



By Patrick Pikacha
Editor

Melanesia: a unique place on earth

Very few places on this planet equal the biological and cultural diversity of Melanesia. The landscape is covered with rich hues of green, with forests packed with hardwoods and lush foliage. A diversity of habitats exist here, with tropical moorlands and grasslands, savannas, mangrove and swamp forests, wet cloud forests, even tropical glaciers, its waters gracefully penetrating the lowland tropical rainforests.

Located in the Southwest Pacific Melanesia is home to the earth's third biggest mass of continuous tropical rainforest. It's bird and plant diversity is just as plentiful as Australia's. There are together more orchid species in Melanesia, than any other area on the planet. The varied mangrove species found in this region are amongst the most wide-ranging and diverse in the world. Rainforests in New Guinea are the only home for nearly all birds of paradise and tree kangaroos on earth. The biggest pigeon, tiniest

parrot and longest lizard survive here. There are weird animals, such as giant – rats that inhabit trees and build their nests like eagles or occupy hollows; and flamboyant amphibians that live in montane and lowland forests, some of which still unknown to science. Melanesia also contains some of the most diverse coral reefs in the world.

Whilst Melanesia's environment is globally remarkable, more importantly it sustains the livelihood of about 9,500,000 inhabitants in 6 countries, West Papua

(politically annexed to Indonesia), Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, New Caledonia and Fiji. It also contains more than one fifth of the world's languages, and unique cultures unlike anywhere on earth. Consequently how to best safeguard this area of high ecological value and the life support structures it possesses, like clean waters and rivers, healthy forests, and sustainable growth rates to name a few, is a matter the people of this region must understand and wisely plan for.



In recent times deforestation caused by logging has played a major factor in the loss of biodiversity in Melanesia. Worse still this has threatened the livelihood of its people.

By far the largest logging concessions occur in New Guinea and Solomon Islands. The World Wildlife Fund estimates that 21 million hectares of forest in Papua New Guinea is included in existing or future logging concessions. A recent FAO report on logging in the Solomon Islands summarizes the impact of logging here; "Logging practices have been criticized for being wantonly

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CONTRIBUTORS IN THIS ISSUE



Asian assault: logging in Choiseul Province, Solomon Islands. (Photo: T. Kabutaulaka)

destructive, with “high grading” being carried out with little regard for the residual forest or the wider environmental implications of forest degradation. Log harvests have far exceeded the sustainable capacity of the merchantable forests, and most projections suggest these forests will be cut out within the next decade.” Thus, the unsustainable rate of deforestation by Asian logging companies swathing through Melanesia’s forests is a matter of serious concern to the long – term livelihood of its inhabitants. And to bring this consequence to peoples attention in particular future leaders is also the purpose of this publication.

The idea of producing a magazine that both documents and captures by digital photography the rich biodiversity of Melanesia has not been without its difficulties. Although the concept needs no justification, the means, equipment and skill to produce a high quality ongoing magazine is risky and challenging.

Some digital photography material in this issue was improved using the free tutorials in the magazine “Digital Photography + Design.” Article submissions are mostly by postgraduate environment students of the University of the South Pacific in Fiji. Young researchers in Melanesia and freelance writers wrote the additional articles in this issue. Together they bring Melanesia’s diverse natural and cultural heritage to life. *Tankiu tumus* and *vinaka vaka levu*.

Unlike other magazines that tend to be more scientific, *Melanesian Geo* targets the general public readership, in particular the future leaders of Melanesia – the high school children and university students interested in Melanesia’s environment, people and culture. I hope that you find something interesting about Melanesia’s fragile environment in this magazine, and wish that you the reader will support its continuing production and circulation throughout Melanesia and abroad.

We would like to hear from writers from Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, New Caledonia, Fiji and West Papua. Or anyone who has carried out research in Melanesia or have an interest in this region. Looking forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely



Tamara Osborne is from Fiji and Editorial Assistant in this publication. As a masters student of the University of the South Pacific (USP), Fiji, she is carrying out research on the Fiji tree frog. Her article on ‘Protecting Fiji’s frogs’ is on page 6.



Patrick Pikacha from Solomon Islands is a masters student at USP. He is currently investigating the ethnobiology and conservation of giant-rats in Solomon Islands. He writes a summary of the threats to Melanesia’s terrestrial environment on page 8.



David Boseto is a freshwater biologist from Choiseul Island in the Solomon Islands, and Masters student of the USP, Fiji. He presents a general overview of the threats to freshwater fishes of Melanesia on page 10.

Kal Muller is a biodiversity researcher of West Papua. He is currently preparing a book on the Biodiversity of West Papua. His article and stunning photographs of the glaciers of New Guinea is printed with permission on page 14.



Jillian Sabetian is from Kolombangara Island, Solomon Islands. She is a graduate of Otago University, New Zealand in Social Anthropology, and currently writes from her home at Vavanga Village, Kolombangara. Her article entitled “Balancing our precious resources” appears on page 20.



Douglas Pikacha native of Marovo Lagoon, Solomon Islands, is a medical surgeon by profession. He is an avid outdoor enthusiast with a concern for the environment. His article on logging and the effects of deforestation on Vangunu Island and Western Solomon Island appears on page 22.



Armagan Sabetian is a marine biologist from James Cook University, Australia. He is currently investigating the ecology of Parrotfishes within marine protected areas in the Solomon Islands. His article “Fishing for Parrotfish in Solomon Islands” is on page 30.



Tony Heorake from Ulawa Island in Solomon Islands, is a postgraduate student in environmental studies at the USP, Fiji. His article on the live reef fish trade appears on page 32.



Dan Savou is a freelance writer from Fiji. His article together with P. Pikacha entitled “Island hopping” appears on page 36.



Placynantis vittensis (P. Pikacha)