

Suwarrow Blog One ? Team arrives in the Cook Islands

Title

The first of many blogs from award-winning wildlife filmmaker Nick Hayward as he joins a team from BirdLife and Te Ipukarea Society (BirdLife in the Cook Islands) who are preparing spend a month eradicating rats from one of the remotest atolls in the South Pacific. *“It was inky dark as BirdLife’s Sialesi Rasalato and Steve Cranwell and I – being the overseas members of the rat eradication team - landed in Rarotonga. Despite the late hour Ian Karika the expedition leader met us at the airport. While awaiting final preparations on our vessel we are staying in bustling Avarua nestled beneath the towering green peaks of an ancient volcano. Very different to uninhabited Suwarrow, where the highest elevation is just 5 meters. On our first morning we had the opportunity of meeting with the whole Suwarrow team. At this meeting many of the faces in the room were new, their personalities hidden by ignorance. Over time like a sea mist gradually clearing each member of the team will become a friend. It’s one of the great privileges of joining an expedition. Having everyone together highlights the collaboration that makes for a successful project. Some of our ground support team were present. Kelvin Passfield from the Te Ipukarea Society (BirdLife in the Cook Islands) and Elizabeth Munroe from the Cook Islands National Environment Service a key partner in the project. We also met Harry and Papay the Park Rangers for Suwarrow. They will be spending the next six months on Suwarrow away from their family and friends. Harry is the senior ranger and he’s returning to Suwarrow having undertaken the role of park ranger last year. His local knowledge will be a great asset to our project. Today there was a very moving ceremony in downtown Avarua for the crews of two New Zealand Vaka’s as they headed for home.*

Image not found

Beah Haka lowres The Kiwis performed a very spirited Haka before swimming out to their Vakas and setting sail for New Zealand.

It's over 3000 kilometres to New Zealand due to adverse winds at this time of year they may take up to three weeks to reach their destination. I'm sure that they won't be daunted by the voyage as the crews are returning after a round trip to Easter Island. Travelling to the extreme east and south of Polynesian settlement. It is very inspiring to see these brave young people following in the wake of their ancestors. The Vakas are traditional Polynesian outrigger voyaging canoes. They are part of a revival of traditional ocean voyaging. The Pacific Voyaging Community has seven Vakas spread across the Pacific including Samoa, Tahiti, Fiji, and Hawaii. The Cook Island Vaka will be sailing to Suwarrow to collect us for the return voyage. Seeing the New Zealand boats depart eases for me at least any reservations about voyaging across the Pacific in a canoe.

Ronthebilgerat lowres

Image not found

<http://www.birdlife.org/community/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Ronthebilgerat-lowres.jpg>

Ron the self-styled “bilge rat” who is working on adding the additional bunks needed for the trip to Suvarrow.

Our transport to Suvarrow is the yacht Southern Cross. Including the caretakers there's eight of us travelling to the atoll. I visited the Southern Cross in the harbour and met Ron the self-styled “bilge rat” who is working on adding the additional bunks needed. He should be ready by Monday our new departure date. We are in good hands with Ron as a lawyer turned carpenter the bunks will not only be structurally solid but also legally up to scratch! He'll be

part of the crew delivering us to Suwarrow". Nick Hayward – Rarotonga, Cook Islands, 17th April 2013 . 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.**

[JG_donate_visa_button](#)

Image not found

http://www.birdlife.org/community/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/JG_donate_visa_button.gif

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.