

Important Bird Areas in the Pacific region identified

A quarter of the World's critically endangered birds hovering on extinction are from the Pacific region, the challenge now is to do everything possible to save endangered Pacific bird species before it is too late. During the thirteenth meeting of the Pacific Islands Roundtable for Nature Conservation in Apia this week, BirdLife International presented a compendium of Important Bird Areas in the Pacific, to the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP). Australia, Fiji, French Polynesia, Palau, New Caledonia, New Zealand and Samoa are the SPREP members featured in the compendium with studies now underway to highlight the Important Bird Areas in the Cook Islands. Important Bird Areas (IBA) are determined by a number of international criteria. It means that a site in Samoa where we have completed the IBA studies is just as globally significant as a site in the Ukraine or Nepal, said Don Stewart, the Director of Bird Life International's Pacific Programme. This is just the first stage in doing something to address the crisis facing the birds and biodiversity, the second stage is to use those sites that are demonstrated to be vital for bird and biodiversity conservation to actually start conservation action on the ground. The compendium of Important Bird Areas - for 14 SPREP member countries where there are no BirdLife Partners plus another seven BirdLife countries also members of SPREP - has taken over four years to complete. The evaluation was carried out with the non government organisation partners of BirdLife International in the different countries however in the absence of an NGO partner there were desk based research literature studies. BirdLife International and SPREP have a Memorandum of Understanding to assist bird conservation in the Pacific region. SPREP is pleased that this IBA compendium is completed and now available to assist and guide bird conservation programmes in the Pacific to recover the population of birds that are on the verge of becoming extinct. This marks another milestone achievement in the partnership between SPREP and the BirdLife International, said David Sheppard the Director of SPREP. 20 IBAs were identified in Fiji, Samoa has eight and Australia has 400 Important Bird Areas. Altogether there are 190 birds on the critically endangered list, of which 44 are in the Pacific region. The Fiji Petrel and the Red-throated Lorikeet are two species from Fiji that are close to extinction, in the Solomon Islands the Makira Moorhen and the Beck's Petrel are named on the critically endangered bird list. Now that BirdLife International has highlighted some of the important bird areas in the Pacific region, work is underway to assist the formation of conservation areas to help the bird numbers grow. We try to encourage a form of protected status for these IBAs as they don't have any legal status but are a powerful tool for encouraging conservation areas and establishing protected areas, explained Stewart. There are a number of challenges to doing this in the Pacific which are different from other places in the world. One of them is the nature of land ownership which is communally owned so communities must get behind conserving our biodiversity and work with Governments to help ensure protected areas. This

compendium is all aimed at saving what is left before it is gone.?