

Title

In the final blog of the epic trip, the team arrive back to Rarotonga to delight in the luxuries that they've missed over the past six weeks, reflect on the impacts of the modern world, and look towards a brighter future for conservation in the Cook Islands. Dawn of day seven at sea we saw the peaks of Rarotonga, looming out of the clouds like the Promised Land. At last, it was time for a warm fresh-water shower, a toilet that flushed with a button, and the choice of a plethora of food and drinks. On Suwarrow it was a choice of just tea and water. Being back in Rarotonga reminded me of the excesses of modern life, and the drain on the earth's resources that it has become. I asked Ian Karika why it was important that the Cook Island *Vaka* (traditional boat) the *Marumarua Atua* collected the team from Suwarrow? "For the eradication team it wasn't important, but for the *Vaka* crew and Cook Island community it was", said Ian. "This is because *Marumarua Atua's* role is to raise environmental awareness. For the crew to be involved in the baiting and support the conservation work raises the prominence of these issues in the Cook Islands". Translated from Maori *Marumarua Atua* means 'under God's shade, or protection'. It uses no fossil fuels; relying only on the wind to sail her, and the sun to charge her electric batteries. She's example to us all of how we can move towards a greenhouse gas free future. After a safe crossing of the Pacific Ocean we were indeed honoured to be travelling on such a fine vessel with a remarkable crew. It's now time for us all to return home to our families.



The Suwarrow team celebrate their safe arrival back to Rarotonga with family and friends.

The work though is far from over. There's a film to be edited for BirdLife's World Congress about this amazing trip to help launch their new Invasive Alien Species Programme. The experience gained on Suwarrow by BirdLife and the team will be used on further eradication projects in the Cook Islands and across the Pacific. In particular the two youngest members of the team Ben and Mia now have the knowledge to train other Cook Islanders in the techniques of rat eradication, biosecurity and island conservation. Like the stars we followed, it seems the future for conservation in the Cook Islands is bright. Nick Hayward – Avarua, Rarotonga, Cook Islands ***

You can follow Nick's posts by subscribing to emails at <http://birdlife-pacific.wildiaries.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.