

# CEPF SMALL GRANT FINAL PROJECT COMPLETION REPORT

## I. BASIC DATA

**Organization Legal Name:** Birdlife International

**Project Title (as stated in the grant agreement):** Protecting the Internationally Important Seabird Colony of Vatu I Ra Island, Fiji.

**Implementation Partners for This Project:** Birdlife International Fiji Programme

**Project Dates (as stated in the grant agreement):** February 1 – August 31st, 2006

**Date of Report (month/year):** 30<sup>th</sup> September 2006

## II. OPENING REMARKS

**Provide any opening remarks that may assist in the review of this report.**

Vatu I Ra is a small 2.3 ha island located in the Vatu I Ra channel between Vanua Levu and Viti Levu about 15km off the north east of Viti Levu. It has been identified as an important Bird area in Fiji as it supports in excess of 10,000pairs of breeding seabirds and more than 1% of the population of known Black Noddy (*Anous minutus*). The island is uninhabited but is visited by fishermen who are known to harvest some seabirds and eggs. The island is currently used for periodic tourist visits, from which the land owning community does not derive benefits. The community has approached Birdlife for assistance to manage the island. The eradication of rats and the implementation of abatement measures is the first step of a programme to support the community to manage the island sustainably. The long term aims are to reach agreement of a management plan and declaration of protected area status, assessment of the seabird population, training of community members in management and tour guiding, liaison with tourist companies to ensure a financially viable tourist programme.

## III. NARRATIVE QUESTIONS

1. What were the initial objectives of this project?
  - To successfully eradicate pacific rats from Vatu I Ra island and to use this as a demonstration model.
  - Implement re –invasion abatement measures (permanent bait stations on the landing site and frequent visitor boats, placement of information boards).
  - Training of community members in eradication and abatement methodologies.
2. Did the objectives of your project change during implementation? If so, please explain why and how.

No
3. Briefly describe the methods used in achieving the objectives of this project.

For the eradication of rats from Vatu I Ra, 90kg of baits were ordered to complete two baitings of the island at 13kg/ha and a 30 kg contingency. As the island is approximately 84m wide at its widest point. Three lines were marked the length of the island at intervals of up to 21m, 42m and 63m. The lines were marked with cruising tape and included the hillock and the rock stack. The baiters followed these lines. In addition lines of bait were applied along immediately inside the forest edge and above the high tide mark.

Baits were hand broadcasted from the lines in two applications, approximately 14 days apart. Extra baits were sown in areas of likely rat habitat such as rank grass, boulders and forest edges. The baiting were done in the late afternoons and completed prior to nightfall to minimize crab interference.

#### Hermit Crab Experiment

A simple experiment was conducted to assess how much bait hermit crabs removed. This required assessing the density of hermit crabs and assessing bait removal by weight. The density of crabs was measured by randomly placing the 10 quadrants of 1m×1m across the island, from the beach where the density of crab was the greatest and moving inland. To assess for the bait take, 30 plots were set with a known bait mass during the drop 1 and bait drop 2 and the removal rates were measured. The assumptions being that temporal differences are not significant (i.e. change in crab density or behavior) and that the number of surviving rats would be sufficiently low not to remove significant quantities of bait during the second application: thus allowing comparison of removal rates by crabs and rats and crabs alone. The conclusion was that hermit crabs were not a significant influence on bait consumption, they did not appear to be strongly attracted to the bait and rats appeared to remove the majority of the bait within hours.

Monitoring of the island was from the 14<sup>th</sup> –20<sup>th</sup> August. The monitoring of the island has been contracted to Dr.Dick Watling of Environment Consultants. The monitoring tools consisted of snap traps, tracking tunnels and peanut butter waxed tags. Vegetation plots were also marked on the island to assess the impact of the rats on young sprouting vegetations. The team also conducted a thorough nests count of the seabirds on the island.

4. Was your project successful in achieving the expected objectives? If no, explain why not. If yes, please explain how the project was successful and the key factors that contributed to its success.

Yes, the preliminary result shows that the project was successful in achieving its objectives. The operational plan was followed. A key factor that contributed to the success was the timing of the eradication. The eradication of rats from Vatu I Ra was timed for the month of July, the driest season of the year in Fiji. While not known until the team arrived on the island, this was also the time when there was a decrease in the number of sea birds nesting and therefore less available food

(chicks and eggs and regurgitated fish) available for rats. It was also the time when rat population was high and as a result the rats were hungry. This resulted in high bait consumption over a very brief period.

From the results of our first monitoring the team did not observe any rodent activity on the island. Hermit crabs, ants and cockroaches mostly ate the baits.

5. Describe what was achieved in terms of:

a) Capacity development

- The Vatu I Ra project has provided opportunities to increase the skills of Birdlife Staff and the Nagilogilo clan on eradication, monitoring and the maintenance of the Biosecurity as a whole.
- The project has opened the door for local communities in strengthening their networking skills with other stakeholders such as the Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Environment, and Fijian Affairs.
- This project has also brought about the exchange of Birdlife staff with the Viwa project in the development of capacity on different operations.
- Development of Birdlife staff skills on sea bird monitoring.
- It has also enabled other Birdlife partner (Palau Conservation Society) to participate in the eradication and at the same time learn .One of the group was present and participated during the first bait lay on Vatu I Ra Island.
- The project, along with the Viwa project has raised wider awareness of invasive alien species in Fiji, amongst the wider public and also within the conservation community

b) developing partnerships;

- **The Pacific Invasive Initiative**  
Developed close partnership with PII achieved capacity development, expert input, troubleshooting, guidance, and information exchange and also has provided PII with a learning experience.
- **Ministry of Environment**  
Birdlife International has a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Environment. . It has supported the principles, concepts and management of Vatu I Ra, particularly as it has been listed as a site of national significance in the National Biodiversity Strategic Action Plan. This project has also brought Birdlife to closely liaison and awareness of Invasive species during a seminar, which had generated a lot of discussion at government level.
- **Fijian Affairs Board**  
Have pledged support in providing assistance in protocols and other traditional obligations that Birdlife needs to arrange with the community.
- **University of South Pacific – Institute of Applied Science:** assisted Birdlife during the first survey and have done a baseline survey of marine biodiversity. During this project the university has been closely liaising, sharing of skills and resources with Birdlife.

- c) raising awareness of invasive species and generating community support for their management;

Birdlife International has had ongoing community consultation with the Nagilogilo clan. During various community meetings Birdlife staff have often highlighted the issues of invasive species and the impact that it has on native flora and fauna. During the feasibility visit to Vatu I Ra several members of the communities accompanied the team to witness the impact of rats on the seabirds and the plants on the island. The villagers were very interested and now understood the importance of eradicating invasive species. Several of them were interested in the eradication techniques. The community has pledged its support to the project.

There has been a seminar presentation with other non-government organizations, government ministries and the University of the South Pacific in the raising of awareness of Alien Invasive Species in Fiji and the Pacific.

- d) involving the local community and other stakeholders:

The Vatu I Ra eradication has involved the local community from the beginning of the project. Community members took part in the feasibility study of the island, the eradication of rats, monitoring and the maintenance of the island biosecurity. The local guides have undergone training in the identification of birds on the island, monitoring and biodiversity values. During our last visit, local fisherman were also involved in the project by participating in discussion on the eradication, they expressed interest and spent time with the team asking questions while following the team to check the baits.

This project has brought renewed enthusiasm to manage the island by the local community.

- e) providing benefits to the local community and other stakeholders.

The local communities have benefited from the project by gaining knowledge and skills/ training in a range of areas including – bird identification, track marking, rodent control, monitoring and communication with others. The community have gained better understanding in biodiversity values and strengthened their networking skills. They have gained confidence in communication with people in the various government ministries.

6. What was the impact of the project at the local level?

The clan has explored the possibility of generating income from tourist visit to the island. The eradication of rats from Vatu I Ra is a step forward to achieving this goal. The clan wishes to generate income for their community and they see eco-tourism as a means to do so. It has also provided direction and motivation for island management.

7. What was the impact of the project (if any) at the national level?

During the eradication, the leader of the clan realized the importance of conserving the island in its natural state. The community has begun to explore the process of gazettement the island as a reserve. This would involve a detailed description of the island, the work carried out, a confirmation of the rightful owners by the Native Land Trust Board and an agreement from all the stakeholders including Birdlife International. If the island is gazetted, the impact is that it would restrict people from illegally landing and require all movements monitored and permitted.

8. Did your team experience any disappointments or failures during implementation? If so, please explain and comment on how the team addressed these disappointments and/or failures.

No, the team did not encounter failures. The disappointment or frustration was weather conditions where strong winds and sea with the rough seas resulted in the team being delayed one day on each visit. On trip two this restricted our ability to make decisions on the density of rats surviving on the island following the first bait lay. The team addressed this problem by assuming the rats were still present on the island and therefore proceeded with the second baiting of 13kg/ha as identified by the Operation plan. It would be desirable and essential in future that the team reach the island a day prior to monitor and assess the success of the eradication.

9. Describe the key positive and negative lessons learned from this project that would be useful to share with other organizations interested in implementing a similar project.

The key positive lesson learnt from this project is that local Birdlife staff had the opportunity of upskilling from experts in New Zealand. This project was further strengthened by working closely with the landowners and sharing similar objectives. From this project we also learnt skills in liaising with other stakeholders. The skills and knowledge learnt from this project could be passed on to other non-government organizations. From our trips to Vatu I Ra Island Birdlife management now have to implement Occupational Health and Safety issues and communication.

There were no negative lessons learnt from this project.

10. How has the project been promoted? (Please enclose/attach press clippings, brochures, publications, videos, websites, photos, etc). Please describe the products developed during the project and how and to whom these were disseminated.

Yes, the project has been promoted. Birdlife International has helped the Nagilogilo clan set up a notice board on the island advising the visitors (tourists and fisherman) to respect the island and not to harvest eggs, chicks and turtles. There has been various press releases by Birdlife in relation to the Vatu I Ra

project on national television. This was targeted for the general public to raise awareness on the eradication of rats from the Vatu I Ra Island.

11. Describe any follow-up activities you wish to implement and how you intend to do so (eg other invasive species management actions you wish to pursue, or how you plan to scale up the project to a broader area).

**Monitoring**

**Rodents**

Monitoring will comprise three random lines on Vatu I Ra:  
 Each line would consist of 6-7 group of tracking tunnels baited with roasted coconuts, snap traps and peanut butter flavored waxed tags nailed to trees at random heights. The monitoring would take place a month after the first drop for seven nights then every six months within the 2 years. The monitoring of the island would be outsourced to a contractor Dick Watling of the Environment Consultants. It will involve Birdlife staff and Clan members

**Birds**

On each monitor trip it is envisaged to get team members to record bird activity on the island to assist in building up a picture of annual activity.

**Scale up**

The Vatu I Ra project is one of the first rat eradication projects in Fiji and a successful operation will demonstrate methodologies that are effective. This has the potential to be used as a demonstration project for the eradication of rats on smaller islands with community participation. The implementation of the operation will also be used to highlight the impact if rats on breeding seabirds including priority species such as the critically endangered Fiji petrel. Birdlife and the local community will be seeking a high profile for the project, both to raise local awareness and also attract interest in island restoration from the tourist industry.

12. Please provide any additional information you think may assist CEPF in understanding any other aspects of your completed project.

In addition to the primary objective of rat eradication, this has been a key strategic project for capacity development and advocacy: pursuing conservation particulars for future work on invasive alien species.

**IV. ADDITIONAL FUNDING**

*Provide details of any additional donors who supported this project and any funding secured for the project as a result of the CEPF grant or success of the project.*

<b>Donor</b>	<b>Type of Funding*</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Notes</b>
RNHP	B	\$ AU 180,000	Core FIJI PROG Funding

**\*Additional funding should be reported using the following categories:**

- A** *Project co-financing (Other donors contribute to the direct costs of this CEPF project)*
- B** *Complementary funding (Other donors contribute to partner organizations that are working on a project linked with this CEPF project)*
- C** *Grantee and Partner leveraging (Other donors contribute to your organization or a partner organization as a direct result of successes with this CEPF project.)*
- D** *Regional/Portfolio leveraging (Other donors make large investments in a region because of CEPF investment or successes related to this project.)*

Provide details of whether this project will continue in the future and if so, how any additional funding already secured or fundraising plans will help ensure its sustainability.

BirdLife Fiji Programme has applied for a Darwin Project to continue community-based conservation on IBAs. Development of a management and tourism plan will be undertaken as part of this project. Birdlife also has submitted an application to the Whitley Award to undertake IAS management and ecotourism work on two IBAs and is preparing a GEF SGP project on burrowing petrels

## **V. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Comments**

-It is vital that all the team members, involved in the eradication project, to be totally committed and motivated. It would be disastrous for the operation if they were not.

- It is desirable and essential in future that the team involved in the project to be able to reach the island a day before to monitor and assess the eradication success of the island.

### **Recommendations**

If monitoring over the next two years results in a successful eradication it has the potential to recommend that an island of a similar size to Vatu I Ra (2.3 ha), with a thin understory of vegetation, would require 13 – 20kg / ha to successfully eradicate Pacific rats. This is subject to comprehensive bait coverage of the island.

-Prior to any eradication attempt, maximizing the amount of knowledge of the island's rat population in terms of species present, density, seasonal behaviors and favored habitats would increase the chances of success.

-It is also recommended that the local community and the implementing agencies should share similar objectives and the local landowners need to be involved and strongly support the project for it to be a success.

-It is important that applications processes, planning and reporting process and paper work are to a high standard. But the process must minimize paper work and be as simple

as possible if the project template is to be successful on PICTs. The format of the final report is good and fit for purpose.

-Birdlife International raise Health and Safety standards when working in remote locations to ensure staff have support with appropriate communications technology and other requirements.

## VI. INFORMATION SHARING

CEPF aims to increase sharing of experiences, lessons learned and results among our grant recipients and the wider conservation and donor communities. One way we do this is by making the text of final project completion reports available on our Web site, [www.cepf.net](http://www.cepf.net), and by marketing these reports in our newsletter and other communications. Please indicate whether you would agree to publicly sharing your final project report with others in this way.

Yes  \_\_\_\_\_  
No  \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, please also complete the following:

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