

# Safeguarding priority forest sites with local community support, Fiji

The Greater Tomanivi is a block of old-growth forest totaling 180km<sup>2</sup> ranging from lowland to mountain forest on Fiji's highest mountain (Mt Tomanivi) and is an Important Bird Area holding seven globally threatened birds. Nature Fiji, the BirdLife Partner, has been working with local communities on forest management of this globally important IBA. The Greater Tomanivi IBA is owned by the State (Crown Freehold) but land ownership of part of it is in the process of being reverted back to Native Tenure which will give ownership to the customary indigenous people currently regarded as the mataqali Nadala. This project aimed to give the community the option of conservation, and empower them with knowledge that will help them manage the IBA when the land ownership and authority of the IBA revert to the landowners. A main focus of the project was on raising awareness of the importance of biodiversity conservation, and the prospects for doing so. The community had indicated that they would like to continue to have the IBA protected but they had no means, or understanding, by which to begin to address this. The work has helped bring about a major shift in the way the community, especially young people, think about their forests. As one workshop participant commented: "*Au bau taleitaka saraga na workshop. Baleta au sa qai vulica mai kina na bibi ni noda Vanua ni Manumanu Vuka, vatakei na yaga ni Site Support Group e na veitokoni vei ira na soqosoqo vaka i MareqetiViti kei BirdLife*" (*?I really liked the workshop. It has taught me about how important our birds are, and the important role that Site Support Groups play in supporting organizations like MareqetiViti and BirdLife* ? - Asenaca Tokula - Nadala SSG youth member). The project has raised awareness of:

- the international and national significance of the forest, and its importance to local communities, particularly to the landowning village (Nadala Village), and other villages (Tikina Nabubuco)
- the ecosystem services provided the island of Viti Levu by the forests and the negative impacts of destructive activities at head waters to flora, fauna, communities and villages downstream.
- the connectivity of headwaters and river mouths and the ocean.
- the value of native species and their vulnerability to threats posed by introduced species and poor land management. The work has built the capacity of:
- stakeholders that were not previously involved in discussions on the management of the forest and raised their awareness of the IBA's importance.
- young people who previously had not known about the existence and significance of the IBA.
- young people to advocate for endemic and endangered species in front of a public audience other than their own village.
- young people to recognise threats to biodiversity around their villages, and to recognise the differences between native species and introduced, invasive species.

**Biodiversity at Greater Tomanivi IBA** Seven globally threatened bird species have been recorded within the IBA: the

Red-throated Lorikeet *Charmosyna amabilis*, Long-legged warbler *Trichocichla rufa*, Pink-billed Parrotfinch *Erythrura kleinschmidti*, Friendly Ground-dove *Gallicolumba stairii*, Black-faced Shrikebill *Clytorhynchus nigrogularis*, Masked Shining Parrot *Prosopeia personata*, and the Giant Forest Honeyeater *Gymnomyza viridis*. The Red-throated Lorikeet was last observed within the IBA in 1993, and the Long-legged warbler population was rediscovered in 2003, a century after it was first described. **22 May 2010 - International Day for Biological Diversity** This year's International Day for Biological Diversity theme of 'Biodiversity for Development and Poverty Alleviation' is a reminder of the unique contribution of biodiversity to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. This is one of a series of projects showcasing the BirdLife Partnerships work around the world to improve livelihoods while conserving biodiversity. This project is part of a small grant programme managed by the BirdLife Secretariat with generous support from the Aage V. Jensen Charity Foundation.