

Suwarrow Blog 13 - Larcenous saboteurs and creative crab-chefs

Title

Today the team search for more islets with rat inhabitants and find the inquisitive coconut crabs have a culinary bent. “

The baiting is still on hold while we wait for a gap in the weather. The vagaries of recent forecasts testing the patience of the team as predicted rain fails to eventuate. But telling how much rain is going to fall on a pinhead in the middle of the Pacific Ocean would be a challenge to any forecaster.

Nevertheless, this has given us a chance to attend to other tasks. While planning the eradication, anecdotal reports suggested Motu Oneone may also have rats in addition to the known populations on Anchorage and Motu Kena. To verify this two nights of searching and trapping were conducted on the island. Oneone is ten hectares of lush native tropical forest, a large booby colony and many frigatebirds. But most numerous are the coconut crabs whose inquisitive and destructive habits added to the challenge of trapping and life on the island.

In an effort to put the rat-traps out of crab reach they were positioned in trees, but clearly a coconut morsel was irresistible to these lumbering calciferous crushers. Returning to check the traps the following morning a piece of string to which a trap was once attached was all that remained. Searching the vegetation below generally revealed a spring, a treadle, and other dismembered parts. Traps were by no means their sole attention. The many new and shiny objects to be found at the camp provided a source of ‘entertainment and discovery’ like no other.

Despite hanging anything that could be out of harm’s way, an extended search finally revealed the water bottle had received a pounding beneath a bush and the food bucket toppled mixing the plums and baked beans. A combination to test even the ravenous. In spite of the local sabotage enough information was collected to confirm there are no rats on Oneone. Good news in progressing the aim of a rat-free Suwarrow. Hopefully the weather will do its part in the next day or two and we can complete the baiting operations for Anchorage, Motu Tou and Motu Kena”.

Nick Hayward, Suvarrow Atoll, Cook Islands.

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The expedition to remove rats from Suvarrow National Park is a joint http://www.birdlife.org/community/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/JG_donate_visa_button.gif

project between BirdLife International, Te Ipukarea Society (BirdLife Partner in the Cook Islands) and the Cook Island National Environment Service. The project is being kindly supported by the European Community, David and Lucile Packard Foundation, SPREP, GEF and Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund, and forms part of the BirdLife Invasive Alien Species Programme which is tackling this greatest of threats to wildlife around the world. BirdLife wishes to thank the efforts of many who are supporting the programme including Pacific Invasive Initiative, Pacific Invasive Learning Network, New Zealand Department of Conservation the University of the South Pacific, Landcare Research New Zealand, Island Conservation, Wildiaries and Nick Hayward.