



NatureFiji-MareqetiViti

Newsletter 4

February 2010

Ni Sa Bula and welcome to the International Year of Biodiversity.

2010 is the Convention of Biological Diversity's International Year of Biodiversity. This is a special year for NatureFiji-MareqetiViti, as we are Fiji's only membership-based conservation NGO working solely for the conservation of our biodiversity.

February is also host to World Wetlands Day, which aims to raise awareness of the conservation of wetlands. Wetlands, including rivers, lakes, swamps, mangroves, mud flats and seagrass beds are so important to us as they provide clean drinking water, fish, prawns, waste water treatment, flood control and recreational use. Fiji's theme for World Wetlands Day 2010 is Care for Fiji's Wetlands and Biodiversity: an answer to climate change. So the next time you pass a factory by the river, or people throwing rubbish into the river or mangroves, or farming or road building on a steep slope above a river you need to think about the negative impacts these actions could have on your future and Fiji's future generations.

In December 2009, three youths from our Tomaniivi Nature Club participated in the Conservation International Fiji Programme's vegetation rehabilitation project in the Tokaimalo District of the Ra Province. This trip was the youths' first experience in a reforestation

programme. Meli Lote, Meli Naiqama (both of Nasoqa Village, Tikina Nabubuco, Naitasiri Province) and Litia Taubere (Nadala Village, Tikina Savatu, Ba Province) have all previously participated in NFMV's nature camps. Their participation in Conservation International's reforestation program is part of our Tomaniivi Site Support Group development program in building the capacity of those living around the Important Bird Area FJ07 and surrounding forest to learn about and care for Fiji's unique and rare species that take refuge in that forest.

The trip has left the youths very enthused about reforestation work and the need to develop a good nursery to source Fiji's native and timber tree species for reforestation programmes. We are all looking forward to relaying our message to the rest of the members of the Nature club in Nadala Village and Tikina Nabubuco.



Tomaniivi Nature Club youth on Mt. Tomaniivi in September 2009.

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 Petrel features in SCIENCE ILLUSTRATED

The success of the May and October 2009 Fiji Petrel “chumming expeditions” around Gau Island is still creating interest via the international press. Science Illustrated, a popular magazine packed with science and discoveries on a wide variety of subjects, from space exploration, medical breakthroughs to environmental insights has recently run an article and an advertisement on the Fiji Petrel.

NFMV gratefully acknowledges our NFMV members Marijcke and Peter Thomson for the Science Illustrated story on the first ever sighting at sea of the Fiji Petrel (*Pseudobulweria macgillivrayi*) in May 2009.



Science Illustrated also ran an advertisement to attract assistance for NFMV, the Species Guardian for the Fiji Petrel which is regarded as one of the rarest birds in the world and categorised as **Critically Endangered** on the IUCN Redlist.

The current objectives of NFMV's Fiji Petrel project are to find the nesting burrows of this small petrel which are somewhere in the rugged upland forests

of Gau Island, so that they can be actively protected from feral pigs, cats and rats. We are also working with Gau Island community members to enable them to take the lead in conservation management. So the exposure provided by Science Illustrated is greatly appreciated, and we strongly recommend the magazine for anyone, especially the young with an interest in science - www.scienceillustrated.com.au

NFMV's second Fiji Petrel Expedition of 2009 took place in October. Three Fiji Petrels were confirmed during 11 days at sea at various locations off the coast of Gau. New Zealand's foremost petrel specialist, Dr Mike Imber joined the team with NFMV life-member, Joerg Kretzschmar, taking up the important job as photographer. A strong southerly migration of Mottled Petrels and Cook's Petrels was one of the highlights. In all, eleven Fiji Petrels were seen on the two Expeditions this year.



Photo: Fiji Petrel at Sea off Gau (Jorg Kretzschmar)

In November a credible report was received of two Fiji Petrels seen 250 miles south east of Fiji. This is probably the first observation of Fiji Petrels away from Gau Island and confirms that their feeding grounds are well to the south of Fiji.

Project Updates

Endangered Sheath-tailed Bats found in Taveuni Caves

A NFMV survey of Taveuni found two caves with populations of the Endangered Pacific sheath-tailed bat (bekabeka), now extirpated from most of Fiji. Once widespread and common, the small insect-eating Pacific sheath-tailed bat has experienced a dramatic decline throughout its range. It is currently listed by IUCN as Endangered with the Samoan population probably extinct.



Photo: Pacific Sheath-tailed Bat with pup (Kelera Macedru)

It is also very rare in Fiji, having disappeared from dozens of caves from which it was known in the 1970-80s. So it is with some excitement that a NFMV survey of caves in Taveuni located the Pacific sheath-tailed Bat in two caves on the island. And in one of them, the Tavuyaga Cave near Nakorovou village, Vuna, the bat was breeding.

No more Fiji Flying Foxes The final survey for the Fiji Flying Fox at Des Voeux Peak, Taveuni was completed recently without any further sign of the Fiji Flying Fox, one of the world's rarest bats (see Newsletter 3 for info. on the last sighting). NFMV is very grateful to Annette Scanlon for her dedicated work in harsh conditions and to Telecom Fiji Ltd., who allowed the team to use their communication facilities as a base camp.

Fiji Sago Palm Project gets a Boost

NFMV's Sago Palm Project has just had a funding boost from the Pacific Development Conservation Trust which will augment existing funding from the British High Commission. Kolinio Moce is NFMV's new manager for the Sago Project. Our first restoration project with the Culanuku community is going very well with regenerating sago being released from invasive creepers, through active intervention. The planting of sago palms as mini reserves or as plantations for sustainable thatching is also part of the project and in addition to a project in the Garrick Reserve, NFMV member Warwick Pleass has planted a large stand in his new eco-farming and water bottling development at Nabukavesi. Meanwhile Joe Kabakoro is planning with NFMV to plant 4 acres at Dakuinakoro behind Pacific Harbour - where sago used to grow until a few years ago.



Photo: Sago Palm wetland restoration at Culanuku (Dick Watling)

Permanent Forests This important project is now under way, in association with BirdLife International, and with excellent cooperation from the Dept of Forestry and NLTB. Funded by the Aage Jensen Foundation, it is a 3 year project, managed by Nunia Thomas .

Other NFMV and Member News

Have you seen our Website Upgrade?

No? Look up www.naturefiji.org for new features on our website. You can find out all about our new projects, get to know our staff better and get updated on our planned club activities for 2010!

2010 NFMV Calendar Success

We are proud to announce that we have sold out our 2010 International Year of Biodiversity Calendar. Thank you to all those involved in the calendar sales and particularly to Stuart Chape for the donation of his photographs. Thanks to everyone's support we raised nearly \$5,000.

New Staff

Eleazer O'Connor - is NFMV's Fiji Petrel Conservation officer to Gau Island. He joined us in September 2009 and has since been involved with field work on locating the colony of the critically endangered Fiji Petrel.



Kolinio Moce - is working with NFMV's Permanent Forests and Sago Palm projects. He formerly worked for the Fiji Museum and then with Environment Consultants Fiji for 20 years as Senior Associate.



Theo Blossom

- from the UK. Joined NFMV in August as a volunteer working with Eleazar O'Connor on Gau.



NFMV Strategic Plan Meeting

A camp in the Sigatoka valley was the unlikely setting for our recent strategic planning meeting. We had a highly successful retreat, reviewing the good and bad of 2009 and discussing the future of NFMV. We left the meeting enthused and energised with detailed work plans for 2010. Thank you Nicola Thomson for facilitating !!

Introduced Iguana in Fiji

Please look out for the non native Green Iguana - this is a serious alien now established on Qamea Island, and being taken as pets around the country. This is a potentially very serious pest and its spread must be stopped. If you see one



anywhere, please call Nunia Thomas immediately on 3100 598 or 929 1758.

Photo: Rob Fisher

Details of the difference between the green iguana and the native banded and crested iguanas are shown on the NFMV website www.naturefiji.org.

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