

News from the Australasian Section of the Society for Conservation Biology

NICOLA NELSON¹
Lecturer in Conservation Biology

SCB Board of Governors Meeting

THE Australasian section was represented at the recent Board of Governor's meeting in Irvine, California by Karen Firestone. This meeting was focused on strategic planning for the Society as a whole over the next few years, and will provide a framework for the Society and our section to continue developing. The Australasian Board had drafted a preliminary strategic plan specifically for our section, but we need to develop further objectives, goals, and outcomes in light of the Board of Governor's strategic planning outcomes. We would like input and assistance from the Australasian membership in forming a working committee to assist in putting together our strategic plan. If anyone is interested, please contact Karen Firestone at kfirestone@unsw.edu.au.

Changes to the Australasian Board

Thanks to Tish Silberbauer for all her work to help put forward the Australasian section over the past few months. Tish has helped out with the newsletter and with PCB news and views as well as presenting student awards on behalf of SCB-A, before resigning from the board earlier this year.

We welcome Brendan Mackey to the Board as the new Communications Chair. Brendan is a Reader at ANU.

Conference News

The ASH/SRARNZ/FiSH Conference
February 7–11, 2005

The inaugural combined Australian Society of Herpetologists (ASH), Society for Research on Amphibians and Reptiles in New Zealand (SRARNZ) and the Fijian Society of Herpetologists (FiSH) conference held at Springbrook, south-east

Queensland was a resounding success. Over 156 delegates attended an engaging five days of presentations including papers from international professionals including Dr David Skelly (Yale University, Connecticut, USA) and plenary speakers from Australia and New Zealand. The week proved to be an invaluable opportunity for academic and student herpetologists from Australia, New Zealand and Fiji to share their research and ideas.

The Australasia section of the Society for Conservation Biology awarded a two-year subscription to *Pacific Conservation Biology* to Tamara Osborne (University of the South Pacific) for the best student paper on conservation biology in the Australasian Region. Her paper was entitled: "Abundance and phenology of the Fiji tree frog (*Platymantis vitiensis*) in Savura Forest Reserve, Viti Levu, Fiji".

New Guinea Biological Conference
16–18 June 2005

Your attention is drawn to the Seventh New Guinea Biological conference to be held at the University of Cendrawasih, Jayapura. The meeting is open to everyone interested in the Biodiversity, Ethnobiology, Ecology and Conservation in the geographical area of New Guinea, with this year's theme of "Participatory Natural Resources Management in Sustainable Development". Direct all Biocon VII inquiries to: Conference Secretariat: Rosye H. R. Tanjung, PhD, Science Faculty, University of Cendrawasih, Waena Campus — Jayapura, Papua-Indonesia 99351. Phone: (62) (967) 572 115/572 116. Email: hefmyca@yahoo.com.

SCB 2006

The 20th annual meeting of the Society for Conservation Biology, Conservation Without Borders, will be held 24–28 June 2006 in San

Jose, California, USA. The meeting will focus on transcending real and perceived boundaries of ecology, sociology, geography, and politics that impede conservation science and its application. The meeting will focus on four major themes: local-level and regional-level conservation, marine and freshwater conservation, 21st century conservation, and trans-boundary conservation. The call for symposia, workshops, and organized discussions will be open 1 August–15 October 2005. The call for abstracts will be open 15 October 2005–10 January 2006, and registration will open on 15 January 2006. We look forward to welcoming the global community of conservation professionals to California. Students will be eligible for discounted registration fees. In addition, there will be numerous opportunities for students to interact with each other, with professionals, and to participate in meeting co-ordination. More information about the meeting is available at <http://www.ConservationBiology.org/2006> or from 2006@m.conbio.org.

*Australasian Ornithological Conference/
Australasian Shorebird Conference*

The 3rd biennial Ornithological Conference of the Royal Australasian Ornithological Union will be held at Blenheim, New Zealand from 6 to 10 December 2005. There will be a two-day meeting (11–13 December) of the Australasian Wader Studies Group immediately after at Nelson. Both meetings provide a forum for an exchange of information and ideas between researchers and conservationists throughout the Pacific. Details are available at www.osnz.org.nz/conference or by email to wmilblenheim@clear.net.nz.

Conservation Biology Work in Fiji

Fiji adopted a National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan

(NBSAP) in 2002. The conservation priorities and recommendations within this important legislation were largely based on a synthesis of biological surveys, a few natural history papers, and consultation with experts. At that time, a body of applied conservation and ecological studies was simply not available to inform the development of the NBSAP. Recently, a number of NGOs and academic programmes, including the Wildlife Conservation Society-South Pacific (WCS), the Departments of Biology and Marine Studies at the University of the South Pacific (USP), The National Trust for Fiji, BirdLife International-Fiji, Wetlands International-Oceania, World Wildlife Fund-South Pacific (WWF), and the Regional Herbarium of the South Pacific, have increasingly undertaken research on applied conservation biology issues in terrestrial, freshwater, and marine ecosystems. All of this work is conducted in collaboration with Fiji's Ministry of Fisheries and Forests and Department of Environment, as well as provinces and local communities, and the findings are relayed to the government and landowners to assist in the refinement and implementation of the NBSAP.

Conservation studies are critically needed as Fiji is currently revising its forest strategy and developing marine resource management plans. Recent archipelagic-scale studies have included (1) assessing the conservation status of Fiji's seasonal forest, among the most endangered forest type in the Pacific and the only habitat for the endangered crested iguana, and (2) an effort to identify biotic provinces and sub-provinces for measuring the representation of Fijian invertebrates, plants, herpetofauna, birds, and freshwater fish within the existing and proposed network of forest reserves. The latter study is important because even though each larger island is known to have a good proportion of single-island endemics, the degree of localized endemism within the larger islands and on smaller islands is still unclear. Important altitudinal transects and forest corridors have also been identified, as well as special elements such as caves and wetlands. For the

purposes of designing a forest reserve network, WCS studied the minimum-area requirements for a viable population of masked shining parrots and giant forest honeyeaters as we suspect these are some of the species with the largest habitat needs. Shining parrots were also found to require the cavities in larger trees for nesting, a dwindling feature in Fiji's forests due to logging. Similarly, Fiji's giant longhorn beetles, among the largest in the world, require large trees for successful reproduction. A study of rat predation suggests that rat activity is lower in remote forests, with the consequence that forests far from the forest edge may act as refugia for endangered island species. Taken together, the data from such studies can be used to prioritize forest blocks for conservation action and guide the delineation of boundaries.

Conservation research on single-species is also underway. One project is attempting to eradicate introduced cane toads from an offshore island to benefit a population of the endangered Fiji ground frog. The ecological effects of alien mongoose are also being studied through comparisons of mongoose-free and infested islands. A study looking at the impact of rats on dry forest regeneration and crested iguana populations is underway and a proposed program to restore dry forest habitat and iguana populations on four priority islands awaits word on funding. Species conservation plans are being developed and implemented for the critically endangered Fiji petrel, the rare gymnosperm, *Acmophyle sahiana*, and the endemic Fiji sago palm.

WCS, WWF, Wetlands, and USP Marine Studies are working with communities to establish science-based networks of marine reserves coupled with watershed management plans. The placement and configuration of these reserves are informed by studies of spawning aggregation sites, coral bleaching refugia, the impacts of watersheds on marine systems, and the ecological response of different habitats to a range of management regimes. The long-term conservation vision is to establish reserve networks across an entire

seascape, the scale necessary to begin to effectively conserve marine biodiversity and enhance fisheries. Studies by others on herbivory of marine algae, the effects of live rock harvesting, and connectivity among serranid fish populations complement the seascape-scale work.

These selected examples are intended to illustrate the recent growth of conservation-related research in Fiji. Much remains to be done in terms of addressing issues, training and capacity-building for Fijians, and communicating findings to influence resource-use strategies. When we arrived in Fiji several years ago, we initially pondered why so few conservation studies were available. However, we quickly found that Fiji's dense forests cover some of the most rugged terrain in the world and the reefs are often pounded by large swells and swept by fast currents. Conservation data is hard won and every study is an achievement. The recent increase in activity reflects the growing commitment, professionalism, and collaboration of the Fijian conservation community.

David Olson, Program Director
Wildlife Conservation Society —
South Pacific
11 Ma'afu Street, Suva, Fiji
Email: <dolson@wcs.org>

Thanks to Jean-Marc Hero, Erica Fleishman, Karen Firestone, and Andy Mack for their contributions.

¹School of Biological Sciences, Victoria University of Wellington, Wellington, New Zealand.
Email: <nicola.nelson@vuw.ac.nz>