



## ISSUE 15 – JUNE, 2015



Talofa and welcome to the June edition of SPREP-Tok. I have recently returned from American Samoa where I attended the Pacific Islands Environment Conference (PIEC) – jointly sponsored by the governments of Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and American Samoa.

The theme for the 2015 conference – Islands United: Creating Solutions – speaks to the myriad of environmental issues faced by all of our Pacific island member countries and territories in these challenging times. The event provided a valuable opportunity to explore further options for cooperation between SPREP, the Pacific US Territories and the United States.

During my visit I had the pleasure of accepting an award, on behalf of SPREP, from the Governor of American Samoa in recognition of our efforts to ensure a healthy environment in the Pacific.

We look forward to continuing, and growing, a fruitful relationship with our Pacific US Territory Members, and working together towards sustainable development that preserves our environment for the benefit of future generations.

**David Sheppard**  
Director General, SPREP

## LATEST NEWS



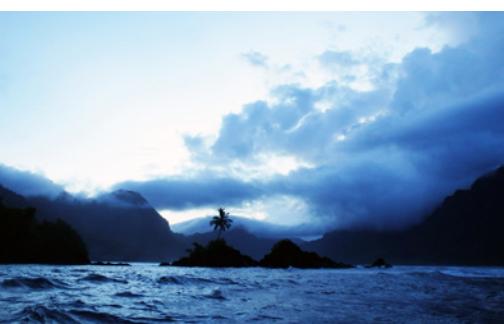
### CALLS FOR URGENT ACTION ON USED OIL MANAGEMENT

An audit of used oil stockpiles across the Pacific region has revealed an alarming risk to both the environment and health of local communities. The results have identified an urgent need for a regional used oil collection system, as well as national used oil stewardship systems, to enable the collection, storage and reuse of used oil and lubricants in an environmentally sound manner. [Read more...](#)



### US PEACE CORPS AND SPREP ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS

SPREP and the US Peace Corps have signed a Memorandum of Understanding to strengthen the region's response to climate change. Through the agreement, Peace Corps Volunteers will be placed at SPREP to help improve adaptation and resilience to climate change impacts in Pacific island countries and territories. The MOU was subsequently [mentioned by the United States Whitehouse](#) in their release on 'Launching a Public-Private Partnership to Empower Climate-Resilience Developing Nations'. [Read more...](#)



## NEW METEOROLOGY PROGRAMME TO FOCUS ON SIDS

SPREP has congratulated the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) on their resolution to establish a new programme dedicated to Small Island Developing States (SIDS). The new programme – designed to enhance weather, climate, water and other environment related services in the region – builds upon the work undertaken at SPREP in collaboration with WMO and other partners. [Read more...](#)



## BLUE DAYS PROJECT HERALDS STRONG WAVES OF ACTION

New milestones are being celebrated following the adoption of a plan of action to strengthen marine-based ecotourism across the region. The plan has come about following the Blue Days Conference, jointly organised by the Government of French Polynesia and SPREP, through which sixty participants from across the Pacific discussed an eco-tourism framework which focuses on charismatic marine wildlife such as whales, dolphins, turtles and sharks. [Read more...](#)



## SPREP SIGNS HOST COUNTRY AGREEMENT WITH VANUATU

SPREP and the Government of Vanuatu have signed a milestone Host Country Agreement to facilitate the in-country implementation of the Pacific Ecosystem-based Adaptation to Climate Change (PEBACC) Project. The PEBACC project, funded through the Government of Germany, will help Vanuatu adapt to the impacts of climate change by protecting and restoring the natural resources and ecosystems that support livelihoods and resilience to natural disasters and climate change. [Read more...](#)



## SOLID WASTE PRACTITIONERS SHARE THEIR SUCCESS STORIES

The important contribution made by local counterparts to the improved management of solid waste in the Pacific region has been emphasised at a regional gathering in Okinawa, Japan. The 'Training of Trainers for the Promotion of Local Experts' meeting brought together representatives involved in the Project for Promotion of Regional Initiative Solid Waste Management, known as J-PRISM. At the meeting, representatives from the Pacific region shared their experiences in implementing solid waste management initiatives. [Read more...](#)



## SPREP TO OPEN ITS DOORS TO THE PUBLIC ON 2 JULY

On 2 July, SPREP will commemorate its establishment with an Open Day for school students and members of the public. Visitors will be able to visit the SPREP compound and learn more about the environmental issues that affect our region and how we can work together to address these. Interactive work stations across the campus will touch upon the different focus areas of SPREP, including biodiversity and ecosystem management, climate change, environmental monitoring and governance, and waste management and pollution control. [Read more...](#)



Photos: © Isabella Chowra

## THE PURPLE SWAMPHEN – COOPERATION BREEDS SUCCESS

The SPREP campus in Vailima, Samoa has many beautiful features – one of which is our resident population of purple swamphens (*Porphyrio porphyrio*). These cosmopolitan birds – native to the tropical and sub-tropical regions of Africa, Asia, Australasia and the Mediterranean – are a member of the rail family.

While plumage varies between the 13 recognised sub-species, purple swamphens can be identified by their resplendent purple feathers, bright red bills and frontal shields, short tails and long legs.

Purple swamphens live in small communities, ideally in wet areas that have ample foliage in which to nest and shelter. They spend most of their time foraging for plants and insects on the ground or in swampy waters.

Interestingly, while ground-dwelling birds are in decline worldwide, some species have managed to buck the trend and continue to thrive – despite threats from predation and habitat degradation. The purple swamphen is a case in point. While specific populations of the bird may be in decline, overall it is performing well and is listed on the IUCN Red List as a species of 'Least Concern'.

Key to the purple swamphen's success could well be its tendency towards cooperation and teamwork. The purple swamphen has developed a number of successful mechanisms to aid in its protection from predators. Notably, swamphens are prone to kick up a noisy fuss when threatened – complete with wing flapping and dramatic shrieks – and will even assemble in mobs to attack small predators such as rats.

Crucially, the purple swamphen can also distinguish when such displays are unlikely to succeed. For example, when there is a need to quietly alert other members of the group to the presence of danger, they will flick their tail up and down to expose the bright white feathers underneath. This display is believed to be a form of code through which they can cleverly communicate an imminent threat without drawing attention to themselves in the process.

Purple swamphens breed several times a year (depending on latitude) and lay a clutch of up to six eggs – one day at a time. The swamphens on the SPREP campus have been observed breeding four times a year.

In close-knit groups, eggs will often be laid in a communal nest and females will take turns to share incubation duties. The chicks, which hatch after about three or four weeks are especially cute in that they look as though they've been constructed by a child, using black pom poms and pipecleaners.

Purple swamphens hold an important place in Polynesian culture – and were held in high regard as a chiefly bird in Maori and Samoan cultures. European sailors passing through Samoa in days gone by observed swamphens being kept by Samoan chiefs as pets.

### PURPLE SWAMPHEN FAST FACTS

- The Samoan name for the purple swamphen – *manuali'i* – literally translates as 'chiefly bird'. The common name for the New Zealand subspecies of purple swamphen is *pūkeko*.
- While they are not considered threatened from a global viewpoint, populations of purple swamphens in parts of Europe have declined as a result of habitat loss. In Portugal, for example, the species is considered endangered.
- Historical evidence shows that the Romans kept purple swamphens as decorative birds at large villas and expensive houses. They were regarded as noble birds and were among the few bird species that were not used for food.

### INTO THE CLOUD FORESTS OF RAROTONGA

Anyone who has spent time in a cloud forest will vouch that these special places have an ethereal, other-worldly quality. These magical habitats are found only at elevations where the vegetation is often covered in cloud. The cool, moist conditions are ideal for epiphytic plants including ferns, orchids, mosses and lichens. As cloud forests are often uninhabited by humans, they present a rare opportunity to study pristine wildlife conditions characterised by a high rate of endemic species.

As part of the GEF-PAS Integrated Island Biodiversity Project, the Cook Islands recently undertook a rapid biodiversity assessment, known as a BIORAP, of the cloud forests of Rarotonga.

A team of five including representatives from SPREP, Wildlands New Zealand, Cook Islands National Environment Service and Samoa's Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MNRE) participated in the final week of the survey – charged with the task of surveying plants, lichens, land snails and insects on the two peaks of TeManga and Maungaroa.

For the MNRE's Talie Foliga, the expedition provided an opportunity to draw on the experience he gained through involvement in a similar survey in the central Savai'i cloud forests of Samoa in 2012. It also provided him with a valuable capacity-building opportunity, which will be enhanced through sharing his experience and knowledge with colleagues in Samoa.

The Cook Islands BIORAP took place from 4-22 May 2015 and was coordinated by the Cook Islands National Environment Services (NES) and Wildlands New Zealand. A report outlining the key findings will be released later this year.



*Talie Foliga from Samoa's MNRE is no stranger to surveying cloud forests. Photo: A.Wheatley/SPREP*



*The BIORAP team camped for two nights on top of TeManga where the only suitable place to sleep was a small flat space right at the peak. Photo: A.Wheatley/SPREP*

### COMING UP

- 9 - 10 July:** 18th Pacific Islands Roundtable for Nature Conservation (Fiji)
- 20 - 23 July:** Pacific Meteorological Council and Ministerial Meeting (Tonga)
- 21 - 25 September:** 26th SPREP Meeting (Samoa)
- 30 November - 11 December:** UNFCCC COP 20 (France)

