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Protection and sustainable management of French Polynesia land-birds threatened by extinction

This project is located in French Polynesia on the islands of Tahiti (Society Island), Fatu Hiva, Tahuata, Ua Huka (Marquesas archipelago), Rimatarara (Australes archipelago)

The general objective of this project is to develop a network of sustainable management in the 32 IBAs (Important Bird Areas) of French Polynesia by implementing concrete actions for the protection (biosecurity) or the recovery of endangered birds that are living in those IBAs. Some species population numbers less than 50 individuals.

The actions involve creating Species Support Groups to engage local habitants in protection measures such as invasive species control and ecotourism, educating the islands residents on the endemic species and the threat posed to them by invasive species and creating protected areas for the species the most at risk of extinction.



Project achievements

Invasive Alien (exotic) Species (IAS) have deeply modified the fragile ecosystems of French Polynesia Islands. Of 33 land bird species that breed in French Polynesia, 28 are endemic and 20 are threatened by extinction: 71 % of the species! It is quite urgent to act.

This project implemented recovery actions for 9 endemic land birds threatened by extinction, including 3 critically endangered species.

- In two years, 18 young Tahiti Monarch (*Pomarea nigra*) and 8 young Fatu Hiva Monarch (*Pomarea whitneyi*) were produced and reproductive pairs increased from 7 to 10 for the Tahiti Monarch and from 2 to 6 for the Fatu Hiva Monarch. Those two birds are the most threatened birds of French Polynesia with less than 50 individuals each.
- Ua Huka and Rimatarā, the last Marquesas and Austral inhabited islands free from black rat and Tahuata, free from Great Horned Owl (present on Hiva Oa, at less than 4 km from Tahuata) have been protected from those invasive species by three local residents trained for this biosecurity action. These residents were also formed as Ecoguides and were able to guide tourists to view the birds; so far, they presented 'their' birds to 94 tourists.

And the population of those 5 islands has been involved:

- More than 2000 children and 50 teachers have followed conferences, participated to a bird watching adventure or helped with reforestation by planting local trees through the tree-nursery project.
- More than 1000 adults were contacted through door to door campaigns; another thousand participated to Species Recovery Group meetings, annex meetings or to field work.
- A biosecurity chain was created around Rimatarā and Ua Huka involving the schooners deservng those islands, their crews and different actors present on Papeete wharves (Tahiti) and air flight companies.
- 20 landowners have participated to a cultural exchange between Tahiti, Fatu Hiva and Rarotonga (Cook Island) and a letter of intention for the creation of a reserve for the Tahiti monarch has been signed. A similar letter is ongoing on Fatu Hiva.

Project Objectives

The recovery/biosecurity actions have been implemented by involving local people through the creation of Species Support Groups. Those SSGs will propose to local population several secondary actions for the protection of their species and the sustainable use of those areas through the development of ecotourism, forest long term exploitation and hives. In the areas containing the two most critically endangered species of French Polynesia: Tahiti with the Tahiti flycatcher and Fatu Hiva with the

Fatu Hiva monarch the SSG will propose to create Protected Areas on the basis first of oral agreement then official declarations without juridical values. The Takitumu Conservation Area (TCA), an area managed by three Maori families from Cook Island and containing several tens of people, will serve as model for the establishment of the Conservation Area of French Polynesia.



Because in their great majority, French Polynesia endemic birds and their ecosystems are threatened by Invasive Alien (Exotic) Species (IAS), the actions will share two specific objectives:

- Protect the endemic birds of IBAs from the arrival of IAS in the last islands where they are living. The three islands selected are Rimatarā (Austral islands), Ua Huka (Marquesas islands) and Tahuata (Marquesas islands).
- Save the endemic birds of IBAs through a sustainable control of the IAS present in their territories when the size of the island does not allow the eradication of those IAS. The two islands selected are: Tahiti (Society islands) and Fatu Hiva (Marquesas islands).

Nine endemic land birds could benefit from concrete recovery actions and the local population perception of these species will change with renewed awareness of their forgotten natural heritage.



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