

Suwarrow Blog Two ? A beacon of hope

Title

The second 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. In this blog Nick visits the Takitumu Conservation Area and learns how the Rarotonga Monarch shows how invasive species control can make a significant impact... *“Nestled in the south of Rarotonga is a small gem, the Takitumu Conservation Area or TCA. It’s 155 acres of forest with tangling vines, towering ferns, glistening fast flowing streams from which peer large clawed freshwater prawns. Most of all it’s the home of the Kakerori or Rarotonga Monarch a small grey flycatcher. For the Suwarrow team the plight of the Kakerori is a beacon into how invasive species control can make a significant impact. In the 1960’s the Kakerori was thought extinct. It was rediscovered in 1973 and when surveyed in 1989 there were thought to be just 13 pairs. It was one of the world’s 10 rarest birds. The main culprit in its decline was the introduced Ship Rat *Rattus rattus* an agile climber who feeds on the eggs and chicks. The adult Kakerori are vigorous defenders of the nests and would sometimes also be killed by the rats.*

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Rat control at the TCA has brought the Kakerori back from extinction.
Rat control at the TCA has brought the Kakerori back from extinction.

To reduce the Kakerori’s decline the Cook Island Conservation Society in 1989 began a rat control program during the breeding season. Now there are populations on two islands and over 500 individuals. Ian Karika our expedition leader is and president of Te Ipukarea Society [BirdLife in the Cook Islands] also project manager of the TCA took me up to see the Kakerori. We climbed through vine thickets into an opening and heard the noisy chatter of the resident birds. They are curious and aggressive calling from the treetops and thickets at the bumbling humans.

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Ian looks down to the ocean from the top of the TCA.
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Ian

From a lookout at the top of the reserve we had a great view down to the ocean. Standing out clearly against the bright blue sea were dazzling White-tailed Tropicbirds. Ian is an elder of the Karika family who along with two other family’s the Manavaroa and Kainuku are traditional owners of the land. In 1996 these families took over the management of the rat control

program. Ian spoke to me of the sense of pride he has that the Kakerori was rediscovered on his land and how the three families have worked together to control the introduced rats. Tom Daniel an elder of the Manavaroa family works as tour guide for the TCA. Despite being 79 he glides up the steep hills like a mountain goat. Tom says guiding here is what keeps him alive and he plans to be doing it for another 20 years.

Tom Daniel works as tour guide at the TCA.

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

Tom Daniel works as tour guide at the TCA.

Tom is a fountain of knowledge on Suvarrow having been the first caretaker of the island in 1978. He also worked on submitting the application for the creation of Suvarrow as a national park in 1978. A person with great local knowledge for the Suvarrow team. In early May a group of 10 landowners from Tahiti - alongside staff from Ornithological Society of Polynesia-Manu (SOP-Manu - BirdLife in French Polynesia) - will be visiting to learn about the Kakerori conservation program. Rats also threaten the Critically Endangered Tahiti and Fatu Hiva Monarchs - two species closely related to the Kakerori. This is a wonderful example of how local conservation groups are sharing their successes and expertise throughout the BirdLife Pacific Partnership. If you're in Rarotonga, I highly recommend visiting the Kakerori at the TCA. To protect the reserve and contribute to the maintenance costs including rat control all visitors must join a guided tour with Tom". Nick Hayward – Rarotonga, Cook Islands, 20th April 2013.

Nick captures his first clear look at the Kukupa or Rarotonga Starling and managed to film some amusing freshwater prawns. You can here the Kakerori chattering away high in the branches.

For further information about the TCA, please [click here](#). To contact Tom in Rarotonga, please

call 24964. 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**
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and save more species. Image not found http://www.birdlife.org/community/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/JG_donate_visa_button.gif 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.