

# Birds down Mt Washington

By VASITI RITOVA

**T**he bird protectors are over in Mount Washington too.

There are many pretty birds in Kadavu and the protectors are right in the thick forest, up and down Mount Washington in Nabukelevu to fence off critical areas that would shield the beautiful Kadavu birds from predators.

And the Darwin Initiative is playing a major role in it.

Mount Washington was identified as an Important Bird Area (IBA) because of its importance and iconic identity to Kadavu.

It supports extensive old-growth forest and has four species of bird endemic to Kadavu flying all over its forest area.

"The forest is threatened because small scale agriculture has been increasingly impinging on the forested area," says a statement from Birdlife International. "The main reason is that farming on the steep slopes is not sustainable due to erosion and new gardens are constantly being cut from the forest."

The BirdLife Fiji Team has worked with communities to tie a forest protection agreement in to training and support for sustainable agricultural practices that reduces the pressure on the forest.

It involved a lot of replanting around the village boundaries and everything from sandalwood and grass was planted.

"This is a new approach for developing protected areas in Fiji" explains James Millett, Senior Technical Advisor to the BirdLife Pacific Division.

"Importantly it has raised a great deal of interest from the communities because it is practical and clearly linked to sustainable village incomes and reduces the pressure on their forest resources" he added.

A three day sustainable agriculture and forest protection workshop was organised by BirdLife International's Conservation Officers Tuverea Tuamoto and Mere Valu with support of the Government of Fiji and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community.

The workshop was opened by the newly appointed Roko Tui Kadavu (Executive Head of the Provincial Council), Ratu



*Planting sandalwood in Lomati village - a new source of income*

Vunilagi Dawai.

The workshop focused theoretical training on a number of key areas and then put teaching in to practice on a one hectare demonstration farm and a small nursery that had been constructed in advance.

Training included developing contour farming using Vetiver grass, an introduced grass that has been used in Fiji for 50 years.

It has not become invasive and is considered safe to introduce in agricultural systems.

"It is so effective at trapping sediment it will eventually create terraces but it is not widely used in village gardens because farmers are unaware of the benefits," he said. "This really is grassroots conservation".

The demonstration farm also reintroduced traditional Taro varieties

have an exciting model for integrated forest and farm management emerging, one that we will be showing in other sites where forest is threatened by agriculture"

Between 2002 and 2005 the Darwin Initiative supported a project to identify Fiji's Important Bird Areas which documented 14 IBAs mainly in the remaining areas of old-growth forest.

Most of the IBAs are threatened by the forest clearance for logging or subsistence



that are better suited to local conditions and more resistant to disease than modern cultivars.

Taro is a root crop and the staple carbohydrate on Pacific Islands and reintroducing old varieties will improve the production and reduce the risk of catastrophic crop failures from disease.

Arboriculture was also taught and native saplings were planted out. Of special interest were Sandalwood trees that have high value timber from which aromatic oils are extracted, 14 were planted in the village and special training was given on the collection and germination of seed.

"Sandalwood is a valuable crop and could make a real difference to village livelihoods but it is rarely managed sustainably" explained Tuverea.

James added, "This has been a learning experience for us as conservationists as well as for the land owners and I think we

agriculture and also by alien species.

A subsequent Darwin project Community-based Conservation Groups at Fiji's Key Conservation Sites focused on developing Site Support Groups and community based protected areas on selected IBAs.

The Darwin Initiative is a British government funding agency that has provided funds for a number of projects in the South Pacific and worked closely with BirdLife in identifying Important Bird Area, areas essential for the conservation of birds and biodiversity.

Additional funding for the workshop and sustainable farming training was from the GEF and NZAID funded Small Grants Programme, implemented by UNDP.

BirdLife International is especially grateful to The Land Use Division, The Department of Forestry and Secretariat of the Pacific Community for expert inputs and supply of materials.



☞ Sandalwood is a valuable crop and could make a real difference to village livelihoods but it is rarely managed sustainably ☞





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## Saving Natewa's rich biodiversity

3/15/2009

Paddling along the protected coastline of Natewa Bay, the second largest bay in the Southern Hemisphere, to watch out for endangered bird, animal and plant species, has become an important undertaking for the people of Natewa and Tunuloa.

The community has been tasked to take charge of conservation because of the little education local communities have received on Fiji's rich biodiversity.

Natewa and Tunuloa have embarked on a major awareness campaign to save some of the areas' well-loved species.

And their regular discoveries have reinforced the importance of conservation in Fiji and the Pacific Islands, one critical area of concern with international conservationists.

International experts have come together to work with the people in the region on conservation, on saving the forests where many live, and protect them against alien invasive predators, like rats, that are endangering these birds' very existence. A BirdLife International community conservation programme was introduced in the Natewa Peninsula in 2005.

It became a demonstration project to protect forests in the South Pacific and quickened efforts by Birdlife International to introduce the programme to conservationists from local communities in Natewa and Tunuloa and their peers from French Polynesia and New Caledonia.

James Millett, BirdLife International's Senior Technical Advisor for the Pacific Region, said a workshop to promote the concept occurred in Navetau, Natewa early this month.

"The purpose of the workshop was to provide training for our overseas participants in community oriented conservation techniques, less widely practiced by our regional neighbours. For locals it was an opportunity to showcase their community conservation skills," said Mr Millett.

The BirdLife International initiative focuses on the Natewa and Tunuloa Important Bird Area (IBA) that contain untouched forest and is home to rare birds such as Silktail and Orange Dove.

The programme has convinced landowners of the importance of protecting their forest; it also resulted in an agreement that bans commercial logging and other non-sustainable activities, as well as protecting the area from forest fires.

Today, at least eleven Mataqali from the Natewa Area have collectively agreed to protect over 6000ha of their forest over a ten-year period.

"The undertaking by the landowners means that they are also protecting their fresh water supplies, their food, and their fisheries and through their efforts in protecting the land minimize flood damage and erosion.

"This is grassroots conservation at its finest," said Mr. Millett.

The workshop was funded by the British Government's Darwin Initiative and by the Aarg V Jensen Foundation, active in funding forest sites in Fiji.

This week, Birdlife International stated that there have been rare discoveries of a unique Pacific bird in Solomon Islands.

"The recent discovery of the Vanikoro White-eye reinforces the importance of conservation in the island countries, said Don Stewart, Director of BirdLife's Pacific Partnership Secretariat.

The discovery was made by a team of experts that was led by Dr. Guy Dutson of BirdLife Australia (a BirdLife partner organization in Australia). They found the bird on Vanikoro.

It is closely related to Fiji's long legged Warbler.

Mr Stewart said that the discovery of the white-eye, coupled with the rediscovery of birds that were thought extinct (like the Long-legged warbler in Fiji) stresses the importance of protecting the habitat where these birds have been found.

"We continue to work with the people in the region on conservation, on saving the forests where many of these species live, and by protecting them against alien invasive predators, like rats, that are endangering these birds' very existence,"

he added.

"The recent commitment by landowners to protect over 6,000 hectares of their native forest in the remote Natewa Peninsula on Fiji's second largest island Vanua Levu, is a reflection of increased awareness of the need for conservation.

Mr Stewart said the discovery illustrates how little is known about biodiversity in the islands, especially in Melanesia.

"We believe that there are more undiscovered bird species in the islands. Finding them is an ongoing effort as we explore the many forests, wetlands, and shorelines in the region," said Mr Stewart.

The new bird was named after Vanikoro Island. Its full name is Vanikoro White-eye *Zosterops gibbsi*; the scientific name *gibbsi* is in honour of the first person to see the new species, David Gibbs.

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# Birdlife workshop promotes grassroots conservation







***BirdLife International community conservation programme has become a demonstration project that hopes to be a model for the protection of forests in the South Pacific.***

A BirdLife International community conservation programme introduced in the remote Natewa Peninsula in 2005 has become a demonstration project that is hoped to be a model for the protection of forests in the South Pacific, according to James Millett, BirdLife International's Senior Technical Advisor for the Pacific Region.

The programme was

introduced to 40 participants from Fiji, French Polynesia and New Caledonia at a two-day workshop held in Navetau, Natewa.

"The purpose of the workshop was to provide training for our overseas participants in community oriented conservation techniques, less widely practiced by our regional neighbours. For locals it was an opportunity to showcase their

community conservation skills," said Mr Millett. The BirdLife International initiative focuses on the Natewa and Tunuloa Important Bird Area (IBA) that contain untouched forest and is home to rare birds such as Silktail and Orange Dove.

The community conservation programme started in 2005 convinced landowners, at that time, of the importance of protecting their forest and

resulted in an agreement that bans commercial logging and other non-sustainable activities, as well as protecting the area from forest fires.

As a result of the workshop, 11 Mataqali from the area agreed to protect over 6000ha of their forest over a ten-year period reinforcing the 2005 agreement.

"The undertaking by the landowners means that they are also protecting their fresh water

supplies, their food, and their fisheries and through their efforts in protecting the land minimize flood damage and erosion. This is grassroots conservation at its finest," said Mr. Millett.

The workshop was funded by the British Government's Darwin Initiative and by the Aarg V Jensen Foundation, active in funding forest sites in Fiji.



# Pacific birds face extinction



*Rimatara lorikeet*

The Pacific region, comprised of the Pacific Islands, Australia and NZ, has the "dubious honour" of having the highest bird extinction rate in the world

One quarter of all birds in the world that face extinction are to be found in the Pacific region, including Australia and New Zealand.

This is according to a new Red List report published by IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) in partnership with BirdLife International.

The report is issued every four years.

BirdLife International is a global alliance of conservation groups working in more than 100 countries and territories. As the definitive authority on the status of birds, it supports IUCN in compiling the Bird Red List.

The List makes "grim reading" according to Don Stewart, BirdLife International's Regional Director for the Pacific

countries.

"Another danger posing a real threat to the survival of the region's birds is the introduction of predators such as rats, mongoose and the Brown Tree Snake to islands.

"The Brown Tree Snake shows the destruction predators can cause. Accidentally introduced into Guam, probably in cargo, this voracious predator eats birds eggs and chicks and has resulted in the destruction of almost every species of bird on Guam.

These snakes now appear to be spreading to neighbouring islands.

Mr Stewart said that conservation efforts can make a difference.

"We are working with our regional partners to implement programmes to protect endangered species and we have met with some



species of birds world-wide now threatened with extinction.

The Pacific region, comprised of the Pacific Islands, Australia and New Zealand, has the "dubious honour" of having the highest bird extinction rate in the world.

Three hundred and eighty-four bird species in the region are threatened, with 44 of these (25 per cent of the world's total) classed as critically endangered, meaning they are only one step away from extinction.

Mr Stewart said that these figures should be alarming to all of us who live in the region.

"We should be very worried about the extinction of our bird species and should take action to tackle the reasons.

"The destruction of bird habitats - those areas where birds live - is a particular concern, with deforestation being a key reason in many South-western Pacific

success.

In French Polynesia, the Marquesan Imperial Pigeon has been taken off the Critical list following the success of a conservation programme run by MANU, BirdLife's partner in the country.

In New Zealand, the Little Spotted Kiwi has been taken off the threatened list as a result of a number of birds being transferred to islands free of predators.

Of significant importance, according to Mr Stewart, is the "Species Guardian Initiative" launched by BirdLife where a local organisation becomes The Guardian of a threatened bird.

So far, two organisations have signed up to become Guardians for three of the Pacific's rarest birds: the Fiji Petrel, Tahiti Monarch and Polynesian Ground Dove.



*Marquesan Imperial Pigeon*



# The GREEN PAGE

FIJI SUN

12TH FEBRUARY, 2007

By **KELERA SERELINI**

Some of the world's most spectacular parrot species live in the Fiji Islands, but they could soon join the world list of extinct birds if their main predator is not eradicated.

Although there are a number of reasons why parrot populations are dwindling, the main cause is the black rat, an introduced species that climbs up to nests and eats eggs and chicks. The rats have also been found to have a devastating impact on biodiversity.

Suva-based BirdLife International Pacific has been monitoring the disappearance of these birds and working on ways to stop them from becoming extinct.

Fortunately for the birds, the Pacific Parrot, in particular, a donation of \$719,000 from the British Birdfair will be used to protect the parrots in the region.

The small parrots of the Pacific islands are thought to have been the worst affected by the accidental introduction of the black rat.

Many of the small parrots have already been lost from French Polynesia and the Cook Islands.

However, for bigger Islands such as Fiji and New Caledonia, parrot populations have retreated deeper into the forests, but could eventually disappear altogether.

BirdLife's regional representative, Mr Don Stewart, said that the money from the British Birdfair - a major annual event in England - would be used in a number of



projects aimed at protecting parrot populations.

"We expect to begin protecting those endangered parrot-breeding sites from black rats, their main predators, that are literally devastating parrot populations," he said.

It has been confirmed that the Cook Islands, French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Samoa and Fiji will focus on five endangered parrot species.

These include the Ultramarine Lorikeet in French Polynesia and the Uvea Parakeet in New Caledonia.

The Ultramarine Lorikeet reintro-

**"We expect to begin protecting those endangered parrot-breeding sites from black rats, their main predators, that are literally devastating parrot populations"**

duced population now survives on Uahuka in the Marquesas Island.

Unfortunately, population of the birds on the other islands have been total wiped out by rats since mid-1970's.

The money received is going to be used for training staffs and equip baiting stations to ensure rats are kept away.

Mr Stewart said that efforts would also be directed toward assisting in the translocation of the endangered species of the Rimatara Lorikeets, presently found on only one island in French Polynesia.

Some of the birds will be relocated to another island in the Cook Islands.

In addition, a search is to be mounted in Fiji, as part of the project, to attempt to locate the Red-throated Lorikeet, which has not been sighted for more than 10 years.

According to Birdlife Pacific senior technical adviser James Millet that the Red-throated Lorikeet have always been regarded as rare and is only found in Fiji.

He said surveys that were carried out in 2001 to 2003 have not been successful as the bird was nowhere to be found.

The bird is known to wander by following period of trees.

The Fiji Birdlife Pacific programme team believes that "if we can find the flowering trees, we can find the bird."

Mr Don said there were 37 critically endangered birds in the South Pacific out of a staggering 289 globally that are threatened with extinction.

"That is why events like the 2006 British Birdfair are so important for organisations like ours. For 18 years, this annual three-day event has hosted thousands upon thousands of visitors with a special emphasis on the worldwide protection of threatened bird species," Mr Stewart said.

"Each year, the Birdfair organisers select a region to help bird conservation projects, this year, it was the South Pacific and the "Saving of the Pacific Parrots".

"BirdLife is extremely grateful to the bird fair organisers for their generosity and commitment in helping us achieve a great deal towards bird conservation around the world."



The

# GREEN PAGE

8TH JANUARY, 2007

By ALUMECI NAKEKE

Gau is an island that is known for its different types of lumi or seaweed but it is the only known breeding place for the critically-endangered Kacau or Fiji petrel.

Where their nest is not really known but BirdLife Fiji presumes that it may be in the interior forests of the island.

The forested interior of the island has been set aside for the conservation of birds, which is known as important bird areas (IBA). BirdLife Fiji states that IBA designation has no legal basis but it provides a strong scientific justification for the conservation of these areas.

However, this bird is in danger and it is not really known how many still exist.

In 2004, the National Trust of Fiji initiated a community awareness programme for the locals, which ran for a year in association with RARE. And in the same year, the Trust with BirdLife Fiji and the Wildlife Conservation Society started a community-based project with the intention to attract petrels to an accessible location and to enable them to obtain more information from grounded birds together with an initiative to protect the highlands of Gau where these petrels are believed to nest.

So far, they have been able to collect data from one petrel but overall there no further information is available from which they could assess the status of the Fiji petrel.



BirdLife Fiji believes that the threats to the petrel are feral or wild cats and rats, which may harm nesting birds.

Mongoose is also one of those animals that prey on birds but they do not live in Gau. The island also has a lot of iguanas and the Fijian ground frog and studies also suggest that the island has a high number of endemic plants.

And after 100 years of little conservation on the island there is renewed effort towards determining the status and conservation needs of the Fiji Petrel. It was in 1855 that they took the type specimen on Gau and in April 1984 a rediscovery of a further eight records of the petrel

‘However, if the Fiji petrels’ nesting ground could be located there may be potential for a low level of specialised eco-tourism to cater for interested ornithologists’

grounding on the island or offshore.

Gau is the fifth largest island in Fiji with a population of about 3000 and has very fertile agricultural land.

The important bird areas is lowland forest with stunted forest on ridge tops and includes some of the world's lowest altitude montane cloud forest on the high exposed slopes.

On the conservation of the Fiji petrel, BirdLife Fiji believes that it is likely to be dependent on the control of some invasive alien predators. It has been found that small petrels across the world are vulnerable to predation at the nest by wild or introduced cats, pigs, and rats and it was

found that all these were present in the forests of Gau.

It was also found that it did not have any cliffs or inaccessible mountain ledges where the petrels could nest and be out of reach from these enemies.

But the organisation needs more research to locate the nesting ground of the petrels, to monitor breeding success and the impact of these predators. Even though they do not have mongoose on the island measures should be set out to make sure that they do not land on the island from Viti Levu or Vanua Levu.

It has also been found that subsistence farming are going uphill although the forests are not being threatened by clearance from the villagers but there is also the threat of fire.

But as the population increases, BirdLife Fiji notices that agricultural activities are slowly increasing as there are also some restrictions on harvesting of marine resources.

However, if the Fiji petrels’ nesting ground could be located there may be potential for a low level of specialised eco-tourism to cater for interested ornithologists.

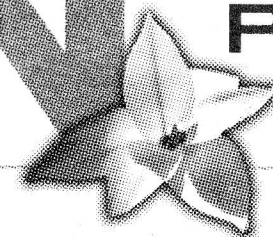
Furthermore Gau is also home to Tahiti petrel which is classed as a near-threatened species but this petrel may be also be possibly found in Kadavu and Taveuni.

Locals use the birds’ white feathers for fishing purposes and in Kadavu they cook special meals out of this bird for distinguished visitors.





# The GREEN PAGE



11TH SEPTEMBER, 2006

FJI SUN

## Mongoose and humans push rare beauties to the brink

**F**iji has about 11 bird species threatened with global extinction and another six classified as near threatened.

And if nothing is done to protect them, they would be among the list of extinct birds in the world.

There are 27 national endemic species while another ten species are shared with some of our neighbouring islands.

Currently, Fiji has 87 species of breeding birds and 59 of these are mostly forest birds, 19, breeding sea birds, 11 introduced from other countries and three are now extinct due to predation by man or mongoose.

Another 52 bird species only visit Fiji, they do not nest here and most occur in small numbers - 29 are non-breeding seabird visitors which are usually only seen at sea and 22 are non-breeding shorebird visitors and usually seen along the coast.

Some of the near extinct ones have not been sighted for years and one of them is our local Red-throated Lorikeet (*Kulaiwai*) and the Fiji Petrel (*Kacau ni Gau*), said Birdlife International's regional representative in the Pacific, Mr Don Stewart.

The red-throated Lorikeet has not been sighted from 2002 to 2003 but people in Taveuni believe they have heard it or seen it but there has been no proof yet.

Another bird that has been in extinct is the Barred-winged Rail or *Saca*.

The near threatened ones are Silktail (*Sisi*), Masked Shining Parrot (*Kaka*), Tahiti Petrel, Whistling Dove (*Soqeta*),

Collared Petrel (*Kacau*) and Kadavu Fantail. Birdlife has done a three-year research project to identify sites for bird conservation in Fiji and these are now known as Important Bird Areas.

It has no legal basis but it provides a strong scientific justification for the conservation of these areas.

About 14 sites have been identified and these comprise of natural forests on the island of Viti Levu, Taveuni, Kadavu and Gau, Rotuma, Ogea and Vatu-i-Ra, which has Fiji's biggest seabird nesting colony.

And to conserve these areas there has to be measures on preventing the entry of Indian mongoose to Taveuni, Kadavu and Gau islands. In logging areas, a standard should be set to be followed and wildfire management through dialogue with landowners, operators and government.

Planting of new mahogany and other cash crop to degraded forest and converted land should be restricted.

New invasive alien species should be prevented from entering the country and islands and environmental awareness programmes be carried out extensively.

Birdlife International aims to work with landowners to promote conservation awareness and action and to help the government and all people of Fiji to ensure the survival of these birds and other wildlife for the future generations of Fiji.

The Natewa and Tunuloa peninsula has suffered extensive logging, which continues around the IBA. Logging is often unsustainable, leading to increased

numbers of invasive alien species as well as degraded forest.

And the impact of of unsustainable logging on drinking water quality, marine resources in Natewa Bay and other environmental problems, have lead a number of the mataqali in at least four villages around the IBA to seek assistance for forest conservation.

In opening the British Birdfair in central England this year, Fiji's High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, Emitai Boladuadua said many bird species have gone extinct.

"A staggering 289 globally-threatened birds live in the Pacific of which 37 are critically-endangered - a quarter of the world's total. Many species are feared to have gone extinct in recent times," he said.

The Fair, focuses on birds and wildlife concerns, offering over 300 exhibits, plus seminars, and lectures, with its primary purpose to raise money for bird conservation projects worldwide.

Mr Boladuadua, in his address, mentioned the Pacific's Rimatara Lorikeet, Ultramarine Lorikeet and Uvea Parakeet as critically endangered and "Fiji's own Red-throated Lorikeet, a species that has not been seen for years".

To address this "critical danger, especially to the parrots", Mr Boladuadua said that the money raised from the Birdfair would go to Saving The Pacific Parrots, a project proposed by Birdlife International through its regional, Fiji-based office BirdLife International Pacific

Partnership Secretariat.

Birdlife International's regional representative in the Pacific, Don Stewart, said the project would be coordinated by his office in Suva.

The Saving the Pacific's Parrots project will be launched in 2007 in the island countries of Fiji, Cook Islands, French Polynesia, New Caledonia and Samoa.

"The Birdfair-funded project will centre on protecting endangered bird breeding sites from black rats, the main predators that are literally devastating the parrot population," said Mr Stewart.

"The project would also assist in the relocation of a number of Rimatara Lorikeets now found only in French Polynesia to the Cook Islands to increase the parrots' chances of survival."

However, Birdlife International states that two main reasons for conserving Fiji's biodiversity is: Our moral obligations to ensure that future generations of Fijians can share the natural world that we currently enjoy and that is all of its species and natural habitats are beautiful and spiritually uplifting and link us with our traditional cultures and beliefs.

The second reason is the utilitarian justification that natural ecosystems provide Fiji with a huge amount of free services such as drinking water, hydro-electric power, soil conservation, fish, wild pigs, yams, ferns, traditional medicines and others. In particular, Fiji's largest industry, tourism, depends on Fiji's clean and attractive environment.