



Nature Fiji-Mareqeti Viti Newsletter

Special Issue Number 1

Ni Sa Bula and welcome to our first newsletter,

First, I need to apologise for the long delay in the production of this newsletter and that as an organisation we have been ignoring our members. Please do not take this as a sign of inactivity - in fact it is a symptom of quite the opposite!

As you will see in the newsletter since our official launch at the Sigatoka Sand Dunes a year ago (see page 12) we have been hard at work selecting our work priorities, fundraising with some success (see p.6 and 9), putting together a team (see p.5) and launching projects (see p.6). In particular, the Sago Palm Project has quickly assumed a national profile with major media coverage and interest. While our first completed project - Fiji's Endangered Species has been received enthusiastically.

NFMV's entry into the conservation scene, as the only local, membership-based organisation has been well received and the organisation has had good coverage in the media. We are working closely with the Department of the Environment; we sit on several sectoral committees and we assisted the Department with the Environment Week Campaign (p.12).

NFMV has initiated efforts to promote and protect Fiji's natural environment by other groups, as with the USP mangrove study, while we are partnering with the National Trust of Fiji in both the Sago Project and the Fiji Petrel Project.

Our website www.naturefiji.org has been launched to good reviews and provides more information about the organisation and our work.

Now that we are established and operational, a priority this year is our Membership and this begins with our AGM next month. The 'news for members' on page 15 updates you on opportunities to get involved with the work of NFMV and some member benefits that we hope to keep sourcing for you. We will circulate a newsletter as resources permit, please write in to us with any questions or areas of interest that you would like the newsletter to explore for you. Our contact details are on the last page of the newsletter.

Thank you for your support,

Dick Watling

Director, NatureFiji-MareqetiViti

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MareqetiViti can be best translated as 'Caring for Fiji' which epitomises the mission of the organisation.

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

Feature Article

Destruction of Fiji's Rivers & Streams

Background

Fiji's rivers and creeks are a little-recognised resource of great subsistence and sustenance value for the traditional Fijian way of life and the majority of rural dwellers. They are also of considerable biodiversity interest, the recognition of which has only come about in the last few years.

Increasingly, however, the greatest locally-recognised value of rivers is as a source of gravel and rocks for the construction industry and consequent "gravel rental" or lease rights for adjacent landowners.

The very rapid and unsustainable manner in which gravel and boulders are being extracted is causing major ecological changes in many of Fiji's rivers and streams, and major changes in flow rates and volumes. The economic impacts of these changes are beginning to be felt in the form of increased and more extreme flooding, increased dredging needs, and the undermining of the foundations of bridges, Irish crossings, river walls, culverts etc.

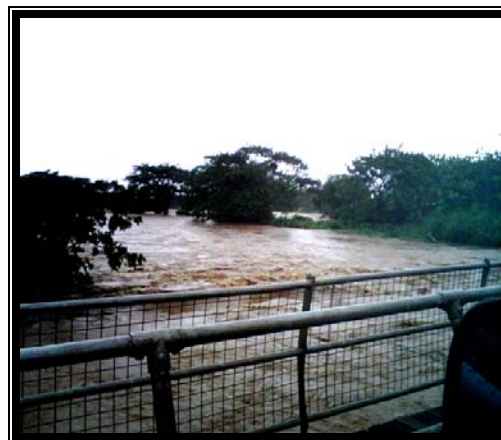
...The very rapid and unsustainable manner in which gravel and boulders are being extracted is causing major ecological changes in many of Fiji's rivers and streams...the economic impacts of these changes are beginning to be felt...

The economic costs to the nation of increased severe flooding, increased dredging and the replacement of riverine infrastructure will be enormous, and will be paid for by taxpayers - not the extractors of gravel and boulders.

There is an urgent need for the extraction of sand, gravel and boulders to be brought under control and undertaken only at sustainable levels, with the bulk of these materials being sourced from quarries and gravel pits.

Traditional Values of Rivers & Streams

Unpolluted rivers and streams have traditionally been an essential component of traditional rural lifestyles. Apart from wild pigs, rivers and streams have in the past provided the bulk of essential dietary protein for the vast majority of inland Fijians in the form of fish, prawns and eels. The loss of these is a major detriment to rural lifestyles.



Nadi River in flood (viewed from bridge entering Nadi town), 2007, Photo: Marc McElrath

Similarly a constant supply of clean water has been an expectation of rural living and one of the important determinants in the location of villages. Rivers and streams have always provided drinking water, but have also been important for washing and bathing, as well as for livestock needs.

Biodiversity Values

Until very recently, including the 1993 National Environment Strategy, it was believed that Fiji's freshwater biodiversity was limited and uninteresting with minimal endemism (i.e. no species that are only found in Fiji). However, in the last five years research has shown that this assumption is very wrong.

There are around 143 species of fish, invertebrates and plants in Fiji that are known to spend at least half of their lives in freshwater. 132 of these are native species while the other 11 are known well-established populations of introduced fishes.

There are at least 10 known species of native fish that are only found in Fiji's rivers and streams (i.e. endemic species). Most of these endemics are widespread throughout the high islands, however some species are only known from single streams (e.g. Waitavala and Tavoro on Taveuni island). There are also two additional suspected undescribed endemic pipefishes from the genus *Microphis* that inhabit streams in Kadavu.

...There are at least 10 endemic fish that are only found in Fiji's rivers and streams ... some species are only known from single streams...



Redigobius sp. a new species of Gobiie discovered in 2003, found only in 2 rivers in Vanua Levu. Photo: Nunia Thomas

There are at least five native fish species that could be considered endangered, these include three species of gobiie whose restricted habitat and small population size render them highly vulnerable to extinction (see picture above). The two other species are listed on the IUCN Redlist of endangered species and are extremely rare, they are the Otomebora Mullet (*Liza melinoptera*) and a species of Grouper called *Epinephalus lanceolatus*.

Construction Values

River sand, aggregate and rocks have become a very common and cheap source of material for Fiji's construction and road building industries, indeed they have fuelled the construction industry for the past half century. With Native Land Trust Board (NLTB) providing "gravel rental" lease rights or Open Licenses to commercial operators in exchange for fees, landowners adjacent to rivers have enjoyed cash windfalls. However, much of

this land that is being leased and mined for gravel is not on native land but is in fact legally owned by the State.

Effects/Impacts

Rock, gravel and sand production is a natural process in every catchment system and there is a sustainable level of extraction at which little or no impact arises. However, exceeding that extraction level can lead to major impacts and these are all too clearly seen in many if not most rivers near Fiji's urban centres. Removing boulders and rocks dramatically changes the hydraulic characteristics of a river - generally Fiji's rivers, in their natural state, are a mixture of quiet pools or stretches of slow moving water, interspersed with whitewater rapids of variable length and water velocity.

This is the natural order of rivers and Fiji's native species are adapted to this alternating river passage and habitats. Excessive extraction of river material eliminates habitat differentiation (pools and rapids) and the river takes on the characteristics of a smooth, culvert with a lowered river base course.

This has the following consequences:

1. Different river habitats are lost (pools, rapids, stretches etc.) with disastrous consequences for Fijian aquatic fauna i.e. loss or a great reduction in prawns and Ika Droka;
2. With the river reduced to a 'culvert-like' condition, floods are not 'held up' by a varied river topography, and so proceed down the catchment at a much faster rate. If this coincides with a high or rising tide, then much larger floods are experienced at the river mouth. This is what has been happening increasingly in Nadi over the past two decades and occurred at Labasa during Cyclone Ami. Mistakenly attributed to 'climate change', increased flooding for many of Fiji's rivers is something which is entirely of our own making;
3. Fine gravel, sand and silt are delivered much faster to the mouth of the river where they settle out and impede navigation and may increase flooding. Costly dredging is required more frequently to mitigate these effects;
4. Lowering the base course of rivers, undermines those structure which were built when the rivers were at a higher

level i.e. bridges, Irish crossings, culverts, irrigation off-takes, and river and flood protection walls. Undermining such structures means that they will not withstand the design forces they were built for and will sooner or later have to be replaced.

...The current generation, in particular the construction and tourism industries, are mining a resource at very little cost to themselves, the detriment of which will be felt by future generations...



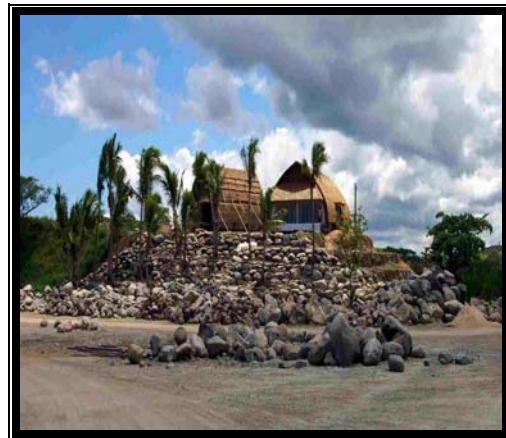
Taveuni stream, Photo: Stuart Chape

The first of these impacts effects biodiversity values, but very importantly the ability of subsistence dwellers to obtain a major portion of their dietary protein and to enjoy an unaffected rural lifestyle to which they are accustomed.

The last three of these impacts pose significant risk and financial implications for downstream dwellers, and major financial implications for the State, which will ultimately be borne by the taxpayers. The current generation, in particular the construction and tourism industries, are mining a resource at very little cost to themselves, the detriment of which will be felt by future generations.

That the State allows this extraction from the nation's rivers, without any consideration of the financial or social implications, is a classic example of unsustainable resource management.

Removal of large boulders and rocks from the upper stretches of rivers can be especially damaging. This has occurred to exhaustion on the Sabeto River. Much of these rocks went to the Denarau Resort, the Sonaisali Resorts and the Wailoaloa Fantasy developments - the irrational issue here is that angular quarried rock is much superior as an engineering material than rounded boulder rock for the armouring of sea walls. Considering the massive price that is being paid by Fiji's natural environment as well as its current and future generations, it seems perverse that the use of these rocks is often purely decorative.



River rock sea wall at Momi development, Photo: © NFMV

We plan to run a feature article which reflects NFMV's views on important conservation issues in each newsletter. If you have an issue that you are interested in hearing more on - please write to us at support@naturefiji.org

The NatureFiji-MareqetiViti Team



Vilitati Seru

Vilitati Seru, Fiji's foremost soil expert and a retired agricultural officer joined NatureFiji-MareqetiViti in February 2008 as the Conservation Officer in charge of the Sago Project (see page 6).

Vilitati is from Naboutini, Serua and resides in the heart of the diminishing Sago country, so he is well placed to undertake the community consultation which is his first challenge.

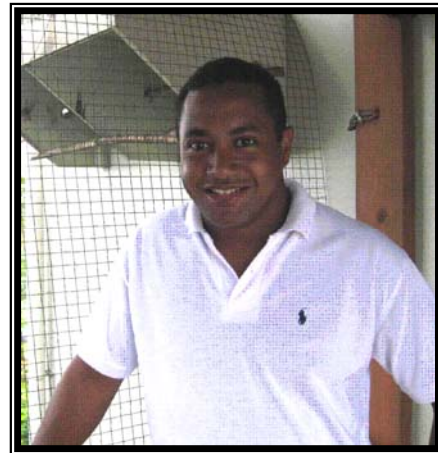
The Sago Project is funded by the Pacific Development and Conservation Trust.

Laiakini Waqanisau

Lai joined NatureFiji-MareqetiViti at the end of March, 2008. He was recruited to assist Vilitati Seru on the Fiji Sago Palm project on the tourism-commerce aspects.

He has lived in Serua and takes a strong interest in the conservation of the Fiji Sago Palm.

Lai has a degree in Geography and Environmental Science from the University Wollongong. He has worked for a range of Fiji-based environmental NGOs and has served as an army reserve for Fiji's Territorial Forces.



Nunia Thomas MSc.



Nunia joined NatureFiji-MareqetiViti in December 2008 as its first full-time employee.

Nunia is from Draunivi in Ra and completed her Masters of Science at the University of the South Pacific (USP) last year. The subject of her thesis was: 'The Distribution and Abundance of the Endangered Fiji Ground Frog (*Platymantis vitianus*) and the Introduced Cane Toad (*Chaunus [Bufo] marinus*) on Viwa Island in Tailevu'.

Nunia was a graduate assistant at the USP's South Pacific Regional Herbarium where she conducted biodiversity survey expeditions, environment impact assessments and community-based conservation workshops before joining NFMV as a conservation officer.

With her first project with NFMV launched in April this year (Endangered Species of Fiji - page 6), Nunia is now managing her next project: "Safeguarding Fiji's Priority Forest Sites".

Projects Underway

Fiji Sago Palm Project

The "Rainbow Warrior" Trust is funding NFMV's flagship Sago Palm Project

The Pacific Development & Conservation Trust, set up as a result of the Rainbow Warrior incident a decade ago, is fully funding our Sago Palm Project for 2008.

The Fiji Sago Palm (*Metroxylon vitiense*) is an endemic Fijian species essentially restricted to the Serua Province, and is under great threat from unsustainable harvesting for thatch and for palm heart.



Devastated population of Sago palm at Dakunikoro, in Pacific Harbour. Photo: © NFMV

The project is being undertaken in partnership with the National Trust for Fiji and the Department of the Environment.

Vilitati Seru and Laiakini Waqanisau have been recruited as project officers (see page 5). Vilitati Seru is currently conducting wide consultations with the landowners and harvesters, whilst Laiakini is doing the same with the tourism and business sectors, as well as the relevant government departments.

Together the duo has significantly raised awareness on the project and promoted the sustainable use of the Sago Palm. The aim of the project is to produce and implement a Fiji Sago Palm Recovery Plan in close cooperation with the stakeholders, the Plan is currently in draft form.

Endangered Species of Fiji

British High Commission funds NFMV to produce Fiji's first electronic compendium of endangered species - launched in April

NFMV has compiled ecological, taxonomic and cultural information on 50 of Fiji's approximately 424 endangered species. This information was previously difficult to access.

This project was generously funded by the British High Commission, who hosted the launch of the website at the residence of the British High Commissioner, Mr. Roger Sykes in April this year.

Endangered Species of Fiji can be accessed as a web page on the NFMV website. It is also available as a CD Rom at \$10.00 from NFMV (support@naturefiji.com).

The CD Roms were distributed free to Fiji's schools during environment week in early June.



Cover page of the NFMV CD that was distributed to Fiji Schools and is available from NFMV

Projects Underway

Safeguarding Fiji's Priority Forest Sites

NFMV to train and empower Mt Tomaniivi communities to protect an internationally significant bird habitat thanks to a grant from the Agave Jensen Foundation

NFMV has secured a grant from the Agave Jensen Foundation to develop Viti Levu's first 'Site Support Group' for the Greater Tomaniivi Important Bird Area (IBA).

IBAs are areas that have been identified by BirdLife International as critical habitats for endangered bird species. Where possible, Site Support Groups are set up by local communities to assist or lead the conservation of such sites. BirdLife International is a global Partnership of conservation organisations that works to conserve birds, their habitats and global biodiversity.

Site Support Groups are being developed by BirdLife International for two of Fiji's 14 Important Bird Areas. The Greater Tomaniivi IBA currently supports 22 bird species which are internationally or nationally regarded as "threatened with extinction".



The Red Throated Lorikeet (Critically Endangered) - one of the 22 threatened bird species that call Mt Tomanivi home! Photo: Bill Beckon

This project aims to work with the local community (Nadala Village) and relevant government and non-governmental

management of the Greater Tomaniivi IBA and their endangered plants and animals.

The Agave V Jensen Foundation is a Danish Foundation that has been supporting BirdLife International Partnership for more than five years.

NatureFiji-MareqetiViti has received funding from the Jensen Foundation under a small-grant programme that targets work with local community groups towards long-term sustainable use of natural resources at key biodiversity sites.

Fiji Petrel Project

NFMV has been appointed 'Species Guardian' for the Critically Endangered Fiji Petrel on Gau Island. Fund raising is under way!

BirdLife International has appointed NFMV as the 'BirdLife Species Guardian' for the critically endangered Fiji Petrel. As the species guardian, NFMV is responsible for taking conservation action for the Petrel on behalf of BirdLife International, and also to monitor and report annually on its status.

The Fiji Petrel is sighted from time to time in Fiji and is known to nest on Gau Island as deserted nesting burrows have been found there. However, no nesting colonies have been discovered to date, which makes it hard to protect the species.

Big plans are underway to provide some much needed research and action on this enigmatic species. NFMV has raised two grants so far and is developing two additional funding proposals.

The grants that have been secured will be used to launch our proposed project on Gau Island. The secured grants are from the BirdLife International - Royal Forest & Bird Community Conservation Fund and the Disney Foundation. The Gau Project will contribute to the implementation of the Recovery Plan for the Critically Endangered Fiji Petrel by focusing on empowering the Gau community to implement parts of the Recovery Plan themselves.

Projects Underway

In particular the community will be trained to protect, monitor and maintain Fiji Petrel nesting burrows. This will be done by first working with a colony of Collared Petrels, so that when Fiji Petrel nesting burrows are eventually discovered - the community will be ready to spring into action!

A project officer will be recruited once arrangements have been made with our partner in the work on Gau Island, the National Trust for Fiji.

In late July, NFMV is leading an expedition to locate the Fiji Petrel at sea. On board will be four international sea bird specialists led by Harodam Shirihai. Mr Shirihai made international news last year when he 're-discovered' Beck's Petrel (which was thought to be extinct) in the Solomon Islands. Beck's Petrel is a close relative of the Fiji Petrel. We will be using Mr Shirihai's 'bird-baiting' technique of "chumming" with fish chum soaked in fish oil to attract the Fiji Petrel. The expedition will spend 10 days in Gau and southern Fiji waters.

NFMV is working with the New South Wales Parks and Wildlife Department to mobilise "petrel burrow-finding dogs" on Gau in 2009. Such dogs have been very successful in New Zealand on the Taiko Petrel project in the Chatham Islands.



Almost all we know about the Fiji Petrel is from dead birds. Here is the original specimen collected in 1855 and preserved at the British Museum, UK. Photo: BMNH

Northern Lau Islands Biodiversity Survey

NFMV has contributed to a biological survey in the Lau Islands that has discovered rare seabird nesting colonies

Two of NFMV's Trustees, Doctors Marika

NatureFiji-MareqetiViti
www.naturefiji.org

Tuiwawa and Dick Watling jointly led the terrestrial component of the Northern Lau Islands Biodiversity Survey.

The Survey was undertaken for the Lau Provincial Council in collaboration with the Institute of Applied Sciences from University of the South Pacific.

15 islands were surveyed, five seabird breeding colonies were identified as Sites of National Significance. Of particular interest was the sand cay of Nukucikobia which had turtle nesting tracks on it, as well as a breeding colony of Sooty Tern (only two other colonies known in Fiji) and Masked Booby (only one other colony known in Fiji).

A CD Rom copy of the 150 page report can be ordered from the NFMV secretariat at support@naturefiji.com.



Sooty Tern colony on Nukucikobia island, northern Lau Group. Photo: © NFMV

Mago Island - Conservation Values study

NFMV has carried out a Conservation Values assessment of Mago Island, the property of actor-producer Mel Gibson.

Mago Island, one of the largest freehold islands in Fiji was recently acquired by actor-producer Mel Gibson.

In May 2007, NatureFiji-MareqetiViti undertook a Conservation Values study of the island, as a result of which, the island's management has become NatureFiji-MareqetiViti's second Corporate Gold Sponsor (see page 15).

The island retains some very good forest stands - the majority of which lie over limestone karst rock.

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Projects Underway

Three Globally Threatened species are found on Mago - the Sheath-tailed Bat, the Samoan Flying Fox and the Friendly Ground-Dove.

The Conservation Values study provides the management of Mago with recommendations to improve the conservation status of the island's wildlife.

A copy of the report is available from the NatureFiji-MareqetiViti secretariat at: support@naturefiji.com.



The Coconut Crab - a globally threatened species which is quite common on Mago Island © NFMV

NatureFiji-MareqetiViti Technical Reports

Three NFMV technical reports have been released:

1. *The Conservation Values of the Terrestrial Wildlife of Mago Island, Lau, Fiji.* August 2007. Dick Watling.
2. *Second Monitoring Survey of Vatuiria Island, Lomaiviti, Fiji.* August 2007. Dick Watling.
3. *A Report on the Edible Palm Heart Trade of the Fiji Sago Palm Metroxylon vitiense.* May 2008. Chinnamma Reddy.

Copies of these reports can be obtained by emailing the NFMV secretariat at support@naturefiji.com.

To keep up-to-date on these projects and more go to the NFMV Website at: www.naturefiji.org

Projects in the Pipeline!

What bird call is that?

NatureFiji-MareqetiViti with BirdLife International and Vision Fiji is organizing a radio spot where the song or call of a Fijian bird will be broadcast and listeners will be asked to ring in and identify the bird.

This is an initiative to raise awareness of Fiji's unique avifauna and the beautiful but little-known calls of many species. The possibility of having these calls used for Vodafone ring-tones is also being investigated...but sponsors will have to be found...

The Navua Palm ... who's funding?

Heterospathe phillipsi (Navua or Phillip's Palm) is currently classified as Endangered (IUCN Global Status) because of its very restricted distribution in two small unprotected forest areas on Viti Levu. One location is near Nakavu (inland from Navua) and the other inland from Pacific Harbour. The total wild population is believed to be less than 250 individual palms.

The solitary and generally slender palm (12m in height) occurs sparingly in and on the edge of dense lowland rainforest as an understorey, canopy or semi-emergent palm.

Projects in the Pipeline!

These forests are some of the wettest in lowland Fiji.

Masked Shining Parrots have been recorded eating the fruit of the palm. The palm heart is reported to be edible while the immature seeds are said to taste like coconut.



An illustration of the Navua Palm by George Bennet in the book 'Palms of Fiji' which can be purchased from NFMV (see page 15).

Conservation Plans

It is not known why the Navua Palm has such a restricted range, in this respect it is similar to at least 8 other endemic Fjian palms. The National Trust for Fiji's Garrick Forest Reserve lies two kilometres from the Nakavu population of the Navua Palm but there are no palms in the reserve. However, the palm grows very readily in Suva gardens.

Currently, 200 palms are being propagated by NatureFiji-MareqetiViti at the USP Nursery and these will be transplanted to found a new population in the Garrick Reserve when they have reached maturity some time next year. Nature Fiji members will be invited to help with this tree planting operation next year.

We have received \$4,500 from Thrigby Hall Wildlife Gardens, UK which has kick-started this project, but we will need to raise more funds in order to get the trees planted.



200 palms are being propagated by NatureFiji-MareqetiViti at the USP Nursery. © NFMV

Purchase of the Qaraniqio Sago Palm Reserve

NFMV is currently applying for a grant to purchase a 16 hectare area of land alongside the Qaraniqio river at Pacific Harbour so as to establish Fiji's first Sago Palm Reserve. The application is being made to the International Conservation Union (IUCN) which runs a programme that provides 'Small Grants for the Purchase of Nature' (SPN).

The site that NFMV would like to secure is freehold land which is being offered to NFMV at a very reasonable price by its owners Mr & Mrs Llew Boddam-Whetham who are great supporters of NFMV's Fiji Sago Palm project.

If we are successful in the purchase, the plan will be to rehabilitate the sago which is being illegally harvested at the moment and, after further fundraising, build an interpretive centre and education facility at the reserve.

Rats responsible for the demise of the Lau Fan Palm

The Lau Fan Palm (*Pritchardia thurstonii*) is one of Fiji's threatened palms. It is restricted to small mushroom limestone islets in the lagoons of Vulaga, Ogea (southern Lau) and one of the Sovu islets (northern Lau).

Surprisingly the Lau Fan Palm is absent from the nearby mainland islands...why? the answer would appear to rats.

Rat trapping on the Sovu Islets found rats to abundant on all Islets apart from the single islet where the palm is abundant - locally referred to as 'Palm Island'.

NFMV is seeking funding to eradicate rats from Sovu lailai, the island nearest to 'Palm Island' (200 metres away). Removing these rats will have two benefits; firstly there is a very real risk that the rats will spread to Palm Island and destroy this remaining palm sanctuary, secondly it will create another sanctuary for the Lau Fan Palm.



'Palm Island', Sovu islets in Northern Lau.
No rats, so the palms survive. Photo: © NFMV

Other NFMV News

Viseisei Mangrove Study

NatureFiji-MareqetiViti sponsored two USP students to study the ecological health and status of nationally significant mangrove sites at Viseisei

Mangroves are one of Fiji's most precious natural environments. They are a very biodiverse and important habitat for many species of bird, fish and invertebrate. They act as a buffer between rivers and the sea by filtering out sediment and slowing down flood waters. They also provide local communities with food and firewood. Very little information is available about the status of Fiji's mangroves and these important natural areas are constantly under threat from coastal development.

Temalesi Koroi and Litia Volaukiviseisei are biology students at the University of the South Pacific. Together with their supervisor, Dr Milika Naqasima-Sobey, they went to Viseisei, Vuda Point to assess the ecological health of the mangroves located there.

They particularly focused on the mangroves of the Dreketi Inlet and the Saweni flats, two areas identified as Sites of National Significance in the National Environment Strategy.

NatureFiji-MareqetiViti provided the initial recommendation for the research, a series of time-lapse aerial photographs of the area and transport for the students during their three days of field work.

Other NFMV News

Launch of NFMV and our Strategic Plan!

NFMV was launched as an organisation on Saturday 30th June 2007 at the Sigatoka Sand Dunes National Park. The event was hosted by the National Trust for Fiji and saw children from surrounding villages and communities plant trees to assist in the restoration of the Park's remnant littoral forest.



Chief guest Mr Radike Qereqeretabua, planting a cycad at the Sigatoka Sand Dunes during the NFMV Launch, August 2007 Photo: L. Murphy

NatureFiji-MareqetiViti's Strategic Plan was endorsed by the Trustees and released for public circulation on 28 August 2007. It can be downloaded along with the NFMV 'Start Up Plan' from the 'About Us' Tab on our website.



A nature talk for the children by the Sigatoka Sanddunen ranger during the NFMV launch Photo: L. Murphy

NFMV participates in the Environment Week Campaign

NFMV was part of the 2008 Environment Week organising committee, led by the Department of Environment. The theme for this year's Environment Week campaign was "*Learn, Live with and Save our Endangered Species*".



Mr. Epeli Nasome (Director of the Department of Environment) planting another cycad palm donated by NFMV at the launching ceremony for Environment Week in the Children's Park in Sigatoka. Photo: Jone Niukula

NFMV Conservation Officer Nunia Thomas served on the organising committee, and joined the official bus tour from Suva to the Children's Park in Sigatoka Town, to brief the Chief Guest Mr Epeli Nasome (Director of the Department of Environment) on the Fiji Sago Palm Project at Culanuku near Galoa.

NFMV is grateful to the Department of Environment for their invitation to be an active member of the organising committee.

NFMV featured in the 2008 Fiji Student Diary

NFMV was invited to contribute to a page in the European Union-funded Fiji Student Diary for 2008. The theme for this year's student diary was '*The Environment*', and NFMV is one of the many (but Fiji's only local) conservation NGOs featured in the student diary. The diary was distributed to all schools in Fiji.

Other NFMV News

Breaking News: Blind Snake Found on Taveuni

A blind snake, species unknown, has been found on Taveuni, the first for over a century

A blind snake reportedly from Vuna, Taveuni was exhibited at the illustrious meeting of the Members of the Linnaen Society of New South Wales in 1897. The original specimen has never been found and the record has hitherto been regarded as suspect.

However Allan Gortan, the owner of the Paradise Taveuni Resort has recently procured a specimen in the resort garden....and is working with NFMV to find others. Another good example of how little we know of our own Fijian fauna.

NFMV has arranged for the snake to be sent to specialists at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, U.S.A for identification.

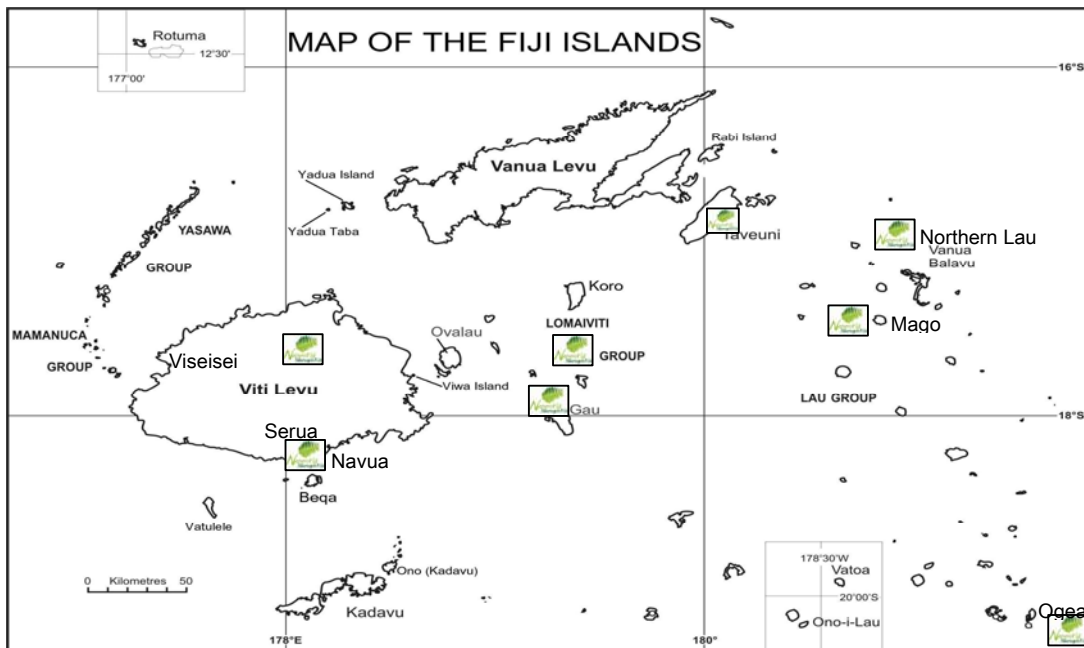
It is a true blind snake and not to be confused with the rare Fiji Burrowing Snake *Ogmodon vitianus* which is confined to the forests of Viti Levu.



A new blind snake from Taveuni. Yet to be identified or scientifically described. Photo: © NFMV

Where we are working

This map indicates the location of some of our projects (completed, underway and in the pipeline) that have been described in this newsletter



Base Map Source: Claire Morrison 2005.

Endangered Species Page

Here are some of the fascinating species that can be found on NFMV's Endangered Species CD Rom and website!

The Fijian Flying Fox

The Fijian Flying Fox (*Mirimiri acrodonta*) is Fiji's only endemic mammal and is one of the world's rarest mammals.

Fiji's native trees have a significant dependency on the Flying Fox or bat. Bats and Fiji's native plants have evolved together for so long that the plants rely on bats for the fertilisation and dispersal of their seeds. This bat-plant relationship is unique to the South Pacific Island

To date, the endemic flying fox has only been found in the montane cloud forest (over 900m) around Des Voeux Peak.



No ecological research has been undertaken on the flying fox.

Photo: T. Flannery

The Fijian Flying Fox habitat, the montane cloud forest, has a limited distribution in Fiji, and is also of global conservation concern because of its vulnerability to climate change and slow recovery after hurricanes.

Taro, Dalo

The earliest record of agricultural activity in Fiji dates back to 2,500 to 3,000 years ago. The root crop dalo (*Colocasia esculenta*), is a culturally important food that has been linked with the development of Pacific Island societies from these early times.

It has been a main staple food, or the 'kakana dina' (translates to true food) of Fijian society, and in the past, no meal was ever complete without the presence of dalo. It is also the preferred choice for traditional ceremonies.

Because of the pressure to meet consumer demands, many dalo farmers are phasing out from the traditional varieties in favour of the new hybrids.

There is no known effort to conserve the traditional varieties of crops in traditional gardens outside of the Koronivia Research Station's field genebank. The on-going loss of traditional Fijian varieties of dalo is a loss of cultural heritage which receives little attention from conservationists and government alike. It also means the loss of some of Fiji's tastiest dalo from our soqos!



Vavailoa - a traditional variety of dalo

Photo: Nunia Thomas

Member News

Since launching in June 2007, we now have 50 members. Your support has enabled NFMV to develop a strategic plan and write project proposals for our priority areas of work. We were then able to send these proposals to a range of donor organisations some of which have agreed to fund certain areas of our work - hence the projects listed on pages 6-9.

We need your ongoing support!

One of NFMV's central aims is to raise awareness about Fiji's unique species and habitats and to promote conservation action - as our founding members we need your ongoing support as ambassadors for this work. By growing your awareness, spreading the word and getting involved - you can make a real and lasting difference to the protection of Fiji's natural environment.

See below for information about how to get involved and how to renew your annual membership.

Life members: The Millers and Joerg Kretzschmar

David and Elsa Miller have joined Joerg Kretzschmar as our new life Members.

We are highly appreciative of David & Elsa's timely support for NatureFiji-MareqetiViti in its 'start up' phase.

David & Elsa are no strangers to conservation in Fiji. They recently underwrote the publication of BirdLife International's landmark book "Important Bird Areas in Fiji", and before that the acclaimed "Palms of the Fiji Islands" by Dick Watling - both of which are available to NatureFiji-MareqetiViti members at a discount (see below).

In June last year, with applications for membership not even open, we received our first application and donation. Dr Jorge Kretzschmar of Bochum, Germany, undertook his doctoral research here in the 1990s and has been a regular visitor ever since. Thank you Jorge !!

Corporate Gold Members

NFMV now has two Corporate Gold Sponsors these are:

- Mago Island, and
- Environment Consultants (Fiji) Limited

NatureFiji-MareqetiViti
www.naturefiji.org

Please see the membership form below for information about how you can get your employer or business this special status.

Member benefits

Extension of membership

In recognition of NFMV's founding members patient support in our first year of operation, we are extending all memberships that have expired or are due to expire in 2008 to 1 January 2009.

Entrance discount Kula Eco-Park

Simply provide your NFMV member number and photo identification at the entrance for a 25% discount. You can contact us at support@naturefiji.com if you do not have your member number.

Kula Eco Park is Fiji's only wildlife park. Set in tropical forest, the park showcases Fiji's flora and fauna including some of Fiji's rarest endangered species. You'll have the chance to be photographed with iguanas, musk parrots, snakes, sea turtles and more.

The park is open seven days a week from 10am till 4pm. It is located opposite the Outrigger Lagoon Resort near Korotogo, Its website is: www.fijiwild.com.



10% discounts on Fiji wildlife books

Around 20 books and pocket guides on Fijian wildlife are available at a 10% discount for NFMV members.

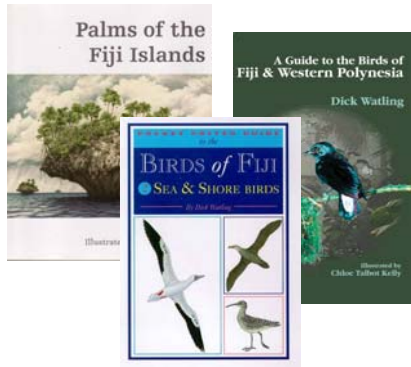
These books include the classic '*Guide to the Birds of Fiji and Western Polynesia*' and the recently published '*Palms of the Fiji Islands*'

For a full list of the books available refer to the Environment Consultants website at: www.environmentfiji.com/publications.

For International book orders (US\$) download the International Order Form at: <http://naturefiji.org/downloads/order.pdf>.

For orders within Fiji contact us at: support@naturefiji.org

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Patrons donating \$100 or more will receive a wildlife book as a gift from NFMV!

Win an Original George Bennett Painting!

Internationally acclaimed wildlife artist, George Bennett (you can see some of his recent Fijian wildlife paintings on page 10 of this newsletter and on the NFMV Website) is supporting NatureFiji-MareqetiViti.

All members are automatically entered in a draw for an original wildlife painting by George Bennett. The draw will be held at NFMV's Annual General Meeting (details included below).

Upcoming member benefits

We hope to soon arrange more discounts as well as introducing organised visits to our project sites and other interesting locations such as:

- Mt Tomanivi
- Waisali Reserve
- Yadua Taba Iguana Reserve
- Sand Dunes
- Lake Tagimoucia

Upcoming NFMV events

Annual General Meeting

NFMV's first Annual General Meeting will be held on 27 August 2008. The time and venue will be advertised in the Fiji Times in early August.

All members and people interested in joining and/or volunteering for NFMV are encouraged to attend the meeting to find out where we are heading, have a say and get involved in the work of NFMV.

To New Members

By joining NatureFiji-MareqetiViti (NFMV) you will become a member of Fiji's sole local and leading conservation organisation.

As a non-profit and non-government organisation, NFMV depends on membership subscriptions, donations and bequests. It is your support and generosity that will enable NFMV to work actively for the conservation of Fiji's Natural Heritage.

We hope to grow an active membership that will assist in conservation projects, wildlife management and island restoration projects.

Members of NFMV will receive our newsletter which reports about local and international conservation activities, current issues, as well as ongoing projects and events sponsored by NFMV or its partners.

We hope to attract other benefits for our members as NFMV develops its national profile (see above for existing benefits).

A membership application/renewal form is included at the back of this newsletter.

Acknowledgements

Nicola Thomson and Deborah Sue for newsletter design and editing. Very many thanks to Helen Dalton for help with proposals. Thanks too to BirdLife International for on-going support. To Terunesh Rao of *integralelements* (www.integralelements.net) for our website and IT assistance beyond the call of commercial reality. Thanks very much to Fiji Fish Ltd. for help with the Fiji Petrel Project and the Thrigby Hall Wildlife Gardens, UK for a generous donation to the Navua Palm Project.

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For Newsletter content, you may contact us at

support@naturefiji.org

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259 Prince's Rd, Tamavua, Suva, Fiji

Phone: +679 3383189 Fax: +679 3381818



NATUREFIJI-MAREQETIVITI MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM

- Yes! I want to join NatureFiji-MareqetiViti and support its programs
 I want to renew my membership with NatureFiji-MareqetiViti

I also want to donate \$10 \$25 \$50 \$100 \$ _____

I understand that my donation will go directly to help with NatureFiji program activities.

First Name:	<input style="width: 95%;" type="text"/>	Last Name:	<input style="width: 95%;" type="text"/>
Address Line 1 :	<input style="width: 98%;" type="text"/>		
Address Line 2 :	<input style="width: 98%;" type="text"/>		
City:	<input style="width: 80%;" type="text"/>	State:	<input style="width: 80%;" type="text"/>
		Zip Code:	<input style="width: 80%;" type="text"/>
Country:	<input style="width: 98%;" type="text"/>		
Home Phone:	<input style="width: 98%;" type="text"/>		
Work Phone:	<input style="width: 98%;" type="text"/>		
Email:	<input style="width: 98%;" type="text"/>		
Member number (if you are renewing an existing membership):	<input style="width: 98%;" type="text"/>		

Please Tick	Annual Fee (FJ\$)	Please select which category of membership you would like Category
<input type="checkbox"/>	\$25	Standard Members (over 18 years and resident in Fiji)
<input type="checkbox"/>	\$50	Overseas Standard Members (all ages, resident overseas)
<input type="checkbox"/>	\$35	Family Members (resident in Fiji)
<input type="checkbox"/>	\$10	Discounted Standard Members (Full time Students; Juniors – under 18 years; Senior Citizens (over 55), and others as determined by Council)
<input type="checkbox"/>	\$10	Affiliated Member Landowner or community groups, other conservation NGOs, wildlife clubs (as determined by Council)
<input type="checkbox"/>		Corporate Members:
<input type="checkbox"/>	\$500	Corporate (enables agreed usage of NatureFiji-MareqetiViti logo)
<input type="checkbox"/>	\$1,000	Corporate Gold (agreed usage of NFMV logo and your logo & a link on our website)
<input type="checkbox"/>	\$2,000	Life Member (single payment)

WAIVER

1. I the undersigned applicant or member of NatureFiji-MareqetiViti accepts full responsibility for my own safety during any NatureFiji-MareqetiViti organised activity or any activity organised by or on behalf of the same.
2. I accept that the some activities I may be involved in as part of NatureFiji-MareqetiViti may be or are inherently dangerous and carry risks that may involve physical injury or death.
3. I accept that the members whether event organisers or members of the committee do not carry any special expertise or skill on which I can rely in the event of misfortune or accident howsoever arising.
4. In signing hereunder and joining NatureFiji-MareqetiViti (whether my yearly fees are overdue or not) I accept all legal responsibility for such risks as may exist on any activities organised or carried out by NatureFiji-MareqetiViti.
5. I agree and accept without question that NatureFiji-MareqetiViti, the Council, the event organiser(s) or any of NatureFiji-MareqetiViti members cannot be held liable in the event of any misfortune or accident, howsoever arising.
6. I agree and accept that I, or any relative or next of kin who seeks to claim through me will make no claim, action, demand, or writ whatsoever for any liability whatsoever on NatureFiji-MareqetiViti, its committee members, event organisers or members for breach of any tort or any claim for breach of contract, or any other action whether at common law or any claim whatsoever under any statute law now known or hereinafter enacted including for any breach of care or any failure to take proper or adequate care of me during any activity, howsoever arising, organised by or on behalf of NatureFiji-MareqetiViti.
7. I agree that in the event of misfortune or accident howsoever arising I will not disparage, slander or defame any member of NatureFiji-MareqetiViti, NatureFiji-MareqetiViti as an entity in its own right, or the Fiji Nature Conservation Trust.
8. I acknowledge and accept that I have read and understood all the waiver clauses in this document.

Family, Members/Applicants only

9. In relation to family members, joining or renewing membership, I as the parent or guardian accept the above waiver clauses in relation to any of my children who may seek to make a claim, action, demand or writ (in their own right or using a next friend) against NatureFiji-MareqetiViti, the Council, the event organiser(s) or any member, howsoever arising.

I accept the conditions in the Waiver and wish to confirm my membership application and/or donation:	
Signature: _____	Date: _____
Print your name: _____	
I am also signing on behalf of (if applicable – for group): _____	

Payment	
Membership Fee:	_____ FJ\$
Donation:	_____ FJ\$
Total payment:	_____ FJ\$
I would like to pay by:	
<input type="checkbox"/> Cheque (enclosed)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Cash	
<input type="checkbox"/> Credit card (details provided below)	
I authorize NatureFiji-MaraqetiViti to debit my credit card for the total payment amount above	
<input type="checkbox"/> Visa	
<input type="checkbox"/> Mastercard	
Full Name on Card	_____
Card Number	_____
Expires	_____
Signature	
Please fax this page to us on +679 3381818 or scan and email it to us at support@naturefiji.org	