

Bird Conservation: A Regional Perspective

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Purpose

To stimulate discussion and ideas to develop recommendations to the Nature Conservation Conference.

Background

1. I would like to start by saying that regional actions are determined by national priorities. Accordingly our role at the regional level is to support country efforts in conservation.
2. Prior to 1998, bird issues at SPREP came under the general context of Pacific Islands conservation. Following requests by member countries, the bird conservation programme was initiated at SPREP in 1998 with funding from New Zealand, and a dedicated avifauna conservation and invasive species officer was brought on board.
3. To assist the programme, in 1998 and 1999, SPREP organised three sub-regional meetings to develop the “Bird Conservation Priorities and a draft avifauna conservation strategy for the Pacific Islands region”. However, the document was not well utilised within national and regional level planning and implementation processes, for example during preparation of NBSAPs. Why this is unclear, as the document provides excellent information, particularly in regards to identifying priorities and issues for bird conservation. It is perhaps because it was published more as a technical paper than a working strategic document. It remains a well-formed baseline to assess bird conservation progress.

4. SPREP organised the Oceania Bird Conservation Workshop prior to the last nature conservation conference held in Rarotonga, 6-7 July 2002. This meeting produced a set of recommendations for the conference (Annex 1). Yet again, the recommendations from this meeting remain vague to many, other than the few that attended. Among the attendees was BirdLife International, who would become a major player in bird conservation in this region.
5. In 2002, the BirdLife International Pacific Secretariat was established to support the Pacific BirdLife Partnership, which then consisted of seven NGOs, one each from the Cook Islands, Samoa, New Caledonia, French Polynesia, New Zealand and Australia, and one individual from Fiji. The Partnership has now expanded to include an NGO from Palau. The approach of SPREP and BirdLife is similar, both servicing and supporting organizations, one being government environment bodies and the other national NGOs. In recognition of shared views, a collaborative partnership between SPREP and BirdLife International Pacific has ensued. This was formalized in February 2007 through a MoU and a joint work plan.
6. In June 2005, the second regional meeting of the Bird Conservation Programme and Regional Bird Strategy Review was held in Suva. The meeting was a gathering of NGOs from the Pacific birdlife partnership, and SPREP member country governments. The meeting found that many of the objectives and actions of the bird strategy were being tackled. Furthermore, with the advent of BirdLife International Pacific's programme, much of the on the ground bird conservation work had been boosted.
7. Governments remain an important regulatory body in biodiversity conservation. It was acknowledged that the Governments and NGOs needed to work closely together because of the roles they play in achieving common objectives. For that reason, one of the outcomes of the meeting was the establishment of a bird working group consisting of government and NGO members under the

Pacific Islands Round Table for Nature Conservation (RT) Threatened Species and Ecosystem Group. This aimed to improve coordination and collaboration between governments and NGOs.

8. Another outcome was the development of the Suva Declaration related to bird conservation (Annex 2). Considerable discussion was also held on mainstreaming regional bird conservation efforts into the wider context by integrating the actions of the bird strategy into the Action Strategy for Nature Conservation in the Pacific Islands Region 2003-2007 (AS). This was because the RT, the monitoring group which monitors the AS, is a more structured entity, meeting regularly to monitor AS progress. A draft charter was prepared to help guide the bird working group, which was established under the RT mechanism.
9. In 2006, the bird programme was amalgamated into the Island Biodiversity portfolio at SPREP. Hence we have now come full circle, where bird conservation is again considered as a part of the wider Pacific biodiversity conservation goals.
10. The bird strategy referred to in paragraph 3 notes various threats to birds. These include, habitat loss and land degradation, hunting, illegal activities such as trade, and introduced predators. In view of that, a number of conservation measures need to be taken. Some of these are mentioned here along with suggestions to facilitate progress towards their development.

Establishment of Protected Areas

11. To increase Protected Areas for birds, the IBA studies that have been completed and are currently underway should be considered when establishing PAs. IBAs should be used to advocate site protection.
12. The Pacific Round Table Protected Areas data base contains less than 100 entries related to birds, from about 500 total entries. Though it is recognized that this is not completely

accurate, owing to repetition of and omission of data, it is still a significant base on which to build, and monitor the progress towards establishing more bird related protected areas.

Legislation and Policy reviews

13. A common problem relating to Pacific legal and policy frameworks is the lack of enforcement, compliance and monitoring of them. For many PICs, the role of managing the environment is divided among several ministries, agencies and committees. In some cases there is an overlap of legislation/policies that has led to confusion of roles and jurisdiction between the different entities. A major issue is there are so few regulations to support implementation of Environment or related Acts.
14. Hence, when development of, or review of, policy and legal frameworks are conducted, advocate that bird priorities are included.

Partnerships

15. Dealing with the environment is not for the reclusive and partnerships are important for progressing conservation. The establishment of partnerships also reduces duplication and overlap of activities. The Partnership between SPREP and BirdLife International has been formalized with joint activities of mutual interest being established (this meeting being one such activity). Nonetheless, there is room to further expand and increase partnerships to address bird conservation issues. While many NGOs and CBOs are not specifically bird focused, their work can have an indirect impact on them.
16. The BirdLife Pacific network currently covers eight countries and territories in the region. This should be extended. There is a need to identify potential new partners working on birds and work in cooperation with them.

The Roundtable Bird Working Group (WG)

17. The Round Table Birds working group is a partnership. Their main mode of communication has been through an email discussion group established in 2005.
18. The charter for the group remains a draft without any form of commitment. While the thought behind establishing the group was a noble one, the question arises “is the WG still valid?” If so, how do we improve efforts to meet the aims and objectives that we are all striving for? Do we need to predetermine the functions of the email group, or is it fine the way it operates now? Could it grow and if so what other areas apart from an information base could it expand into?

Resources

19. Within the last 5-10 years there has been an increase in funding opportunities to assist bird conservation. Some of these funding sources include the CEPF, GEF/NZAID Small Grants Programme, MacArthur foundation, the Darwin Initiative, Global Green Grant, BP, RNHP, the GEF-PAS, and so forth. Thus, the future should be bright as long as the funds are utilized to the best advantage to birds.

SPREP

20. What can we do? We can provide advice, coordination, support e.g. look at draft national proposals and make comments (but you have to take the lead), act as a clearing house of information (learning from others experiences).

Recommendations to take forward to the main meeting?

- To be completed after discussion at this meeting
- Tangible
- Action plans?

Oceania Bird Conservation Workshop

Rarotonga 6 – 7 July 2002

Conclusions and Recommendations to the 7th Pacific Island Conference on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas

Forty people, including most of the leading bird experts of the Pacific, met to consider the ways in which the implementation of the Pacific Regional Bird Strategy could be enhanced.

The goals of the meeting were to:

- ❖ Develop a shared understanding of what is going on for bird conservation in the Pacific and for migratory species in Oceania
- ❖ Review the needs and priorities for bird conservation in the light of existing projects, proposals and opportunities
- ❖ Particularly focus on the needs of migratory species of the Central Pacific Flyway and on the major GEF Island Restoration proposal
- ❖ Exchange and share ideas and develop proposals to collaborate on bird conservation efforts in the Pacific
- ❖ Facilitate ongoing networking and partnerships amongst Pacific bird conservation stakeholders.
- ❖ Identify priorities to input to discussions on the next Action Strategy for Nature Conservation in the Pacific Islands Region (2003-2007).

The specific meeting outputs sought were to:

- ❖ Further progress in mechanisms to implement the Pacific Regional Bird Conservation Strategy
- ❖ Plans and proposals for increased collaborative work on bird conservation in the Pacific
- ❖ Particular progress towards further collaborative work in the Central Pacific Flyway
- ❖ Particular progress towards further collaboration on the Island Restoration project
- ❖ Input from Pacific Bird Conservation stakeholders to relevant Action Strategy objectives and key actions.

In addition to the many specific outcomes of the meeting that will be documented and followed up by the group in the coming months, there were a number of broad recommendations that came out of the meeting for input to the Nature Conservation Action Strategy process.

Recommendations:

RECOGNISING that we share many bird species across the region, and that we therefore share responsibility for their well being;

RECOGNISING that we also share many issues that face us in managing our bird species, including exotic predators, pollution, habitat alteration, seabird Bycatch, unregulated harvest;

RECOGNISING that the Pacific is globally richest in endemic species and that small island bird species are 50 times more at risk of extinction than their continental relatives

RECOGNISING that many of our bird populations are declining, and that we share a sense of urgency to reverse this decline;

ACKNOWLEDGING that we have demonstrated our commitment to addressing these problems through the collaboratively developed and endorsed Pacific Regional Bird Conservation Strategy;

WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS HAVE AGREED TO:

UNDERTAKE new collaborative work at the species level, at the site level, and at the regional level. Key amongst this is the development of new collaborative teams such as the Pacific Bird Conservation Working Group.

AND THE WORKSHOP:

URGES all countries and organisations to place a high priority on building capacity for Pacific Islanders to understand and manage their own bird populations, which involves building understanding and interest at the community level and through all levels of the education system, as well as improving the skills of land managers and those directly involved in managing bird populations or areas of particular importance to birds.

URGES all countries and donor agencies to place a high priority, through implementing the collectively developed and endorsed Pacific Regional Invasive Species Strategy, on invasive alien species eradication, prevention and control, recognised as the key threat to the survival of island bird faunas as well as most other biodiversity in the Pacific.

URGES all countries and agencies to undertake collective and integrated effort on bird conservation, SEEKS to actively seek to develop and participate in better networks between relevant people and REQUESTS SPREP to coordinate the Pacific Bird Conservation Working Group as the key network in this area.

SEEKS to mainstream birds into the wider conservation effort and SUGGESTS countries and agencies use birds as flagship species for conservation efforts, as in many cases solving the problems birds face will also solve wider conservation issues

REQUESTS countries and agencies to build bird conservation efforts from the local community level in a way that also benefits the local people, as longterm commitment to the recovery and conservation of bird and other species depends on the goodwill and ownership of the people who live and interact with the species on a daily basis and who must make a sustainable living in the process.

Annex 2. Suva Declaration

Participants to the joint SPREP and BirdLife Pacific Meetings in Suva, 27 June-2 July 2005, noting with mounting alarm:

THAT the Pacific region has more threatened bird species per unit of land area or per person than any other region in the world; and the most extinctions;
And recognizing that birds have long been indicators to wider biodiversity concerns;

We therefore resolve:

THAT no more bird species must be allowed to become extinct in the Pacific Region; and that the conservation status of all threatened birds must be improved.

We therefore:

welcome initiatives taken for stronger collaboration between BirdLife's Pacific Partners and SPREP member countries in working together to achieve these goals;

recommend that bird conservation actions be integrated into the Action Strategy for Nature Conservation at the regional level and the National Biodiversity Action Plans - NBSAPs (or similar plans) at the national level;

request the Roundtable for nature Conservation to establish a new working group within the Threatened Species and Ecosystems working group focusing on improving collaboration and coordination of bird conservation activities in the region and on monitoring progress;

acknowledge the contribution made to the implementation of SPREP's Regional Bird Conservation Strategy by BirdLife's Pacific Regional Strategy, and in particular BirdLife International's Important Bird Area and Globally Threatened Species Programmes; and

Request that this resolution be placed before that 16 the SPREP meeting for consideration and endorsement and that regular progress reports be provided to each SPREP meeting and to BirdLife International's Global Council.