

# SCIENCE AND THE MELANESIAN PEOPLE

Science has been practiced in the Melanesian regions since the days of the early European explorers, when shipboard naturalists stepped off the vessels on which they were travelling to explore the wondrous biodiversity that exists on the isles of Melanesia.

Today science is helping to address many of the inter-connected problems that have arisen over the last century, such as biodiversity losses, environmental degradation, habitat fragmentation, and the decline in natural resources available for use by the Melanesian people.

There are a variety of environmental and biological concerns covered in this issue, from mining pollution in the Solomon Islands by Marlon Houkarawa, to population monitoring of the rare and critically endangered Black Wallaby on Goodenough Island (PNG) by Roger James and David Mitchell. Also included in this issue is an article on a taxonomic study of *Syzygium* trees being conducted in the region by a Masters student at ANU, Senilolia Tuiwawa; the results of an analysis of the diet of the endangered Crested Iguana in Fiji by Clare Morrison; an interesting article by Aaron Jenkins of Wetlands International concerning the connectivity of marine and terrestrial aquatic ecosystems.

The crew of *Melanesian Geo* have all worked on scientific projects dealing with biological and environmental issues and are fully aware of the potential of scientific effort to redress problems, particularly biodiversity losses due to the range of natural and human-induced processes presently occurring in the region.

More than often, community-based conservation and management programmes



are being set up by scientific organisations, like universities and associated research institutes. These programmes often begin with the acknowledgement of an existing biodiversity-related concern in a particular area by researchers and/or the local people. Reconnaissance at the site then identifies key problems, and potential avenues for in-depth research.

These community-based projects are the very definition of the relationship that exists between the people of Melanesia and science being practiced in the region. Such projects require the dissemination of information and results from the research to the local people involved in the project. Meetings with the communities are often held to discuss the ongoing project and any outcomes from the research.

Local involvement is paramount to the success of such projects, as the support of the people living in the area is necessary to ensure further environmental degradation

and/or biological harvesting is regulated. The outcomes of the scientific efforts can be used to make decisions about current and future resource use, and for sustainable resource use planning.

It is heartening to note that scientific research in Melanesia is becoming increasingly led by the people of Melanesia themselves. Researchers of Melanesian origin working for research institutions, governmental and non-governmental organisations are becoming increasingly active, enhancing local ownership of the information and scientific data that is being generated.

Since the days of the early European naturalists, science in Melanesia has grown in leaps and bounds with the aid of overseas researchers and scientific institutions. Advances in scientific knowledge and technology are increasingly incorporated into research in Melanesia. But what is even more important is the increasing desire to use science to help our people solve their environmental problems.

This is the key to the future of science in the region.

- TAMARA OSBORNE  
ASSISTANT EDITOR



## Letters



Dear Patrick--a great initiative, I was very sorry to read about Tawatana--I know this village, or knew it in the early 1980s but it was a different place then, before the locust loggers entered

the island.

Keep up the good work.  
Regards

DR JUDY BENNETT  
NEW ZEALAND

Author of the Books "Wealth of the Solomon Islands" & "Pacific Forests:"

Dear Editor,

Live and Learn Environmental Education would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you and your team for such a great achievement in combating and educating Pacific Islands citizens on issues relating to our environment. Your publication is such that is very informative and contains quality information gathered appropriately. I believe that your article will greatly benefit a wide range of audience in terms of research initiatives undertaken by individuals, government institutions and NGO's. Such emphasis should be supported and commended. With our current Education programs on Biodiversity and Education for Sustainable Development in the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, PNG, Fiji, Cambodia and the Maldives, Live and Learn Environmental Education (SI), a non Government Organization would like to continue receiving subsequent issues and would be more than happy to subscribe. We are looking forward to working closely with you and your team in terms of information sharing and development of Educational materials. Best wishes and regards.

JACOB ZIKULI  
Program Manager, Live and Learn, Solomon Islands

## Major contributors in this issue



Mike and Jeanine D'Antonio are currently serving two year contracts as CUSO co-operands and have worked in protected areas throughout Canada, the US and Africa. They now make their home with their three-year-old son, Camas on Tetepare Island in the South Pacific. Read about the benefits of conservation on Tetepare Island on page 8.



Dr Clare Morrison is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of the South Pacific, Fiji. Her research on the Fiji crested iguana is on page 10.



Aaron Jenkins is the South Pacific Islands program manager for Wetlands International. His article on the connectivity of the freshwater ecosystem and the marine environment is on page 12.

Liz Wilson, Luanne Losi and John Pita work for the World Wildlife Fund. Their efforts to conserve leather back turtles around the Bismark Solomons Sea Ecoregion appears on page 18.

An article on leatherback turtle surveys in Solomon Islands was written by John Pita, WWF (third from right), Pita Ramohia, TNC (far right), and Joe Horokou, Environment Dept, SIG (fifth from right). The surveys were sponsored by NOAA (Scott Benson, NOAA researcher standing fourth from right) in collaboration with Conservation International, The Nature Conservancy, and World Wildlife Fund.



Roger James and Dave Mitchell work for the Melanesian Program of Conservation International. Their story on tracking and conserving the elusive black wallaby of Goodenough Island, Papua New Guinea is on page 22.



Senilolia Tuiwawa is a recent postgraduate student from the University of the South Pacific currently pursuing a Masters of Science in plant systematics at the Australian National University. She writes an introductory background of her research involving the evolutionary history of *Syzygium* in Vanuatu.

Fred Patteson and Nester Leguvaka coordinate the National Capacity Self Assessment in Solomon Islands. It is a nationally funded project funded by Global Environment Facility and implemented by UNDP. The project focuses on Solomon Islands compliance to the UN International Environment Conventions. The article is on page 32.

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