

Rat eradication planned in the Cooks

Title

TIS (BirdLife in the Cook Islands) is planning a project with BirdLife International and the Cook Island's National Environment Service to eradicate rats from Suvarrow National Park to protect Suvarrow's globally important seabird populations. The threat to Suvarrow's seabirds was revealed when a rat infestation was discovered on Motu Tou during a seabird survey in 2008. The survey found that no Black Noddys were nesting on Motu Tou when this species was observed nesting there during a survey in 2000. Motu Tou also has few nesting birds of other species. Invasive species are a main cause of biodiversity loss in the Pacific. Rats, cats and other introduced mammals are believed to be responsible for 90% of extinctions since 1800, and remain the key cause of decline for 90% of the region's 200+ globally threatened birds. If left unchecked the risk of these rats invading the other islets remains and as such the potential for severely degrading our National Park. Suvarrow is internationally known for its globally significant populations of seabirds including 13% of the world's Lesser Frigatebirds, a reputation that could be threatened if there is no control over rats and other introduced mammals. Rat eradication involves the laying of rat bait on infected motu following a carefully planned programme. All measures are taken to ensure there are no negative effects on the environment and that impacts on other species are minimalised. The eradication is planned for August-September this year and will be followed by implementation of a biosecurity plan to prevent rats being brought in again. Suvarrow was identified as an Important Bird Area and Key Biodiversity Area during the Conservation in the Cooks: Setting Priorities, Building Capacities project funded by CEPF via Birdlife International. **Subscribe to The BirdLife Pacific Quarterly E-Newsletter**

Work to identify KBAs and IBAs in the Cook Islands is supported by the Critical Ecosystems Partnership Fund (CEPF) through Birdlife International. CEPF is a joint initiative of Agence Francaise de Developpement, Conservation International, the Global Environment Facility, the Government of Japan, the MacArthur Foundation and the World Bank. A fundamental goal is to ensure civil society is engaged in biodiversity conservation. The focus of CEPF is the conservation of threatened species and other globally important species.