

Annex 8: Press releases, newspaper article, workshop certificate

31 March 2006



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USP wins two major Darwin Initiative Awards

[Back to News](#) »



Canopy fogging to measure insect numbers in the South Pacific's unique forest habitats. This project - 'Focus for Fiji: Insect Inventories for Biodiversity Assessment' is one of the two which have been chosen for an international environment initiative award.

The University of the South Pacific has been awarded two major awards to help conserve the unique biodiversity of the South Pacific. The Darwin Initiative, funded by the United Kingdom Department for Environment aims to assist countries which are rich in biodiversity to implement the Convention on Biological Diversity through funding collaborative projects. The Darwin Initiative has just funded 41 new projects around the world, two of which have been awarded to USP. Projects have a strong focus on capacity building, partnerships, community engagement, and livelihoods.

The first project, 'Focus for Fiji: Insect Inventories for Biodiversity Assessment' is a collaborative project between the University of Sussex, UK, the Division of Biology and the Institute of Applied Sciences at USP. The project will build significant capacity for insect biodiversity survey work in Fiji by establishing and training an expert entomology team. The team will then design and complete insect biodiversity surveys, prepare, preserve and identify specimens and raise awareness of environmental and biodiversity issues by running workshops for local farmers, villagers and school

children.

The second project, 'Distance Learning for Biodiversity Conservation in Small Island Developing States' is a partnership between the International Centre for Protected Landscapes, UK and two USP sections, the Institute of Applied Sciences and Pacific Centre for the Environment and Sustainable Development (PACE-SD), and the Apia-based Pacific Regional Environment Program. The initiative will develop an existing face-to-face training course called the Pacific Island Community-based Conservation Course, developed with Darwin funding by the partners in 1999, for flexible learning delivery and develop more Pacific case studies for both. The course has been praised for its focus on both academic and professional skills and combination of classroom and field exercises. Almost 40 members of communities, government departments and nongovernmental organisations have been trained during these courses to date.

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USP scientists launch book on butterflies in Fiji

[Back to News >](#)



USP's Pro-Chancellor Research and Graduate Affairs Dr Ana Taufe'ulungaki with Sunil Kumar (Left) and Hilda Waqa-Sakiti at the launch of their book 'Butterflies of the Fiji Islands'.

The South Pacific is considered to be one of the most important areas in the world for biodiversity because of the many unique species found here, and by developing our scientific knowledge we shall be able to act as custodians of these species for future generations, says USP's Pro-Chancellor Research and Graduate Affairs Dr Ana Taufe'ulungaki.

Dr Ana made the comments at the launch of a book titled 'Butterflies of the Fiji Islands' authored by two University of the South Pacific scientists at the Fiji Museum in Suva, Fiji, recently.

She added that Fiji and the whole of the South Pacific had many unique 'endemic' species which are found nowhere else in the world. One such species, the Fiji swallowtail butterfly 'is included in the book.

The book by Sunil Prasad and Hilda Waqa-Sakiti will be used to raise awareness in the Fiji Islands about the various forms of butterflies found in the country.

According to Mr Prasad who has done a Masters in Entomology, while doing research for the book, both he and Ms Waqa-Sakiti found that there was hardly any awareness about these beautiful creatures.

"For many they are just insects so this book serves to work as a guide to explain further about these butterflies and why they are so important to us," said Mr Prasad.

"It is also written in a language that will be easy for all to read - both adults and children."

In launching the book, Dr Ana also thanked the British Government funded Darwin Initiative for supporting the project 'Focus on Fiji: insect inventories for conservation', which made the production of the book possible.

The Darwin Initiative is a small grants program that aims to promote biodiversity conservation and sustainable use of resources around the world. The program assists countries with the conservation of biological diversity and draws on British expertise in the field of biodiversity.

Dr Ana pointed out that insects contributed over three-quarters of all species on the planet and as such contributed immensely to the biodiversity of the world in which we live.

"Butterflies are one of nature's most beautiful creatures and this book will provide those living in Fiji with a reference guide to those lovely insects," said Dr Ana.

"Butterflies are not only beautiful creatures but they are also important ecologically, providing pollination services which maintain the ecosystems which are so vital to the well being of all of us. Butterflies have been described as part of the charismatic mega fauna - organisms that can be identified and appreciated not just by specialist zoologists but by naturalists of any background. They can be used as representative tokens of more hidden and difficult to study fauna in a vast range of potential investigations such as biogeography, behaviour, evolution, land use studies and conservation projects."

She also expressed delight at the involvement of the two young authors from USP's Faculty of Science and Technology.

"I am delighted to see that this book has been authored by Sunil and Hilda. The future of conservation of the South Pacific's unique biodiversity will be led by this generation of young scientists"

Images for the book were provided Gaden Robinson, Dave Britton and Max Beaston through the Fiji Museum.

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 28.07.2009 12:51 Age: 1 yrs
 Category: IAS News
 By: Hilda Waqa

Agricultural Pests Taxonomy Training

Scale insects found on many plants in Fiji can seriously affect plant growth. A three day specialist training workshop on the Taxonomy of the Scale Insects of Fiji held from 13th to 15th July at the Institute of Applied Sciences (IAS) was organized by IAS through a Darwin Initiative funded project titled: "Focus on Fiji-Insect Inventories and Biodiversity Assessments". The workshop was conducted by Dr. Chris Hodgson, an entomologist who is a world authority on Scale Insects and works at the Cardiff Museum, Wales. Participants of the workshop included those directly involved with the study of scale insects: Koronivia Agriculture Research, Quarantine Department, Colo-i-suva Forestry Research and the University of the South Pacific.



Scale insect workshop participants at Laucala campus

This is part of a series of training in taxonomy that IAS has organized and conducted in the past as part of their Capacity Building Program in Taxonomy. The workshop was a first on the taxonomy of scale insects to be conducted in Fiji and has generated a lot of interest from the above organizations due to the economic significance of this group of insects. Scale Insects (Hemiptera: Coccoidea) are of significance economically as they feed on a wide variety of plants and many are considered as pests, however, very little is known of their taxonomy in Fiji.

The training has enabled participants to acquire proper skills in having the specimens collected from the field, mounted onto slides and using classification keys to assist with their identifications. Ms. Losalini Leweniqila, the Principal Research Officer at the Koronivia Agriculture Research Station commented, "The workshop was very useful in that our knowledge of the identification and taxonomy of scale insects was increased. Information gathered from this workshop has directly strengthened our capacity in conducting the Pest & Disease Survey in Rotuma; which is a prerequisite to their trade with Tuvalu. I hope USP will continue to enhance the skills of technical workers in the member countries through specialist trainings like this".

The three-day workshop ended with the presentation of certificates by the Director of IAS, Prof. Bill Aalbersberg. Dr Hodgson together with entomologists from Koronivia Agriculture Research and USP will spend a further two weeks conducting scale insect surveys in Kadavu, Taveuni and Sigatoka.

For further information contact Mr. Marika Tuiwawa, Curator- USP Herbarium, on telephone 323 2975 or on email tuiwawa_m@usp.ac.fj.

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Eight years in the making

Ifereni Nadore
Saturday, September 19, 2009

Villagers in the upper reaches of Serua and Navosa have been feeding on a rare insect delicacy that appears exclusively in their forests once every eight years.

The delicacy commonly known as the nanai, has found itself in every household in specific areas of Navosa and the tikina of Nuku in Serua for the past two weeks.

The insect which is scientifically known as the Raiateana Knowlesi belongs to the order Hemiptera and the Cicadidae family.

According to the University of the South Pacific, a recent review on the Cicadas of Fiji records a total of 20 species and 100 per cent endemism with some island subspecies. Nanai, which was first described in 1907 is endemic to Fiji.



Varasiko Nacuwa, with a plant sporting the delicacy.

USP spokeswoman Hilder Waqa Sakiti said at present, scientific publications indicate that Raiateana knowlesi has only been recorded on Viti Levu in the Nadroga/Navosa Province.

She said there have been verbal reports of a similar species in the Serua area but further scientific investigations into the identification as being that of the same species is needed to confirm the second locality.

"Very little is known of this species in Fiji and further research and awareness into the significance of the insects of Fiji is essential," said Ms Sakiti.

Deputy chairman of the Serua Provincial Council Ratu Manueli Roseru said villagers had been have been out in the damp forests to catch nanai knowing that it would only last for few weeks.

The Fiji Times crew had a first-hand experience on how nanai was cooked in bamboo stems before it was served with coconut milk.

The taste is more or less like prawns roasted over charcoal.

Ratu Manueli said the nanai would shelter in trees to protect themselves from predators such as birds, mongoose and snakes.

"Women also use nanai for bait when they go out fishing," said Ratu Manueli.

Ms Sakiti said the Cicadas would go through an incomplete metamorphosis where immature stages called nymphs looked very similar to adults but lacked wings and reproductive structures.

"After a series of moults, the final moult to adulthood occurs with expansion of wings," said Ms Sakiti.

"After mating, the female deposits hundreds of eggs in the bark of twigs. When the eggs hatch, the newborn nymphs drop to the ground and burrow into the soil. The nanai goes through a life cycle that lasts eight years," she said.

Cicadas live underground as nymphs for most of their lives, at depths ranging from about 30 cm up to 2.5 m, feeding on root juices. In the final nymphal instar, they create an exit passage to the surface and emerge. They then moult (shed their skins) on a nearby plant for the last time and emerge as adults. The nymphal shell usually remains attached to the plant.

Ms Sikitani said the main activity as adults was to reproduce and reports from the people of Motokana Village in the Nadroga/Navosa Province have mentioned that they usually survive as adults for two-three weeks.

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