



TE IPUKAREA SOCIETY

*Caring for our Environment
Taporoporo i to tatou Ao Rangi*

Kia Orana e te katoatoa. Teia te nuti no Māti 2020.

Welcome to the March 2020 edition of our newsletter. We hope you are all coping as well as can be expected in these uncertain times with Covid-19.

It is with great sadness that we note the passing of our friend and colleague, the renowned Pacific botanist Dr Arthur Whistler. We had the pleasure of a visit from Art early last year, when he took our staff on a field trip sharing his wealth of knowledge of native and introduced plants. He will be sorely missed in Samoa, and the rest of the Pacific.



The late Dr Art Whistler at the Takitumu Conservation Area sharing his passion for plants with former TIS staff members Liam and Jessie

Our intern Andrea George has now completed her 2 month internship. We wish you the best of luck with your future studies and know you will excel in whatever path you choose to follow.

Finally, a big meitaki ma'ata to Kia Orana Villas who is our first Gold Corporate sponsor for 2020!

We understand many of our members and corporate sponsors will be feeling financial pressure at this time, so we are very grateful for any assistance, big or small.

Alanna guest speaker at Rotary

Earlier this month, Alanna attended a special combined dinner with Rotaract and Rotary Rarotonga to celebrate World Rotaract Week and to introduce Rotaract's new executive.

As a guest speaker at the dinner, Alanna introduced an exciting upcoming project for Te Ipukarea Society.

We hope to collaborate with Rotaract, Rotary and others to kick off this project once we receive grant funding. Watch this space!



Alanna as guest speaker at Rotaract and Rotary function

Has Mother Nature had enough?

We are not listening to Mother Nature – and now she has sent us all to our rooms to think about our poor behaviour.

The current almost worldwide lockdown with Covid-19 has helped us stop and consider how we continue to add additional abuse to our Earth despite the ravages of climate change, pollution and over development.

The Cook Islands Government has done an excellent job of responding to this health emergency. Parliament last week quickly dealt with the current COVID-19 virus legislation and approved very welcome emergency funding.

On the other hand, Government are already planning a rapid return to some questionable development priorities. At its sitting, Parliament also approved an additional \$95,000 for the Seabed Mining Commission. This money is to enable Government to get their seabed mining exploration plans underway.



Sir David Attenborough – Deep Sea Mining is ‘beyond reason’

This rush to add further impacts to our island home comes amidst several international warnings about what seabed mining could mean for our future.

Environmental groups in New Zealand are this week celebrating a significant Court of Appeal victory against seabed mining of iron-sands in Taranaki. The decision focused on the need to be cautious in the face of unknown environmental effects.

The famous naturalist, Sir David Attenborough, also recently urged governments to ban deep sea mining. His advice is based on a recent study by Flora and Fauna International which warned of “potentially disastrous” risks to the ocean’s life-support systems if it goes ahead.

In the foreword to the report, Sir David said:

“The fate of the deep sea and the fate of our planet are intimately intertwined. That we should be considering the destruction of these places and the multitude of species they support – before we have even understood them and the role they play in the health of our planet – is beyond reason.”

He went on to highlight the importance of the deep sea for the global climate and the proper functioning of ocean habitats. The rush to mine this pristine and unexplored environment risks creating terrible impacts that cannot be reversed.

The study warns plans to mine the seabed could cause significant loss of biodiversity, disruption of the ocean’s “biological pump”, and the loss of microbes important for storing carbon. The mining process may also create plumes of sediment that smother areas far from mining sites and kill wildlife.

Te Ipukarea Society has joined a number of other organisations that have recently called for a 10 year moratorium on seabed mining.



Alanna researching deep seabed samples at the University of Hawaii. There is so much more to learn about the biodiversity of the deep sea.

The Deep Sea Conservation Coalition said a moratorium will allow time for the environmental risks to be more comprehensively understood. It will also allow time to more fully assess the social and economic risks and find alternative sources for the responsible production and use of the metals. This could include a transformation to a resource efficient, closed-loop economy, and more responsible terrestrial mining practices.

Conservation International, who have played a significant part in helping the Cook Islands establish our Marae Moana Marine Park, are also calling for a 10 year moratorium.

They say this is needed in order to allow for scientific studies to comprehensively understand the risks and allow time to develop approaches that reduce these risks and manage deep-sea ecosystems to ensure no loss of biodiversity, critical ecosystems, and the ecosystem services they provide.

COVID-19 has been a tragic event for us and the world, and hopefully will end soon. But meanwhile we should also learn from our experience. We should consider this a message from Mother Nature, telling us it is time to slow down and reflect on the important things in life, and to be cautious about how we move forward.

We need to treat our world with care. If we stuff up again, Mother Nature's next response may be far worse!

Funky Friday sessions at Apia Te Uki Ou

In March TIS staff took a Funky Friday session each Friday with a group of students at Apia Te Uki Ou, focusing on sustainability.

The initiative started with a beach clean-up and waste audit one week, followed by nature conservation photography the next. The students, with a range of ages, then honed their filming skills by producing short videos on environmental issues.



Our environment through the eyes of youth – nature photography by Apia Te Uki Ou students

The final session was a freshwater ecology learning experience catching fish and chasing eels at the stream by the Empire Theatre. Stephanie Jansen from Discover Marine and Wildlife Eco Centre lined the children up across the stream to guide the small fish into nets.

The fish were taken for the rescued birds and Ponu the turtle, currently at the wildlife centre. TIS member and ATUO teacher aide Bernie Whittaker won the prize for most rubbish collected on the day!



Learning about freshwater ecology at the Empire Stream

An interview with a dedicated beachcomber

Te Ipukarea Society recently visited Motu Taakoka in Muri, to observe which seabirds were present during this time of the year and to look for potential nesting or roosting sites.

Grey herons (Kotuku) and a few Wandering Tattlers (Kuriri) were still observed feeding along

the motu's rocky shoreline, packing it on before their long journey back north. While no nesting/roosting sites were discovered but there was a distinctive seabird smell present.



TIS seabird surveying team survey the interior of Taakoka.
Meitaki ma'ata to KiteSup for sponsoring kayaks for the team.

While we were there, we bumped into this beachcomber who was about to depart our shores for Alaska, completely oblivious to the current COVID-19 concerns and the havoc this was causing. He very politely agreed to be interviewed.

Q - We're delighted to have a Wandering Tattler (WT) with us today. Could you please tell us more about your travels?

WT – Thanks its lovely to be here. Travelling can be pretty exhausting, I can tell you that much for free.

Q – I bet! So please tell us how it works. You and your mates breed in the Northern Hemisphere? And then what?



A lone Kuriri (Wandering Tattler) fattening up before its long flight back to the Northern Hemisphere

WT – Yes we breed in Alaska or in North West Canada. We are a shoreline bird but we like to breed along the gravelly streams in the northern mountains. After that I just choose a holiday destination in the South Pacific for summer. Actually I came across a copy of the Escape Magazine and saw a story about Suwarrow and Te Ipukarea Society's work there to make the island better for birds like me. It looked interesting, so I thought I would go and have a look. Unfortunately, I was blown off course by Cyclone Wasi and ended up here in Rarotonga.

Q – Oh well, Suwarrow's loss is our gain! So what did your flight path look like from Alaska to the Cooks?

WT – If you imagine running a string directly from Alaska to the Cook Islands, that's pretty much it.

Q – And did you stop on the way?

WT – Nah, I used to have a stopover in Hawaii but found the wings seized up, making it harder to get going again.

Q – But that's incredible?!

WT – Yes well, I was able to catch my breath once I got here of course.

Q – So hang on a minute, you didn't stop at all? You just gunned it down?

WT – That's right, no stops. I just slicked my feathers back and flew 12,000 km of mostly open ocean. 9 days straight for the Cook's.

Q – 9 days without stopping? That's amazing.

WT – Once I did it in 8 and a half days... that was a personal best.

Q – Now you're preparing to do this all over again, in the other direction?

WT – Correct, that's why I've put on a few extra kgs while I was here.

Q – You'll fly that off no doubt?

WT – That's the plan! Take the word from this Tiny Tattler, if you've stacked on some weight, vigorous exercising non-stop for a week or more works wonders!

Q – Terrific, hey thanks for taking the time to give us an exclusive insight into your travels, I know you have places to be!

WT – I'm just waiting for those clouds to come in, so I can sneak past Customs and Air Traffic Control. I don't want to quarantine in NZ before I fly north.

Q – Pack something warm, it might get chilly up there at cruising altitude!

WT – Cool, see you next summer, maybe in Suwarrow! I'll be the one on the beach stuffing myself on insects, crustaceans and juicy crabs.

Credit to the very funny "Clarke and Dawe" for the inspiration!

Environmental Advocacy

The National Environment Service (NES) has begun its review of the Environment Act 2003 and has developed a draft policy to inform this proposed new legislation.

Te Ipukarea Society staff members Kate, Alanna and Andrea attended the stakeholder workshop earlier this month and then, along with our Technical Director Kelvin, met with NES staff again to give more detailed feedback.



The TIS team meeting with staff of National Environment Service to discuss strengthening the Environment Act.

We are supportive of the proposed direction and general principles set out for the review. We will continue to advocate for a more stringent legal framework which has greater provision for: public participation; transparency; good decision making and effective monitoring and compliance.

We also attended the Biodiversity meeting for Ridge to Reef to confirm the projects and budgets for Quarter 2. Kelvin will continue as co-chair of this forum for the remainder of the project.

Takeaway Coffee Cups – at your disposal

We are sorry to be the ones to say that your love affair with the disposable coffee cup is over – in the name of the environment. Think of it as a bit like ending a toxic relationship. One that you didn't know you were in.



Get your reusable cup and support Marumaru Atua at the same time!

While we in the Cook Islands love our coffee on the run, the vast majority of disposable coffee cups can't be recycled. Yes, they're made of paper, but in order to hold liquid they are often lined with plastic or similar. Not to mention the plastic lids headed straight for, you guessed it - the landfill.

Our office at TIS has two worm bins – arguably more like bug hotels, but all those twitchy hungry organisms do a great job of demolishing our lunch waste and providing nutrient rich soil for our vege garden. Sometimes if we see the words 'compostable' on the label of a cup or utensil, we choose to accept the challenge and chuck it in our worm bin to let those little beasties do their worst. It's not always that successful, truth be told.

Currently in our worm bin we have a 'compostable' coffee cup that we can confirm is

really, not compostable at all. Even the cockroaches won't go near it, and that's saying something!

A lot of the disposable coffee cups are coated in a bio-plastic which is made from plants not oil. While this is definitely a lot better than petroleum based plastic, it does require commercial hot composting which we don't have readily available here in the Cook Islands. Not to mention the energy that goes into production of single use cups.

Yes, these are the pressures inherent in living in a society of convenience. We love it. Don't judge.

Somewhere along the line, takeaway coffee became a status symbol, showing just how busy and important we are! But we believe that perhaps in the not too distant future, carrying takeaway cups will suffer the same negative image of walking down the street with a cigarette.

Luckily for us in Rarotonga, reusable coffee cups are available for sale in lots of great cafes and at CITC. Try Love Café, Reefside, Beluga, Vibe and more. Or why not support the Marumaru Atua vaka and purchase one of the gorgeous green & black cups for sale as a fundraiser. Text Cecile on 54107 to get yours now!

Change really can come over a cup of coffee. Get in on it and ditch your addiction to that paper coffee cup – go reusable and be seen to be green.

Vodafone Cook Islands – Turning from Red to Green

As a major employer and key player in the business community, we wanted to know what strategy Vodafone Cook Islands had for addressing environmental sustainability. So we asked them.

Electricity usage is a high source of emissions, especially for a telecommunications provider. A total of 107 solar panels powering up to 185 watts each, are installed at the company's main headquarters. These power operations of business in Parekura, dramatically reducing energy costs. In the Outer Islands, solar energy is also responsible

for the day-to-day operations of its offices and stations.

Over recent years, some of the older fuel powered work vans have been replaced by electric vehicles. The company now has four electric vehicles in its transportation fleet, with more on order.



Vodafone Cook Islands's growing fleet of electric vehicles

The company plans to use technology to embark on several sustainable ventures. As a start it wants to help achieve a paperless society.

Changing to email for bills has alone meant that up to 2500 paper bills don't need to be printed per month. Stationery items such as diaries, calendars and notepads are no longer purchased for staff, and customer forms and contracts are in the process of being digitized.



Vodafone Cook Islands – moving towards a paperless society

Last year, postal services replaced its manual signature book with a USPS Electronic system. This allows customers to confirm receipt of parcels by

signing electronically via a tablet device, thereby avoiding unnecessary paper use.

Vodafone is currently collaborating with Cook Islands General Transport (CIGT) on how to better manage Vodafone's E-Waste. There are several methods being considered, one of which is doing more on-site recycling of E-Waste by first stripping down and collecting valuable metal or parts that can be reused. The advice of the experts at CIGT is currently being sought, so watch this space!

Recently all the staff at Vodafone did a rubbish cleanup, starting from the Topshape Gym going down to the Punanga Nui market. There was a phenomenal amount of rubbish collected.

The private sector has an important leadership role to play when it comes to tackling climate change and other environmental issues. It says that the big players in town are not only taking this environment business seriously, but that their customers are demanding it too.

Out with the old - in with the new

Here in the Cook Islands we simply do not have the infrastructure required to recycle electronic waste.

This means we rely heavily on collection centres to dismantle all e-waste which includes mobile phones, computers, personal stereos, television sets, and whiteware appliances.

These local collection centres then separate out valuable parts before shipping remaining material back to countries that can properly dispose or further recycle these items. This is not currently an option during Covid-19 pandemic.

The luxury of having collection centres is dependent on having available funding to pay for the shipping and handling costs associated with e-waste. This means that the opportunity to drop off your e-waste to these collection centres is only available at certain times of the year.

By not having an open-door system all year around it has resulted in some people disposing of e-waste

in irresponsible ways from burning, burying or dumping in open sites or streams.



What to do with all the E-waste?

To better manage these issues the Draft Solid and Hazardous Waste Bill due to be considered by Parliament in the middle of this year, proposes a scheme for the payment of an Advanced Disposal Fee by all importers of prescribed goods.

This could mean that electronic products, whiteware appliances and cars brought into the Cook Islands will incur an additional small fee that will go towards the proper disposal of the product once it reaches its end of life.

Meitaki maáta for reading our newsletter – and please keep safe!

From all of us at Te Ipukarea Society

MEITAKI

to our generous supporters



Turamatūtū Bakery



Sands Villas
RAROTONGA



Bergman & Sons est 1976
Cook Islands Black Pearls



Air Rarotonga
the Airline of the Cook Islands



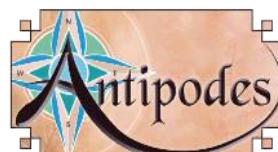
Pacific
Resort
Rarotonga



NAUTILUS
RESORT
MURI BEACH - COOK ISLANDS



KOKA
LAGOON CRUISES



//czechmate



Rarotonga
Printing Ltd



Maire Nui
Tropical Gardens
& The Hidden Spirit Cafe

Xetu moana

The Café



Heritage
Holdings



GOLD

SILVER

BRONZE