

Petrels fuel Fijian exchange programme

Title Community members from two BirdLife Fiji Programme Site Support Groups (SSG) recently visited a NatureFiji-MareqetiViti project on Gau Island to learn about petrel conservation techniques. Earlier in September representatives from the Mount Nabukelevu SSG, on the island of Kadavu, and Vatuiria SSG, based on the main island of Viti Levu, visited the long-running NatureFiji-MareqetiViti project which seeks to conserve Collared and Fiji Petrel. ?The main objectives of the one week visit was to provide a platform of information exchange, sharing knowledge and strengthening skills with the local volunteers and the NatureFiji-MareqetiViti field staff on Gau on Petrel survey techniques?, said Mere Valu ? BirdLife Fiji Programme. The trainings allowed the SSGs to learn monitoring, radio tracking and searching of petrels. The team spent the week spotlighting, searching and monitoring Vulnerable Collared Petrel burrows which have been found by NatureFiji-MareqetiViti using trained sniffer dogs from New Zealand. They discussed the importance of conserving petrels and protecting their habitats with Gau community members from Nukuloa and Navukailagi villages. ?This training has enabled me to understand key features to look for when searching for Collared Petrel burrows in thick forested areas within our Important Bird Area on Kadavu?, said Jovesa Drau ? Chairman of the Mount Nabukelevu SSG. Gau Island is unique in that it lacks many invasive species - such as the Indian Mongoose - which pose a major threat to bird species in other islands in Fiji. The island also has densely forested areas which provide ideal for nesting opportunities for seabird species like Collared Petrel. The island is thought to be the only breeding site for Critically Endangered Fiji Petrel in the world. The site exchange has enabled the Nabukelevu and Vatuiria SSGs to understand the use of different survey methods, and how to apply them when searching for and monitoring petrels in Fiji. ?We learned how the use of trained sniffer dogs can really help when trekking through rough terrain searching for hidden seabird burrows?, said Akuila Qionibaravi from the Vatuiria SSG. The trip was funded by the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund. The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund is a joint initiative of l?Agence Française de Développement, Conservation International, the Global Environment Facility, the Government of Japan, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, and the World Bank.