

NatureFiji-MareqetiViti on the high seas

Title

NatureFiji-MareqetiViti (NFMV), and the BirdLife Pacific Secretariat, recently participated in a seabird survey amongst the islands of Moala, Totoya and Matuku. The results obtained, revealed that the waters between the islands of Totoya, Matuku and Moala are found to be important for seabirds. A number of petrels were documented, namely the Tahiti, Mottled, and Collared Petrel, in the months between late April and early May.

The most significant find was the sighting of a Fiji Petrel between the island of Totoya and Matuku, becoming the 3rd ever sighting recorded of this rare seabird. Land based research on the three islands, revealed that Collared petrels are indeed breeding on these islands. Collared Petrels are currently listed as a Near Threatened species (IUCN Red list 2011) with an assumed small population that is declining . Previously known to have only been breeding in the islands of Gau, Ovalau, Taveuni, Kadavu and Moala. It was once recorded in Viti levu and Vanua levu, but the population has since been extirpated since the predation of the introduced mongoose. Currently with the Fiji Petrel project by NFMV, studies have been focused on acquiring better knowledge about the ecology of the Collared Petrels. The information from this survey would provide ground information on petrel behavior that would prove beneficial to the research and ultimate protection of Fiji's only endemic seabird, the Fiji Petrel.

Rat identification proved crucial to the seabird research, having recorded Pacific rats on all three islands, while near Naro village in Moala, Black rats were identified. Black rats are major threat to seabird's globally; the existence of this rodent species would be a major threat to the Collared Petrels on the island, as well as other yet to be documented seabird species. The research was made possible with the kind assistance of the captain and crew of the yacht Infinity, that provided both passage, accommodation , as well as assisting in research activities both on land and at sea.

On the 13th of July, 2011, NatureFiji-MareqetiViti on behalf of the research team, presented at the Lau Provincial Council meeting the findings of the 10 day survey trip. The presentation was received positively, particularly the results of the seabird survey. Find out more at the [website](#). [Click here to subscribe to The BirdLife Pacific Quarterly E-Newsletter](#).