

NatureFiji-MareqetiViti Start-up Programmes

NatureFiji-MareqetiViti has identified seven start-up programmes which provide an example of the types of projects which the organization wishes to be involved with.

1. Nature Club Programme

A priority programme for NatureFiji-MareqetiViti will be the establishment of Nature or Wildlife Clubs possibly in association with schools. Seema Deo, Fiji's most experienced environment-conservation education and public awareness professional has been commissioned to prepare a report on how this can be best undertaken, with a proposal for Pilot Project funding. The report has been submitted as draft and is currently being considered by the Trustees. New Zealand's Forest and Bird Society has also offered its assistance. A three year pilot programme is envisaged before embarking on a nationwide programme.

3. Communication Programme

Providing information and awareness material on Fiji's wildlife conservation needs is envisaged as a core activity of NatureFiji-MareqetiViti. NatureFiji-MareqetiViti will initially demonstrate its commitment to communicating the conservation message to landowners and rural communities. Experience has shown that the visually appealing pocket poster guides of the birds of Fiji are well received by villagers and are useful in assisting conservation projects. Through securing a grant from the World Bank, two guides have been produced in the Fijian language which illustrate every Fijian breeding bird and regular migrant.

Presenting these to the Ministry of Education for distribution to schools throughout Fiji will be part of the NatureFiji-MareqetiViti launch and it will be complemented by presenting copies to NGOs and other organizations working in the field i.e. BirdLife International.

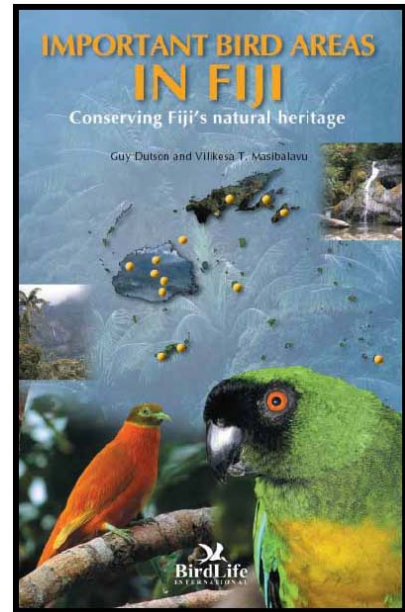
Other start up projects will consist of:

- Fijian Bird Guides (as per 1 above) their widespread dissemination through Ministry of Education and NGOs;
- Distribution of the English equivalent Bird Guides – 1: Land Birds, 2: Sea and Shore Birds;
- Distribution of the recently published 'Important Bird Area' (Masibalavu &



Dutson 2006).

- For two years in the 1980s, Dick Watling wrote a weekly article in the Sunday Times, on Fijian wildlife and conservation. If agreement with a tabloid can be agreed, this will be repeated under the NatureFiji-MareqetiViti banner and other contributing authors will be invited to participate to provide a forum of conservation messages, opinions and information.
- University graduates and others will be approached as volunteers to prepare articles for Kaila – the school children’s weekly newspaper.



3. Endangered Species’ Programme

Active protection of Fiji’s threatened and endangered species is in its infancy in Fiji and confined to all extents and purposes to the Crested Iguana on Yadua Taba. NatureFiji-MareqetiViti intends to work on other threatened species of biodiversity of cultural importance.

To initiate this programme, NatureFiji-MareqetiViti will draw up a Recovery Plan for Fiji’s highly threatened Sago Palm, a species of cultural as well as biodiversity significance which continues to be exploited on a daily basis yet is now reduced to 10 populations in the world. Only three of these populations are not currently impacted by the ‘heart of palm’ or ‘thatch harvesting’ trades, both of which lead to the rapid demise of the population. The increased unsustainable use of Sago Palm Thatch by the tourist industry is particularly unfortunate. A draft Fiji Sago Palm Recovery Plan has been prepared by NatureFiji-MareqetiViti, and funds will be sought to implement this through:

- Introducing legislative protection as first recommended in the 1993 ‘State of the Environment Report’;
- Fully protecting certain sites through agreement with landowners;
- Restoring sites through agreement with landowners;
- Locating ex situ germ plasm plantings;
- Drawing up guidelines for sustainable harvesting for thatch; and,
- Arranging the introduction of a commercial clumping palm to serve the ‘heart of palm’ industry requirements

4. Resorts’ Conservation Values Programme

Resorts are usually unaware of the conservation values and potential of their island, landholdings, immediate surrounds etc. Some have great potential to manage and develop these both for conservation purposes and visitor interest. They also have a captive market for involvement and fund raising. NatureFiji-MareqetiViti will offer

to identify the Conservation Values of resorts and hotels with an outline of what management requirements are practical. This will be offered on an expenses only basis and most of Fiji's leading terrestrial and marine ecologists have agreed to participate in this programme.

The programme has been initiated with Moody's Namena, on Namenalala Island, Savusavu. Here, the Red-footed Booby colony and forest habitat is of national importance while the population of Friendly Ground Dove is of international significance as this is a Globally Threatened bird. The Common Mynah arrived in 2003 and has now increased to about 20 pairs. A project to eradicate these using methods developed in the Seychelles will be attempted. If successful this will be the first such eradication in Fiji and may pave the way for their eradication on other islands with similar conservation values.

In April 2007, Dick Watling undertook a week long Conservation Values study of Mago Island for its new owner, Mel Gibson. The completed report is now with Mr Gibson for consideration and hopefully follow up conservation action.

5. Conservation Partnerships with Landowners

Landowners are the key to conservation in Fiji and NatureFiji-MareqetiViti will develop partnerships to address this meaningfully. The difficulties will not be underestimated, but the current 'fad' of short-term, over-funded inputs by international NGOs and bilateral donors will not be repeated by NatureFiji-MareqetiViti. NatureFiji-MareqetiViti will be much more selective and attempt to develop long term partnerships. In this respect NatureFiji-MareqetiViti will look at the Site Support Groups being established in Natewa and Kadavu under the three year Darwin Initiative funding and if these appear to have potential for future partnerships without significant funding requirements, NatureFiji-MareqetiViti may become involved as part of this programme.

6. Savura Education and Amenity Park

Suva's Coloisuva Forest Park is an important education and recreation site for Suva citizens and visitors. Unfortunately it is not a forest but a Mahogany plantation and the trees are now at harvesting age. While there have been assurances that the Forest Park will be maintained, it is only a matter of time before this is reversed, simply because the land is rented and the landowners know full well that their future lies in the harvesting of the trees, the receipt of stumpage and then the development of the area into high-end residential sites. On the other side of the Coloisuva ridge is the Savura and Vago Creeks, these watersheds support some of the best forest in south east Viti Levu and they are within 10 km of the centre of Suva. These watersheds are also key parts of the Suva Municipal water supply and are in designated catchments. Converting these catchments into a forest park with an educational centre with guided walks and sign posted trails will be a significant educational and recreational resource for the citizens of Suva and its visitors. It will also enable an income to be earned by the landowners who currently receive very little recompense for the non-uses of the catchments.