

### PREVENTING EXTINCTIONS

#### Fatuhiva Monarch *Pomarea whitneyi*



Société d'Ornithologie  
de Polynésie (MANU)

### Background

Fatuhiva Monarch is endemic to Fatu Hiva in the Marquesas Islands, French Polynesia. It is one of four extant endemic *Pomarea* flycatchers found in French Polynesia (a further four species are documented as extinct, two as recently as the 1970s and 1980s). *Pomarea* species appear to be exceptionally sensitive to House Rat *Rattus rattus* nest predation, but tolerant of Polynesian Rat *R. exulans*. Without conservation action all known populations of *Pomarea* exposed to introduced House Rat have become extinct. Cat predation has also been identified as a significant threat.

The Fatu Hiva population was considered to be secure until the discovery of House Rat in 2000, presumably originating from an introduction in the 1980s or early 1990s. The monarch has undertaken a severe decline. In 1975, the population was estimated at several hundred pairs and in 1990 it was still common. In February 2000, a field survey estimated a mean density of one pair / 10ha in the lower Omoa Valley and, assuming similar densities elsewhere, the total population was estimated at a few hundred pairs (400-1,000 individuals). Unlike in 1975, no birds were observed in the groves of mango on the slopes and ridges up the Omoa Valley, and the lack of adults with immatures indicated low breeding success. Repeat visits in 2003 and 2006 only found the species using three out of eight potentially suitable valleys above Omoa, and just one out seven near Hanavave. Furthermore, the encounter rate during surveys declined from 0.35 individuals per point count in 2003 to 0.23 individuals in 2006, and 0.11 in 2009 – representing a decline of 69% over this period. The population is now estimated at just 67 individuals, and may become extinct in the near future.

### Actions being implemented

1. A **Species Action Plan** is being formulated. It will include evaluation of threats and conservation actions.
2. The **rodent control programme** has been enhanced by identifying an optimal baiting regime to ensure efficient use of staff time and bait usage, and creating buffer zones around territories. Bait stations are set up 20-25m apart, and catapults are used to bait inaccessible areas.
3. A **monitoring and colour ringing** programme is underway and is becoming more self-sufficient as local people are trained. All breeding events of the monitored pairs are recorded.
4. Basic **research on ecological requirements** has been carried out by a student. This will be used to decide which nearby rat-free island might be appropriate for translocation.
5. Linked to the above, the student has assessed the feasibility of **translocation** to nearby Raivavae and Rimatara. Habitat modelling and rat trapping were conducted on the islands.
6. A **Site Support Group** has been set up involving 18 local community members.

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