

# Mili promotes a better way

Title Miliana Ravuso has been working to protect birds and their habitats in Fiji for the past five years. As the Senior Conservation Officer for the BirdLife International Fiji Programme in Suva, she and her colleagues address the many challenges confronting birds, and the overall environment on a daily basis. Much of her time is focused on protecting Important Bird Areas (IBAs) - areas that are important for the survival of Fiji's native bird species. To achieve this, she works closely with landowners who live in these areas to implement conservation methods that will both provide a sustainable income for them as well as protect their forests. This includes sustainable modern farm practices that minimise soil erosion, the establishment of tree nurseries (and the replanting of native trees), and other conservation and income-generating activities that now offer options for the landowners "who may not have been aware of their choices." Miliana, who is known as Milly to her friends, attended Suva Grammar before enrolling in the University of the South Pacific where she obtained her Bachelors Degree in Environmental Science. "I was attracted to the sciences at high school, in the lab, trying new things, mixing chemicals, always something to discover. I didn't see myself in an office job, being an accountant or something similar. I've always loved the outdoors." Her love of the outdoors led Milly to a three-month research project on cultural learning, cognition and co-operation in the Yasawas. "This was an opportunity to try something different, something new. While living in a village in the Yasawas, I realised that my calling was to help people understand natural resources and use them wisely." Milly started working for the BirdLife International Fiji Programme in 2005 and is now leading on a number of conservation projects. Most recently she has been working with the land-owning mataqali in Nabukelevu (Kadavu) and Natewa Tunuloa (Vanua Levu), to protect their forests. Some of these mataqali have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with BirdLife International and agreed to establish community-declared protected areas for their forests. "The signing of the MOUs by some landowning clans in Nabukelevu and Natewa Tunuloa is the result of a successful continuing awareness programme on the importance of birds and their habitats," said Milly. "These mataqali are now aware of the negative impact that unsustainable agriculture and logging practices have upon the forests, the land, the watershed, the birds but also on their own future. Once they realised that, we had to find alternative livelihood projects that use natural resources in a sustainable way." This work, which is funded by the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund and the Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme, has been carried out in close partnership with Departments of Environment and Forestry, and the respective Provincial Councils. "For example, with the assistance of the Department of Agriculture, and the South Pacific Commission's Center for Pacific Crops and Trees, which supplied seedlings, a model tree nursery has been established on Kadavu, for the replanting of native trees. "What is exciting about the signing of the MOUs is the ownership that the mataqali have taken in preserving their forests," Milly added. "There are now groups of volunteers in Nabukelevu and Natewa Tunuloa who are working with their respective village and district councils to protect the environment. "Although I did not start out with an interest in birds, my work has always involved connecting people to the environment. I am very much a

people person. "My knowledge about, and love for conserving birds has come about as a result of my work for BirdLife International, where I have been fortunate to have met really great mentors who have helped me build my capacity and up my skills. I can see how my background was setting the platform for my working here at BirdLife," concluded Milly.