

Suwarrow Blog Eleven ?

Coral moonscapes and cool tropical trade winds

Title

The latest blog from wildlife filmmaker Nick Hayward as he joins a team from BirdLife and Te Ipukarea Society (BirdLife in the Cook Islands) eradicating rats from Suwarrow – a seabird mecca in the South Pacific. Today the team reclaim their machete from a robber crab and enjoy the ‘modern’ comforts of Anchorage while contemplating a new departure date. *“Motu Tou and neighbouring Motu Kena have been successfully treated with their first application of rat bait. There will be a second in seven day’s time. If we miss a single rat the whole operation and two years of careful planning could be wasted. The application of bait is the culmination of all the hard work cutting the tracks and preparing the bait stations. This very thorough preparation is the key to a successful operation as previous successful invasive species eradications across the Pacific by BirdLife have indicated. By now Motu Tou has become almost a second home with the team camping there overnight during the track cutting. I can report that coconut crabs continue to be a nuisance. One morning Sia’s machete had disappeared. It eventually turned up deep inside a bush where it had been hidden and snacked on by the crabs. Camping on the beach on Tou, I felt cold for the first time on Suwarrow with the southeasterly trade winds blowing in from the sea. The bright clear night was lit by streaks of shooting stars. They shone momentarily as straight lines pencilled across the deep black of a dark night. High in the sky, the Southern Cross pointed the way home to Rarotonga. It made us all think of home and the loved ones we have left behind. With these thoughts in mind, we heard the Vaka (boat) was scheduled for a 14th of May departure. A bit of a surprise as we thought it was leaving on May 11. Let’s hope they can make a speedy voyage so we return on time. Our main home on Suwarrow is Anchorage. Harry and Ngatupuna, the rangers, have been working hard cleaning up the site and it’s looking very smart for the opening of the park on the first of June. Here we have a flush toilet, electric lights (courtesy of the generator) and enough water for a bucket shower. True luxury. Suwarrow is a beautiful Pacific atoll but it does have a hard edge. When the tide recedes it reveals a large expanse of jagged coral reef. As the midday sun beats down it becomes a scorching barren moonscape. Dazzling bright on the eyes and hard on the feet. Tomorrow the plan is to bait Anchorage, we then require three rain free days so the bait isn’t spoiled. The forecast is looking good”.* Nick Hayward – Motu Tou, Suwarrow Atoll, Cook Islands. 9th May 2013. *** You can follow Nick’s posts by subscribing to emails at <http://birdlife-pacific.wilddiaries.com>/or through BirdLife’s [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) pages. The expedition to remove rats from Suwarrow 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.