

CEPF FINAL PROJECT COMPLETION REPORT

I. BASIC DATA

Organization Legal Name: BirdLife International

Project Title (as stated in the grant agreement): Conservation in the Cooks: Setting Priorities, Building Capacities

Implementation Partners for this Project: Te Ipukarea Society Inc

Project Dates (as stated in the grant agreement): Apr 1, 2010-Mar 31, 2012

Date of Report (month/year): June 2012

II. OPENING REMARKS

Provide any opening remarks that may assist in the review of this report.

III. ACHIEVEMENT OF PROJECT PURPOSE

Project Purpose: The long-term impacts of this project will be to provide an improved national capacity for the sustainable management of KBAs in the Cook Islands by promoting a network of Site Support Groups supported by strong NGO and government partnerships. The NGO community will have enhanced capacity to develop a coherent programme of work based around KBAs.

Planned vs. Actual Performance

Indicator	Actual at Completion
Purpose-level: The short-term impacts of this project will be enhanced awareness and ownership of KBAs within the Cook Islands, the promotion of site management plans (restoration plans) and Species Action Plans, the development of a staffing capacity at TIS that will facilitate the accessing of other funding opportunities and the development of follow-up projects.	A series of Key Biodiversity Areas have been identified across the Cook Islands, using both terrestrial and marine fauna/flora as trigger species. A restoration plan has been developed for the Suvarrow National Park Key Biodiversity Area, with expectations to establish further management plans at other sites as opportunities arise. This has resulted in further funding at one site, Suvarrow, to eradicate rats from some of the islets within the atoll. The identification of the Takitumu Conservation Area as a Key Biodiversity Area has supported the work of their Site Support Group, the TCA Coordinating Committee. An example Species Action Plan was prepared for the Rarotonga Starling, although the species turns out to be under less threat than originally anticipated and so priority actions are limited. Considerable work on developing TIS capacity was undertaken, both through funding via CEPF and additional funding through Jensen. This has established a robust governance and a transparent budgetary

	process, laid out a 5 year strategic plan for the organization and established a fundraising plan.
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Describe the success of the project in terms of achieving its intended impact objective and performance indicators.

Establishing a suite of Key Biodiversity Areas has enabled the identification of priority conservation work for species and site conservation. The marine KBAs, in particular, have focused attention on gaps in knowledge regarding conservation priority species which will, hopefully, be remedied in years to come. The opportunity to talk to island communities, explaining the uniqueness of their flora/fauna, has raised new awareness about the uniqueness and global importance of their biodiversity which, with continued support and encouragement from TIS, will develop into careful management to maintain the biodiversity.

The elevation of TIS as a respected, national environmental NGO has been spectacular. TIS is now considered to be a serious contributor to the resolution of environmental issues with accepted expertise on bird conservation in particular. This project has enabled TIS to develop a very positive relationship with the government environment ministry National Environment Service (NES) to the point where the first Memorandum of Understanding between NES and TIS has been developed. The project has developed a solid Strategic Plan and Fundraising Strategy for TIS in order to present a more focused, professional organization and guide the work of TIS.

Were there any unexpected impacts (positive or negative)?

The acknowledgement of TIS by the government and community as a respected environmental organization was unexpected. The profile of TIS has been raised significantly and the organization has been invited to become a member of several government and non-government committees.

IV. PROJECT OUTPUTS

Project Outputs:

Planned vs. Actual Performance

Indicator	Actual at Completion
Output 1: A complete and agreed set of IBAs / KBAs is published and disseminated among all key stakeholders in the Cook Islands and the Pacific region.	
<i>Indicator 1: A network of experts and advisors establish a Project Steering Group to support data needs, provide technical advice and enhance the sustainability of the project results</i>	An in-country Project Steering Group was established at the outset of the project and has ensured that results collected are most appropriate for the purposes of furthering conservation effort within the Cook Islands.
<i>Indicator 2: A desk-based revised KBA inventory including IBAs is available for peer review</i>	A KBA/IBA inventory was prepared, disseminated around the PSG, to BirdLife and Conservation International representatives, comments taken on board and revised for publication.
<i>Indicator 3: New data is available on data deficient sites in particular internationally important seabird populations</i>	Surveys of seabirds in the Northern Isles of the Cook Islands was undertaken. However, due to mechanical problems with the vessel used, not all sites were visited. This leaves some sites as data deficient to be surveyed when the next opportunity arises.
<i>Indicator 4: Communities on KBAs have a</i>	Presentations on the findings from the KBA

<p><i>greater awareness of biodiversity, sustainable management and improved links with government and NGOs</i></p>	<p>assessment have been made to communities on all accessible islands. This has raised awareness, within these communities, of the uniqueness and global importance of their fauna/flora which, with continued support and encouragement by TIS and project partners (NHT and TCA) will result in sustainable management on the sites. Two sites have already established Site Support Groups where sustainable management is central to the discussion process. It is anticipated that, given time and further contact between communities and TIS, other communities will revive their conservation management groups.</p>
<p><i>Indicator 5: A joint set of IBAs and KBAs identified using A1, A2 and A4 criteria are agreed</i></p>	<p>13 KBAs have been identified (7 of which also qualify as Important Bird Areas), with 3 further sites classed as Candidate KBAs based on red-listed threatened or restricted range species with limited data on abundance and distribution. 7 of the KBAs have a substantial marine component.</p>
<p><i>Indicator 6: A combined IBA and KBA inventory is published and data is uploaded to the World Bird Data Base (WBDB) and contributes to the Cook Islands Natural Heritage Trust Biodiversity Database</i></p>	<p>An inventory of the KBAs in the Cook Islands has been prepared and printed. This has been disseminated around all stakeholders in the Cook Islands and will be posted to other interested parties in the Pacific. Data collected for the KBA assessment has been logged into the CINHT Biodiversity Database while information will have been uploaded to the World Bird Database by the end of June.</p>
<p>Output 2: Produce Site Management / Restoration Plans for priority species and sites in the Cook Islands</p>	
<p><i>Indicator 2.1: Information gathered on the status of the Rarotonga Starling and Rarotonga Cyrtandra (Cyrtandra rarotongensis) to inform the red-listing process and support Species Action Planning</i></p>	<p>Surveys for both species were co-ordinated, in conjunction with the Cook Islands Natural Heritage Trust. The findings will be used to update current status for both species in the red-listing process. Plans for further action for both species have been discussed.</p>
<p><i>Indicator 2.2: Model Species Action Plans published for Rarotonga starling and Rarotonga Cyrtandra</i></p>	<p>It was felt, by the Project Steering Group, to be inappropriate to prepare a Species Action Plan for the Rarotonga Cyrtandra due to the rarity of the species and the likelihood that such a plan would draw attention to it and further threaten its status. A poster has already been produced on rare Cloud Forest plants of Rarotonga including the Cyrtandra which raises local awareness of their significance but is careful not to identify specifically where these plants are located. A SAP was prepared for the Rarotonga Starling (based on a model developed by the Australian government) which highlights future actions, the priority of these actions and the cost of undertaking these actions. This should</p>

	provide a useful template for future SAPs completed for the Cook Islands most vulnerable species.
<i>Indicator 2.3: Peer reviewed restoration plans (feasibility studies and operational plans) for the restoration of Suvarrow and Takutea and other sites that may have restoration potential</i>	A restoration plan (both the feasibility study and the operational plan) has been prepared and peer-reviewed for Suvarrow. Further funding will enable rat eradication to be undertaken later this year. A feasibility study could not be produced for Takutea due to the lack of current data resulting from the failure of the boat to reach Takutea following the northern group seabird survey. Discussions with landowners of Takutea (based on Atiu) have commenced and a funding proposal written with the ultimate aim of developing a restoration plan for that island also.
Output 3: NGOs, government agencies and local communities have improved capacity to set conservation priorities and implement site- and species-based conservation programmes	
<i>Indicator 3.1: Staff of locally based NGOs have the capacity to identify, monitor and review KBAs and are able to manage and update data resources.</i>	Locally-based staff have, with support from both BirdLife and CI staff, identified the KBAs within the Cook Islands. They have also developed a monitoring programme based on changes in status of the KBAs and have included a five-year review of the KBA-IBA directory in their strategic plan
<i>Indicator 3.2: TIS is a staffed NGO with a strategic plan in place that addresses species and KBA priorities and works in partnership with national bodies</i>	TIS now has full-time staff in place, a 5 year strategic plan (2012-2016) that outlines next steps and regular liaison with other national bodies, including government departments, in the Cook Islands. This project has helped TIS develop its first Memorandum of Understanding with the government environment agency, the National Environment Service.
<i>Indicator 3.3: A TIS fund raising plan that will support work on priority sites and species</i>	TIS now has a fund-raising plan in place that identifies site and species work, together with a review of the level of involvement in a range of environmental issues across the Cook Islands.
<i>Indicator 3.4: A network of Site Support Groups established on priority sites for management (i.e. sites where Restoration plans / SAPs are developed).</i>	TIS has promoted 2 Site Support Groups to date (on Suvarrow and Takitumu Conservation Area IBAs) and is in positive dialogue with local communities on Atiu (for both Atiu and Takutea IBAs), Aitutaki, Mangaia, Mauke and Mitiaro.

Describe the success of the project in terms of delivering the intended outputs.

The project has successfully delivered on the intended outputs. The project has furthered knowledge about priority areas and species within the Cook Islands, identified gaps in current knowledge regarding species numbers and distribution and furthered knowledge regarding the current status of many of these species. Raising awareness among communities associated with

the IBAs/KBAs within the Cook Islands has developed throughout the project. There are now 2 Site Support Groups associated with IBA/KBAs while positive discussions are ongoing with communities associated with another 6 KBAs. The project has also provided substantial support to enable TIS to establish itself as a professional NGO well positioned to champion environmental issues within the Cook Islands.

Were any outputs unrealized? If so, how has this affected the overall impact of the project?

The inclusion of the IBA and KBA sites onto the World Biodiversity Database is currently being undertaken at the BirdLife regional office – and will be conveyed back to TIS when complete. There are opportunities here to capture the conservation actions undertaken for the IBAs/KBAs in the Cook Islands to contribute to national, regional and global targets/achievements. This has had little impact on the current project but will, over time, provide a database with standardized reporting of conservation actions for each of the prioritized sites and in line with other IBAs and KBAs.

V. SAFEGUARD POLICY ASSESSMENTS

Provide a summary of the implementation of any required action toward the environmental and social safeguard policies within the project.

We contacted the northern group communities well in advance of our visit there and were careful about the message we were conveying to them about the seabird survey. The management of seabirds in the northern group is a sensitive issue because the birds are harvested as an alternative source of protein. It was important to emphasize that we were not coming to stop them from harvesting their birds but we were coming to help them assess the status of populations and to identify invasive alien species threats and the feasibility for eradication.

During presentation of the results of the IBA/KBA analysis, it was important to let communities know that the decision to protect an area or conserve a species remains with them. However, the importance of their site because of the threatened and/or restricted range species they contain was stressed. In addition, the importance of Suvarrow as a site with globally significant congregations of the Lesser Frigatebird and Sooty Tern was also emphasized.

VI. LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE PROJECT

Describe any lessons learned during the various phases of the project. Consider lessons both for future projects, as well as for CEPF's future performance.

It is important for the implementing organisation to be clear about all details regarding specific project outputs from the outset. For example the implementing organisation (TIS) assumed that a "feasibility study" for a rat eradication would be an assessment of affordability, accessibility to the site and ability to eradicate rats, rather than a comprehensive assessment with much more detail. This caused the lateness of the completion of the feasibility study.

This has been a great lesson for TIS and after completing the Suvarrow feasibility study with the assistance of BirdLife, TIS is now confident to write feasibility studies for other rat eradication work in other sites in partnership with technical experts and is aware of the time required to do that.

Project Design Process: (aspects of the project design that contributed to its success/failure)

Project Execution: (aspects of the project execution that contributed to its success/failure)

VII. ADDITIONAL FUNDING

Provide details of any additional donors who supported this project and any funding secured for the project as a result of the CEPF grant or success of the project.

Donor	Type of Funding*	Amount	Notes
Jensen	C	Euros 9,000	Funding to enhance capacity development for TIS as an NGO and BirdLife partner
Packard	A	USD 32,000	Contributed to the North Islands seabird survey.
EU project	A	Euros 33,000	Contributing to the development of biosecurity plan on Suvarrow.

***Additional funding should be reported using the following categories:**

- A** *Project co-financing (Other donors contribute to the direct costs of this CEPF project)*
- B** *Complementary funding (Other donors contribute to partner organizations that are working on a project linked with this CEPF project)*
- C** *Grantee and Partner leveraging (Other donors contribute to your organization or a partner organization as a direct result of successes with this CEPF project.)*
- D** *Regional/Portfolio leveraging (Other donors make large investments in a region because of CEPF investment or successes related to this project.)*

Provide details of whether this project will continue in the future and if so, how any additional funding already secured or fundraising plans will help ensure its sustainability.

The next stages of the work programme have been incorporated into the TIS Strategy. The aim of this project, to identify KBAs/IBAs within the Cook Islands, has been successful in achieving a suite of priority sites. There are still further sites that may be identified in the future once increased data becomes available but identification of these will not form a core part of a future project.

The next steps for the KBA/IBA programme is to monitor and report on the success of these sites as priority areas for conservation. Funds are being sought to enable this monitoring to be undertaken. In addition funds are being sought to develop the Local Empowerment Programme, which this project has been successfully initiated through the identification of 2 Site Support Groups. There is every hope that further SSGs can be established within the Cook Islands thereby ensuring improved conservation status for many of the priority sites within the country.

Finally CEPF have funded the eradication of rats from islets within the Suvarrow atoll, a project to be undertaken in 2012, and then followed up through monitoring and biosecurity advice under a BirdLife Pacific EU Island Restoration project.

VIII. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

VIII. INFORMATION SHARING

CEPF is committed to transparent operations and to helping civil society groups share experiences, lessons learned and results. One way we do this is by making programmatic project documents available on our Web site, www.cepf.net, and by marketing these in our newsletter and other communications.

These documents are accessed frequently by other CEPF grantees, potential partners, and the wider conservation community.

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