Amazing 2012 breeding season for Tahiti Monarch

Title
The Critically Endangered Tahiti Monarch *Pomarea nigra* has enjoyed its most successful breeding season since Société d'Ornithologie de Polynésie (SOP-Manu; BirdLife Partner in French Polynesia) began an intensive programme of nest protection in 1998.

“Ten young fledged, representing a four-fold increase on previous years, and seven new territories were established”, said Caroline Blanvillain, SOP-Manu’s Chargée des oiseaux terrestres.

Tahiti Monarch is Critically Endangered according to BirdLife on behalf of the IUCN Red List, with only 44 mature individuals of this flycatcher known in 2011. The main threat is nest predation by Black Rat. Predation and disturbance by introduced bird species including Indian Myna *Acridotheres tristis*, Swamp Harrier *Circus approximans* and Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer* are also adding to the pressures on the tiny global population.

The highly invasive plant pest *Miconia calvescens*, and goats and other introduced mammals have caused deep structural changes to Tahiti’s forests. By 1998, the monarch was known from only four valleys in western Tahiti, and may now be confined to three, with a total range of less than 28 km^2.

Up to and including the 2012 breeding season, SOP-Manu’s efforts had succeeded in stabilising the breeding population at five to 13 pairs. News of the 2012 breeding success has raised hopes that the population may increase and reoccupy former territories. If the improvement in fledging success is sustained, some birds will be moved to the island of Rimatara, which is currently free from rats, mynahs and other invasive species, and where suitable breeding habitat is available.

“Those ten new chicks raise a fantastic hope for the species’ survival”, added Caroline. The success of the September 2012-March 2013 breeding season follows a progressive intensification of SOP-Manu conservation work.

Since 2009:

1. The control of invasive predators has been greatly expanded from its focus on rats at the nest sites to include mynahs and bulbuls with increasing efficiency
2. Six pairs of monarchs which nest at the upper end of the Vallées Maruapo Important Bird Area , above a series of high waterfalls which make access very difficult, have been

brought into the recovery programme.

“The control of introduced birds was considerably increased in 2012, and explains the sharp increase in breeding success last year”, added Caroline. “In addition, we have inventoried the monarch’s nesting habitat and are now restoring it”.

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