

Ni Sa Bula and welcome to our May 2010 Newsletter. As you will see the NatureFiji-MareqetiViti (NFMV) team continue to be busy and involved in many exciting and fruitful projects.

NFMV have been working with many partners on the conservation issues facing Fiji. One of the partners is RiversFiji who manage The Upper Navua Conservation Site, internationally known for being one of Fiji's Protected Areas and Fiji's first "Wetland of International Importance" or "Ramsar site".



A palm tree that was wedged against the gorge during heavy flooding
Photo by Kelera Macedru

Logging at the site has been a continual activity since RiversFiji started operating an eco-tourism business at the Navua gorge. To date logging is still the biggest threat to the Protected Area.

RiversFiji have proposed setting up an information centre for visitors, where there would be awareness materials to promote the unique biodiversity of the 614 ha site. Public support could be one of the greatest tools used in protecting the site. NFMV greatly supports the Conservation work of RiversFiji and will work with them closely to protect one of Fiji's greatest landmarks.

The valenisoqo (village hall) at our sago palm project rehabilitation site - Culanuku Village has been graced with a monument from the British High Commission (Suva). A plaque commemorating the British High Commission's support for the community of Culanuku was personally delivered by Her Majesty's High Commissioner to Fiji, His Excellency Mr. Mac McLachlan on the 13th of January 2010.



We thank the British High Commission (Suva) for their continued support for NFMV and the community of Culanuku.

NFMV was also invited by the Birdlife International Fiji Programme for a workshop at Daviqele Village, Kadavu on the "Mount Nabukelevu Important Bird Area (IBA) Management Planning Workshop".

Kelera Macedru, NFMV's conservation officer attended the two day workshop presenting to the 40 attending participants on the endangered species that NFMV is researching.

Work on drafting a management plan for the community declared Protected Area will be an ongoing activity, for Site Support Group Members, relevant members of the community and Birdlife International.

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

Fiji's own boa constrictor snake - Fact and Fiction

Helen Sykes, Marine Ecology Consulting



Candoia bibroni bibroni is Fiji's own snake, of the Pacific Island boa family. Its closest cousin is *Candoia bibroni australis*, the

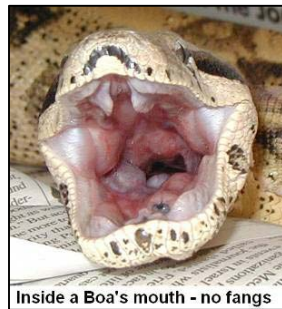
Solomon Islands boa. Snakes have an undeservedly bad reputation and many people kill or damage them. It's time to sort Fact from Fiction and wake up to these beautiful, harmless and useful animals.

Fiction: All snakes are poisonous

Fact: Boa constrictors are not poisonous, but kill their prey by sitting still, grabbing the animal, and wrapping their body around it tightly until the animal can no longer breathe. Once the animal is dead the snake swallows it whole. They have special jaws that unhinge to allow them to open wide enough to swallow rats or even fruit bats.

Fiction: All snakes have large sharp teeth (fangs).

Fact: Boa constrictors do not have fangs. They have small, delicate teeth, facing backwards to help hold onto their food. Even if a Fiji boa bites a human by mistake, the teeth are not large enough to tear our skin, although the pin-pricks may bleed a little. Getting scratched by a cat is worse!



Fiction: Snakes are ugly, slimy creatures

Fact: The skin of the boa is dry, soft and feels like silk. Most are brown/pinkish, but some are grey/black, yellow/green, or even black with

red bellies. There are different patterns on different islands. Most snakes on Taveuni have zig-zag patterns on their backs, while Viti Levu snakes are blotchy with a black stripe on their belly.

Fiction: Snakes are a pest

Fact: Fiji boas are great at pest control! They eat mice, rats and mynah birds. Even the smell of a snake may keep rats and mice away from your house or garden.

Fiction: Boa constrictors are giant snakes

Fact: The Fiji boa is quite small. The females reach a maximum of 2 metres long with a thickness of a woman's wrist, while the males are usually only 1m to 1m 30cm long, and about as thick as a man's thumb.

Fiction: Snakes cannot be tamed

Fact: When kept in properly made cages and handled kindly and regularly, snakes can make great pets. However, it is not kind to take a wild animal and put it in a cage. It is also against the law to capture and keep a Fiji boa without a permit because it is a CITES listed species.



Regularly handled male and female Fiji Boas - very tame

Fiction: Snakes are evil

Fact: Because of the Bible story about the serpent that tempted Eve, some people think that snakes are evil, but this was just a way of telling the story, to say that the devil took the shape of a snake. No animal is "evil"; they are all part of nature.

For more information please visit www.pacificboasnakes.blogspot.com

Project Updates

Harvesting Ban on Sago Palm

Culanuku Village has now enforced a 5 year ban on harvesting within their rehabilitation sago site.

NFMV has also heard from Roko Tui Serua that all villages within the Serua Province have unanimously agreed at their village meetings that a ban on unsustainable sago harvesting should be enforced for conservation.



The Serua Provincial Office with support from the Fijian Affairs Board, Ministry of Indigenous Affairs supports the conservation of sago palm but is also mindful of its economic benefits to landowners. Working with NFMV, they are introducing a sustainable harvesting manual to assist harvesters and the conservation efforts being undertaken.

Thanks to our members and friends who participated in the club event at the Garrick Reserve, weeding invasive species from the sago palm plantation - despite the rain.

Fiji petrel - news from Gau

The New Year heralds the "Petrel Season" as we know it. The February new moon found Eleazar O'Conner, Qalo Moce, Peni Kacau and Dick Watling up at Waitabua high on the ridge above Nukuloa village, Gau.

There have been no signs of the Fiji petrel during Feb to April but there are tens if not hundreds of collared petrels in the vicinity. Over 20 collared petrels have landed and



provided Eleazar and his team with important experience in handling, measuring and weighing petrels.

In April, the project took possession of a state of the art "burrow scope" 2 metres of probe with a



camera in the head sending wireless signals to a screen on the surface. Eleazar has already established that the collared petrel burrow we monitored last year has a small chick in it again this year. The burrow scope will show whether petrels or crabs live in the many burrows that we find. In July we will welcome Jill West, a volunteer who has vast experience in monitoring petrel and shearwater burrows.

Tomaniivi Nature Club meets the Fijian Affairs Board

Four youths from our Tomaniivi Nature Club assisted the NFMV team their presentation of the Permanent forest estates project to the Fijian Affairs Board on the 23rd of May 2010. Meli

Naiqama (Nasoqo), Meli Lote (Nasoqo), Litia Taubere (Nadala) and

Sunia Kalidredre (Nadala) were nominated to represent their team and met with the Roko Tui Ba, Ratu Isimeli Vanalagilagi Vesikula.



They also participated in a workshop on preparing project proposals, facilitated by Maaikie Manten, Birdlife International.

Other NFMV and Member News

“Plant a million trees” campaign

The Department of Forests recently launched their “Plant a million trees” campaign. The aim is for Fiji to plant a million trees by April 2011, thereby educating children and the citizens of Fiji on the importance of trees in our daily lives, our economy and in maintaining our fragile islands. Opened by His Excellency The President of the Republic of the Fiji Islands, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, the three day campaign saw Fiji’s government agencies and conservation NGOs at Rt. Sukuna Park informing Fiji about why trees are so important for our



biodiversity. The NFMV, South Pacific Regional Herbarium and Wetlands International team display was a success - it was the most popular stand at the exhibition!

NFMV welcomes Ruth Urben, a new Life Member

Ruth Urben has joined NFMV as a Life Member bringing to the number of life members to three. NFMV is very grateful to Ruth for her generosity. As a small organization struggling to reach a sustainable status, life membership donations are very welcome as they contribute greatly to our core funding. Ruth is presently working at SOPAC.

Matava Resort - NFMV welcomes its First Resort Corporate Sponsor

Matava Resort, on the far western tip of Kadavu, has become NFMV’s first Resort as a Corporate Sponsor. Matava, is an eco adventure getaway offering a fun and unique blend of cultural experiences and adventure activities in the environmentally diverse and remote island of Kadavu.

NatureFiji-MareqetiViti’s First Corporate GOLD Member

NFMV welcomes ATS Pacific Fiji as our first corporate GOLD member. ATS Pacific Fiji is the leading inbound travel management company in the South Pacific. Their operations are located in Australia, New Zealand and Fiji. ATS Pacific Fiji signing up to join NFMV demonstrates their recognition of Fiji’s need for conservation and that they support our mission and objectives. A warm welcome to ATS Pacific Fiji from all the NFMV team.

Membership News

NFMV’s membership is growing steadily. We currently have 114 members and aim to have 300 by the year 2012.

A call for renewal of membership has recently been sent out to some of our members. If you have not renewed your membership, please take the time to do so, as membership is the strength of NatureFiji-MareqetiViti.

We have added a new category of NFMV member called “Supporter” for people who participate in our conservation activities but cannot pay the annual membership fee. Supporters will not be eligible for discounts or voting, but they will be a part of NFMV and receive our newsletter.

NFMV has also joined the social networking site www.facebook.com. Stuart Gow from Matava resort was a great help in setting up our page. Vinaka Stuart!

NFMV acknowledges the many members who have been active in assisting us through out the years, we will continue to organise activities and updates on our projects for our club members. Any feedback from you is welcome.

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