

Social Assessment

31/05/2020

CEPF Grant 110288

Grantee: BirdLife International

***Project Title:* Biodiversity Rapid Assessment Project for Futuna and
Aneityum**

Project Location: Tafea province in Vanuatu

Grant Summary

1. **Grantee organization:** BirdLife International
2. **Grant title:** Biodiversity Rapid Assessment Project for Futuna and Aneityum
3. **Grant number:** 110288
4. **Grant amount (US dollars):** \$
5. **Proposed dates of grant:** 01/07/2020 – 31/05/2021
6. **Countries or territories where project will be undertaken:** Tafea province of Vanuatu with some training activities in Shefa Province.
7. **Date of preparation of this document:** 31/05/2020

8. Indigenous People affected:

Vanuatu is an island nation located in the South Pacific. Land is custom-owned and the majority of the rural population lives a subsistence lifestyle using the natural resources from their land. Most people living in Vanuatu still have a strong connection to the land and nature, particularly in the rural areas. There is a long tradition of natural resource management using such mechanisms as 'tabu' areas. The system of chiefly governance, although different in different areas, is still strong in some communities, including in Aneityum and Futuna. The level of education is poor in many rural areas with only a limited portion of the population achieving more than basic primary school education. This project will be working in the communities of the province of Tafea. Tafea province is made up of the islands of Tanna, Futuna, Erromango and Aneityum. The capital is based on Tanna. The Tafea province is the most southern of the provinces of Vanuatu. There is a tourist resort on Mystery Island - otherwise the islands are rural and communities live in small villages with limited infrastructure. There are airports on both Futuna and Aneityum, connecting with Port Vila via Tanna, there are currently two flights per week to Aneityum and only one weekly to Futuna (not currently running).

9. Summary of the proposed project:

BirdLife will co-ordinate the project - but will rely on both EDA and VESS to play significant roles in the project activities - each will take the lead on a number of the deliverables. The respective roles and expectations will be formally determined and agreed at the outset of the project. Prior to Phase 1 Mark O'Brien, Christina Shaw and Kingston Baereleo will agree on preferred monitoring protocol based on agreements between Martika Tahi, Christina Shaw, Kingston Baereleo and Emily Tasale and the communities of Aneityum and Futuna, and will modify protocol in the field if practicalities require. We will keep each other informed at all times where, for whatever reason, protocols are not followed.

Phase 1 (July/September 2020). Raising Awareness with the communities on Aneityum and Futuna will be undertaken, identifying and linking up with knowledgeable and interested local personnel, initially the four Vanuat Tai monitors that VESS have previous worked with at the site, identifying sites for survey and obtaining permission to undertake surveys.

Two representatives from EDA (Kinston Baereleo and Emily Tasale), and Martika Tahī of VESS will form a team and spend a week on each of Aneityum and Futuna meeting with local communities and discussing the proposed survey. We will aim to

1. Determine the situation with regards to current conservation actions undertaken as a consequence of the CEPF *Carpoxyllum* Palm survey work coordinated by BGCi under a previous CEPF contract.
2. Identify key individuals within the communities, starting with the VanuaTai monitors, with knowledge about the wildlife of Aneityum and Futuna
3. Identify locations, paths and tracks that can be used to most effectively access the centre of the islands.
4. Develop best practice regarding accommodating and feeding a visiting party of surveyors for 10 and 7 days on Aneityum and Futuna, respectively.
5. Obtain the support of the communities for the survey

EDA will take the lead on reporting back to the project team on this component and will, jointly with VESS, provide a short report on the outcomes of the meetings - prior to the onset of the fieldwork.

Phase 2. (October 2020). We will undertake a 10 day survey to Aneityum. The purpose of the survey will be to assess the current status of the conservation actions on behalf of the KBA trigger species, *Carpoxyllum macrospermum*, and assess the current status of other KBA trigger species on the islands including *Palaquium neoebudicum*, *Emoia aneityumensis*, *Notopteris macdonaldi* and *Pteropus anetianus*. In addition we will set trail cameras to obtain baseline information on the presence of introduced predatory mammals. We will monitor the extent of tramp ants using the standard SPC protocol (a piece of card with a dab of jam in one corner and peanut butter in the other, left for 30 minutes *in situ* and ants collected for identification at a later date). We will trial the use of tablets to capture information on biodiversity, according to methods presented in the Rangers Handbook, and will use this method to also record data to apps such as iNaturalist.

The survey will require expertise in surveying birds, plants, bats and reptiles. Mark O'Brien at BirdLife international will provide the expertise in collecting the bird data and will work alongside Toara Morris of EDA on bird surveys, as well as data on rats, cats and other introduced predatory mammals and also tramp ants. Martika Tahī and Christina Shaw of VESS are experienced in monitoring bats in Vanuatu and will take the lead on this taxa, EDA hope to include a plant expert, recently returned from USP in Fiji (EDA TO), while we plan to recruit an overseas specialist (Dave Chappell) to lead the reptile survey work. (This will require us to pay the Vanuatu Government a stipend to enable an overseas researcher to undertake research in the country.) This person will need to be experienced in collecting reptiles, in particular tree skinks, using methods other than sticky traps. The use of sticky traps for monitoring skinks is banned in Australia and New Zealand on Animal Welfare grounds, is not recommended by the IUCN SSC for Skinks, and is disapproved by senior staff within the partner organisations. Alternatives include 'minnow traps, the use of 'above ground' pitfall traps attached to trunks and branches and 'sleeves' of padded foam that act as nocturnal refuges for the tree skinks and, when unwrapped, provide a sample of species present in the vicinity (Richard Gibson Auckland Zoo and Clare

Morrison Griffiths University, personal discussions). Experiences from other tree skink species in other environments indicates that we shall need to trial a range of methods on site in order to determine the most suitable approach for Aneityum and Futuna.

In addition 2 further staff from EDA (Kingston Baereleo and Emily Tasale), the 2 resource monitors on Aneityum, and up to 7 guides/trackers with local knowledge will form the survey party. Each of these persons will receive training in monitoring the species of interest according to methods currently proposed in the Rangers Handbook. Note that this will provide senior staff (Mark O'Brien, Dave Chappell and Christina Shaw), with the opportunity to modify and update the Rangers Handbook as necessary, and also to provide opportunities for adding information to apps such as iNaturalist.

Initially it was hoped that Vanuatu Government Environment Department staff would also be able to attend – but the current situation indicates that this is currently unlikely to be feasible.

Phase 3. (October 2020) Immediately following the Aneityum survey the survey team, Mark O'Brien, Christina Shaw, Dave Chappell, Martika Tahī, Kingston Baereleo, Toara Morris, EDAs plant expert and Emily Tasale will travel to Futuna for 7 days and repeat the surveys with up to 7 Trackers/Guides/Rangers from Futuna to better understand the biodiversity of this small island. The same methods will be used, for comparison, although we will not use Trail Cameras. Training will again be a key part of the process with the Trackers/Guides/Rangers on Futuna learning about methods required to monitor the species of most interest on the island of Futuna. Again, this will follow the recommendations in the Rangers Manual and also provide opportunities for adding information to apps such as iNaturalist.

Phase 4. (October 2020 to February 2021). After the surveys we will prepare a report that identifies the biodiversity located on the island, together with an estimate of their frequency of occurrence.

- Martika Tahī of VESS will lead on a report on the Status of bats of the islands,
- the plant expert at EDA will prepare a report on 'Current and Future Actions to conserve the *Carpoxyllum Palm*',
- Dave Chappell will prepare a report on the 'Status of *Emoia* skinks and other reptiles, on the islands'. This will include a review of the efficacy of the various trapping methods used and an assessment of whether the results are conclusive, or whether a further survey using one trapping method and/or sticky traps may be necessary.
- Mark O'Brien will prepare a report on the Status of birds on the islands.

Mark O'Brien will use this information as the basis to provide training for all staff at VESS and EDA, and other interested parties in government and other NGOs in Vanuatu, in how to update the status of biodiversity in the relevant KBAs. Each section of the report we will recommend how to best conserve the biodiversity, given the current situation on the island, and make suggestions as to the most appropriate next steps.

Phase 5. (March 2021). Mark O'Brien of BL will lead a small survey to Aneityum, accompanied by Toara Morris of EDA and 2 local tracker guides, to confirm/otherwise the presence of

Collared Petrels on the island, using a bright light at night and acoustics to attract and detect birds flying over. Toara Morris will collect the trail cameras established during the previous survey. In addition there will be some funds to either

1. bring over another reptile expert to conclude the skink surveys (depending on the conclusions from Phases 2 and 3). This may include the decision to use sticky traps - in which case the individual needs to be experienced in the use of this survey method, and will need to modify the method in order to minimise the stress caused to caught animals (such as regular visits to the traps to release caught individuals), or, if this is not deemed necessary
2. bring over a freshwater invertebrate specialist to assess the streams on Aneityum and to introduce the concept of monitoring stream quality based on species occurrence (a specific request from the Vanuatu Government).

Phase 6. Kingston Baereleo and Emily Tasale of EDA and Martika Tahi of VESS will present the findings of the survey to each of the communities on Aneityum and Futuna and propose some suggestions that would benefit the conservation of the KBAs. EDA and VESS will capture the discussions and next steps as recommended by each of the communities. This will be included as the final section of the report for the project and will be prepared by EDA, and will be both timed and costed for future funding proposals as a partnership between the communities and either EDA or VESS.

10. Potential impacts:

The Aneityum and Futuna BIORAP Project – would seek to achieve the following impacts:

Biodiversity:

- Improvement in the quantity, quality and knowledge of biodiversity data on the islands of Aneityum and Futuna.
- New information for specific species, particularly rare, endemic and endangered reptile species.
- Knowledge of habitat type and quality for species present on these islands.
- Scientific evidence to underpin the development of targeted and specific conservation measures.

Human well-being:

- Create better understanding of potential impacts of human activities on the local environment in the study area, and confirm existing threats to biodiversity in these areas. Due to the high reliance on the natural environment for subsistence and livelihoods in rural Vanuatu, the impacts of threats on human well-being is very direct and visceral at this level. Assistance to identify and target these threats will assist communities that may be facing changes to address issues related to well-being.
- Several invasive species such as yellow crazy ants, small fire ants, rats and others have an impact on human health and welfare, in addition to biodiversity impacts. These surveys

will help detect any early invasions of several key invasive species so control and eradication can be targeted.

- Baseline for rat species showed that, in 1971, Aneityum lacked Norway rats but was one of the few places with invasive mice in Vanuatu. Different rats have different impacts on people in the region, so knowing the rodent communities will be important for both of these islands.

Civil society capacity:

- Create strong relationships between diverse sets of stakeholders, through interactive and shared trainings and study in the field.
- Share different forms of knowledge (traditional environmental knowledge, non-scientific knowledge, social knowledge, as well as scientific knowledge) and uphold respect for different forms of knowledge and understanding.
- Upskill civil society and local communities in scientific research methods, use of field equipment and data management methods.

Enabling conditions for conservation:

- Providing scientific baseline data and inventory listings to increase knowledge and appreciation for local biodiversity and an understanding of its current status, quality and threats. Through this sharing of data collection and sharing of results, the project will foster enabling conditions for conservation action planning.
- Initiate discussions about conservation planning and management options with communities, and generate interest in potential future collaborations to better develop these, with full community ownership and participation.
- Understanding the traditional uses of the landscape of both of these islands will be important to identifying what opportunities for conservation might exist. Understanding the traditional values for various biodiversity elements will help inform conservation options.

We will undertake before- and after surveys to measure the extent to which the awareness-raising undertaken at the outset and close of this project have impacted on the knowledge and understanding of the local communities involved. Members of the community may be offended by the questions in the questionnaires or the questions may not be culturally appropriate. They may be concerned about how their information will be used. We will minimize the chances that this will happen by ensuring that Ni-Vanuatu staff will ensure that survey techniques are culturally sensitive and that local communities will be trained in how to monitor their own biodiversity – with, if appropriate, individuals being identified as the local, and so global, experts on particular, single island, endemics.

The impact of Covid19.

In the light of the Covid19 pandemic there is a chance that travelling to remote communities could inadvertently result in the transmission of the virus to communities with little or not medical infrastructure or services. To date Vanuatu currently has had

no confirmed cases of Covid19, and it seems reasonable to presume that an interaction with niVanuatu staff will not involved virus transmission. Currently there is no movement into, or out of, Vanuatu from other countries. It is to be hoped that, by October 2020, a Pacific 'travel bubble' has emerged and flights between New Zealand and, possibly, Australia and Pacific Island countries with no covid19 cases will have been established. At the time of writing there is a proposal for the first flight between Australia and New Zealand for the 1st July, and for flights to other Covid19-free destinations within the Pacific to commence from September.

If it becomes clear that adherence to this kind of timetable is unlikely then we will need to reconsider a) surveying in October. Overseas input for the bird survey could be replicated using an automatic acoustic survey, combined with data collected by Toara Morris. The bat data will be collected by local researchers. The reptile data, in many ways the most important, is unlikely to be effective without an experienced surveyor. We need to trial various methods and need to modify methods based on experience and circumstances in situ. It may be possible for the reptile survey data to be undertaken in March, although that provides little time to prepare a report and summarise the findings prior to the end of the project. We would need to understand the extent to which projects could be extended beyond the end of the current timing – given that this coincides with the end of the CEPF programme in the region.

Mark O'Brien will maintain close contact with the Environment department of the Vanuatu Government throughout to ensure that we plan based on the most realistic predictions of the country 'opening up' post covid19.

11. Participatory preparation:

The questionnaires have been used for VESS's survey of flying foxes in the Banks islands. The communities were willing to be interviewed and to date there have been no objections to the questions. Before the questionnaire was used VESS team members had meetings with the Department of Environmental Protection and Conservation and the Vanuatu Cultural Centre to establish if the questionnaire was appropriate. Both DEPC and VKS approved the use of the questionnaire.

The questionnaire will cover the whole of Sanma province. The provincial government will be informed prior to any visit to the province by VESS staff. All interviewees for the questionnaire will be asked their consent to be interviewed before any questions are asked. After the interviews for the questionnaire and the awareness activities have been conducted, community leaders, in areas where the communities have said microbats are seen, will be asked if they would like to participate in the rest of the project. The purpose of the project and the project activities will be explained to the community. If they agree to participate, free prior informed consent for the trapping and acoustic surveys will be obtained. Consent letters from the community leaders will

be proof of the permission. The letters will be scanned and send to CEPF before the trapping and acoustic surveys begin.

12. Mitigation strategies:

Rapid Assessment Biodiversity surveys:

The BL, EDA, VESS team will only conduct surveys in areas where the local community are willing to participate in the projects and have given written consent. The survey team will be respectful of local customs and tabus – VESS and EDA staff will ensure that BL and reptile specialist are aware of any local regulations. The purpose of the surveys and the methodology will be explained to the communities to ensure they understand what will occur on their land.

Conservation plans (local and national):

When recommending conservation actions that the communities could take to help protect the biodiversity in their areas, we will need to understand if the community has been harvesting or hunting the biodiversity, the communities may be willing to stop the harvest. If not, the project team will work with the communities to develop a harvest plan that increases the chances that the harvesting is sustainable and that the species populations are not substantially impacted. We will develop methods of assessing populations to enable the community to monitor their future impacts on the species. In our concluding discussions we will consider opportunities and local interest in creating alternative protein sources, cultural activities or livelihoods.

During all fieldwork the communities and local authorities will be kept informed and will be encouraged to ask questions or raise any concerns they have about the project.

Inter-island travel with respect to Covid19 risk

Currently there are no confirmed cases of Covid19 in Vanuatu and the government has imposed strict international travel restrictions. However there is a significant risk that the virus could be detected in Vanuatu. The project team will abide by all government advisories with respect to international and inter-island travel. VESS may also postpone travel to remote communities above and beyond the travel advisories with an abundance of caution to ensure there is very little risk of transmitting the virus to communities. This may involve re-scheduling or modifying island field trips.

13. Monitoring and evaluation:

The safeguards will be reviewed at the onset of the project, just prior to Phase 1, the visit to the islands to obtain permission to undertake the survey, just prior to Phase 2 and 3 the onset of full surveys, just prior to Phase 4, and maintain discussion throughout the project to ensure the mitigation measures are sufficient to guard against adverse effects and to identify any unforeseen detrimental impacts of the project. This review will be reported to the CEPF every six months.

14. Grievance mechanism:

Indigenous Peoples and other local communities and stakeholders may raise a grievance at any time with VESS or CEPF about any issues relating to the project. During meetings with the communities at the beginning of the project community members will be informed about this possibility and contact information will be provided for the VESS managers and the CEPF secretariat. A project leaflet with details of the project including the grievance mechanism will be handed out to the communities during the VESS visits. The wording about the grievance mechanism on the leaflet is as follows: Grievance Mechanism

“If anyone has an issue with the project, they may raise a grievance at any time. The initial point of contact for any grievance is the VESS CEO, Christina Shaw. All grievances raised will be shared with the project Regional Implementing Team and CEPF grant manager. If you are unhappy with the response, you may contact the CEPF executive director.

Contact details:

VESS, Christina Shaw, vess@vanuatuconservation.org, +678 35214, Po Box 1630, Port Vila, Vanuatu.

CEPF Grant Director and Regional Implementation Team, Daniel Rothberg (drothberg@cepf.net), Vatumaraga Molisa, vatumaraga.molisa@ext.iucn.org, Helen Pippard, +679 331 9084, helen.pippard@iucn.org

Email of the CEPF Executive Director: cepfexecutive@conservation.org”

BirdLife will ensure that we respond to grievances in writing within 15 working days of receipt. We will file all claims with a response and/or a plan for resolving the grievance. We will communicate all grievances received, our response, and our plan for resolution to CEPF within 15 days, as well.

15. Budget:

As the obtaining of prior informed consent from the communities for the biodiversity surveys will occur at the time of the questionnaire survey, there will be no additional cost and the costs will be covered in the CEPF budget. Reporting of safeguards will be incorporated into the project reporting and should not incur additional expense.