

**Social Assessment**

**25/03/2020**

**CEPF Grant 110283**

**Grantee: The Vanuatu Environmental Science Society**

***Project Title: Identifying and protecting important habitat for the Fiji Mastiff  
Bat and the Banks Flying Fox in Vanuatu***

**Project Location: Sanma and Torba provinces in Vanuatu**

## **Grant Summary**

1. Grantee organization: The Vanuatu Environmental Science Society
2. Grant title: Identifying and protecting important habitat for the Fiji Mastiff Bat and the Banks flying fox in Vanuatu
3. Grant number: 110283
4. Grant amount (US dollars): \$99,562.35
5. Proposed dates of grant: 01/04/2020 – 30/04/2021
6. Countries or territories where project will be undertaken: Sanma and Torba provinces of Vanuatu with some training activities in Shefa Province.
7. Date of preparation of this document: 05/03/2020

## **8. Indigenous People affected:**

Vanuatu is an island nation located in the South Pacific. Land is custom-owned and the majority of the rural population lives a subsistence lifestyle using the natural resources from their land. Most people living in Vanuatu still have a strong connection to the land and nature, particularly in the rural areas. There is a long tradition of natural resource management using such mechanisms as 'tabu' areas. The system of chiefly governance, although different in different areas, is still strong in some communities. In others modern western lifestyles are eroding the custom governance. The level of education is poor in many rural areas with only a limited portion of the population achieving more than basic primary school education. This project will be working in the communities of the province of Sanma and the Banks Island in Torba Province. Sanma province is made up of the islands of Espiritu Santo and Malo and the smaller islands between them and off their shores. Espiritu Santo is the largest island in the Vanuatu archipelago and Sanma province is home to just over 50,000 people - 20% of the population of Vanuatu. Luganville, Vanuatu's second city is located on Espiritu Santo and has an international wharf and airport. Access to areas close to Luganville and up the east coast of Espiritu Santo, where there are tourism developments as well as local communities, is relatively easy. However, some areas of Sanma, for example the west coast of Espiritu Santo, infrastructure is limited and access is more difficult. The Banks Islands are in Torba Province, the most northerly of all six of Vanuatu's provinces. Sola, located on Vanua Lava Island, is the provincial capital and consists of a small town with some commercial businesses and accommodation for visitors. There are also tourism bungalows on Gaua, Mota Lava and Ra islands. Otherwise the islands are rural and communities live in small villages with limited infrastructure. There are airports on Mota Lava, Vanua Lava and Gaua. The other islands are accessible only by boat.

The questionnaire will be conducted on the islands of Espiritu Santo, Mal and Aore. In the south and east coasts of Espiritu Santo, many people work either in Luganville town or in tourism businesses. Other people and the people living in the West of Espiritu Santo and on Malo and Aore live in villages and are occupied by subsistence or cash crop agriculture. The aim is to interview at least 300 people with a good geographical spread over the province. The VESS team will conduct questionnaire survey throughout Espiritu Santo, Aore and Malo to identify where communities see

bats, particularly where they see them in caves. Fiji Mastiff bats have been recorded in Espiritu Santo and Malo. Aore is an island that lies between Espiritu Santo and Malo and therefore has potential to be a site for the Fiji Mastiff Bat also. Malo and Aore are small islands and complete coverage can be achieved for the questionnaire. However, Espiritu Santo is the largest island in Vanuatu and some areas are mountainous and hard to access. The main focus for the questionnaire will be the southern and eastern areas of Santo where the geology dictates most of the caves are located in the limestone karst. These areas are more populated and easily accessible. However, Fiji Mastiff bats may also use hollows in trees to roost and there may be caves outside the karst system. Therefore, some effort will be made to visit a small number of communities in the north and west of the island to ensure that important areas of bats are not missed because the survey did not cover all areas. Using a questionnaire to gather information before planning the expedition will mean that the expeditions can be more strategic and focused geographically and will therefore increase the chances of finding the FMB breeding sites within the constraints of the time frame and budget of this project.

The map below, taken from the report on the 2006 Santo Expedition, shows the karst system in Espiritu Santo (in yellow) and the location of known caves (red dots). The locations of previous sightings of the FMB have been marked with a white "x". The project will mainly be focused on these areas. However there will be some effort to conduct the questionnaire in other locations to ensure that important populations of FMB habitat are not missed.



Figure 317: Karst (yellow area) and caves (red dots) of Santo.

The second phase of the project is trapping and acoustic surveys of potential FMB habitat. The questionnaire survey will identify areas where these surveys will occur. VESS will work with the communities in the surrounding area close to the FMB habitat to design conservation actions that help the bats and the people.

In the Banks Islands the communities this project will work with are those that were identified in the previous project to improve knowledge and conservation of the Banks Flying fox. These communities are located on Vanua Lava, Mota, Mota Lava and Gaua Islands. The communities have expressed their desire to conserve the Banks Flying fox on their land and have given written consent for VESS to work with them to this end during the previous project. This collaboration, which began in 2018, will continue into this current project.

## **9. Summary of the proposed project:**

The aim of the project is to identify the breeding sites of the Fiji Mastiff bat (*Chaerephon brugullae*) and to work with the local communities close to these sites to protect them. There are several elements to the project:

Questionnaire survey: The VESS team will conduct a questionnaire survey throughout the province, which asks about where people see bats, about any hunting of bats, any tourism which involves viewing bats and other threats they may be facing. The questionnaire also gathers information about any stories, art, dance or other customs that involve bats.

Trapping and acoustic surveys of the caves and foraging habitat of the Fiji Mastiff Bat (FMB): following the survey some sites will be selected for the acoustic survey and trapping of bats to identify the species and the nature of the calls they make. Measurements and samples of the trapped bats will also be taken. The surveys will be repeated in when the breeding season for these bats is most likely to occur. This survey is designed to identify important breeding and foraging habitat for the Fiji Mastiff bat. It will concurrently identify which communities it is vitally important to work with to help protect this threatened species.

Recommendations for a National plan of action for the microbats and fruitbats will be developed as a result of these surveys.

Training of Ni-Vanuatu scientists on survey and monitoring techniques will be a component of this project. Communities will also be shown how to monitor their populations of bats.

Continued support and capacity building will be given to the communities of the Banks Islands where they are protecting and sustainably managing the Banks flying fox habitat.

## **10. Potential impacts:**

Bats play an important role in the ecosystem and provide ecosystem services to the local human population such as controlling insect numbers including insects that are vectors of diseases such as Malaria and dengue fever. Giving the communities that live close to the flying foxes the tools to conserve them will increase the likelihood of the foxes remaining in the area performing those ecosystem services.

The Fiji Mastiff bat is believed to roost mainly in caves. There are reports of local people who harvest and consume bats from at least one of the caves the FMB is known from. The project may recommend a change to harvesting which could impact the communities.

There are tours for tourists that involve going to caves either to view bats or for other activities. At least one of the caves where Fiji Mastiff bats have been seen is now part of a tourism tour. Tourism may cause disturbance to populations of Fiji Mastiff Bats. On the positive side conservation efforts to protect the bats may attract tourists and may increase the tourism revenue in the area once the local communities know they have a threatened species and if they put in measures to protect the bats. Increasing the local guides' knowledge of the bats and their lifecycles so they can incorporate this into their tours may enhance the visitor experience at the sites.

Members of the community may be offended by the questions in the questionnaires or the questions may not be culturally appropriate. They may be concerned about how their information will be used.

Ni-Vanuatu scientists will be trained in survey techniques and local communities will be trained how to monitor their bats.

In the light of the Covid19 pandemic there is a chance that travelling to remote communities VESS staff could inadvertently transmit the virus to communities with little or no medical infrastructure or services.

## **11. Participatory preparation:**

The questionnaires have been used for VESS's survey of flying foxes in the Banks islands. The communities were willing to be interviewed and to date there have been no objections to the questions. Before the questionnaire was used VESS team members had meetings with the Department of Environmental Protection and Conservation and the Vanuatu Cultural Centre to establish if the questionnaire was appropriate. Both DEPC and VKS approved the use of the questionnaire.

The questionnaire will cover the whole of Sanma province. The provincial government will be informed prior to any visit to the province by VESS staff. All interviewees for the questionnaire will be asked their consent to be interviewed before any questions are asked. After the interviews for the questionnaire and the awareness activities have been conducted, community leaders, in areas where the communities have said

microbats are seen, will be asked if they would like to participate in the rest of the project. The purpose of the project and the project activities will be explained to the community. If they agree to participate, free prior informed consent for the trapping and acoustic surveys will be obtained. Consent letters from the community leaders will be proof of the permission. The letters will be scanned and send to CEPF before the trapping and acoustic surveys begin.

## 12. **Mitigation strategies:**

### **Questionnaires:**

At the beginning of each interview the interviewer will read this statement in bislama:

“The Vanuatu Environmental Science Society is conducting a survey on bats across the Banks Islands. The purpose of this survey is to find out what is known about the bats, where and how they live on your island. The survey will also help us determine how flying foxes are hunted and used by people and whether they are becoming difficult to find.

There are no right or wrong answers to these survey questions. Gender and age range of participants and general location will be indicated in the survey reports, individuals will not be personally identified in any discussion of the study. However, results of the survey will be shared with the Vanuatu government departments and publicly. By taking part in this survey questionnaire you are agreeing to allow your responses to be used in this study. Please tell us if there is any information you would like kept confidential.

Thank you very much for taking the time to answer the questions.”

When asked about stories or art of cultural significance the interviewee will be asked the following in bislama and the interviewer will follow the instructions given in italics:

“Do you know any custom stories, songs, belief, myths, sand drawings or other arts etc related to bats?

Are you happy to share your stories or art? *Note to interviewer: If the teller of the story or art agrees please read them the following options and tick which ones the teller agrees to – please tick all that apply.*

- I give permission to share the story.
- I give VESS permission to use the story in any bat awareness activities and publications.
- I give VESS permission to share the story on VESS website, Facebook page or other social media.
- I give VESS permission to record the story but not to share it.
- I am not the owner of the story but the owner gives VESS permission to share the story and use the story in any activities and social media.

*Note to interviewer: Once the story or art is completed please ask the teller to read it and sign at the bottom that the above permissions are valid.”*

### **Acoustic and trapping surveys:**

The VESS team will only conduct the surveys in areas where the local community are willing to participate in the projects and have given written consent. The VESS team will be respectful of local customs and tabus. The purpose of the surveys and the methodology will be explained to the communities to ensure they understand what will occur on their land.

**Conservation plans (local and national):**

The FMB is often roosting in the same caves as other bats but has only been found in a few caves, whereas other non-threatened species of bat are found in many different caves. When recommending conservation actions that the communities could take to help protect the FMB in their areas, if the community has been harvesting or hunting FMBs, the communities may be willing to stop the harvest. If not, the VESS team will work with the communities to develop a harvest plan that reduces the impact on the FMB populations and where necessary creates alternative protein sources, cultural activities or livelihoods.

In the Banks Islands the communities will be implementing conservation plans that they have developed facilitated by VESS. Again VESS will work with the communities to ensure the implementation of these plans has a net gain for the communities.

During all fieldwork the communities and local authorities will be kept informed and will be encouraged to ask questions or raise any concerns they have about the project.

**Inter-island travel with respect to Covid19 risk**

Currently there are no confirmed cases of Covid19 in Vanuatu and the government has imposed strict international travel restrictions. However there is a significant risk that the virus could be detected in Vanuatu. The VESS team will abide by all government advisories with respect to international and inter-island travel. VESS may also postpone travel to remote communities above and beyond the travel advisories with an abundance of caution to ensure there is very little risk of transmitting the virus to communities. This may involve re-scheduling or modifying island field trips.

**13. Monitoring and evaluation:**

The safeguards will be reviewed at least every six months throughout the project to ensure the mitigation measures are sufficient to guard against adverse effects and to identify any unforeseen detrimental impacts of the project. This review will be reported to the CEPF every six months.

**14. Grievance mechanism:**

Indigenous Peoples and other local communities and stakeholders may raise a grievance at any time with VESS or CEPF about any issues relating to the project. During meetings with the communities at the beginning of the project community members will be informed about this possibility and contact information will be



provided for the VESS managers and the CEPF secretariat. A project leaflet with details of the project including the grievance mechanism will be handed out to the communities during the VESS visits. The wording about the grievance mechanism on the leaflet is as follows: Grievance Mechanism

“If anyone has an issue with the project, they may raise a grievance at any time. The initial point of contact for any grievance is the VESS CEO, Christina Shaw. All grievances raised will be shared with the project Regional Implementing Team and CEPF grant manager. If you are unhappy with the response, you may contact the CEPF executive director.

Contact details:

VESS, Christina Shaw, [vess@vanuatuconservation.org](mailto:vess@vanuatuconservation.org), +678 35214, Po Box 1630, Port Vila, Vanuatu.

CEPF Grant Director and Regional Implementation Team, Michele Zador (mzador@cepf.net), Vatumaraga Molisa, [vatumaraga.molisa@ext.iucn.org](mailto:vatumaraga.molisa@ext.iucn.org), Helen Pippard, +679 331 9084, [helen.pippard@iucn.org](mailto:helen.pippard@iucn.org)

Email of the CEPF Executive Director: [cepfexecutive@conservation.org](mailto:cepfexecutive@conservation.org)”

VESS will respond to grievances in writing within 15 working days of receipt. Claims will be filed, included in project monitoring, and a copy of any grievance will be provided to the CEPF Secretariat.

#### **15. Budget:**

As the obtaining of prior informed consent from the communities for the bat surveys will occur at the time of the questionnaire survey, there will be no additional cost and the costs will be covered in the CEPF budget. Reporting of safeguards will be incorporated into the project reporting and should not incur additional expense.