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 - > Culture
 - > Economy
 - > Education
 - > Environment
 - > Events
 - > Health
 - > International
 - > Justice
 - > Miscellaneous
 - > News items
 - > Pacific
 - > People
 - > Politics
 - > Science
 - > Social
 - > Sports
 - > Tourism

RSS feed



Environment : 06/10/2009 at 3:42PM
Birdlife Kadavu workshop yields results

(Tahitipresse) - BirdLife International has introduced a new conservation initiative on the island of Kadavu in Fiji that could help protect forests in island countries around the South Pacific.

BirdLife International's Senior Technical Advisor for the Pacific Region, James Millett, said that the initiative was launched in a three-day workshop on the island that has focused on the introduction of a model farm and a forest restoration programme.

Twenty-seven participants attended the workshop held in Lomati Village, in the Nabukelevu Tikina that is home to Mount Nabukelevu, the largest area of mountain forest on the island. It supports significant populations of four bird species found only in Kadavu. Protecting Mount Nabukelevu forests is one of the project's priorities, a Birdlife press release states.

Mr. Millett said that unsustainable agricultural practices that have resulted in the degradation of farmed land particularly from erosion has often forced farmers to clear more forest, and is becoming a threat to the Mount Nabukelevu Important Bird Area.

The workshop organised by BirdLife's Conservation Officers Tuverea Tuamoto and Mere Valu, was about addressing this concern by introducing sustainable agricultural practices through the development of a model farm as well as working with the villagers on forest protection and restoration. The goal was to safeguard biodiversity as well as protect community livelihoods.

The initial two acre demonstration farm, located in Lomati Village, was created to show how soil conservation and productivity can be improved on land in the villages near Mount Nabukelevu thus reducing the pressure for further forest clearance for farming. Modern farm practices have been introduced on the model-farm. This included planting soil stabilising grasses, the introduction of traditional Taro varieties resistant to diseases.

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

Through the workshop a forest restoration programme was also implemented. The Nabukelevu villages were encouraged to grow and re-plant native trees including Sandalwood. It is expected that the replanting will not only provide increased protection from erosion but could generate future income through sustainable harvesting of valuable sandalwood.

In addition to the support of the Darwin Initiative, the project was co-financed by UNDP's Global Environment Facility Small Grant Programme and NZAID. Mr. Millett said that this is an exciting approach to forest conservation by addressing the causes of forest loss in a way that will improve village livelihoods.



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