

The Inside Story on Saving the Last Great Places in the

pacific island countries



Pakin Atoll lies 12 miles off Pohnpei's northwestern coast in the Federated States of Micronesia. The largest of its six islands supports some thirty people, all descendents of Mortlockese from the FSM's state of Chuuk who were relocated to Pohnpei by the Germans after the devastating 1905 typhoon. Photo © Jez Ohare

Successful outcomes in conservation in our region are almost always a result of strong partnerships built across a wide range of social and political environments by persistent, committed and highly skilled conservationists. In this issue of the Newsletter we get a glimpse of the wide variety of work our colleagues within the Pacific Program are engaged in and the amazing range of skills and experience they bring to these tasks. We read about the prominent role our colleagues from Micronesia together with Gerald, Audrey and Willie, played at the highest international level to make the Conservancy's engagement in the COP 8 international level meeting in Brazil such a success.

We also see first hand accounts of the deep personal commitment to and interest in nature of our colleagues and partners through Bill's heartfelt article on the last refuge of *Ka* in Kosrae and Umi's story about Obi Skebong's commitment to conservation in Palau. Barbara's profile of Thomas Koi and his commitment to conservation of his clan's reefs in Kimbe Bay serves to emphasize the importance of traditional leadership and the cultures in our region and the importance of our partnerships with local communities if we are to achieve our mutual conservation goals.

Peter Thomas
 Director, Pacific Island Countries Program

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Second Micronesia Staff Retreat

by Bill Raynor

The Conservancy's Micronesia program staff met in January for their second annual Staff Retreat. Bill Raynor, Micronesia Program Director, welcomed early arriving staff from other islands with a tour to the famous ruins of Nan Madol and an informal dinner at his house. The next day, all staff completed mandatory compliance training led by Hawaii-based Conservancy staff Jeff Benz, AP Attorney, and Jan Eber, Hawaii Director of Human Resources. On Tuesday, participants travelled to isolated Nahlap Island off Pohnpei's southern coast to continue the retreat. Under the able facilitation of Robb Johnson, a Coda Fellow from the Massachusetts Chapter, staff reviewed progress on the Micronesia Action Plan 2004-2008, updated key elements of the plan, and began developing the FY07 Operating Plan and budgets. The staff also discussed public and private fundraising strategies to better support ongoing work in the region. A highlight of the retreat was a field trip, led by the Conservation Society of Pohnpei (CSP) and Marine Conservation Officers from the Pohnpei State Marine Conservation Unit, to learn about Pohnpei's efforts to establish a community-led marine protected area network. The next retreat is planned for Palau in January 2007.



Micronesia Staff
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Eighth Conference of the Parties- COP 8- Micronesia

by Emily Tibbot and Trina Leberer

The Micronesia Team was strategically represented at the Eighth Conference of the Parties (COP8) of the Convention on Biological Diversity in Curitiba, Brazil. Trina Leberer and Lucille Overhoff served on the FSM delegation and helped negotiate the Island Biodiversity Programme of Work, as well as focusing on protected areas, invasive species, and access benefits sharing. Conservancy staff also helped to support our FSM partners and provided support and guidance to Palau's government and NGO partners. We also helped support the delegation from the Marshall Islands. Emily Tibbott served as the Conservancy's point of contact for the U.S. delegation for the Island Biodiversity Programme of Work, and advanced relationships that will serve in gaining U.S. financial support for its implementation.

The negotiations resulted in a strong Island Biodiversity Programme of Work that will address many of the critical issues facing island countries and countries with islands, such as integrated coastal management, the need for alternative economic opportunities compatible with biodiversity conservation, and invasive alien species.

The Micronesia Team also participated in two island-related side events coordinated by Conservancy's Pacific Islands staff. The first event, entitled "Exploring a Global Island Partnership," looked at the need for such a partnership to advance conservation in islands around the world. Audrey Newman facilitated the event, which grouped people by islands and geographic region and discussed how these islands might achieve their goals through a global island partnership. Across all groupings, the common message was the need for enhanced communication: sharing information and lessons learned and preventing duplication of effort. The participants decided to form a core group to explore this partnership notion further and determine whether and how to advance it.

The second event, a high-level dinner entitled, "Islands, Marine Biodiversity and Livelihoods: A Global Island Partnership," drew more than 150 people from many countries. Micronesia was in the limelight, as Palau hosted the event, and several regional partners were co-sponsors. Palau's President Tommy Remengesau started the evening by delivering an eloquent speech on the urgent need for island conservation and his commitment to the Micronesia Challenge. Vice President Redley Killian of the FSM followed with an expression of his country's commitment to the Challenge. Stimulated by U.S.-affiliated Micronesia's leadership, other island nations from the Pacific (including Kiribati), the Caribbean, and the Indian Ocean made conservation commitments. The sense of "buzz" and momentum in the room was palpable.

In a climax to the evening, the Conservancy and Conservation International each made committed \$3 million in endowment funding. The funding is intended to challenge U.S.-affiliated Micronesian governments to develop matching national trust funding and to inspire donor countries to step up with financial commitments. The challenge for Conservancy staff is now to work with Micronesian governments to develop and realize these national commitments and, additionally, to work with the donor countries to motivate their engagement. Stay tuned!

federated states of micronesia

Kosrae's Yela Swamp Forest

by Bill Raynor

On the 42-square-mile island of Kosrae, the newest and smallest FSM state, the Conservancy and local partners are embarking on the region's first private land conservation easement. The 150-hectare Yela *Terminalia* Swamp Forest was identified as the highest priority area of biological significance on the island during the FSM ecoregional planning effort in 2000-2002. On Kosrae, most of the coastal freshwater swamps were formerly forested by *Terminalia carolinensis*, locally known as *Ka*. The *Ka* tree is a large, majestic species found only in the Caroline Islands. However, due to road construction, agricultural clearing, logging, and other development activities, only the Yela *Terminalia* Swamp Forest--out of the 13 large *Ka* forests known to exist on prehistoric Kosrae--remains in pristine condition today. In 2003-2004, a team made up of staff from the Kosrae Island Resource Management Agency (KIRMA), the Kosrae Conservation and Safety Organization (KCSO), the USDA Forest Service, and local landowners participated in a Conservancy-sponsored Micronesia-Efroymson workshop series and developed a Conservation Action Plan for the Yela Forest site. The plan identified several strategies for preserving the area, including establishing the core forest area as a state protected area and establishing ecotourism to benefit the local landowners. The planning team also recognized the importance of consulting with landowners when deciding amongst the various options for the site.



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At the partners' request, Fred Annand, Associate Director of the Conservancy's North Carolina Chapter, visited Kosrae for three weeks in July as an AP Conservation Fellow to work with the local government and the landowners to develop a private lands conservation strategy for the Yela Forest. Fred is no stranger to Micronesia, having done a five-month sabbatical there in 1998. He also visited the Republic of Palau in 2000 to help the Conservancy and PCS develop the first site conservation plan for the island of Babeldaob. Fred's visit to Kosrae stimulated the 10 landowning families of the Yela Forest to organize themselves into a non-profit organization, the Yela Environment Landowners Authority (YELA). Working closely with KCSO and YELA, Fred is now developing a draft conservation easement for the Yela Forest. Conservation easements are a new tool for conservation in Micronesia, and Fred anticipates that some legal changes will need to be adopted by island governments to make this strategy effective. However, if successful, conservation easements could quickly expand forest conservation work in Micronesia, since much of the remaining forests in the region are located on private, rather than public lands. Fred will return to Kosrae this fall to complete his assistance to the Micronesia Program and Kosrae partners.

Community Conservation Coordinators on Babeldaob Island, Palau: A Personal Story

by Umiich Sengebau

I've been working with the Conservancy's Palau Field Office for almost four years and now serve as the Terrestrial Conservation Coordinator for Palau. While at the Conservancy, I've had the opportunity to visit many of Palau's natural treasures. I've also had the privilege of working with amazingly dedicated and inspirational individuals.

When I first started with the Conservancy, Palau's terrestrial program was in its infancy. It consisted only of David Hinchley, former Terrestrial Conservation Advisor and Palau Country Program Director, working with two of our local partners on terrestrial issues of Babeldaob. Babeldaob is the largest island in Palau and the second largest island in Micronesia. Today, both the terrestrial and marine ecosystems of Babeldaob are threatened by the construction of a 52-mile road around the island.

To help implement strategies for Babeldaob Island, we hired three Community Conservation Coordinators (CCCs). The CCCs are employees of the Palau Conservation Society (PCS), our local partner, but are assisted financially by the Conservancy through a grant from the Wallis Foundation. The new CCCs are respected Palauans with good local knowledge and contacts, an interest in conservation, and the ability to communicate and work well with local leaders.

I would like to tell a personal story of Obichang "Obi" Skebong, one of the CCCs working in the villages of Aimeliik, Ngaremlengui, and Ngatpang on the west coast of Babeldaob. I first met Obi during our initial meeting with the CCCs early last year. Obi was a member of his village's local community council and is the current President of the Belau Modekngai School Alumni Association. He was and is indeed a respected member of his community.

One day Obi invited me to visit an area that he and a fellow local council member were planning to set aside for conservation and to promote ecotourism activities to generate revenues for his community. The area, called Ngerutechei, takes you from the top of a beautiful outcrop forest down to the swamp forest, where you tread along a traditional stone path to one of Palau's most culturally important sites and finally to the pristine and untouched mangrove forest. I told him that I really admired his forward thinking and I offered the Conservancy's support to help their vision become a reality.



Obichang 'Obi' Skebong
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On the boat ride back to Koror, we discussed how I could help them to draft legislation and eventually, a management plan to protect this area. I knew that Obi's older brother was the Governor and hasn't always supported conservation work, so I asked Obi what he planned on doing to get his brother's support. Obi grinned and paused for about five seconds and said, "Before I started working with PCS, I also believed that large-scale developments like hotels and golf courses which generate a lot of revenues was the answer to many of the problems of the villages. If I'm convinced of the great benefits of conservation and the fact that it can work hand-in-hand with good sound development, I'm sure my brother will come around once he comes to understand it."

Obi has come to believe that conservation and sustainable development for his village can co-exist. This is why he is currently supporting an ecotourism component to a proposed conservation area near his village. Obi is also working on legislation that will protect at least 10% of the terrestrial areas and 5% of the marine areas near his home village.

The effect that the CCCs have had on the communities has been very positive. Since April of this year, three new protected areas have been designated on Babeldaob. These areas are identified by the communities themselves as areas of biological and cultural significance. The areas will hopefully serve as part of the foundation for the Protected Area Network once it is operational.

adelberts

Adelberts Project Sponsors First ITTO Project Steering Committee Meeting in Madang

by Francis Hurahura

The first International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) Project Steering Committee (PSC) meeting, since the approval of the three year \$452,196 grant for the Adelberts, was held in Madang on March 30. The meeting, which included the national and local level governments, funding partners, and Conservancy staff from the Port Moresby and Madang offices, aimed to get the ITTO PSC up and running. Discussions focused on defining the roles and responsibilities of PSC members, developing a detailed first annual plan of operation, and forming a project working group to address technical needs and tackle policy-related issues. An MOU covering the values and responsibilities of the National Forest Authority and the Conservancy, was also prepared.

A field visit to the Almami Local Level Government (LLG) Chambers gave PSC members the opportunity to meet the President, some ward members and the Council Executive Officer and to see the location of the project site. A courtesy call was also made to the Bogia District Administration Office.

This first meeting of the ITTO PSC was a success and the committee members walked away from the meeting with a clear sense of what their roles are and where the PSC will be headed in the future.

manus

Production of a Tok Pidgin Awareness Video on Reef Fish Spawning Aggregations

by Richard Hamilton

In March, Conservancy staff and overseas film producers spent two weeks in Southern Manus making a Tok Pidgin awareness video on grouper spawning aggregations. The film team consisted of director Jordan Plotsky from Firelight Films, underwater cameraman Eric Henningsen from Ion Digital Ltd, and Conservancy staff including Richard Hamilton, Tapas Potuku, Manuai Matawai, and Jerrey Pokiap. Manoi Kanamon, Pokakes Pondraken, and Pwaliou Poliap from Pere also worked with the film crew for the duration of filming.



Jordan Plotsky (blue shirt) and Eric Henningsen at work.
© Richard Hamilton

During the production, the team lived aboard Manuai Matawai's "office," with the majority of field time spent SCUBA diving and interviewing local fishers. Tapas Potuku kept everyone laughing and smiling for two weeks with his endless supply of jokes and betel nut. The film team is particularly grateful to the community of Pere and Peli for making their stay so enjoyable.



Post-production work of the video has been ongoing since mid-March, and drafts of two versions of the video (one version in Tok Pidgin and one version with English narration and English subtitles) will be available in early June, with a goal of producing final copies for distribution by late June.

Manuai Matawai's "office"
© Richard Hamilton

Three Local Level Governments in Kimbe Bay Approve Marine Environmental Management Legislation.

by Stephen Keu

Working to conserve nature in as the face of Papua New Guinea's complex land tenure systems, diverse culture, and unstable political structure is very challenging. The Conservancy's Kimbe Bay field staff, with assistance from the resource team in Brisbane and Port Moresby, is working with the three LLGs, Talasea, Hoskins, and Bialla, to protect the rich marine resources and diversity of Kimbe Bay. The proposed network of MPAs for Kimbe Bay lies within the jurisdiction of these LLGs.

The three LLGs have all have passed their marine legislation as required by the PNG organic law and are now in the process of implementing requirements of the law. This milestone highlights the good relationship that the Conservancy has built with communities and governments in Kimbe. By enacting these laws, communities are empowered to process, declare, and manage their marine resources on a sustainable basis, now and for future generations. With the legislation in place, Kimbe Bay project staff are now working to build the capacity of the LLG representatives to perform the duties specified in the legislation.

The Face of Traditional Leadership and Conservation in Kimbe Bay

by Barbara Masike Liri



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Thomas Koi was born on June 15, 1941 in Kilu village in the Talasea area of West New Britain Province. Talasea is part of the wider Kimbe Bay, one of the world's most richest and diverse marine environments. The reefs of Kimbe Bay are home to many species of marine animals including whales, dolphins, dugongs, and many thousands of coral reef fish species. The Conservancy is working with the Talasea LLG to initiate a Marine Protected Area (MPA).

Thomas is a local clan leader of the Kavutu clan and now has 12 grandchildren. He has seen more than enough to know that his grandchildren's future may not be as adventurous as his when it comes to enjoying the simple things provided by one's environment. As a young boy growing up in this coastal area, Thomas remembers his fishing expeditions along the beach. "We never had to go far to fish, we could just walk along the beach, under the shade of those huge

trees, and spear the fish," Thomas recalls., "Now there are not many of these trees around, they have all gone for some reason, and I am not sure if my grandchildren will have all the fun I did then."

Thomas' concerns have to do with threats to the marine life of Kimbe Bay. The sedimentation from land-based activities washing out into Kimbe Bay has affected the marine life of the bay. "The oil palm has brought some good things, people have money, but it seems this is at the cost of our marine resources, and that is not so good. I think there is a way to balance out things," he says.

Thomas is one of the local leaders who introduced the Conservancy to traditional reef closures more than seven years ago in an effort to rebuild fish stocks at the local reefs. He worked with the Conservancy to initially close four reefs. After six years of closure, Thomas and his clans began to see more fish return to the reefs, a perception that was confirmed by independent monitoring of the reefs by scientists from Australia's James Cook University.

The positive results of the closure have inspired surrounding communities to close fishing on their own reefs and join the LMMA network. LMMAs are areas that have been closed to fishing activities for certain periods of time, such as six months to a year, so that marine resources can recover. There are now a total of 21 reefs and three mangrove areas managed as LMMAs in the Kimbe area. The LMMAs are run by a committee who have the responsibility to close off reefs, restrict certain types of fishing, and enforce local LMMA rules. The Conservancy helps to coordinate the LMMA work in the Kimbe Bay by carrying out monitoring surveys in conjunction with scientists from James Cook University.

Once in a while, Thomas paddles out to check on damaged coral reefs to see if life is coming back. The fish he can still see, and clams are coming back too, but for the corals, it's still a bit too slow. The challenges ahead are many, but for now the clan communities in Kimbe Bay need to take ownership of the LMMA concept to protect their resources. Their inspiration is the hope that, in the future, the grandchildren of Thomas and their generation will still enjoy the same adventures and fishing expeditions the he enjoyed in his young days.

solomon islands

Community Conservation Officers Achieve SCUBA Diving Qualification

by Peter Ramohia

The Conservancy, through its community MPA projects in Isabel and Choiseul provinces, has established programs aimed at monitoring marine resources and the health of coral reefs. The goal of the program is to provide scientific baseline information on species richness, abundance, biomass and percentage live coral cover within the established MPAs and identify new significant marine areas in the two provinces. Such information will enable the Conservancy, together with the local communities and the provincial authorities, to manage, preserve and enrich significant coral reef areas.

SCUBA diving is one of the skills needed for collecting proper scientific data in coral reef habitats. In March, Conservancy staff and some of our partner Community Conservation Officers from Isabel and Choiseul were trained and certified by Solomon Watersport as PADI Open Water Divers. Solomon Watersport donated the equipment and books needed for this course, plus registration with PADI. The course was conducted at the Sanbis Resort near Gizo in Western Province.



© Peter Ramohia

Congratulations to Mr. Emululi Opiopala, Mr. Cameron Rini, Mr. Esera Ta'am, Mr. Jimmy Kereseka, Mr. Levi Tanavalu and Mr. Linold Madada, on successfully completing the PADI Open Water course.

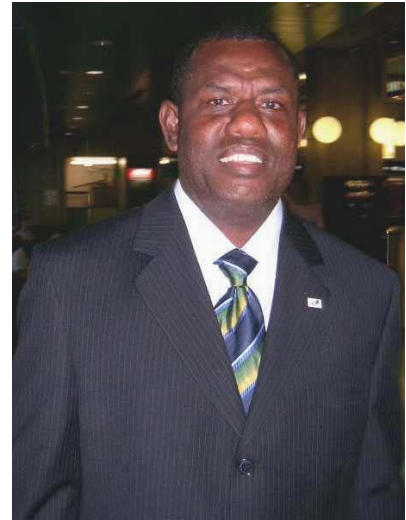


General News

Thank you to Ian Harrison of Harrison's Menswear in Brisbane Australia for generously donating a very handsome suit to Willie Atu of the Conservancy's Solomon Islands field office. Willie was part of the Solomon Islands delegation attending COP8 in Brazil. Prior to the conference, Willie was concerned about the fact that he didn't own a business suit and might let his delegation and the Conservancy down by not being appropriately dressed at this high-level meeting. With time running out for Willie to find an affordable solution to this dilemma, Robyn Curham brainstormed with her close friend (and suit wearer) Greg and found Ian Harrison of Harrison's Menswear.

Ian, in a very kind and generous gesture, donated a very handsome navy pinstripe suit, a smart pale blue shirt (Willie's favourite colour), a belt, and a great suit carrier for Willie to take with him to the Conference. Needless to say, Willie was arguably the most handsome man at the COP8 conference.

For those of you who live in Brisbane, and anyone else passing through, if you're looking for a great menswear store, Ian's shop is at: Shop 2, 136 Racecourse Road Ascot, QLD 4007 Ph (07) 3268 2126 Email: queries@harrisonsmenswear.com.au



© Robyn Curham

New Faces

Sean Austin, Micronesia Terrestrial Conservation Coordinator

Sean joined the Conservancy in April and will be based at the Palau field office. He completed a M.S. in Wildlife Conservation from New Mexico State University in Las Cruces in 1996 and his Ph.D. in Biodiversity Conservation/Management at Texas A&M University in 2002. Sean comes to the Conservancy from Cambodia, where he launched the country program for Birdlife International and served as the Country Program Manager for the past three years. Prior to that, Sean worked for WWF as a wildlife biologist in Cambodia and Thailand and a conservation planner in the Eastern Himalayas. Sean will be responsible for assisting partners in their terrestrial conservation efforts in Palau, the FSM, the Marshall Islands, the Northern Marianas, and Guam, focusing mainly on Palau. He will work closely with in-country and regional partners to develop ecoregional assessments and conservation area plans at priority conservation areas. In Palau, he will work with staff and Board members of partner agencies engaged in terrestrial conservation work, with initial emphasis on helping the Bureau of Agriculture and PCS, to develop and implement terrestrial conservation strategies in Palau.

Geoff Lipsett-Moore Pacific Island Countries Conservation Planner

Geoff joined the Conservancy in May and will be based in the Brisbane office. Geoff will provide technical and scientific support and leadership for our conservation planning activities and will integrate his work with the Conservancy's global and regional planning processes. Geoff will also be working to ensure the appropriate field application of our planning processes and to help build planning and spatial design capacity within our Micronesia and Melanesia programs and with our partners.

Geoff has a Ph.D. in Tropical Rainforest Ecology and 20 years of experience working on an extensive array of terrestrial and marine biodiversity conservation and management programs in an equally diverse range of capacities. Geoff's past work has included: wildlife biologist on Sub Antarctic Heard Island, National Mala Recovery Program Coordinator in Central Australia, Program Manager for the Forest Reform Process for NPWS in NE NSW, Ecologist for Ontario Parks in Canada, Environmental Consultant to WWF in Peru, and CEO for the Nature Conservation Trust of NSW. When he is not out working to protect biodiversity, he is usually out on exploring the world's wide places with his wife Catherine.



For more information, please contact **The Nature Conservancy, Indo-Pacific Resource Centre**

Phone: +61 7 3214 6900

email: jalmany@tnc.org