

## Social assessment – indigenous peoples

### The emperor, the king and the little pig: status of the lost rats of Guadalcanal The University of Queensland

#### Indigenous Peoples in the project area

##### Guadalcanal

Guadalcanal is the largest island in the Solomon Islands and also the highest (reaching over 2,300m above sea level). The Guadalcanal Watersheds Key Biodiversity Area spans an area of 376,146Ha from lowland forest to the summit of Mt Popomanaseu. A number of different tribal groups retain ownership of various parts of Guadalcanal and villages are present across both coastal and inland sections of the island. We proposed to commence work in two regions where we had a long association with landowners: the Kovi Basin; and Guadalcanal Highlands. The landowners of Kovi Basin identify their tribal area as commencing at Tasahe (south western Honiara) to the Lungga River (including the Lungga Plateau which attains an elevation of 800m above sea level). Our collaborators (Uluna tribe) from Guadalcanal Highlands identified the region from Keresapo Village to Mt Popomanaseu (highest point of Guadalcanal) as the second area where we could commence our project. This allowed us to deploy cameras along elevational transects from lowland forest to montane cloud forest (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Map of Guadalcanal identifying sites to be used for camera trap surveys.

## **Potential positive and negative impacts**

### Positive

One major benefit of our surveys was income generation through payment of guides, landowners and porters, and buying local produce. Although villagers in the Guadalcanal project area mostly live a subsistence lifestyle, people need income typically for non-perishable foods, medical and school expenses, as well as manufactured materials such as clothes, fuel and batteries. Sources of income in regional villages are very limited (mainly selling items in local markets).

Another important benefit was education, capacity building and training. The project collaborated with SICCP scientist Corzzierrah Posala and provided further training in the use of camera traps.

Information collected in our surveys also helped promote the protection of forests from industrial logging and mining. This outcome can benefit entire communities through provision of clean water, building materials for the whole village, and healthy populations of terrestrial game animals and marine life for harvesting. Cultural heritage is also conserved (kastom sites /sacred sites).

### Negative

We did not identify any adverse impacts as a result of this project. This is because our project lasted just 18 months in total, and only approximately 3 months of fieldwork was undertaken. Our methods were non-invasive, not prescriptive, and were tailored to different communities.

Because our surveys were relatively brief at each site and employment opportunities limited, one possible negative impact we identified was conflict between households or villages over who is hired. If payment and employment of local guides was not handled carefully, disagreements could be a problem because communities are organised into hereditary groups and village governance is hierarchical. We did not decide which members of the community to be hired, this is decided by Uluna tribe leaders.

A minor negative impact of hiring local guides was tobacco use. Most guides and porters smoked tobacco but we do not believe this project led to any increase in tobacco use.

Future conclusions derived from this project may be that hunting of native rats is unsustainable. In the longer term, prevention or regulation of hunting these species could negatively affect the poorest households by reducing protein availability. However, it is our observation that these rats are rarely hunted and are not a priority source of protein on Guadalcanal.

## **Consultation with affected communities**

In the Solomon Islands, there is a process of hierarchical discussions led by customary landowners and the local community that must be adhered to before anyone who is not an owner can work in forests (or to visit them for any purpose), even in cases of a simple observational visit to a site. Our discussions began with tribal representatives who discussed the project with council of village chiefs.

We have consulted partner communities in the planning phase of this project. This took place during visits to Kovi basin communities (2010 - 2014), and Keresapo Village (2013 – 2014). All of our discussions took place in Solomons pidgin, in informal, village or town settings. When seeking permission for the proposed surveys, we explained the project in detail, including the proposed method, project duration, participants, purpose and expected outcomes. In these discussions, we did not dominate the conversation and time was given such that they were able to freely to express their views and any concerns.

Investigators leading this project have developed associations with the involved communities over many years. Communities in this project were happy for the proposed surveys to occur and gave consent, including clear terms of access, verbally.

### **Measures to avoid adverse impacts and provide culturally appropriate benefits**

The long-term relationships between Tyrone Lavery and involved communities have been built over several years. Adverse impacts were avoided by maintaining honesty and transparency with the methods and results of the surveys and constant contact with Guadalcanal project members. We encouraged involvement in the project by community members to whatever level they saw as appropriate. Communities were involved in determining the best places to target these species and any future proposed management measures will be culturally appropriate, determined in consultation with communities.

### **Monitoring**

At the beginning and end of each field survey period at each community we used informal discussions to monitor local opinion, positive and negative outcomes of the project. No negative comments were received.

### **Grievance mechanisms**

People were encouraged to register any grievances with community leaders at the project sites. Any grievances raised with the project leads or third-party contact were to be communicated to Lysa Wini the in-country Project Liaison and subsequently the CEPF Regional Implementation Team at IUCN within 15 days, together with a plan for remedial action (if any is required). No grievances were recorded.

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