

The Natewa Tunuloa Site Support Group (SSG) - on Fiji's second largest island of Vanua Levu - has started its first independent project with funding from the GEF Small Grants Programme (GEF SGP), implemented by UNDP. This project is the first ever project to be managed on the ground by an SSG in Fiji and shows the level of commitment from the local communities and forest owners, said Miliana Ravuso, Senior Conservation Officer for the BirdLife Fiji Programme. The Natewa Tunuloa Important Bird Area (IBA) covers a large tracts of old-growth rainforest and supports seven out of the nine subspecies endemic on Fiji's second largest island Vanua Levu including Shy Ground-dove *Gallicolumba stairi* (Vulnerable) and Silktail *Lamprolia victoriae* (Near Threatened). The forest is also identified in the Fiji National Biodiversity Strategy Action Plan as a Site of National Significance and highlighted in the National Regional Tourism Strategy as an area with potential to provide regional community benefits and to diversify tourism products. BirdLife International has been working with communities at the Natewa Tunuloa IBA to establish environment-friendly sustainable livelihoods for communities which also help to protect their forests, said Milly. This has been successful so far with communities implementing new handicraft, bee-keeping, poultry and agricultural projects. A community-managed Protected Area of about 6,625 hectares was established and communities are working closely with the SSG to monitor and manage their natural resources more sustainably for their own benefit, and for the benefit of their future generations, added Milly. Sandalwood farming, also a proposed livelihood component for the project, will divert pressure from forest resources as it can be better sustained in the long term. The new GEF SGP project will provide support to sustain the community-declared Protected Area at the Natewa Tunuloa IBA through a major reforestation effort, which will involve the replanting of valuable native trees including both fruit and timber species, said Katarina Atalifo, GEF SGP Fiji. A similar initiative has been undertaken in Nabukelevu, Kadavu with funding as well from GEF-SGP (see news story [Mt Nabukelevu model farm](#) in the Fijian press). An ecotourism scoping study has also been conducted for the Natewa Tunuloa IBA to gauge the viability of products offered by the IBA, including its cultural and natural heritage.



Silio Lalaqila of Muana Village & a SSG rep presenting a village ecotourism map at the Ecotourism Workshop.

The project will provide capacity building and technical training for the SSG to manage small scale projects and will enhance the communities' knowledge and skills for wise management of the community-declared Protected Area, noted Milly. BirdLife International will continue to develop and build the capacity of other SSGs in Fiji so conservation actions and activities are driven by SSGs on-site - sustaining the work at the IBAs into the future. This project is being funded by the GEF Small Grants Programme (GEF SGP), implemented by UNDP. BirdLife's projects at Natewa IBA have also been kindly supported by CEPF, UK Darwin Initiative and Australian Government Regional Natural Heritage Programme. CEPF unites six global leaders who are committed to enabling nongovernmental and private sector organizations to help protect vital

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