Okotopa-Noema 2017

Merry Christmas from Te Ipukarea Society

Kia orana tatou katoatoa i teia tuatau Kiritimiti. Our President, Executive Committee, and Staff would like to wish all our members and supporters Merry Christmas and a happy and safe festive season for each of you and your families. Remember to consider creative ways to reduce waste and unnecessary consumption when choosing presents for loved ones. We thank you for your support in 2017 and we look forward to your continued support in 2018,

Kia manuia e kia mataora no te Mataiti ‘Ou

*helpful tip* this year wrap your presents in recycled newspaper to save waste and money.

Alanna’s Time at Miss World 2017

Since having arrived back home from Sanya China, it has been straight back to world of conservation at the Te Ipukarea Society office for Alanna. Her one month Miss World experience has finally wrapped up with some life long memories which she never thought she would ever experience.

“It was definitely a whole new environment for me, from having to wear make up on a daily basis to wearing high heel shoes and fancy dresses. My one month trip felt like an eternity but I was silently surprised by the new friends I had made, who were not your stereotypical pageant girls, which I thought was going to be rare to come across”

Alanna during school visits this year to teach students about composting and worm farming, which was included in her “beauty with a purpose” competition video.

As well as being able to showcase the Cook Islands to the world stage through the Dancers of the world section screened on live TV for the final show, Alanna was also able to use the Miss World platform to screen some of the conservational work that Te
Ipukarea Society have been conducting throughout the Cook Islands.

An important component of the Miss World competition was the ‘Beauty with a purpose category’ where contestants from around the world were to produce a video of themselves raising money for a charity or non-profit organisation which they believed to be of a worthy cause, and to highlight the initiatives these organisations carry out. For this category, Alanna decided to base her beauty with a purpose project around our Mana Tiaki sustainable fundraising initiative, which has been supported by Cook Island Tourism to raise funds for Te Ipukarea Society.

Mana Tiaki is a system where visiting guests have the opportunity to give back to the environment they come to love and enjoy. Here, guests are able to make a donation of their choice during the check-out process of participating accommodations on the island. Donations collected then get channelled through to Te Ipukarea Society who then carry out environmental conservation work.

For Alanna’s beauty with a purpose project, she was able to highlight the work the Society has carried out with the endemic Mangaian Kingfisher bird, the Tanga’eo. TIS developed a management plan for the Tanga’eo in the form of a documentary which can be found on YouTube. This project received support from the Jensen Foundation and Arcadia Fund, through BirdLife International. Alanna also brought attention to a current waste management project TIS has conducted within Cook Islands schools, where students have been introduced to the idea of composting using a composter unit and worm farming to produce organic fertilizers rather than burning organic waste or relying on chemical fertilizers for agriculture. This project received financial support from the Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme administered by UNDP.

Alanna’s beauty with a purpose video was named in the top 20 for the beauty with a purpose category and can be found on YouTube under “Cook Islands Alanna Smith beauty with a purpose” or try this link https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UxvQv6N5EWc

British Conservationists Donate to the Marumaru Atua Rebuild Appeal and Te Ipukarea Society.

Last month’s edition of the Te Ipukarea Society newsletter has proven to be especially rewarding for the Cook Islands Voyaging Society and Te Ipukarea Society. The newsletter has a wide distribution both locally and overseas. The October edition included a short story on the fire that caused severe damage to the Cook Islands traditional voyaging canoe Marumaru Atua. It also included a story on the recent passing of Te Ipukarea Society patron, Dame Margaret Karika Ariki. When British conservationists David and Sarah Gordon read the stories, they were moved to make a very generous donation of NZ$20,000 to the Voyaging Society towards repairs. In addition, they made a $10,000 donation to Te Ipukarea Society, in memory of Dame Margaret’s long term association with Te Ipukarea Society.

The Gordons have shown lifelong commitment to bird conservation and provided ongoing support and assistance to Birdlife Pacific Partners. Together they established the Birdlife International Community Conservation Fund, which has contributed directly to recovery operations for threatened bird species. They have been visiting the Cook Islands for many years, and have previously made donations to support the work of the Takitumu Conservation Area. Their last visit was in October last year, for the Birdlife Pacific Partnership Meeting hosted by Te Ipukarea Society. At that meeting they also made generous donations to the Palau Conservation Society, the Ornithological Society of French Polynesia, and Te Ipukarea Society to support the bird conservation work of those organisations.
In a letter to Te Ipukarea Society, the Gordon’s said that the Cook Islands Voyaging Society is a wonderful concept, conserving the traditions of the Cook Islands people and, most importantly, passing on to the next generation both the skills and the gift of their inheritance. They added that this is so important in a world where traditional values are being lost to the detriment of mankind. It is also a bonus for the natural environment in that these traditions bring people closer to nature so that they feel an affinity and a need to conserve. They have met the Voyaging Society’s president, Ian Karika (who is also Te Ipukarea Society President), a number of times, and know him to be an outstanding man whose values are the real values of the natural world. Hearing of the devastating fire, they felt that it was of the greatest importance that the Vaka be repaired, and they hope that their gift will also encourage others to contribute in whatever way they are able.

As for Te Ipukarea Society, they said the organisation is an excellent example of what a small organisation can do to make a difference, if led by capable and enthusiastic people. It is a model of how a BirdLife partner can and should develop in a small country. They were very glad to have met Liam, Alanna and Kelvin when they attended the Pacific conference in Rarotonga last year. They said it was particularly heartening to see two young people developing their conservation skills under Kelvin’s leadership. They have the capacity to really make a difference in their lifetime. The gift to TIS remembers Dame Margaret and adds thanks to all the other great people who worked on bird conservation in the Cook Islands. This includes the great contribution to the recovery of the previously endangered Rarotonga Fly Catcher, the kakerori, by Ed Saul, whom they also know, as well as Linda Nia, Gerald McCormack and others associated with the Takitumu Conservation Area.

Te Ipukarea Society and the Cook Islands Voyaging Society would like to express their sincere gratitude to the Gordon’s for their very generous donations, and we look forward to seeing them back in the Cook Islands in the near future.

Liam Attends UNESCO Education Workshop

From the 15th-17th November, Liam Kokaua was able to represent the Cook Islands at the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Workshop for Youth Leadership Training on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in Bangkok, Thailand.
UNESCO has been promoting ESD through the Global Action Programme (GAP) launched in 2014. GAP focuses on generating and upscaling ESD action at all levels and in all areas of education, and in sustainable development sectors. Young people are both beneficiaries and drivers of ESD action and are therefore the focus of one of the five priority action areas under the GAP.

The workshop objective was to empower youth leaders from the Asia-Pacific countries to inspire and mobilize other young people in their home countries to actively engage in ESD in order to build more sustainable, just and resilient communities.

Liam was able to form a valuable youth network of successful individuals, working in areas including environmental degradation, poverty, human trafficking, exploitation of domestic servants, and war and conflict.

It was an eye opening experience for Liam seeing the huge size of Bangkok, and the embedded culture of consumption there, being able to see shorelines and wetlands full of plastic and polystyrene, and thousands of street vendors selling every type of product in single-use plastic. It was daunting but also motivating for him to step up his work within our communities in the Cook Islands and abroad.

The final day consisted of a Field Trip to Bang Kachao Island, the “Green Lung of Bangkok”. It is called such due to being the last remaining natural green area in the huge city of over 8 million people, providing much needed oxygen and green space to its inhabitants. It is also a very popular tourist destination for both foreigners and even people who live in Bangkok, wanting to get out of the city.

Top: Bang Kachao, “The Green Lung” is clearly visible from space. Middle: Bang Kachao is a rare peaceful environment amidst an urban jungle. Bottom: Plastic and polystyrene is washed onto Bang Kachao from the city’s Chao Phraya River.
the lense of (N)ature, (E)conomy, (W)ellbeing, and (S)ociety to analyse sustainable development problems affecting the island and its people.

It was an eye opening experience for Liam seeing the huge size of Bangkok, and the embedded culture of consumption there, being able to see shorelines and wetlands full of plastic and polystyrene, and thousands of street vendors selling every type of product in single-use plastic. Seeing such widespread pollution has now been motivating for him to step up his work in spreading awareness around environmental conservation within our communities both in the Cook Islands and abroad.

One of the requirements of the workshop is to run a workshop for youth to address ESD, which will be implemented by February 2018. Liam is now considering ways to create a real impact through this workshop to enhance Education for Sustainable Development here in the Cook Islands.

Meitaki ma’ata to UNESCO and the Government of Japan for approving Liam’s application and funding this opportunity.

Mere Delivers Climate Change Project on Tongareva

Te Ipukarea Society staff member Mary Rauru-McDonald took a break from her usual work balancing cheque books to travel to Tongareva (Penrhyn) Island in September for a combined Climate Change and Waste Management project. The following is her personal account of her experiences taking some “Rarotongan” worms all the way up to our Northernmost and most isolated island, while ensuring they survived the journey!

In September I had the opportunity to travel to the Northern Cook Islands, including Manihiki and Tongareva. The aim of the trip was to deliver and instruct the school children at Omoka and Tetautua schools on the use of Weather Stations and Worm Farms as part of our SRIC Weather Stations project as well as out GEF Small Grants Waste Management project. I was able to secure passage on Taio Shipping’s vessel, the “Lady Moana”.

The day before we left I went around Rarotonga in search of compost worms for the worm farm in case there were none on Tongareva (this turned out to be the case). I was after the wriggly, feisty ones found most often around a pig feeding area. These are the best for composting and known as “Red Wriggler’s”. Eventually I managed to collect about 50 worms in a couple of ice cream containers. The worms were supplied with plenty of pawpaw and lettuce to feed them over the next week that they would spend at sea.

I also purchased two bags of Bakers Compost to use as an initial start in the Worm Farm container and two boxes of apples as a treat for the children (apple’s rarely make it up to Tongareva!). The day we left Rarotonga was cold and rainy and we had a rough crossing through the night to Atiu where “Lady Moana” was to unload desperately needed fuel. Then it was a long exciting, calm sail for four days to Manihiki.

It was a welcome sight when the first motu’s of Manihiki appeared on the horizon. A couple of hours later it was a relief to arrive on land that did not continually rock and roll. We spent two nights in Tauhunu where I stayed with Lawrenca William’s family and Mama Sue. While in Manihiki I met up with Anna Rauru, the Principal of Ruamanu School in Tauhunu. Our TIS project officer Alanna had delivered a worm farm to them the previous month and it was great to see that the composting and worm tea production were going well.

Once the cargo was unloaded it was then off to Tongareva, another 24 hours away. We arrived at night and had to stay off-shore until the next morning, so that we could sail through the narrow reef passage into the lagoon and tie up at the Omoka wharf. Upon arrival I was met by Poti Maeva, the principal of the two schools, Omoka and
Tetautua, and we walked the short distance from the wharf to Omoka School. It was incredibly hot, as well as being windy and dry as they had not had rain for several months, hence there was very little drinking water.

Poti introduced me to teacher Sonny Napa and her 12 students from year 5-8. There was also one student from Tetautua School, Tulia Mamia. Tulia will go back to her school which is located on the far side of the atoll and teach her fellow students what she has learned.

We discussed how to set up the weather stations and how each instrument functions, which includes measuring for humidity, wind speed and direction, UV radiation, barometric pressure, and rain measurement.

We set up the Omoka worm farm under the shade of a tree as worm farms can’t work in full sunlight. The students gathered coconut fibre, bananas, pawpaws, leaves and the two bags of Bakers compost I had bought from Rarotonga and began to establish the worm farm. My “Rarotongan” worms had endured their sea voyage very well during their time at sea. I had also taken some worm tea and compost from our worm farms at Te Ipukarea’s office to show the students what happens once the worms get established in their new home and how to use it on their plants and vegetables they are trying to grow.

We only stayed on Tongareva for a few hours as the captain expected deteriorating weather on our long trip back to Rarotonga and the ship needed to be back to transfer people to the Manea games in Mitiaro.

A big Meitaki ma’ata to the Captain and crew of “Lady Moana”, the William family, Napara family, Kaina family, Poti Maeva, Sonny Napa & Omoka and Tetautua school students. Special acknowledgement to Climate Change Cook Island’s SRIC Project and GEF Small Grants for funding.

Omoka School Principal Poti Maeva and Mere in front of Tongareva’s turquoise lagoon.
Building Resilience To Climate Change In Small Island Pacific States.

Tokelau is located 500km north of Samoa and 600km north-west of Pukapuka, where the Cook Islands and Tokelau share a common marine boundary. In fact Pukapuka is twice as close to Fakaofo in Tokelau as it is to Rarotonga. The three atolls of Tokealu are very similar to our own northern group atolls. The atoll nation has a population of about 1500, and a total land area of only 10 sq.km. It is regularly serviced twice a month by a 2 day voyage from Apia, Samoa, and is the first nation in the world to be powered 100% by renewable energy.

In early October Te Ipukarea Society’s Kelvin Passfield travelled to Tokelau from Samoa as a part of a larger consultation team travelling for the GEF Small Grants Programme. The team travelled on the cargo vessel Fa Sefulu, for consultations on Faka’ofo, Atafu, and Nukunono, the 3 atolls that make up Tokelau. The purpose of Kelvin’s travel was for discussions related to the Australian Government funded Global Environment Facility Small Island Developing States Community Based Adaptation (GEF SIDS CBA) climate change project. This is implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and being delivered by Te Ipukarea Society in Tokelau, Niue, and the Cook Islands. The consultation team were ferried ashore at each island for consultations while the cargo was being offloaded, which afforded 6 to 8 hrs on each atoll for discussions and site visits.

Formal meetings were held with the Taupulega (council of elders) on each atoll where Kelvin explained the project and asked for some ideas about possible projects for Tokelau with the available funds. With only about NZ$60,000 available, a decision needs to be made on whether one larger project on one atoll is undertaken, or whether smaller projects could be undertaken covering all atolls.

Possible project ideas discussed related to ecosystem based foreshore protection, improving access to safe drinking water, and improving the quality of the soil to build resilience to the impacts of climate change. There was also a presentation by two biogas experts from Apia on a proposal for a Waste-to-Energy biogas pilot project for Tokelau. This would be based on utilising pig manure and a biodigester to produce methane gas for cooking. The experts, Mr. Usufono Fepuleai, and Ms. Sose Utu-Fepuleai have a successful biogas plant in Apia at the Youth With a Mission (YWAM Campus) that they use for demonstration purposes. Cook Islander Tom Wichman has trialled biogas plants using pig waste in Rarotonga in the past, but apparently there are none functioning currently, possibly due to the down turn in commercial piggeries.
The final decision on which projects will be implemented in Tokelau is dependent on the three Taupulega of Tokelau, with the decision expected early November.

Te Ipukarea Society would like to extend our sincere appreciation to the UNDP Samoa Office, and in particular GEF Small Grants Programme Sub Regional Coordinator Filifilia Iosefa, as well as the Tokelau Apia Liaison Office, and Loia Tausi form the Tokelau Environment Department, for assisting with logistics for the travel. Funding was provided by Australia through the GEF Small Grants Programme Global Grants.

It’s Time To Start Pushing Towards a Sustainable Tourism Industry

There has been considerable debate about the impacts of tourism on the Cook Islands these few weeks in the local media. We thought it may be timely to document some of Te Ipukarea Society’s activities, and the activities of others, that attempt to reduce the impact of tourism on our little paradise.

As an environmental NGO Te Ipukarea are not anti-tourism, and in fact tourism and its impacts on the environment are among the reasons we were formed back in 1996. However we are supportive of a more sustainable approach to the development and operations of the industry. Until such an approach is adopted, we agree with Sel Napa’s recent comments that any growth of tourism in its current form needs to be strictly controlled. Our infrastructure needs to catch up with our rapid increase in tourism numbers over the past 10 years, to be able to cope with it. While it is great that Government has major infrastructure projects underway, such as the water project and renewable energy, these projects do not deal with the major tourism related issues affecting our environment

Muri Lagoon is a classic example of what can happen if we do not consider the impact of tourism growth on our environment. While influx of waste water from inadequate septic systems is not the only cause, there is little doubt that is a significant factor.

We appreciate that the smaller scale tourism (Air BnB type accommodation as Minister Mark Brown pointed out) generally has a lower impact on our environment and major benefits to our local economy as the money earned on these properties, generally stays in country. It is the high density tourism, where anywhere from 3 to 300 accommodation units are squeezed into small coastal sections, that is having the largest impact on our lagoon

The overflowing landfill is another issue that is getting worse, despite recent improvements in the recycling process. Te Ipukarea Society has been promoting a container deposit (refund to consumers upon return of the empty bottles) system for more than 10 years, in order to generate revenue to be able to ship our glass and plastics offshore. We are very pleased to see some promising progress in the past 12 months with support from WATSAN for the progress of the sustainable financing mechanism. This is referred to as an Advanced Disposal Fee (ADF), and will include the refund deposit and a small sum for recycling costs. WATSAN is also working on a policy to ban polystyrene imports for takeaway foods.
Physical removal of seaweed in Muri Lagoon is just a short term solution. The root cause of the nutrients feeding the seaweed need to be addressed.

Te Ipukarea Society also regularly submit comments on the Environmental Impact Assessments for coastal tourism developments. Typically, our written submissions are that these developments should not proceed unless they can show minimal impact on our environment. These impacts usually relate to sewage disposal and the impact of rock wall revetments on our foreshore. Despite our submissions, invariably the Rarotonga Environment Authority, consisting largely of Members of Parliament from both sides of politics, approve the developments to proceed.

Some tourism operators, including some of the larger resorts, are making a real effort to ensure their hotels, tours and restaurants have minimal impact on our island. For example, they ensure their sewage systems are fully compliant with the regulations, and have an efficient recycling and composting system operating within their own premises, reducing what they have to send to the landfill. A growing number actually make a contribution to the work that Te Ipukarea Society does for our environment, through the Mana Tiaki programme. Unfortunately, others are blindly continuing to operate in favour of their bottom line, the money, with insufficient regard for our Ipukarea. For example, we know several major resorts are digging holes where they burn and bury their rubbish, rather than pay for it to be taken to the landfill. The managers know they would never get away with that approach in Australia or New Zealand, but here they can, so they do! What is needed is more time, effort and money being channelled by these operators into reducing their current impact on our Little Paradise before we go about encouraging additional numbers of tourists to visit. Hopefully these errant operators can be encouraged to follow the lead of those operators who are utilising a more “island friendly” way of doing business.

TIS Seeks an Environmental Intern

Te Ipukarea Society Inc. is seeking an intern to assist with our activities, for a period of 2 to 3 months. Applicants could be a recent school leaver, university graduate, or university student on break. While preference will be given to Cook Islanders with the ability to speak Cook Islands Maori, the main attributes are a passion for protecting our environment and an enthusiastic and responsible approach to the work. The internship may lead to a permanent position at a later date. Closing date 22 December. For more details phone or email details below.

To apply, please send CV, contact details of 3 referees and a 250 word statement about why you would be good for this position to:

Technical Director, Te Ipukarea Society Inc.
PO Box 649, Rarotonga

Or by email info@tiscookislands.org

Thanks for reading our newsletter!

We hope to see you again Next Year!

Ka kite, The TIS Team