



NatureFiji-MareqetiViti

Newsletter 2

February 2009

Ni Sa Bula and welcome to our 2nd newsletter, we hope you find it interesting. If you would like any more information on us and our projects please take a look at our website.

We held our first AGM in August (2008) at the University of the South Pacific. With a large attendance, the meeting was a great success, thanks to all those that showed their support.

The highlights of the evening were Ms Seema Deo winning the NFMV club member's prize: an original painting of Viti Levu's endemic Pink-Billed Parrotfinch by George Bennett, and the unveiling of a live specimen of Fiji's new snake species, the Taveuni Blind snake.

NFMV gratefully acknowledges Mr. Marika Tuiwawa and Prof. Bill Aalbersberg of the Institute of Applied Sciences-USP, for the use of Warbler House; Conservation International for donating refreshments; and our hard-working volunteers for their assistance in the preparation for the AGM.

We are also very pleased to report that we have recruited 13 new members since our AGM. A very big VINAKA VAKALEVU to our new members who kindly gave extra donations!



BREAKING NEWS - NFMV given grant for Sago Palm Reserve

NFMV has funds to purchase 30 ha of endangered Sago Palm forest at Pacific Harbour. The site currently belongs to Llew & Jo Boddam-Whetham who are great supporters of NFMV.

The block requires urgent rehabilitation and protection from illegal harvesting. We hope NFMV volunteers will help us restore the site. Our first member's event was held here in December when 31 people joined us for a walk through the forest and mangroves and helped us pot up Sago palm seedlings. Many thanks to all the volunteers.



MareqetiViti is best translated as 'Caring for Fiji'

NatureFiji-MareqetiViti's mission is to enhance biodiversity and habitat conservation, endangered species protection and sustainable use of natural resources of the Fiji Islands through the promotion of collaborative conservation action, awareness raising, education, research and biodiversity information exchange.

Feature Article

3rd Iguana Species found in Fiji

The conventional view is that two species of iguana are found in Fiji - the larger Crested Iguana (*Brachylophus vitiensis*) from Yadua Taba Island, Bua and some islands in the Yasawas, and the considerably smaller Banded Iguana (*B. fasciatus*) found on all the other islands of Fiji, and a few islands in Tonga.



However, recent research on the genetics of these iguanas has revealed that there are, in fact, not two but three species. The smaller Banded Iguana is in fact two species which are genetically different but look very similar - though subtle differences in the stripe pattern and the colour of the nostrils can be used to tell them apart.

The discovery has been made by a team of American and Australian researchers led by Scott Keogh, an Associate Professor at the Australian National University in Canberra, and published in the scientific journal, *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B*. Peter Harlow, Curator of Reptiles at Taronga Park Zoo and a long time supporter of research into Fiji's iguanas was a member of the research team.

The scientific name for the new species of iguana is *Brachylophus bulabula* and it includes all those iguanas found on Viti Levu, Vanua Levu, Taveuni, Lomaiviti and Kadavu. The iguanas of the Lau Group and Yasayasa Moala together with those in Tonga retain the old name *B. fasciatus*.

"This remarkable discovery comes close on the heels of the discovery of a new species of snake in Taveuni, a week or so ago. Together they emphasise the remarkable wildlife which we have in our own backyard, and provides all the more encouragement for NFMV in its ambition to get Fiji's youth informed, interested and active in the conservation of the nation's wildlife" remarked Nunia Thomas, Conservation Coordinator of NFMV.

"Further, the research has shown that the iguanas on each island are very different genetically. We now distinguish three species, but in fact each island where they survive has its own unique iguana. This has very important implications for conservation."



Photos by Paddy Ryan
(www.ryanphotographic.com)

Project Updates

Major Lesser Frigatebird nesting colony revealed

NFMV Trustee Marika Tuiwawa led a survey to Central Lau in September. NFMV members Alifereti Naikatini and Isaac Rounds undertook bird, reptile and mammal surveys, finding:

- Over 1,000 pairs of lesser frigatebirds nesting on Vanuamasi. The largest colony in Fiji, making it a site of national significance and a potential Important Bird Area.
- breeding red-footed booby, brown booby and brown noddy. Evidence of masked booby nesting on Lateiviti.



Nesting lesser frigatebird on Vanuamasi, photo by Alifereti Naikatini

Fiji Swallowtail in Suva

The larvae of Fiji's largest butterfly, the Fiji swallowtail *Papilio schmeltzi* breeds on the common coastal shrub *Micromelium minutum* - this has been confirmed in Suva with several generations of observed butterfly emergence. It is a coastal, forest edge species often present in garden areas.

2nd site for the Crested Iguana

Isaac Rounds (NFMV-National Trust), Dick Watling (NFMV), Peter Harlow and Suzie Morrison (Taronga Park Zoo)

surveyed Namenalala island and gave it the thumbs up as a 2nd translocation site for the Critically Endangered Crested Iguana.

The Crested Iguana survives under the National Trust and the Yadua community on Yadua Taba island. However, a single population on a small island is vulnerable to catastrophic events - cyclones, disease, fire etc. So finding a second site is key to its ongoing survival.

Sago Project Milestone

NFMV's Fiji Sago Palm Project has reached an important milestone with the conclusion of widespread consultation with landowners, harvesters and commercial users of the palm.

"Women undertake much of the work, harvesting the Sago leaves and making the shingles - consequently the Women's Sago Forum was the most successful of all."

200 endangered sago palms are felled for consumption each week, photo Chinnamma Reddy



No Sign of the Fiji Petrel

The 2008 mission to find the Fiji Petrel was unfortunately aborted after 3 days due to boat problems. However, several other species of petrel were seen (see website) but no Fiji Petrel. Another survey is planned for May 2009, hopefully with more success.

Other NFMV and Member News

NFMV's new Office Manager

We are happy to welcome on board, Reena Fiu, as our first Office Manager and Financial Administrator. Reena comes from Rotuma and brings with her a wealth of experience. Reena will also be our membership secretary, helping us keep in contact with all our members.



New Books

A new guide to Fiji's forest trees has been published. The guide covers 100 common forest trees, is very well illustrated and is a must have for all Fiji wildlife enthusiasts. "Trees of Fiji: A guide to 100 rainforest trees" by Gunnar Keppel & Shahina A. Ghazanfar.

Conservation International have published a Guide to the Birds of Samoa and American Samoa, as a folded, laminated chart. The authors are Dick Watling and James Atherton, every resident and migrant species is illustrated.

Both books will be available from NFMV...contact Reena Fiu on rfiu@naturefiji.org

ANNOUNCEMENTS

NFMV is looking for a new home! Environment Consultants Fiji have been very generous in providing office space, but we are expanding.... If you know of any (affordable) office space available, please let us know.

Volunteer(s) needed for:

Dissemination of the Birds of Fiji pocket poster guides to Fiji's schools. Help is needed for packing, posting and delivering the guides. Please post or email your application with a CV to us.

Translation of NFMV communication materials (posters, brochures, reports) into the Fijian, Fiji-Hindi, Rotuman, and Rabi languages. If you are fluent in any of these languages and would like to help us out, please contact us we would love to hear from you!

Congratulations

NFMV Trustee and Curator of the South Pacific Herbarium, Mr Marika Tuiwawa has been awarded the Society for Conservation Biology's prestigious **Distinguished Services Award**.

Well deserved Marika and thank you for all your ongoing work and support.

Thanks

NFMV is sincerely grateful to Ms Helen Sykes who signed up Marine Ecology Consulting as our third corporate sponsor!

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