Key sites for seabird conservation identified in the tropical Pacific

Title

BirdLife has launched a report titled *Important Areas for Seabirds – guiding marine conservation in the tropical Pacific* revealing the most important sites in the tropical Pacific for seabirds – now identified as marine Important Bird Areas (IBAs). Seabirds are great sentinels. The report shows how seabirds tell us about the state of the oceans and islands of the region; reflecting human impacts like climate change, fishing, and invasive species. “Safeguarding these places will protect the livelihoods and cultural heritage of Pacific islands and peoples, and help governments to meet the commitments they have made to biodiversity conservation”, said Don Stewart – BirdLife Director for the Pacific. For millennia seabirds in the Pacific have provided benefits to people such as food, feathers and nutrients for farming (seabird guano). Seafarers use seabirds for navigating and locating fish schools. There are 62 seabird species that regularly use the tropical Pacific. Some are abundant and breed in enormous colonies on remote atolls, others are poorly known, rare and highly threatened.

> *“All seabirds require the protection and effective management of important sites that they rely on, both on land for breeding and at sea for feeding”, said Jez Bird - Pacific marine IBA co-ordinator. “The occurrence of seabirds can identify key sites for conservation called IBAs. The 104 terrestrial sites and 99 marine sites described in this report are among the Pacific’s most exceptional places for seabirds and other wildlife”.*

However, the current condition of these sites varies across the region: at some, seabird populations are stable or increasing; while at others, they are declining rapidly. Strikingly, many sites lack sufficiently up-to-date information to reliably assess their condition. The major threats on land are invasive species and unsustainable harvesting of seabirds for food. At sea, over-fishing and pollution are affecting most sites, but the magnitude of their impacts on seabirds is poorly understood. Climate change is an emerging threat affecting seabirds both on land and at sea. More action is needed to safeguard these sites although there are some encouraging examples of interventions and recent successes. Local community groups, governments and non-governmental organisations have successfully improved the condition of some of the region’s most spectacular sites, benefiting seabirds, other wildlife, and local people. “The BirdLife Partnership can be extremely proud of its efforts to eradicate rats from sites in Palau, New Caledonia, Fiji and French Polynesia. These efforts are already helping seabird populations to bounce back,” comments Jez. “More challenges lie ahead now to increase the level of protection of sites on land and at-sea, and to work with governments to help them deliver on their commitments to biodiversity conservation”. Acknowledgements: BirdLife wishes to acknowledge and thank its Founder Patrons and the many individuals, organisations and donors that have generously contributed to conservation work in the Pacific. In particular we thank the Aage V. Jensen Charity Foundation and the Global Greengrants Fund for their support in the complication and publication of this report.