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1ST OCTOBER, 2007

Bird areas under threat



Mahogany plantations is a threat to Fiji's forest birds and in some places they logged the native forest to plant mahogany and it increased in the 1980s and in 1990s there was an estimated 57,675 ha of mahogany in both Viti Levu and Vanua Levu it was mainly in dense and in mid-dense natural forest on these two main islands.

Selective logging is threatening important bird areas or IBA in Namosi and one of the biggest problems resulting from such logging is the accessibility of alien species in these forests. In some other areas in Vanua Levu and Viti Levu Native trees had been felled and logged and in its stead mahogany had been planted especially in the 1980s and this had greatly affected birds that live in those forests.

Birdlife International has also found that Namosi is the best known site for the endemic Fijian Burrowing Snake and also a skink similar to the Turquoise Tree Skink which is only known to be in Vanua Levu is also found here.

However, selective logging has brought in invasive species such as mongoose and Black rats which attack birds and other creatures in those forests..

In other places native forests have been felled and cleared then planted with mahogany and because they have found the side effects of this the practice has been discontinued some years ago.

Cultivation of land for agricultural uses as in other areas in Fiji is also expanding up the foothills in many areas.

But other areas like the the Savura and Vago Forest reserves are protected and used as water catchment for the city of Suva but it has been protected from being logged since the 1963.

A study of the Savura Forest reserve recorded 560 indigenous vascular plant species and about 52 per cent are endemic to Fiji It also has some globally threatened species bird like the long-legged warbler and only one heard three times at Mount Korobaba but probably more widespread. Another is the Friendly Ground dove which is uncommon or rare. Black -faced Shrikebill - greatly uncommon, pink-



face Parrotfinch and the masked shining Parrot.

The Black-faced Shrikebill has in recent surveys by Birdlife has shown that it is widespread but at low population densities. And it has been categorised as vulnerable because it is believed that it was restricted to old growth forest which was then believed to under threat of accelerated loss to logging and mahogany plantations.

In recent surveys there were 46 birds recorded and most of the birds found were calling males but there could also be some overlooked birds especially because they were silent. This species is also found to be declining at the

same rate as forest loss and degradation.

The Masked Shining Parrot is under the vulnerable to near threatened category and according to Wildlife Conservation Society and Birdlife Fiji in 2002 - '05 that its population is much higher than previously estimated and it's population is about 5000 declining at the rate of more than 30 per cent in three generations.

The Friendly Ground dove is also vulnerable and surveys have found the species to be all over but patchy at low population densities on the larger Fijian islands But unlike Samoa and Tonga there is no evidence that t

bird is on the decline in Fiji because of logging and degradation of forests.

The IBA in Namosi is mostly lowland rainforest along a number of hills and low mountains and ten going up the mountains of Makuluva, which is about 615 metres Nakorolo about 422 metres to the east.

In the book "Important Bird Areas in Fiji - Conserving Fiji's natural forest" it mentions that a botanical transect up Mount Korobaba found a transition from multi-coloured forest with emergents up to 35 m and a rich development of epiphytes and climbers to a 4 - 14 tall broken canopied scrub, poor in epiphytes and climbers.

There are also other isolated mountains in Fiji that have the same kind of vegetation and its growth is stunted because of the shallowness of the soil and strong winds

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But the government owned Fiji Hardwood Corporation Limited did not create any new plantation during 1999 to 2000 however, there were some small plantations created by private landowner initiatives.

But many birds would have been lost at the time of conversion but others have survived in the plantations, which usually contained smaller native trees amongst the mahogany as well along the watercourses and on steep slopes.

Birdlife also mentioned that most of the birds would not also have survived clear felling of the plantations and the subsequent re-planting with mahogany or abandonment to pioneer scrub and creepers.