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. Wet weather has brought with it some bad news for the operation. "*The heavens have opened, bringing rain to Motu Tou. After only one evening on the ground, the rain has almost certainlty spoiled the rat bait. After all the preparation and hard work track cutting, there have been some very long faces around the camp. It's hoped the second application will still be enough to eradicate the rats from Motu Tou. Forecasting the weather is very difficult in Suwarrow. Heavy showers are still passing through and, from what we gather, may continue until Wednesday. There is no point baiting in the rain so the first application on Anchorage has been delayed. As there needs to be a seven-day gap between this and the second application, it puts our schedule in doubt. So it's now lucky the Vaka's departure is delayed until the 14th.*

All the trials and tribulations of the weather are put into perspective when we think of the seabirds of Suwarrow. The bird colonies are truly an amazing sight. On one Motu, in the Gull group of islands and just a short boat ride from Anchorage Island, there's a large colony of both Lesser and Greater Frigatebirds. They circle overhead, soaring on thermals like a congregation of vultures. On closer inspection with their long necks and beady eyes the similarity is even greater. Their personalities match; they're constantly pecking nastily at their neighbours and, at any unguarded moment, pinching twigs from their fellows' nests.

Just a short boat ride from Anchorage Island there's a large colony of frigatebirds.

The young males appear to gather into leks (a patch of ground used for communal display) at the edges of the colony. They compete vigorously to attract a mate: inflating the large red pouch under their necks, flapping their wings frantically and calling loudly. While above the females circle nonchalantly perusing the show. Sometimes they land briefly, more often than not taking off again soon after. Some very brave small Brown Noddies nests in among the frigatebirds while perched in the low vegetation are nervous Red-footed Boobies. There's also a couple of Masked Boobies nesting on the sand. Their bright white colour and size make them individuals among the crowd. Deep in the vegetation are Red-tailed Tropicbirds, sitting tightly on their nests while their partners screech loudly from above. Let's hope for some luck with the weather so that Suwarrow can become totally rat rat-free for the benefit of all the seabirds and other native wildlife." Nick Hayward - 12 May 2013, Motu Tou, Suwarrow Atoll, 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 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.