

Title

The team have finished their final operation to remove rats from Suvarrow and are halfway home to Rarotonga on their Vaka.

"The eradication team were assisted in the final application of bait to Anchorage by the Vaka (traditional boat) crew who had recently arrived to take us back to Rarotonga. We completed the baiting in good time and under favourable conditions. However, the result of the past four weeks work won't be known for several months yet although the early signs appear promising.

On Anchorage, very few rats were trapped in the days preceding the application and all showed evidence of having eaten the bait. With this we prepared ourselves for departure from Suvarrow.

Having enjoyed the islands beauty, a plentiful supply of food and the friendship and support of Suvarrow's rangers, Harry and Ngatipuna, it was not without mixed feelings that we loaded the Vaka for the return journey.

The south-easterly trade winds had begun to blow in the last few days; a pattern set to continue until October. With Rarotonga directly to the south-east of Suvarrow this presents a considerable sailing challenge in navigating the 500 nautical miles without an engine.

With our final farewells and blessings shared, the Vaka and our crew slipped out of Suvarrow's shelter.

As there was no change in wind direction and a strong wind warning in force for the Northern Cook Island group, all 16 people were immediately busy sheeting sails and adjusting the Vaka's course as she began a series of tacks.

By midday we'd passed the Southern end of the atoll and set our course as close to Rarotonga as possible but still to the south, hoping the easterly conditions forecast in two day's time would prevail and help us to get all the way over.

As I write we are 250 miles from Suvarrow and 350 miles to the West of Rarotonga following two days of good speed but constant winds from the south-east.

Everyone is now well in the 'watch routine' with three teams of four each running watch for three hours followed by a six-hour rest.

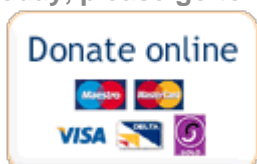
A massive oar (Tuoe), at the stern provides the Vaka's steering. Mastering the art of this is the main activity for the watch crew while experienced watch leaders and navigators Sergio, Jamal and Jason ensure the Vaka's course.

Learning how to use the position of stars and sun, wind and sea direction to find our course across the vast expanse of ocean is an amazing experience and one we're set to continue with for a few days yet.

Having changed our course we're now tacking to the east of Rarotonga to enable one final tack in about two day's time to get down to Rarotonga. A prospect everyone will be looking forward to but for now everyone is in good spirits and enjoying the journey."

Nick Hayward – Pacific Ocean, 350 miles to the West of Rarotonga, Cook Islands.

*** You can follow Nick's posts by subscribing to emails at <http://birdlife-pacific.wildiarries.com/> or through BirdLife's Facebook and Twitter pages. **The BirdLife Invasive Alien Species Programme urgently needs your support to tackle more sites and save more species. To support our work and make a donation today, please go to www.justgiving.com/BirdLife-invasive-species where every penny counts. Thank you.**



The expedition to remove rats from Suvarrow National Park is a joint 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.