



Linking Terrestrial and Marine Conservation Efforts in Milne Bay, Papua New Guinea

Milne Bay Province, Papua New Guinea, is the site of CI's largest and most comprehensive conservation program in the Pacific. It combines a 5-year *Phase One* marine conservation program, funded primarily by the United National Development Program and the Global Environment Facility, with an initiative to protect upland watersheds in the region in an effort to conserve forest biodiversity and nearshore marine ecosystems.

Milne Bay is of global significance for both marine and terrestrial biodiversity. The marine ecosystems in Milne Bay's waters are diverse, rich, and relatively intact, having been looked after for generations by rural island communities who depend on them for an array of natural products. Milne Bay's network of islands both large and small (which include the Trobriand, Conflict, D'Entrecasteaux, and Louisiade islands) is one of the more remarkable island assemblages in the tropical Pacific. These islands support numerous endemic species, including birds of paradise, honeyeaters, butcherbirds, cuscuses, wallabies, and trioks. Rising above the timberline, Milne Bay's penin-



sular uplands are rich and well forested. The Mount Suckling massif is among PNG's most prominent mountain systems.

Peter Mackay, as Chief Technical Advisor, oversees the marine program, known officially as the *Milne Bay Community-based Coastal and Marine Conservation Project*. The initial phase of the program will create an enabling environment for community-based conservation of marine and nearshore natural resources, both to benefit local communities as well as to help Papua New Guinea meet its obligations to the Convention on Biological Diversity. CI is working with partners to help educate communities about conservation, empower government bodies to carry out conservation in the field, and develop incentives that support conservation. In addition, the program is fostering the establishment of a network of marine conservation areas that will, in effect, create corridors for marine conservation in key areas of Milne Bay.

This marine program is both large and complex and involves a range of governmental and nongovernmental stakeholders. Mackay is building a team in Milne Bay to carry out the initiative, including village engagement officers, environmental educators, communication and awareness field officers, ecotourism experts, marine conservationists, and a range of support staff. This team is being assisted by staff from the Melanesia Center for Biodiversity Conservation based in Alostau and Port Moresby. More than twenty island communities have been engaged in this program, and a selection of these will be

Continued on page 4

Inside this issue:

Linking Terrestrial and Marine Conservation Efforts in Milne Bay, Papua New Guinea	1
The Melanesia CBC Technical Team	2
Kingdom of the Ants	3
Fijian Stakeholders Pledge Conservation	3
Conservation Through Partnerships	3

The Melanesia CBC Technical Team

Conservation International prides itself on basing its strategies on science, and that sense of pride spans from the headquarters office in DC to the distant field offices in Melanesia. Over the last two years the Melanesia CBC has been able to hire some of the best conservation “thinkers” in the region. Under the supervision of Gaikovina Kula, the Executive Director for the Melanesia CBC, Dr. Suzette Stephens has recently been hired as the Director for Conservation Science responsible for directing the CBC’s technical team. Dr. Stephens has worked and lived in Papua New Guinea and Indonesia for the last several years completing her doctoral research and working for The Nature Conservancy as a conservation scientist. The technical team that Dr. Stephens manages comprises the Marine Specialist (Steven Lindsay), GIS

Specialist (Sebastian Wesselman), and two Species Officers (Yance de Fretes and Roger James). These staff members are responsible for providing support not only to CI’s conservation projects but also to our partners in Melanesia. What’s more, Dr. Stephens and her staff are identifying and prioritizing critical conservation areas for the newly identified Melanesian Islands Hotspot through a rigorous scientific analysis.

To that end, the Melanesia CBC continues to build both its own and its partners’ technical capacity, and under the new leadership of Dr. Stephens, CI is confident that conservation efforts in the region will be better supported.



Kingdom of the Ants

The Lakekamu Basin and surrounding upland watersheds comprise a quarter million hectares of lowland and upland forest, inhabited by fewer than two thousand people of five different ethnic groups. Conservation International has been engaged with the people of the Lakekamu Basin for nearly a decade, conducting forest environmental research, training, and most recently, conservation planning.

Located about 150 kilometers northwest of Papua New Guinea’s capital of Port Moresby, the Lakekamu Basin is a flat patch of tropical lowland forest tucked behind the coastal Kurai Hills and nestled up against the massive southern scarp of the central cordillera, which rises to more than 3200 meters. CI selected Lakekamu as an important site for work because of its low human population, the vast expanse of uncut forest, and the area’s isolation from the pressing threats of industrial scale logging. Several years ago, a CI rapid biological assessment validated the species richness of Lakekamu. The site surveyed was the richest in ant species of any place on Earth, and is home to a wide array of plant and bird species, among other taxa.

Past work in Lakekamu has focused on field assessments and hands-on field training of Papua New Guinean students. This led to the establishment of a local environmental field station at Ivimka, which remains the only lowland forest field station in all of New Guinea. Although at this moment Ivimka is temporarily closed to visitors, it is planned to re-open after completion of a strong community-management agreement, which

will mandate full community operation of the station. We envision that the station will be a draw to a diverse visitor base comprised of both research scientists and ecotourists. The forests around Ivimka are superb, and the isolated and picturesque local villages are a great attraction to bush walkers and adventure tourists.



The core of the revamped Lakekamu program is a large-scale planning exercise that engages local communities, local level governments, provincial governments, and the national government. Facilitated by CI, this group will collaborate to draft a development plan for the Lakekamu Basin, which includes appropriate small-scale enterprise (such as the Ivimka Station operation), improved agriculture, expand the Health and Education program and zoning of water and forest resources for long-term sustainability and preservation of Lakekamu’s global conservation values. CI recently organized a Provincial Executive Council policy paper submission by the three relevant provincial governments of Gulf, Central, and Morobe, as well as with the Department of Environment and Conservation and Department of National Planning and Rural development in support of establishment of a Basin-wide Conservation Area for the 250,000-hectare Lakekamu Basin.



Fijian Stakeholders Pledge Conservation

The Fiji Islands are globally renowned for their incredible natural beauty and biodiversity. Located in the interior of Fiji's main island (Viti Levu), the Sovi Basin has been designated as the highest priority area in Fiji for conservation. Because local communities own the Sovi Basin, long-term engagement of communities must occur if conservation is to be successful. The Institute of Applied Sciences (IAS) at the University of the South Pacific, working with a grant from the Melanesia CBC, has begun working with local communities towards the conservation of the Sovi Basin, and has recently submitted an optimistic progress report to us on the conservation activities that they have been fostering in the region.



In January, the Sovi Basin Conservation Initiative Working Group was established to bring together stakeholders from concerned institutions to plan, develop and implement awareness-raising strategies for landowners in the Sovi Basin. Briefing meetings were held in late February and early March for the landowners in five villages, which garnered strong support for the initiative. In July, the Melanesia CBC received notice the Native Lands Trust Board officially revoked the BioForests logging concession lease that was held over the Sovi Basin, and that the landowners were eager to move conservation forward. CI's partnership with the IAS has expedited the revocation of the logging concession, and plans to secure the 20,000-hectare Basin as a Natural Reserve area are underway.

Photo by Cynthia Mackie

Conservation Through Partnerships

As mentioned in the last edition of *MelanesiaNius*, one of the primary objectives of CI's Melanesia Center for Biodiversity Conservation (CBC) is to achieve conservation outcomes through fostering strategic partnerships with other likeminded organizations. Thus far the Melanesia CBC has partnered with over 40 institutions across five countries—Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, New Caledonia, Fiji, and Papua, Indonesia. Because of the vastness of Melanesia CBC, partnerships are integral to achieving conservation outcomes.

One of the more recent partnerships forged is between CI's Melanesia CBC, The Nature Conservancy, and The World Wide Fund for Nature Indonesia. The partnership aims to conduct an integrated ecological and socioeconomic analysis of the Bird's Head Functional Seascape in order to develop a dynamic model of the interactions of key human, natural, and physical impacts in the Raja Ampat archipelago. The results of this partnership analysis will help inform the interventions used to successfully achieve conservation. A collaborative proposal was submitted to The David and Lucile Packard Foundation to fund this initiative.

Over the last year the Melanesia CBC has developed a strong relationship with the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) in Papua New Guinea. Last year the Melanesian



CBC financially supported WCS's sponsorship of the annual New Guinea Biological Conference in Goroka. The success of that event has led to other collaborative projects such as supporting WCS in developing a conservation project in Manus Province. The primary goal of that project is to establish an on-the-ground presence, mobilize stakeholders to counter threats to endemic fauna, and assess threatened flagship species through applied research. WCS and the Melanesia CBC are currently negotiating a long-term partnership to work on a protected areas analysis in collaboration with other stakeholders for Papua New Guinea.



With the logging concession recently revoked in Fiji's Sovi Basin, the Melanesia CBC has established an opportune partnership with the National Trust of Fiji. On August 19th, the Director for Pacific Islands Hotspots, Francois Martel, signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Chairman of the National Trust, Radike Qereqeretabua, pledging to work together on conserving Fiji's unique biodiversity. The National Trust of Fiji is a quasi-governmental organization whose responsibility is to ensure the nation's biological and cultural heritage is conserved in accordance with traditional Fijian law. The Melanesia CBC will soon hire a full time staff member to be based in the office of the National Trust of Fiji.





CONSERVATION INTERNATIONAL

**CONSERVATION INTERNATIONAL
MELANESIA CENTER FOR BIODIVERSITY
CONSERVATION**

1919 M Street, NW, Suite #600
Washington, DC 20036

Phone: (202) 912-1343
Fax: (202) 912-1046
Email: bbeehler@conservation.org

Address label

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE
MELANESIA CBC, PLEASE VISIT OUR
WEBSITE:
WWW.CIMELANESIA.ORG.PG

Linking Terrestrial and Marine Conservation Efforts in Milne Bay, Papua New Guinea (continued from page 1)



supported in the development of the marine conservation areas. The *Milne Bay Community-based Coastal and Marine Conservation Project* team is working with 22 communities, and have identified 6 key biodiversity sites, of

which four have been identified as possible MPA sites. The team is currently working on two separate candidate MPA sites—Netuli Island and the Nuakata Island group. In addition, CI's Milne Bay Education and Communication officers led an Alotau Ministers fraternal workshop for church representatives throughout the province. The workshop was attended by 30 individuals, and aimed to encourage church leaders to incorporate conservation messages into religious teachings.

David Mitchell, based in the Alotau office, is spearheading CI's terrestrial/uplands conservation initiative. The short-term goal is to identify and conserve key watersheds that feed into Milne Bay's coastal waters which, when clogged with sediment from erosion due to logging, kill coral reefs and greatly diminish aquatic biodiversity. The long-term goal is to link these watersheds together into an upland forest corridor that will protect Milne Bay's agricultural productivity, its clear-flowing rivers and streams, and its nearshore marine ecosystems. This land-based project nicely complements the efforts of Mackay's marine program. The Melanesia CBC is actively seeking financial support to strengthen the terrestrial conservation efforts in Milne Bay. As a first step on the uplands program, Mitchell is working closely with communities on Fergusson Island on developing a Wildlife Management Area to protect the Goldie's Bird of Paradise (*Paradisaea decora*).