

Spotlight on three Important Bird Areas in the Cook Islands

Title TIS (BirdLife in the Cook Islands) recently visited the islands of Atiu and Aitutaki to raise awareness in the community about the identification of their islands as Key Biodiversity Areas and Important Bird Areas (KBA/IBA). KBAs and IBAs mark the places on earth that have global importance for conservation. They must meet one or more internationally accepted criteria. In simple terms for the Cook Islands, a place can qualify as a KBA/IBA if it contains globally threatened plants or animals, unique species or globally significant populations of a species. Atiu island (29km²) has a population of 570 people who have responsibility over the biodiversity on Atiu and the nearby uninhabited island of Takutea (1km²). Atiu was identified as a Key Biodiversity Area and Important Bird Area (KBA/IBA) because of five bird species, five landsnails, an endemic plant and two species of marine turtle. Bird species which qualify Atiu as an Important Bird Area are the endemic Atiu Swiftlet *Collocalia sawtelli*, the endangered Rimatara Lorikeet *Vini kuhlii*, the endangered Rarotonga Flycatcher *Pomarea dimidiata* and the endemic Cook Islands Fruit Dove *Ptilinopus rarotongensis*. The vulnerable Bristle Thighed Curlew *Numenius tahitiensis* is a candidate bird species for the Atiu IBA. Takutea is an important bird area because of its globally significant population of Red Tailed Tropic Bird. 1600 birds were counted in 2008. Aitutaki qualifies as a KBA/IBA because of two bird species, six landsnails, an endemic spider and a coral reef fish, the Humphead Wrasse. The Aitutaki Island Council asked TIS for help with protecting a bird refuge and marine protected area. They also want their bird populations monitored. To read more, please click to [TIS newsletter](#) (pdf 630 kb). 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. **Subscribe to The BirdLife Pacific Quarterly E-Newsletter**