

# A boost for eco-tourism in the Cook Islands

Title Situated in the south-eastern quarter of Rarotonga, capital of the Cook Islands, the Takitumu Conservation Area (TCA) covers 155 hectares of steep bush-clad hills rising to 220m . Within it is found a thriving population of Rarotonga Monarch (or Kakerori) *Pomarea dimidiata* - once one of the rarest birds in the world. A new leaflet is attracting increasing numbers of eco-tourists to the sanctuary in search of the unique wildlife found there. The conservation area was set up in the mid 1990's under a GEF-funded South Pacific Biodiversity Conservation Programme. Since that time, work undertaken at the site has been described as one of the world's great conservation success stories. Although common in the mid-1800s, the Rarotonga Monarch subsequently declined rapidly and was not seen between in the early 1900s and 1973. However, in 1983 21 birds were discovered and a survey in 1987 estimated the population at 38 individuals and declining.



To save the species, intensive control of

predators - particularly black rats - was started, and by 2000, the population on Rarotonga had reached 221 individuals, leading to its down-listing from Critically Endangered to Endangered on the IUCN Red List. To attract more visitors to the site, a new pamphlet has been produced by TCA Field Officer Lynda Nia. "Having this leaflet available has certainly increased my workload, which is a very good thing for both me and the TCA", said Teauriki Daniel - TCA Chief Guide. "It makes me proud of our heritage conserved in the area and of what we have done there to achieve it". As well as Rarotonga Monarch, tourists attracted to the site are also enjoying encountering healthy populations of other endemic birds such as Rarotonga Starling *Aplonis cinerascens* and Cook Islands Fruit Dove *Ptilinopus rarotongensis* (both Vulnerable) - which have also benefited from the continued predator control undertaken in the area. Visitors may also see Lynda Nia and the TCA team continuing their hard work at the site: putting rat poison out along baitlines, recording banded birds or their nests or fledglings, or keeping the baitlines and tourist tracks open and safe.



Visitors may see Lynda continuing her hard work at the site.

?The Takitumu Conservation Area is a testament to the hard work of Lynda and the TCA team and a symbol of hope for biodiversity in the Pacific?, said Jacqui Evans - Programme Manager for Te Ipukarea Society (BirdLife Partner in the Cook Islands). To download the leaflet, please click the following - [Takitumu Conservation Area Leaflet](#) (3MB, .pdf). If you'd like to find out more information please contact Lynda at: [kakerori@tca.co.ck](mailto:kakerori@tca.co.ck). [Click here to subscribe to The BirdLife Pacific Quarterly E-Newsletter.](#)