

Strange looking bird makes welcome reappearance

Title

One of the world's least known (and frankly, strangest looking) birds has been photographed on the Samoan island of Savai'i by researchers.

The sighting of the young Tooth-billed Pigeon *Didunculus strigirostris*, by a team from the the Samoan Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MNRE), is the first confirmed sighting in almost a decade.

Tooth-billed Pigeon or Manumea, as it is locally known, is endemic to Samoa and is the country's national bird. BirdLife lists it as Endangered due to its small, fragmented range and population. It has declined rapidly over the last 20 years as a result of hunting and habitat loss. However, the lack of recent records may mean its status needs to be reassessed.



Moeumu Uili, who is leading the team of

researchers with funding from the [Conservation Leadership Programme](#), tells the story from the 9th December:

“One of the team, Fialelei, went outside to hang his wet clothes on the line. He heard a noise that attracted his attention. He looked up the tree and saw a bird sitting up high on one of the tree branches. We got our binoculars and camera and

started searching for the hooked bill which is the bird's distinguishing feature. I started taking as many pictures as I could before the bird flew off. A closer look using binoculars and we knew we had found it, the rare Manumea. Everyone had questioned whether the bird still existed. Now we know it is still alive.”

The next step for the researchers is to survey Samoa's southern island, Upolu, where some anecdotal reports have been collected. More fieldwork is needed to get the full picture, they say.

“The MNRE has been very concerned for this species. It's a great relief that, with support for training and funding through CLP they have undertaken these surveys and had such a positive outcome. Now to work out what we can do to save the species”, said Mark O'Brien, BirdLife's Senior Conservation Officer in the Pacific.