

Birds of Fiji face danger

FIJI needs to introduce measures for the protection of its birdlife.

This was the conclusion in the book *Important Bird Areas of Fiji: Conserving Fiji's Natural Heritage* launched by British High Commissioner Roger Skyes this week.

The book states that invasive species contributed to an alarming loss of biodiversity in the country.

It describes 14 sites in Fiji which are of global importance for bird conservation.

Compiled and edited by Vilikesa Masibalavu and Guy Dutton, the book states that the 14 areas were priorities for conserving Fiji's natural heritage.

It also states that Fiji's rich natural heritage includes 11 threatened bird species and 27 endemic bird species living nowhere else in the world.

The book updates the status and conservation needs of the special birds and is aimed at land-use planners, policy makers, conservationists, forest managers, researchers, bird watchers, landowners and the public.

Mr Masibalavu and Mr Dutton worked on the book over the past three years.

They were sponsored by the Darwin Initiative of Defra (the UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs).

The European Commission and Dutch government were part-sponsors.

In launching the book, Mr Skyes said the gradual



Vilikesa Masibalavu and Guy Dutton launch their book about endangered birds of Fiji

decline of species, caused by factors such as habitat loss and predation of invasive alien species such as mongoose and rats, clearly pointed out a wider biodiversity loss in Fiji.

"It is important that some measure of protection be afforded to these important bird areas.

"The Fiji project has

involved three years of ornithological surveys across Fiji made largely by local people," he said.

Mr Skyes said that as a result of the successful work presented in the book, the UK government had agreed to fund another three-year project aimed at working with local landowning units.



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Villages sign pact to protect their forests

By Theresa Ralogaivau (Tuesday, June 16, 2009)

INTENT on protecting natural flora and fauna in their forests, six villages in Cakaudrove have signed a memorandum of agreement with Bird Life International to do just that over the next 10 years.

Eleven landowning units within the villages of Vusasivo, Nadavaci, Naqaravutu, Muana, Wailevu and Navetau signed the agreement earlier this year.

The villagers own land in the Natewa-Tunuloa community which was declared a protected area.

According to the agreement, the villagers are legally bound to reject the logging of their native timber by any logging company.

They are also bound to accept conservation of their forests for the protection of fauna and flora.

The Natewa-Tunuloa community protected area spans more than 6625 hectares of forests.

In a presentation to the Cakaudrove Provincial Council, Bird Life International said the Natewa-Tunuloa forest was of national significance.



The Silk Tail which is dwindling in numbers because of extensive logging

"It is identified in the National Biodiversity Strategy Action Plan as a site of national significance and also mentioned in the National Regional Tourism Strategy as an area that has the potential to provide regional community benefits.

"It is identified as a globally important site for the conservation of birds and biodiversity."

The conservation effort is especially geared at protecting the Silk Tail bird species or *Lamprolia Victoriae* which, according to the Bird Life International website, is categorised as a near threatened species because of its declining population.

According to Bird Life International the bird species that is endemic to Fiji is 'common and widespread on Taveuni and "highly localised' on Vanua Levu where it is restricted to the Natewa Peninsula".

The bird's population is rapidly declining because of logging.

"Its population at the Natewa peninsula was estimated at 3000 to 6000 pairs," the website stated.

"On Taveuni, where relatively little forest has been lost, 5000 to 8000 pairs were estimated in 2000. On Vanua Levu, the Natewa peninsula is already extensively logged and habitat continues to be lost due to logging, clearance for agriculture and conversion of logged forest to exotic plantations," the website said.

"Exploitation of mahogany plantations is a further risk."

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Intergrated development

(Sunday, June 14, 2009)

WE applaud the work done by BirdLife International to conserve forests and associated wildlife.

In its most recent activity, this little-known non-government organisation is involved in the preservation of forests in the Mount Washington or Nabukelevu area of Kadavu.

When we describe BirdLife International as little-known, it is because the work of the organisation and its volunteers goes relatively unnoticed in Fiji.

That is an unfortunate situation in a country where the native wildlife is under threat from developers and the slow but sure advance of cash-based lifestyles in the rural areas.

Many indigenous frog species are extinct or border on extinction because of the introduction of the mongoose.

Several native snake species and the ga ni viti or native duck have suffered the same fate at the paws and jaws of this imported predator.

When the mongoose was introduced to rid the sugar cane fields of pests, experts did not envisage the fact that the rodent would in fact become a pest over the course of time.

Many of Fiji's young people indeed, some older members of the community have never seen the native frogs nor have the set eyes upon the ga ni viti with its distinctive speckled brown feathers.

And few will have laid eyes upon the majestic Fiji Falcon with its sharp eyes and distinctive yellow beak.

Kadavu particularly the Tavuki district is known as home to the brilliantly coloured native parrot.

A sanctuary has been built to preserve this magnificent indigenous species.

Kadavu particularly the Tavuki district is home to four bird species which must be protected.

The island of Kadavu, however, is also home to man.

Development has started to take its toll on this most verdant of islands, with farmers taking over tracts of forest in order to supply yaqona and dalo for markets on Viti Levu.

Because Kadavu is home to so many rare species, it is imperative that an integrated approach is taken to development and conservation.

Villagers are being taught how to maximise their potential for agriculture while protecting the wildlife which is so important to them and the whole of Fiji.

Community livelihood is as important as the heritage we wish to leave for the generations to come.

We must not forget that local wildlife in its traditional setting has the potential to draw visitors and foreign exchange.

Hopefully other communities will recognise the significance and importance of the work done by BirdLife and be encouraged to participate in conservation of endangered native species.

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Kudos for Birdlife

(Wednesday, February 18, 2009)

BIRDLIFE Pacific has been awarded "highest marks" for conservation efforts to protect native forests by the European Commission (EC) Review Team.

The EC assessment of the Birdlife project was part of a review of projects implemented by a number of other agencies in the region.

Birdlife regional director for the Pacific Don Stewart said IBAs are internationally recognised as key sites for conservation.

The organisation protects native forests through the identification and subsequent promotion of Important Bird Areas (IBAs), home to many of the region's threatened and rare birdlife.

"IBAs are internationally recognised as key sites for conservation. They have proved to be a particularly effective way of identifying conservation priorities," he said.

Birdlife's IBA project located and defined areas in the region where biodiversity conservation was globally important.

The project took four and a half years to be completed.

Mr Stewart said the objective of the project was to identify sites of global biodiversity importance in the Pacific and encourage their conservation.

He said that Birdlife and its partners researched and identified IBAs through field work in Fiji,



Endangered species ... found in the Fiji forests the Goldpigeon is classified among the birds Birdlife International wants to protect

Palau, New Caledonia and French Polynesia, and compiled IBA inventories for an additional thirteen countries and territories in the region.

The EC assessment focused on each project's relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability.

Mr Stewart praised Birdlife's partners responsible for the work on the project in French Polynesia, New Caledonia and Palau and the staff of the Pacific Partnership Secretariat in Fiji.

"The challenge is now to work closely with governments and local communities to ensure that the IBAs we have identified continue to be sustainable and to encourage similar efforts in the region, using the IBA approach," he said.

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Re-forestation on Mount Washington

(Saturday, June 13, 2009)

BIRDLIFE International has introduced a new conservation initiative on Kadavu that could help protect forests in island countries across the South Pacific.

BirdLife International senior technical adviser for the Pacific, James Millett, said unsustainable agricultural practices that resulted in the degradation of farm land had often forced farmers to clear more forest, which was threatening the Mount Nabukelevu Important Bird Area.

Through an initial two-acre demonstration farm, located at Lomati Village, villagers were shown how soil conservation and productivity could be improved in farmed land around villages near Mount Washington, thus reducing pressure for further forest clearance for farming.

The model farm introduced farm practices such as planting soil stabilising grass and use of traditional taro varieties resistant to diseases.

"It is our hope that other villages will learn from this model farm enabling them to better utilise their land for sustainable farming," said Mr Millett.

The initiative was launched in a three-day workshop on the island that has focused on the introduction of the model farm and a forest restoration program. Through the workshop a forest restoration program was also implemented. The Nabukelevu villagers were encouraged to grow and re-plant native trees



Villagers and youths of Nabukelevu plants trees and soil stabilising grass around Mount Washington on Kadavu

including sandalwood. It is expected that the replanting will not only provide increased protection from erosion but generate future income through sustainable harvesting of valuable sandalwood.

Twenty-seven participants attended the workshop at Lomati in the tikina of Nabukelevu that is home to Mount Washington, the largest area of mountain forest on the island. Mount Washington supports significant populations of four bird species found only on Kadavu. The project's priority is to protect Mount Washington forests and biodiversity alongside community livelihood.

The workshop was organised by BirdLife conservation officers Tuverea Tuamoto and Mere Valu with support from the Department of Forestry, the land-use section of the Department of Agriculture and Secretariat of the Pacific Community.

In addition to the support of the Darwin Initiative, the project was co-financed by UNDP's Global Environment Facility Small Grant Program and NZAID.

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Facilitator Nunia Thomas (right) from Fiji discusses conservation with Anne Gouni from a conservation group in French Polynesia with workshop participants in the background. Inset: The rare Orange Dove, which is found in the Natewa area of Vanua Levu.

Villages vow to protect forests, birds

ELEVEN *mataqali* from Natewa have agreed to protect over 6000 hectares of their forest following a workshop on conservation by BirdLife International.

BirdLife International's senior technical adviser for the Pacific region, James Millet, said the undertaking by the landowners meant they were also protecting their fresh water supplies, their food, their fisheries and through their efforts in protecting the land minimise flood damage and erosion.

Mr Millet said their initiative showed grassroots conservation at its finest.

He said the BirdLife International community conservation programme introduced in the Natewa Peninsula in 2005 became a demon-

stration project that they hope will become a model for protection of forests in the South Pacific.

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

Mr Millet said 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 Silk-tail and Orange Dove.

Although he said there were no definite statistics showing the

number of rare birds in the areas, he did say that they were in danger of being extinct.

The community conservation programme started in 2005 and convinced landowners, at that time, of the importance of protecting their forest. It resulted in an agreement that bans commercial logging and other non-sustainable activities, as well as protecting the area from forest fires.

Mr Millet said the programme was introduced to 40 participants from Fiji, French Polynesia and New Caledonia at a two-day workshop held in the village of Navetau in the *Tikina* of Natewa recently.

The workshop was funded by the British Government's Darwin Initiative and by the Aarg V Jensen Foundation.

BIRDLIFE

- BirdLife International is a global partnership of conservation organisations that strive to conserve birds, their habitats and global biodiversity

- It works with people towards sustainability in the use of natural resources.

- BirdLife Partners operate in more than 100 countries and territories worldwide.

- They also collaborate on regional work programmes in every continent

- It's conducting a three-year study on Fiji's birdlife.

Pacific birds stare at extinction



Pacific lorikeet

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 (based in Suva), with 1226 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% of the world's total) classed as critically endangered, meaning they are only one step away from extinction.

Mr Stewart said 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 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 success."

In French Polynesia, the Marquesan Imperial Pigeon has been taken off the Critical list following the success of a conservation program 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

Move to save Pacific birds

A CAMPAIGN to save Fiji's own critically endangered red-throated *Lorikeet* and 36 other Pacific birds has begun.

"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," said Fiji's High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, Emitai Boladuadua.

He made the comment while opening the 2006 British Birdfair in Rutland Water in Central England last weekend.

The Birdfair, celebrating its 18th year, 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. More than 20,000 people attended the three-day event.

Mr Boladuadua, in his address, mentioned the South Pacific's *Rimatara Lorikeet*, *Ultramarine Lorikeet* and, the *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 the money raised from the Birdfair would go to "Saving The Pacific Parrots", a project proposal organised by Birdlife International through its regional, Fiji-based office BirdLife International Pacific Partnership Secretariat.

Birdlife International's regional representative in the South Pacific Don Stewart, said the project would be co-ordinated by his office in Suva organisation.

The "Saving the Pacific's Parrots" project proper would 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 those endangered bird breeding sites from black rats, their main predators that are literally devastating the parrot population.

Rats make way for bird tours

BIRD watching tours, a form of tourism that has grown in popularity throughout the world, will now be available on Vatu-i-Ra island, says the BirdLife International Pacific representative, Don Stewart.

This follows the eradica-

tion of black rats that had posed a major threat to seabirds nesting on the island. Mr Stewart said a team organised by BirdLife International visited the island for several days in July placing specially prepared bait to eradicate the rats.

"A monitoring team, led by Dr Dick Watling, made a return visit to Vatu-i-Ra last week and was unable to find any trace of live rats. This was most encouraging for when they arrived on the island in July, it was over run by rats," Mr Stewart said.

Vatu-i-Ra is a small 2.3-hectare island located 16 kilometres off the north east coast of Viti Levu and is home to a significant number of breeding seabirds.

The island has been identified by BirdLife as an "important bird area".

Funds for endangered birds

THE Suva-based Birdlife International Pacific received \$719,000 from the British Birdfair to help in protecting the South Pacific's 37 endangered parrot species from extinction.

The funds was raised to be used in numerous projects geared toward protecting the endangered parrot population in the region.

"We expect to start protecting the endangered parrot breeding sites from black rats, their main predators.

"The rats are literally devastating parrot populations," said Birdlife's representative in the Pacific, Don Stewart, said in a statement.

"Each year, the Birdfair organisers select a region in the world

to help bird conservation projects there. This year it is the South Pacific."

Mr Stewart said the group had identified 37 critically endangered birds in the South Pacific out of a staggering 289 worldwide which were threatened with extinction.

"That is why events such as the 2006 British bird fair are so

important for organisations such as ours," he said.

The Cook Islands, Fiji, French Polynesia, New Caledonia and Samoa will focus on protecting five endangered parrot species.

The five species include the Ultramarine lorikeet in French Polynesia and the Uvea parakeet in New Caledonia.

As part of the project, a search

will be conducted to locate the Red-throated lorikeet.

The parrot species has not been seen in more than 10 years.

"Birdlife is extremely grateful to the Birdfair organisers for their generosity and commitment in helping us achieve a great deal toward bird conservation around the world," said Mr Stewart.