

Videos provide new information on Mao

Title Mao *Gymnomyza samoensis* is an endemic honeyeater found in Samoa which is classified as Endangered by BirdLife on behalf of the IUCN Red List because it has a small, fragmented range that is declining as the quality of its forest habitat diminishes. Unless urgent action is taken, these unique birds have a very high risk of going extinct in the near future. A new research project is seeking to gather ecological information on the factors that have led to the Mao's current decline. Leading this research, Rebecca Stirnemann tells BirdLife of some recent video footage that provides new information on species. "The Mao is a curious species and by imitating their calls they come down to investigate us. They are wondering if we are another pair which is invading their territory. In this valley in Samoa in the early morning we can hear a number of Mao making their musical duets. We are here to study the Mao an endangered Honey eater now found only in Samoa. The Male calls to the female and she trills in response. Then she disappears. We follow her through the forest to a tall tree there in the tall branches is an oval shaped nest. We check it and inside is the single chick monitored constantly by a special nest camera. Footage shows the mother bird is constantly feeding the chick a mix of insects and small geckos. At another nest a video has captured the sad moment an egg is lost. The black and white footage has been filmed at night while the female sleeps on the nest keeping the egg warm. While she sleeps a rat leaps on to her back and as the mother bird escapes the rat picks up the egg in its mouth and carries it off to eat later. This pair does not manage to raise any chicks this year. This video is the first footage which proves that the adult birds cannot defend the nests from invasive rats and may begin to explain their decline. We go and monitor a third pair they have been lucky and their single chick has left the nest. This chick will continue to be monitored to recognize her the research team have places two coloured rings on her leg. She follows the mother bird closely making a constant begging call. Unlike most birds which only feed chicks a few days after leaving the nest the mother Mao will continue to feed her chick for 2 more months. During this time the young chick may still be vulnerable to other invasive species such as cats. We can only hope she will make it. As we stand here it is strange to these beautiful calls will stop forever if we don't do something to stop the current decline." **Rebecca Stirnemann** This project is funded through the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund with support from the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment (MNRE) Samoa, the Conservation Department New Zealand and The Rufford Small Grants Programme. CEPF unites six global leaders who are committed to enabling nongovernmental and private sector organizations to help protect vital ecosystems: L'Agence Française de Développement; Conservation International; The Global Environmental Facility; The Government of Japan, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation; The World Bank. **Click here to subscribe to The BirdLife Pacific Quarterly E-Newsletter.** To read more about the project: www.samoanbirds.com, and [please click here](#) to find out how you can help support the project now!