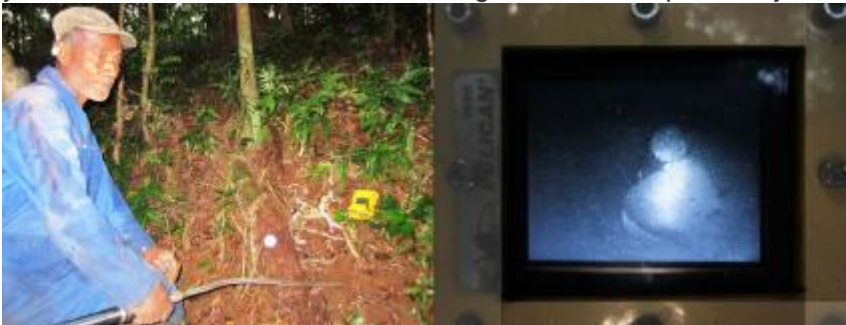


Title It looked like 'just another forested hillside' but Bob and Tar - the Fiji Petrel detector Dogs proved otherwise - they found the first significant colony of Vulnerable Collared Petrels to date. It is extremely hard work quartering the steep forested hillsides of Gau with the detector dogs and where the dogs go, the handlers have to follow. Eleazar O'Conner and Poasa Qalo have taken the dogs up hills and down slopes which show no signs that anyone has ever been there before. But all the forest on Gau has to be methodically checked for nesting petrels. Nearly four months of searches had so far produced 8 burrows either occupied or being excavated during nocturnal visits by their owners. All were known or considered to be Collared Petrel nests. Delaisavu, an unremarkable hillside above the village of Navukailagi in the north of the island didn't look very special. But the Bob and Tar proved otherwise. Loosely scattered on the steep slope, 25 burrows have been found and registered in the database - the world's first ever well-documented colony of the Collared Petrel. Each burrow is inspected with the burrowscope - but not all reveal their owners as some of the burrows are more than the two metre length of the burrowscope and others have right angle bends that the burrowscope cannot get round. So there is still much to be learned. It is quite possible that one of the burrows could belong to a Fiji Petrel. For Eleazar and Poasa, the find could not have come at a better time - a great reward for an enormous amount of effort. For the dogs, Bob and Tar, finding the burrows reinforces their training and the congratulations and attention showered on them after each find, helps to keep them searching hard for more. For the Fiji Petrel Project, this is tremendous progress and the possibility of finding a Fiji Petrel nesting burrow, after nearly 30 years of intermittent research is looking like a distinct possibility.



Joeli Kove with burrowscope inspects a nesting burrow

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