

Bat Conservation International and Rotokas Ecotourism Consultation

Location: Togarao Village, Wakunai District, ARoB

Date: 11/02/15

Welcome:

Chief Peter Bari welcomed BCI, Bougainville Environment Bureau, Rotokas Ecotourism and the community to this consultation workshop. He stated that he was happy to have BCI here in Togarao

Opening Prayer:

Judah Ruetea thanked God for bringing us all together safely today

Introductions:

All visitors introduced themselves, including: the Bougainville Environment Bureau (Gavin Reynolds and Beatrix Oni) and BCI (Dave Walden).

Presentation:

See PowerPoint presentation

Community Feedback:

Question: Why are you interested in these specific Bats here in Bougainville?

Dave: BCI interested in conserving all bats but specifically interested in endangered bats. The two bats mentioned are critically endangered and endangered respectively. But it also because there is a group on the ground (RE) is interested in conservation.

Judah Ruetea (Church worker - Very happy to see the amount of diversity of bats in Bougainville, it is really good for us to understand the amount and different number of bats in our area. Question: what is your plan to look after the bats, what are you going to do now? Will you just tell us all this information then leaving again?

Gavin: The BEB is still in the planning stage. There is firstly a need to consult communities before developing plans and policy. There are 3 key areas BEB will develop policy on but it must be done in consultation first.

Dave: We believe that the bat species are still here and that is why we are here today. We want to come and get ideas from you develop a plan together.

Judah Ruetea (Church worker) – When he sees the bat he wants to kill and eat the bat. This isn't the conservation should be done, we haven't been conservationists. Now this is consultation has opened our minds and we realise the important part they play in our ecosystem. We understand now that bats just aren't there to steal our fruit and banana's, pawpaw and other fruits, they also play an important part in our ecosystem. So I am happy to hear to this presentation, but we, the people here don't know how to conserve the environment or bats, we need to be presented with a plan.

Dave: Some first steps include awareness materials for schools teachers, communities so we can learn more about the bats here in Bougainville. We would be interested in doing an expedition to learn more about the bats, what helpful things are doing and what unhelpful things they are doing.

David Atuai: how do we tame the bats?

Dave: over time bats can learn to trust to be around people again, it just takes time for them to build that trust with humans again

Kokora: Do bats have their own language?

Dave: Yes, even within species there are different dialects

Judah Ruetea (Church worker): Are there specific trees that will attract the trees to come back?

Dave: Yes, I'm not sure for which trees but there will be certain trees that bats like to pollinate, roost at and eat at. So if we can understand more about the bats we can understand what these trees are.

Timothy Taure: Before people started cutting all the bush down there were lots of bats and birds around, now that we are cutting down trees the bats and birds go away. Also now that we are moving in to hamlets and spreading out many of the bats and birds are leaving. My contribution is that this project should start and you should work with Rotokas Ecotourism to help educate people on environmental conservation. Including replanting of the trees

Peter Bari (Clan Chief): We really want to this project to come back. One observation is that some years ago many bats died, then our saksak trees also started dying as well and we are wondering if there is a link there.

Chief: Why did the bats die all at once many years ago?

Judah Ruetea (Church worker): Is it possible for migration to take place where bats can bring disease and illness. We are worried that if we start restoring the bat populations they could also start causing disease. And can we recover some of the bats that we have lost.

Chief: Will this be the last visit for will you come back?

