in protecting these resources, and this is borne out in the ongoing demand from communities for SPBCP assistance in setting up conservation areas.

The SPBCP approach is a softly-softly one which takes the time to establish trust between communities and outside partners and experts. SPBCP programme officers help establish a coordinating committee, made up of representatives from the community, Government agencies, non-governmental organisations, and regional and international agencies working in the conservation field. The communities themselves decide on the appointment of a Conservation Area Support Officer, who acts as the liaison point between the coordinating committee and the community.

Income generation options

The coordinating committee supplies the expertise which the community needs to make its decisions about how best to use its resources, but all decisions are the responsibility of the community itself. After the area's biodiversity has been researched, feasibility studies are made of potential income generation options. Some of those options now in operation around the Pacific include:

- ecotourism
- butterfly farming
- beekeeping
- sports fishing and
- handicraft production.

It all takes time. The SPBCP experience has been

continued on page 15

Their decades-old differences became irrelevant: instead of arguing boundaries and ownership of resources, both villages found they were in full agreement on the importance of conserving a mutually-valued resource.

Community-driven biological surveys do work!

Larry Orsak (Reprinted from *The New Guinea Tropical Ecology and Biodiversity Digest*)



Biodiversity surveys in PNG happen now and again in different parts of the country and it is likely these activities will continue, if not increase, if PINBio gets off the ground. This essay describes a process of planning for biological surveys that seems to avoid a lot of problems that such surveys have faced in the past.

I started thinking about all this after several years of carrying out insect surveys in Madang with a team of “mangibinatang” school leavers, where we did a lot of collecting mostly of butterflies and other insects. Through all those collections, in many villages, we never had a problem or misinterpretation with the landowners. This was in stark contrast with some experiences I had had with more formal biological surveys, including those arranged by PNG-NGOs. Why the difference?

Why biological surveys?

First, there's now little doubt in my mind that even the 'difficult' landowners we've worked with, base their reactions on fairly simple assessments of our survey work. In essence: what do they feel the researchers are getting out of the survey versus what do they think they're getting out of it? Indeed, what DO landowners think they're getting out of these biological surveys? And what do they want to reap? Money? Work? Certainly money and jobs seem particularly prominent anytime I've been involved in big biological surveys. But ironically, when we carried out biodiversity surveys in Madang, apart from the first area we visited, no jobs were given and no money was paid as a result of these surveys. In fact, this was made very clear from the beginning. So what were people in the village getting out of what we were doing in those cases? They must have felt they were getting something else out of what we were doing. If not, we most certainly would have faced difficulties.

Let's analyse this further. During these small surveys, what we did never looked like a big production, big money programme. The school leavers did most of the work. Apart from the first survey in the Adelbert Mountains, we never needed carriers or other major village assistance, and we most certainly never used helicopters. Which begs this question again: what were the landowners getting out of our work that made them so receptive to what we were doing? The answer is: Information! This comprised two types:

- 1 information on interesting and unique species we were finding, and
- 2 information on wildlife (always insects or plants) that people could sell or farm if they wanted.

A few times, the information we provided was in response to a specific community need. Invariably,

these requests were related to trying to stop unsustainable industrial logging.

Collaborative work with communities

Probably the most important key to working collaboratively with communities was that they had asked us to work on their land first, rather than us asking them. Sounds like a minor variation, but the results were dramatically different. More villages found out that we offered a service – biological survey. And they must have felt they got significant information out of that service, because they invited us to work on their land, and after the surveys were over, we didn't hear any complaints.

There's an important detail in all this – when I say people in the village asked us to carry out biological surveys on their land, this does not mean that we planted the idea into their head, and they responded with their request. Nogat tru! That is what the big biological surveys have often done in the name of “letting the people decide”. In reality, it's nothing more than passive imposition of the survey on local communities. When that's the strategy, it's pretty hard for people to feel, deep down, that it was really their idea to have the scientists come survey. So my “lesson learned” is that there can be no imposition, either passive or active, on the communities in arranging biodiversity surveys on their land, if you want the highest guarantee of trouble-free results. I'm not so naïve to think that villages throughout PNG are so enamoured with biodiversity surveys that they'll contact us before we contact them. But we can make contact in a different way than how it tends to be done now. When we were carrying out our small biological surveys along the North Coast and in the Gogol Valley area, we didn't tell people what we were doing directly. Instead, people found out what we were doing through the educational materials we produced, talks at local schools, and via word-of-mouth from both the Papua New Guinean staff at CRI and the villagers we had already worked with. In time, our activities became fairly well known. Even when only a small fraction of people who had heard about our work came to invite us to go to their land, this still resulted in us doing 2 – 3 local surveys a year. It could have been even more than that, had we made a specific effort to develop this activity.

What were the landowners getting out of our work that made them so receptive to what we were doing?

The answer is:

Information!

...A few times, the information we provided was in response to a specific community need. Invariably, these requests were related to trying to stop unsustainable industrial logging.



Working with communities in the bush

Researchers involved in biodiversity surveys need to tax themselves a considerable block of time to interact with local communities, both before the survey and afterwards.

The planning of biological surveys

PNG is becoming increasingly information-starved. Villagers are usually smart enough to figure out if whoever is speaking to them is a much better resource person than themselves, or is someone who knows only a little bit more than they do. The latter, they often dismiss; the former, they are often attracted to. This is how “sources of information” fit into the big picture of PNG today, and shows more clearly how it can fit into the planning of biodiversity surveys.

You’ll notice that our experiences in “pleasant biological surveying” concerned small-scale, limited activities. Does this have relevance to doing large-scale, multi-taxa biodiversity expeditions? Can such large-scale events become problem-free simply by being community-driven mechanisms for acquiring information on the local plants and animals? I don’t know. But I do know what 2 prerequisites would be, even for the large-scale expeditions. First, if we truly want biological surveys to be community driven, we can’t put our fingers on a map and say, “that’s where we will carry out the survey.” If we do that, we automatically prevent the result from being community-driven. It’s okay to select a general region as the survey focus, but beyond that, flexibility is the name of the game.

Time interaction with the community

The second prerequisite is time investment. Researchers involved in biodiversity surveys need to tax themselves a considerable block of time to interact with local communities, both before the survey and afterwards. As a field biologist, you should plan on contributing a “time tax” to....

- Get out information to the community related to the wildlife in that area, or on whatever other topics that might stimulate community discussion, followed by a community request for a biological survey on their area.
- Fully explain, prior to the biological survey, what the survey will or will not accomplish. If you don’t sleep in the village so that you can story at length with people and provide follow up discussions, forget it! If you can’t speak either tok pisin or the local vernacular, forget it! Such things can’t be compromised, if you want to effectively interact.

- Develop, produce, and disseminate a villager-relevant, villager-absorptive permanent product that describes the results of the biological survey. The technical, English-as-a-first-language reports full of species lists that normally come out of these surveys are virtually useless as a transmitter of information to village communities. Such reports are no longer sufficient. A “time tax” block should be devoted to preparing a number of copies of a colour-illustrated, tok pisin language (or whatever is the local lingua franca) publication that is laminated or printed in such a way to guarantee a long shelf life, then presented both to local schools/churches, and local communities.

- Personally present to the community the basic findings of the survey, after it is finished.

Of all researchers that I’ve seen working in PNG, overseas graduate students have been the best at paying this “time tax”. Most outstanding of all the researchers I’ve known was bat biologist Nancy Irwin, who devoted 1–2 days per week teaching at local schools. Her “time tax” puts the rest of us to shame! More established researchers tend to spend a lot less time doing anything other than the actual field research. As a result, increasingly in PNG, as communities become more empowered, they are likely to face problems. Or, if they finish their work and have left before the problems surface, those coming after them will suffer. In essence, if you don’t pay the time tax, someone else will suffer the results of your lapse, somewhere down the line.

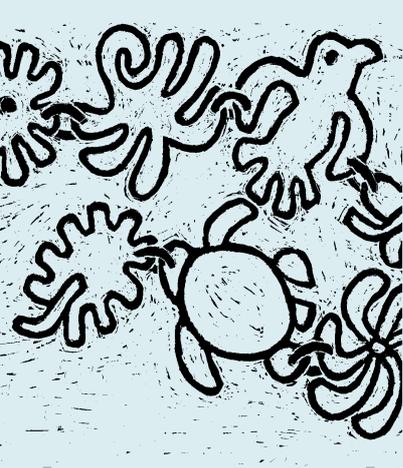
“Time tax” and areas of communication

In biodiversity surveys I’ve been involved in over the last 5 years, I’ve noticed that Papua New Guinean biologists largely don’t pay a “time tax” in preparing written results of survey but, they are and can be quite effective at doing the other ground work communications with villagers.

The large-scale biological surveys I’ve been involved in thus far, have been commendable in paying the “time tax” in pre-survey community meetings. But they haven’t paid much “time tax” in post-survey meetings, and so far have paid zero “time tax” in preparing village-appropriate written products that describe the survey results. I stand among the accused.

Villager’s assessments and surveyers benefits

Sometimes even all that investment won’t stop misinterpretations and unhappiness within the local communities over the survey. Villagers are not only assessing “what we’re getting out of the survey” but also, “what they [scientists] are getting out of the survey”. They’re comparing what rewards



they see as going to each party as much as they're looking at the absolute rewards being gained. The use of helicopters automatically suggests considerable benefits accruing to visiting researchers. Fancy foods in the bush, while good for expatriate scientists' morale, adds to the perception. Use these things at your peril. Be forewarned: none of it goes unnoticed by members of the local community!

Biological surveys organised by Papua New Guinean biologists tend to go very smoothly but only if that biologist is not only actively involved in the survey work but also pays the pre-survey and post-survey "time tax". Our small-scale surveys in Madang always created an impression that relatively few benefits were going to us. Thus, the "time tax" we had to pay to achieve an acceptable balance was probably a lot lower than would probably need

to be expended for larger, more involved expeditions.

To summarise. Paying a "time tax" to local community to explain what we're up to, when we want to carry out biodiversity surveys, seem to bring good payoffs in terms of the cooperation we then get from the communities on whose land we work. Even more importantly, a key to trouble-free surveys seems to be to create a situation where these biodiversity surveys are sensed by landowners as being community-driven, not just community-based. This is easier to do than it might sound, but the strategy has to be carefully implemented, and above all, it takes time.

Ah, my appetite is whetted now. When are we going to the bush again?

The story of Ikataea (Paddle Snapper) - Part one

A story from Tuvalu

As the big group of small fish floated on the ocean currents, they realised that they were partly protected from fish who wanted to eat them because they were so small and clear they were almost invisible. Unfortunately, many of ikataea's cousins and brothers and sisters did get eaten by other animals.

This is the story of how ikataea grew up in Funafuti lagoon. Her parents were part of a big school of taea who lived on a reef slope at Nanumea or was it Vaitupu? Anyway it was an island quite far from Funafuti.

Around the time of the full moon, all the men and women taea came together in a big group and released their eggs and sperm into the water. Then they separated and continued gathering their food without any further thought for the children they had just given birth to.

Ikataea's mother was quite a big fish and she released about four million eggs. Her sister who was only half her size only produced about one million eggs. Their eggs were fertilised in the water and quickly developed into larval/baby fish. So ikataea

was one of a very big group of very very small fish. In fact they did not look at all like their parents yet. Ikataea was very skinny and clear like a small piece of glass.

As the big group of small fish floated on the ocean currents, they realised that they were partly protected from fish who wanted to eat them because they were so small and clear they were almost invisible. Unfortunately, many of ikataea's cousins and brothers and sisters did get eaten by other animals. Those who survived had a very hard job to find enough food to help them survive and grow. Mostly they tried to catch other very small animals floating in the water, like worms and baby crabs. Many more of ikataea's friends did not find enough food in the big ocean, so the group of fish became smaller and smaller.

Ikataea and the other survivors floated for 60 days in the ocean before they entered Funafuti lagoon and came close to a reef. When they arrived they realised that they had lost some more of their cousins who must have floated past Funafuti and would probably die in the ocean. The remaining 4,000 fish who had entered the lagoon became excited when they could feel that they were close to a reef. They found a nice place of small rocks at the bottom of a reef near Funafatu islet and decided to settle there.

The next day ikataea woke up and looked for her friends but she could not see them anywhere. Instead she was surrounded by 3,999 small grey and red fish. She was very confused, but when she looked down she realised that she too had changed colour (they had all metamorphosed - like the butterfly from the caterpillar). In their excitement the group of fish split up and went to explore their new home.



Peacemaking - the conservation dividend *continued from page 11*

that it takes at least two years to build trust in the community and establish solid linkages between key decision-makers, key stakeholders and potential partners. In those two years, donors don't see a lot of money being spent. But after the groundwork has been done, things tend to move rather more rapidly, as the painstaking work involved in full consultation and community decision-making begins to bear fruit.

The importance of consultation

Time and again, consultation has been shown to be critical to the success of any project. Take the case of the Arnavon Islands, for example.

The Solomon Islands Government decided to set up a conservation area there, but didn't consult the Arnavon Islanders. Government officials started

building a project headquarters on one island. The communities burned it down and barred any government officials from landing on the islands again.

But then, some time later, they decided to ask the Government what it had planned to do with those buildings. When they found out, they asked why they hadn't been consulted – they'd been talking for a long time about establishing a conservation area there.

The Government stepped back, insisted that the community take the lead role with Government support, and now the Arnavon Islands Conservation Area is a reality – providing yet one more example of how concern for protecting the Pacific's fragile ecosystems can overcome seemingly insoluble differences.

Turtles in Vanuatu: Wan Smol Bag play tours 1996-99 *continued from page 8*



Members of Wan Smol Bag, Health Force Theatre in action during the Banks/Torres tour last year

A dramatic accident last year on Aniwa brought turtles to the forefront of the people's thoughts. A young man was drowned when trapped by the rope of his spear gun with which he had hit a turtle. The turtle dragged him deeper and deeper. He could not break free and drowned. A five year tabu has been put on the reef since the man's death. Some seem to have interpreted the death as a signal from somewhere.

The chief on Aniwa said they were very proud to receive a visit from Wan Smolbag Theatre (it was Wan Smolbag Kids who visited Aneitym & Aniwa.) They had heard the name many times although some thought it was Wan Smolbag Toyota! Perhaps this might be a good reason to demand sponsorship from Toyota!!

The chief readily admitted that on Aniwa many tur-

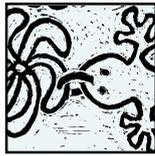
tles were killed and that it was still possible to find turtles regularly when wanted. This was similar to the situation on the neighbouring island of Aneitym where in the village of Angelghowat they have a place called 'backstore' which means a place full of turtles and this is the place where people always go when they wish to eat turtle meat.

Again on both islands, communities said they were resolved to change their ways now that they understood the turtle's breeding cycle. Of course it is very pleasing to feel that one's work has planted a seed for change, but experience tells us that we must find ways of encouraging the villages to keep their promises but you have to start somewhere and both Health Force & Wan Smolbag Kids found the tours very rewarding.

Releasing Turtles in Captivity

El Nino drought destruction: the death of Papua New Guinea's M^cAdam National Park

Larry Orsak and Lawong Balun



We've waited for months hoping to see some article or any announcement of a tragic setback in people's uphill efforts to protect Papua New Guinea's remarkable biodiversity for future generations. Nothing apparently has appeared, so we're taking it upon ourselves to announce the death of M^cAdam National Park in Morobe Province. There are only a handful of national parks in PNG, so the loss is especially painful.

The ultimate cause of death was a massive fire during the El Nino drought months in September 1997. It started on the Bulolo end (from garden-making) and burned for weeks, generally consuming the leaf litter layers. The park is mostly an island of forest today, since much of the surrounding area has already become kunai grassland, coffee plantation, and non-native Piper scrub. The view from the Bulolo Gorge shows nearly 100 per cent fire consumption, so the entire park of more than 1000 hectares has apparently burned.

Loss of the tallest tropical trees

Morobe Provincial officials recently embarked on a new tourism promotion. While we've missed any stories about the destruction of one of PNG's few national parks, we've seen several items about how much money tourists could bring to Morobe Province, Klinki Pines are thought to be the tallest tropical trees in the world, and the "world's tallest" of anything is effective tourist bait. M^cAdam had that potential because it was the best place in the world to see virgin stands of Klinki and Hoop Pine (*Araucaria*). This tourism potential was occasionally tapped by Bulolo's Pine Lodge Resort and Wau Ecology Institute. But it would be an obscenity now for the government or anyone else to promote M^cAdam National Park as home for the world's tallest tropical trees, for the tallest of them all is probably now a skeleton.

It's not just the world's tallest tropical trees that were special. It was also the fact that these trees were graced by various species of some of the world's most spectacular birds, including about 10 bird-of-paradise species. And for those with more attention to detail, the bark of those trees were graced by one of the world's most remarkable stalk-eyed flies, a species whose eye stalks were several times the length of the rest of the body. It used to walk with a sense of purpose in shady, moist spots in the park.

Efforts to restore this protected area

The fire has opened fantastic opportunities for garden-making; the final solution to the park is now in progress. At this stage, it would take some effort to restore this protected area and there is no indication at all that any such interest exists. The PNG Office of Environment & Conservation has decentralised all national park management responsibilities and expenses to provincial governments who

often have no significant source of revenue themselves. Thus, it can be stated with near certainty that the most beautiful piece of land on the long road between Lae and Wau is gone. But few will notice, since obviously no one cared enough to report the loss in the first place. We'll still be able to see Klinki pines in the backyards of Lae and in the monoculture plantations around Bulolo and Wau. They aren't the world's tallest trees, but we can still say they are, since at least they're the right species. We can see many of the larger creatures of M^cAdam in zoo cages here and there, so we don't have to think much that a native home is gone. Opportunities for fooling ourselves and denying the tragedy are endless. The zoos containing M^cAdam birds and animals, the tourism promotion, and everything else that exploits the park's biodiversity would be great, worth supporting and above criticism if people had put as much effort into protecting the roots of these benefits. That is the greatest obscenity – reaping the rewards of M^cAdam's biodiversity while investing virtually nothing in its protection. We all share in the blame.

Food for the termites

And yet, the local people will get one last short-term benefit from M^cAdam National Park's biodiversity. For the dead and weakened trees are now producing a phoenix of new life – millions of showy wood-boring beetles which are now breeding in the dying wood. The last gasp of M^cAdam before the termites commence? Hopefully all the village insect collectors around Bulolo will gather up the beetle bounty, and sell them to the nearby Insect Farming & Trading Agency. That way, overseas collectors can buy these beautiful specimens and be in awe of PNG's megadiversity, while remaining blissfully ignorant of the fact that the PNG splendour in their display cases were products of an even greater splendour being destroyed.

The death of M^cAdam National Park should never be blamed on lack of money. Lack of money is a lame excuse, not a valid reason. The real reason for M^cAdam National Park's loss was disinterest, inattention, and this intriguing prevailing attitude that it is possible to milk a biodiversity cash cow without ever having to feed it.

This biodiversity cash cow is dead. May you linger in our memories, M^cAdam National Park.

For at least 12–15 years, the park has steadily been encroached by gardens and coffee plots. These breaks in the canopy undoubtedly helped the flames repeatedly flare up.

CALL is the newsletter of SPREP'S South Pacific Biodiversity Conservation Programme, based in Apia, Samoa.

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