

## Fiji Petrel

### *Pseudobulweria macgillivrayi*

#### Background

Fiji Petrel is one of the world's rarest and least-studied seabirds. It is believed to be endemic to the island of Gau in Fiji's Lomaiviti archipelago. Formerly known from a single museum specimen collected in 1855, the species' continued existence was only confirmed in 1984 when a bird was caught by Dr Dick Watling of Mareqeti Viti (Nature Fiji). Since this time there have been ten further confirmed or credible records from the island, all involving single birds found grounded in villages. There have also been a number of unconfirmed reports of the species at sea. Although surveys have yet to locate the species's breeding grounds, it is presumed to nest in earth burrows or natural cavities in the forested interior of the island, possibly alongside Collared Petrel *Pterodroma brevipes*. The greatest current threat facing the species is thought to be introduced cats and rats, which predate nesting birds. The recent establishment of a feral pig population in the south of the island may prove an even more serious threat, however, as pigs have been implicated in the demise of numerous seabird colonies around the world. Despite its elusive nature, this mysterious seabird is a source of considerable pride for the Fijian people, and the species is used as the emblem of the national airline (Air Fiji) as well as being depicted on the country's fifty-dollar banknote.



#### Species Guardian: Nature Fiji - Mareqeti Viti

#### Actions being implemented

1. The implementation of the **Fiji Petrel Recovery Plan** is ongoing.
2. Workshops are being planned to **raise awareness** of the proper handling techniques for grounded birds (which are a crucial source of information on the species) and to **develop local expertise** in the collection of scientific data following such incidents. From mid 2009 there should be the potential to radio-track grounded birds. NFMV have employed a community leader on Gau to improve community understanding through village by village visits and to make presentations at provincial, island-wide and district meetings.
2. A key priority is to **locate and protect the species's nesting sites**. Specially trained 'wildlife search' dogs have been used in the past to find Magenta Petrel *Pterodroma magentae* burrows on Chatham Island, and the recent preservation of a freshly dead Fiji Petrel has provided an opportunity to use this technique in Gau. Dogs are currently being trained using feathers from the specimen, and it is hoped that the first searches will take place in July 2009. An expedition to Mt Delaco to undertake lamping and playback at the start of the breeding season and attempt to trap and radio tag a Fiji Petrel is planned for mid 2009. In addition, a pilot 'chumming' expedition in July 2008 did not result in any confirmed sightings but demonstrated the possibility of finding the species using this method; further work is planned for 2009.
3. A **comprehensive scientific review** of the Fiji Petrel and its conservation has been undertaken and recently published in *Bird Conservation International* (Priddel *et al.* 2008).



Most records of the Fiji Petrel are of grounded birds, probably disorientated by village lights (Dick Watling/www.rarebirdseyarbook.com).



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