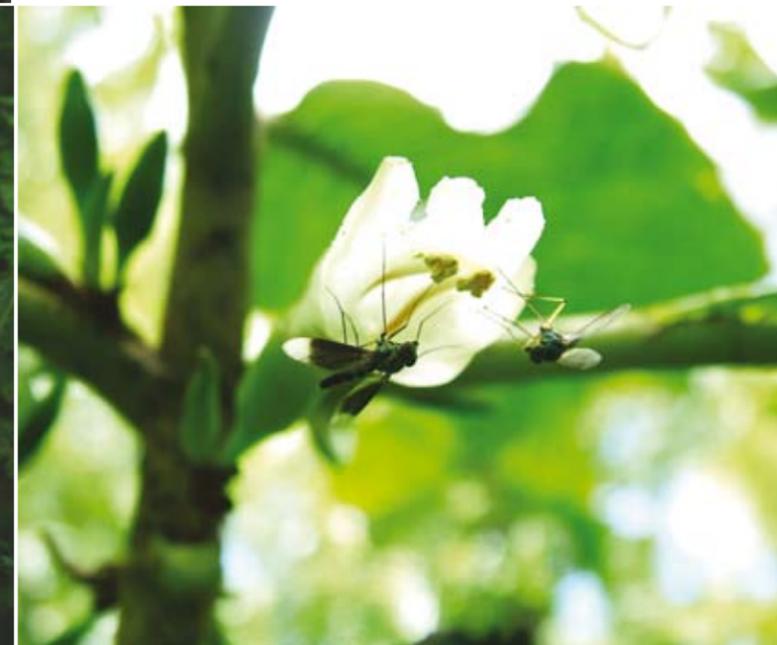




contributing to this project. The plan is to orchestrate detailed field surveys to collect *Cyrtandra*, other gesneriads, and other plant species, throughout the interface zone. This effort will directly serve to answer the important questions about how and why *Cyrtandra* has dispersed into the Pacific but not other gesneriads; the work will generate important distribution information for these and other poorly known plants of the region contributing to our understanding of Melanesia. Local people will have opportunities to participate in field research and gain valuable education and training. This project will also provide funding for training new scientists and conservationists both in country as well as potentially abroad as interns and graduate students.

In the end, I leave Fiji with a renewed sense of purpose. I have made some new friends and I am looking forward to our on-going work in the region. Through continued regional and global support, we stand to unravel an important mystery of the world's biological history and we will help to support the ongoing education of local people to understand and protect this world. I am confident that we are on to something big here. So big that those pesky



Top: Alivereti Naikatini, senior plant taxonomist, South Pacific Regional Herbarium, Suva, Fiji in the field. Above left: *Cyrtandra compressa*. Above right: *Cyrtandra richii*.

David Boseto, from the Solomon Islands, about conducting a broad-scale study of the interface zone. To do so is no small task: the effort will take the permission and collaboration of several countries, as well as thousands of dollars, to complete. I am currently working with my new affiliation, the Marie Selby Botanical Gardens in Sarasota Florida, US, to establish this project as a signature research program there and to acquire funding to conduct the work. Marika and I are also collaborating with the National Tropical Botanical Garden to coordinate this and related projects. The Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh has also expressed interest in

mosquitoes do not seem all that “monstrous” any longer.

John R. Clark's field work in Fiji, conducted in June 2006, was supported by the Higinbotham Trust Award in Botany and by the Gesneriad Society, Inc. as well as private donations from Marge Schmiel. John extends a heartfelt acknowledgment to all those people mentioned in this article. A similar survey was conducted in Samoa in late 2004/early 2005 and John wishes to thank the staff of the Samoan Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment for their assistance. The kind people of Melanesia and Polynesia whom ultimately make this research possible are also acknowledged. If you would like more information on this project or you or someone you know may be interested in participating in this research, please contact John at clarkjr@mail.wsu.edu.

Fiji's Long-legged Warbler thriving

By Vilikesa Masibalavu



Fiji long leg warbler (*Trichocichla rufa*) found in the mountains of Viti Levu.

A recent survey conducted by BirdLife Fiji confirms more new territories of Long-legged Warbler in two of its Important Bird Area's (IBA). A total of three new territories were sighted in the Sovi Basin in December, 2007 and four in the Rairaimatuku Highlands in January 2008. This has brought the total territory of the species to thirty six since it was rediscovered in 2003.

The Long-legged Warbler (or Long-legged Thicketbird) *Trichocichla rufa* is endemic to Viti Levu and Vanua Levu on Fiji. It is known historically from four specimens collected between 1890 and 1894 and a handful of unconfirmed sightings on Viti Levu, and one specimen in 1974 on Vanua Levu. The species was rediscovered in 2003 during a survey undertaken by a partnership of conservation organization in the Wabu Nature Reserve in central Viti Levu.

The BirdLife International Fiji programme undertook a series of field surveys for this and other threatened and endemic birds in 2002-2005 funded by the Darwin Initiative of the UK government. After surveying 18 suitable sites on Viti

Levu and 11 sites on Vanua Levu, the Long-legged Warblers were recorded at just four sites in Viti Levu. Two territories at Monasavu, twelve territories at Wabu, three territories at Sovi Basin and one at Mt Korobaba. The new territories recently sighted are still within these four sites. To date the total territories have increased to six at Monasavu, sixteen at Wabu, thirteen at Sovi Basin and Mt Korobaba still has one because there has not been any further surveys.

What has enabled us to have more sightings is that we now have a much better idea how to survey this species. All recent records have been from old-growth montane forest close to small streams or creeks between 200-800 m. It is exceedingly difficult to find unless calling. Most locations were on steep slopes with unstable land-slide areas where pioneer vegetation, including herbs, *Piper* spp. and tree-ferns, created a dense understory. The Wabu birds were on flatter terrain but the climatic and edaphic effects of the altitude may lead to similar habitat on gentle terrain at 800 m as on very steep slopes at 200 m.

The species appears to be genuinely

localised as there are no records from Mt Tomaniivi which has been visited by many ornithologists, nor from various other montane sites visited by the BirdLife Fiji team after familiarisation with this species at Wabu and Monasavu. However, it could be overlooked at many of these sites, as evidenced by the frequent negative records from the roadside location at Monasavu. It is likely that it is genuinely absent from many areas with its favoured habitat, which have been searched specifically by the BirdLife Fiji team. It has never been recorded away from its favoured habitat of thickets of low vegetation along small streams and creeks, mainly waterfalls and steep slopes.

The Long-legged Warbler had an IUCN Red List status of Data Deficient but this has been re-categorised as Endangered based on this new data which suggests a population that is likely to be <250 birds but without any evidence of a decline. Further surveys are needed at likely sites, especially on Vanua Levu. As a ground species, it may be at risk from introduced predators, notably rats and mongooses. All ground-nesting birds known historically from Viti Levu (up to 15 species of rails and seabirds) have been extirpated by the Small Indian Mongoose *Herpestes auropunctatus* which was introduced to control rats in sugar-cane plantations, and rats may be responsible for otherwise inexplicable declines in arboreal species such as the Red-throated Lorikeet *Charmosyna amabilis*. A pair of Long-legged Warblers with a recently fledged juvenile at Wabu were seen mobbing a mongoose, indicating that some breed successfully in the presence of predators but also that mongoose are present throughout the most remote forests on Viti Levu (and Vanua Levu). Montane forest is being logged in some areas which leads to increased numbers of these invasive alien species but probably does not affect the vegetational suitability of the habitat. The breeding success should be investigated at Wabu and a more disturbed area such as the Monasavu roadside to identify any threats and necessary conservation actions. Most important is active long-term conservation of the key sites, notably Wabu Forest Reserve, the Rairaimatuku Highlands and Sovi Basin.