

PREVENTING EXTINCTIONS

Fatuhiva Monarch *Pomarea whitneyi*



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Background

Fatuhiva Monarch is endemic to Fatu Hiva in the Marquesas Islands, French Polynesia. It is one of four extant endemic *Pomarea* flycatchers found in French Polynesia (a further four species are documented as extinct, two as recently as the 1970s and 1980s). *Pomarea* species appear to be exceptionally sensitive to House Rat *Rattus rattus* nest predation, but tolerant of Polynesian Rat *R. exulans*. Without conservation action all known populations of *Pomarea* exposed to introduced House Rat have become extinct. Cat predation has also been identified as a significant threat.

The Fatu Hiva population was considered to be secure until the discovery of House Rat in 2000, presumably originating from an introduction in the 1980s or early 1990s. In 1975, the population was estimated at several hundred pairs and in 1990 it was still common. In February 2000, a field survey estimated a mean density of one pair / 10ha in the lower Omoa Valley and, assuming similar densities elsewhere, the total population was estimated at a few hundred pairs (400-1,000 individuals). Unlike in 1975, no birds were observed in the groves of mango on the slopes and ridges up the Omoa Valley, and the lack of adults with immatures indicated low breeding success. Repeat visits in 2003 and 2006 only found the species using three out of eight potentially suitable valleys above Omoa, and just one out seven near Hanavave. Furthermore, the encounter rate during surveys declined from 0.35 individuals per point count in 2003 to 0.23 individuals in 2006, and 0.11 in 2009 – representing a decline of 69% over this period. The population was estimated to number 67 individuals in 2009.

Actions being implemented

1. A **Short Species Action Plan** has been formulated, summarizing data and knowledge on Fatuhiva conservation and actions planned for the next 5 years. An extended document will be produced by the end of 2012.
2. The **rodent control programme** has been enhanced by identifying an optimal baiting regime to ensure efficient use of staff time and bait usage, and creating buffer zones around territories. Bait stations are set up 20-25m apart, and catapults are used to bait inaccessible areas. Due to recent improvements, rat density has been reduced in rat controlled areas.
3. **Feral cat control** is operational and effective; the cat population appears to be decreasing in the controlled areas.
4. A **monitoring and colour ringing** programme is underway and is becoming more self-sufficient as local people are trained. All breeding events of the monitored pairs are recorded. Surveys for new territories are being conducted and data is being gathered on breeding and habitat requirements.

5. A **feasibility study** for species introduction onto a rat-free island was conducted in 2010 but no suitable island was found that would not require an **eradication project**.
6. A **Site Support Group** set up in 2010 now involves 20 local community members.
7. SOP aims to raise children's **awareness** of these birds and for the first time, organised a trip in the field with local children to observe an active monarch nest.

Management Actions Required

1. Increase the size of the protected area to encourage the colonisation of this species.
2. Experiment the transfer of 3 pairs from inaccessible valleys to those where control is possible. If birds do not return to original territory, conduct for all birds in inaccessible areas.
3. Create a new grid to control rats in a suitable area for newly transferred birds.
4. Improve monitoring of birds and differentiate between bird recruitment linked with conservation actions from bird immigration from non-protected areas.
5. Produce Species Action Plan
6. Develop a mission with a rat eradication specialist to study the feasibility of a rat eradication on Fatu Hiva.
7. Continue to raise public and key stakeholders awareness.



Left; Emanuel Terorohauepa setting a new Philproof station. Right; SSG dinner in Aug 2011, in Omoa

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