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ONGOING AND UPCOMING EVENTS

- **April 10-16:** Wailevu consultation on proposed rules and boundaries
- **April 17-18:** Wailevu West Management Support workshop, Valeni
- **April 19-20:** Wailevu East Management Support workshop, Bagata
- **April 23-25:** Wailevu fish warden training, Navatu
- **April 26-28:** Kubulau & Wainunu fish warden training, Natuvu
- **April 30-May 1:** Community Educators Network (CEN) training on Sustainable Farming and forestry, Kubulau
- **June 1:** Signing ceremony for Wainunu district network of protected areas & ecosystem-based management plan

EXPEDITION TO VATU-I-RA SEASCAPE



Above: A selection of underwater and overwater shots from WCS Fiji Director, Dr Stacy Jupiter, taken during her recent expedition aboard the Nai'a. © Stacy Jupiter

Yet again the spectacular underwater life of the Vatu-i-Ra Seascape has been highly praised by international divers. For ten days in March, WCS Fiji Director Dr Stacy Jupiter was part of an expedition to Fiji organized by two US aquariums—the New England Aquarium and the Monterey Bay Aquarium. This was the seventh time that staff from the aquariums and others took to the waters of Fiji aboard the Nai'a. The expedition collects data on the health of the coral reefs, picks up trash where they find it, and visits villages to learn about local conservation initiatives.

The highlights of the trip included a visit to Kiobo village where the expedition participants learnt about the long history of marine protection in Kubulau, and the recent changes to the net-

work of protected areas to make the reefs more resilient to the impacts of climate change. After the village visit, one of the expedition participants decided to sponsor four children at Kubulau District School for three years—great news!

The team visited Vatu-i-Ra island and its large black noddie (*gogo, drelo*) breeding colony. BirdLife International eradicated rats from the island in 2007, and with the help of the Vatu-i-Ra Site Support Group, recently installed a solar-powered sound system there, to broadcast calls of threatened petrels (*kacau*) to try and attract the birds back to the island. The last word should go to the beautiful, healthy reefs and huge numbers of fish at dives sites in Namena, which delighted everyone on board and provided wonderful underwater memories for the expedition.

Please send your questions and letters to the Vatu-i-Ra Community Bulletin Editorial Team, using the contact details above.

TAQOMAKI NI NODA VEIKABULA



The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) is a U.S. based international NGO, with conservation programs all around the world, including Fiji. Over the past century, the WCS has worked to establish more than 130 parks and protected areas on land and at sea as well as working on threatened species. WCS works to save wildlife and wild places by understanding and resolving the critical problems that threaten key species and large, wild ecosystems around the world.



VATU-I-RA COMMUNITY BULLETIN



Ni sa bula vinaka! Welcome to the twenty-second edition of the VATU-I-RA COMMUNITY BULLETIN. The bulletin brings together news and results from ongoing work by the Wildlife Conservation Society within the Vatu-i-Ra Seascape.

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THE ADVENTURES OF JOJI GOBY

On 15-16 March, the Wildlife Conservation Society launched a comic book "The Adventures of Joji Goby" at 5 schools in Kubulau and Wainunu districts. Each presentation included:

- A formal offering of a set of comic books (in Fijian language) for the schools to use and incorporate into their teaching curriculum;
- A puppet show performance of the story by WCS staff, complete with question and answer sessions; and
- Presentation of t-shirts and river care packs to designated Goby Youth Ambassadors, with instructions on how to use a checklist to identify whether district rules for stream management are being obeyed.

Overall, we were able to reach over 750 students, teachers and parents between the following schools: Ratu Emeri School, Kubulau District School, Wainunu Seventh Day Adventist School, Adi Eliane School, and Ratu Luke School.

The reports back from the headmasters and teachers were glowing. The headmaster of Ratu Emeri confided that one student told him that they will need to clear the cassava and taro gardens planted for the teachers because they are within 30 meters of the stream, which is in violation of the rules of the Kubulau ecosystem-based management plan. The headmasters from both the Wainunu Seventh Day Adventist School and Adi Eliane both announced that they will help the children put into practice the messages about environmental management that they have been taught. WCS staff will visit the different schools engaged to follow up on how the youth ambassadors are coping with their checklist after the first round of monitoring. Any difficulties in addressing the concerns raised in the checklist should be clarified then.

An article featuring the launch and photos from the event will appear in the April edition of *MaiLife* magazine. Due to the great success of the launch, we will also hold one in Suva in April to further spread the message about protecting Fiji's precious rivers and streams.

KEY EBM MESSAGES:

Preservation of functional integrity of Fiji's ecoscapes through community based management.

- Successful 'ridge-to-reef' management depends on broad stakeholder input
- Inland and coastal communities need to manage their actions and resources together
- 'Ridge-to-reef' management protects habitat for all stages of life
- The success of protected areas for conservation and livelihoods relies on combining bottom-up community engagement with top-down planning
- Public health and livelihoods depend on environmental health
- Healthy ecosystems are the best defense against climate change impacts to livelihoods



Clockwise from top left: The comic; Goby Youth Ambassadors from Kubulau District School with WCS staff and Tui Kubulau; students at Kubulau District School reading the comic; primary and secondary students at Ratu Luke School patiently waiting for the puppet show; Margaret Fox and Adi Sici; WCS staff backstage at Wainunu SDA School.

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COMMITTED TO CLEAN DRINKING WATER

Well-forested water catchments are the perfect way to manage and maintain drinking water supply. In March a small group from WCS Fiji visited Nadivakarua and Namalata (Kubulau District), to map out their water sources and assess any environmental threats to the future sustainability of the water source. Protecting the catchment immediately surrounding the water source is the first step to having a reliable source of clean water for the future.

Following the survey, Namalata village has decided to draw a 200 metre radius buffer around their water source where farming and clearing will be prohibited. Currently, farming has crept up to around 50 metres from the water source in places, meaning that the water source is at risk of drying up in a drought. Already, the water source is only a small creek which is a worrying sign for periods of drought in the future.

The survey found a well-forested area around the water source for Nadivakarua village – village elders agree this water source has never dried up, even when some other villages in Kubulau district run short of water during the dry season. Nadivakarua have marked a track around the water source, to make sure that farming doesn't encroach on the forest near the source. These community decisions will be incorporated into the Kubulau



ecosystem-based management plan which is currently being updated as part of an adaptive management process.

Left: The water source for Nadivakarua village, which is surrounded by a well-forested area protected from clearance.

FIJI LEARNS FROM BANGLADESH

Staff from WCS Fiji joined their WCS Bangladesh counterparts in conducting research on dolphins and whales found in the Bay of Bengal, Bangladesh. For WCS Fiji Field Officers, Margaret Fox and Waisea Naisilisili, this research was part of their training on how to conduct whale and dolphin surveys, with their new skills to be put into practice in Fiji.

It was the first time in this region for the two Fijians and they had an amazing experience in working with the WCS staff from Bangladesh and soaking up the lifestyle and culture of this country. The highlights of their trip started with their journey downriver where they encountered the enigmatic river dolphins, the Irrawaddy and Ganges River dolphins, through to the Sundarban Reserve. This reserve boasts the largest block of mangrove forest in the world and hosts a multitude of species including the rare Royal Bengali tigers, crocodiles, monkeys, deer, various birds, fish, mammals and plants. They continued on to the Bay of Bengal where they conducted extensive studies on the resident but timid Humpback dolphins while also encountering pods of Bottlenose dolphins, Finless porpoises and a Bryde's Whale.

In addition to training the WCS Fiji staff on the various methodologies that can be applied when conducting scientific surveys on dolphins and whales in Fiji, This intense and informative research trip provided a great insight into the biodiversity

and human induced impacts on natural resources from another region. Margaret and Waisea returned home inspired to help Fiji reduce human impacts on the environment, so that its natural resources can stay healthy for future generations to enjoy.

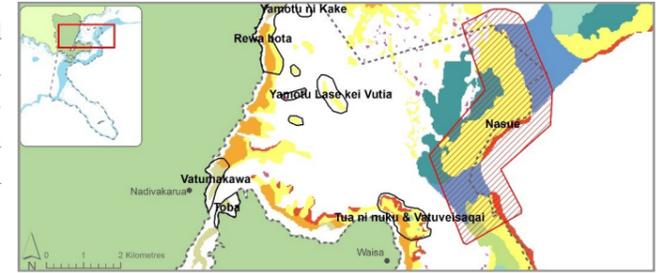


Top: Waisea Naisilisili at sea, taking photographs of dolphin fins for identification. Above: One of the many fishermen who fish for fry for shrimp farms. There are so many of these nets in the rivers, that dolphin mortality from entanglement in nets is very high, particularly for the river dolphins.

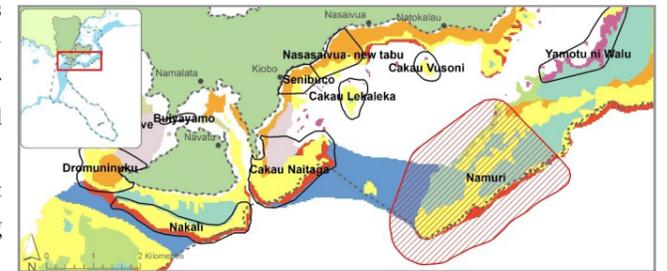
DEALING WITH POACHERS

In early March, staff from WCS Fiji visited each village in Kubulau district to present changes to *tabu* area boundaries proposed at the Kubulau Adaptive Management Workshop in July, and agreed at the *Bose Vanua* meeting in January. A common concern raised by many villages—as well as Tui Nadi and Tui Kubulau—was how to prevent poaching by people of Kubulau and neighboring Wailevu, especially in Namuri and Nasue district marine protected areas.

The Navy informed WCS that they rely on reports about poaching to enforce protected areas; the Navy urged the communities of Kubulau to provide information about poachers so that they can respond. If you see people poaching or using illegal gear for fishing, call the Navy on: 3312585, 3312803 or 3312397 and speak to the Duty Officer or the Duty MSC Officer. Furthermore, at the *Bose Vanua* meeting in January, it was agreed that people who were caught poaching in *tabu* areas or MPAs during 2011 will not have their fishing licences renewed for 2012.



A reminder of the revised boundaries for Nasue (above) and Namuri (below) district MPAs, including 500m buffer (Namuri) and 100-500m buffer (Nasue).



LOOKING WEST: PROGRESS FOR NADI & SOLEVU

Last month, the WCS field team left behind the familiar villages of Kubulau to travel westward: they made visits to all the seven villages in Nadi and Solevu districts to find out about some important decisions made at recent village meetings. These were decisions regarding proposed protected areas and district-wide rules—for the seas, the mangroves, the rivers and the forests of these two districts. These areas and rules were originally proposed by workshop attendees from Nadi and Solevu districts, who joined the Wainunu Management Planning workshop which was held in Daria village in November 2011.

Solevu has identified seven *tabu* areas in their *qoliqoli* and along the coast, including the whole of Solevu's outer reef as a district marine protected area. Three terrestrial and freshwater *tabu* areas have been identified, which aim to protect Solevu's main water catchment. Similarly ambitious, Nadi has proposed twelve marine and coastal *tabu* areas, also including their whole outer reef in a district marine protected area. Nadi's forests and rivers will also be protected with five freshwater and terrestrial *tabu* areas.

At the *Bose Vanua* meeting for Solevu on 16 March, all *tabu* areas were finalised. A signing ceremony for Solevu will be arranged to formally launch the network of protected areas. In Nadi district, the village *tabu* areas are already in place, while the district marine protected area is awaiting confirmation.

Both districts have urgently requested awareness-raising and education on nature conservation issues. As well as this, the

districts will form resource management committees who will then be able to develop draft management plans with the support of WCS Fiji. These draft management plans will include the finalized maps and rules for protected areas as well as the wider district, information about enforcement of protected areas and—importantly—a list of agreed steps which will be taken to make sure that the aims of the management plan will be met.

These new *tabu* areas are an exciting addition to the existing network of community-managed protected areas, that started in Kubulau and is currently being expanded into Wainunu and Wailevu districts. By acting together, the benefits for the whole Vatu-i-Ra Seascape will be the greatest. Communities of Bua and Cakaudrove provinces are taking the right steps for the health of their natural resources and for their own livelihoods—now and for the future.



Above: Participants from Solevu district map out their protected areas at the management planning workshop in Daria village, November 2011.