

Fijian site support groups receive fundraising & biosecurity training

Title BirdLife International Fiji Programme, for the first time brought together representatives of Site Support Groups from 6 sites for a fundraising and biosecurity workshop in early July. The sites include 3 Important Bird Areas (IBAs) and 3 potential seabird IBAs. The workshop which was jointly funded by the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund and the David and Lucille Packard Foundation was a success, considering this was the first to be hosted by the Fiji Programme. SSGs shared vital information and exchanged knowledge on conservation issues pertaining to the relevant IBAs and challenges faced amongst the communities. The 3-day workshop was facilitated by local staff from the Fiji Programme and covered topics which focused solely on local fundraising strategies for the SSGs and the importance of biosecurity measures on islands, particularly globally important seabird islands. The Fiji Programme has been working in most of these IBAs since their identification in 2005 and has been collaborating with Government, local landowners and the resource users at these IBAs not only to protect the birds, but to show ways in which protecting an IBA can benefit the landowners. Since the establishment of the first SSG in Fiji in 2005, their development has been an important part of this engagement process with communities which has led to reduced pressure on forest resources through the establishment of sustainable livelihood projects. The SSGs can now initiate fundraising activities to maintain and manage income generating ventures with the communities. In opening the workshop, Don Stewart, BirdLife's Regional Director in the Pacific said "although BirdLife International is trying to conserve birds and biodiversity at a global, regional and national level, we still need you local custodians to deliver the on-ground conservation outcomes with us". The workshop ended with a 1-day excursion to a seabird restoration island, which is a potentially important seabird island due to its significant seabird populations including a large breeding colony of red-footed boobies and thousand roosting black noddies. SSGs play a crucial role in monitoring IBAs including implementing biosecurity measures for treated islands and assisting in the ecological restoration of these islands, and this workshop was an important way to strengthen their capacity for the continuation of this work at their respective island sites. The Fiji Programme hopes to conduct more annual workshops for SSGs. For more information call Miliana Ravuso at the BirdLife office in Fiji at 3313492. (Photo Credit: BirdLife International Fiji Programme)