Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to you all, our readers, supporters and partners.

Meitaki maāta for all your support this year and we look forward to sharing the year ahead with you.

Meri Kiritimiti message from our President

...and in a FLASH, another year has gone by... does every year end with the same sentiment: Where did this year go?

Is there a way to slow things down? Absolutely. There are many ways. But the most important thing is we have to re-train our minds to embrace the beauty and wonder of slowing things down. Meal preparations, sitting with family, connecting with friends, enjoying the outdoors, repairing items – clothes, lamps, bikes, cars, etc, feeding animals, cleaning areas – indoors and outdoors.

Slowing down to savour every moment to make the action more fulfilling – these are things we can do so that, at the end of the year, we realize we enjoyed so many moments – we savoured all our interactions and time alone – that we didn’t get caught up in the trap of being too busy and needing to make things more convenient and faster so we can move to the next thing to tick off a long list of items.

The beauty of our past Cook Islands ways support the lifestyle where savouring moments is celebrated, let’s embrace these ways and encourage all those whom love and have chosen the Cook Islands as their home to do the same. Relax more and savour each moment and each other, through doing this we will realize the value of our community and our environment and will continue to naturally provide the protective guardianship our Lands and Ocean deserves.

Thank you for all the support this year. Meri Kiritimiti e kia mataora mataiti ou, TEINA Mackenzie, President, Te Ipukarea Society 2019

Welcome Back Alanna

We are very excited to welcome back Alanna Smith who has completed her Masters in Conservation Biology at Victoria University in Wellington. Alanna will be our new Conservation Programme Manager with some fresh new ideas for some exciting projects in 2020. Read Alanna’s account of her year away further in this newsletter.

Inspiring Youth in Conservation and Science

Alanna and Kate represented Te Ipukarea Society at the Ministry of Education junior careers expo. We shared what we do with the year 7-10 students so they might be inspired into potential futures in science, environment and conservation.

Alanna speaks to Apii Nikao students about future careers in conservation and science
We were very impressed with the focus and interest of the students. They managed to fill 3 big whiteboards with their concerns about the environment and ideas on what they can do to make a difference.

Nukutere students keen to join in on our Plastic Battle

The ‘What’s in Our Streams’ aquarium was a big hit, stimulating discussion on threats to stream life and the impacts of invasive species and chemicals on native habitat.

We even had some requests from keen adventurers to climb Maungatea Bluff with us the next time we need to retrieve our bird recorders. Keen green beans!

Our whiteboards were jam packed with student’s personal pledges to make a difference for the environment.

Project Funding from Global Environment Facility – Small Grants Fund

We are excited and grateful to be the recipients of a financial grant from the GEF Small Grants Programme 2019. Watch this space for information on our upcoming waste management project for Mauke and Mangaia.

As members of the Cook Islands Solid Waste Management Committee, we are also supporting the GEF funded project for a rent-a-plate scheme at the Punanga Nui market.

Congratulations to the Mangaia School Committee and to New Hope Church Youth on their success too!

Signing ceremony for recipients of the GEF Small Grants Fund

One Person’s Trash is Another’s Treasure.

The event Te Ora Kopapa Natura O Te Aorangi was held this month, to launch the beautiful upcycled creations of long standing Te Ipukarea Society executive, Sabine Janneck. It was generously hosted by our gold corporate member, Bergman & Sons at the Beachcomber Pearl Market.

We are also celebrating a 5 year anniversary of Sabine and her partner Sasha’s business, The Dive Centre having been a gold corporate sponsor of Te Ipukarea Society. A very big meitaki ma’ata to you both!

Jolene Bosanquet, secretary for Te Ipukarea Society executive spoke at the event:

“It is refreshing to meet someone so passionate about a topic. A topic that many choose to ignore. This passion is both an inspiration for creating art and an effective way to reuse something that is usually considered waste. Meitaki ma’ata for your commitment to the environment of Te Kuki Airani and in particular to Te Ipukarea Society.
Sabine, I acknowledge your purposefulness and your passion for creativity by introducing positive changes in the way we can look at our tita”.

TIS executive committee members, Sabine and Jolene, with one of Sabine’s upcycled creations.

Curiosity Kicks Off Another Epic Journey

Last month we mentioned that our intern Charlee McLean alongside the Cook Islands Voyaging Society and Ministry on Marine Resources set sail on the Maramara Atua vaka to the uninhabited islands of Manuae and Takutea, to conduct research on paua reproduction. Charlee shares her story:

It was an early morning wake up call like no other. The sound of spouting signalled that whales were near and with no hesitation I found myself swimming amongst such mighty yet wonderful humpbacks gracing the ocean with their presence. It was our first day in Manuae and wow! what an amazing kick start to the journey.

Kirby Morejohn, a marine scientist with the Ministry of Marine Resources and organiser of the expedition, guides myself and the team to the first location, where lies the most incredible flourishing reef I had ever set my eyes on. Coated in flowers of paua clams and filled with incredible life, it’s a shame to think the reefs in our Pa Enua were once as vibrant and alive as the uninhabited islands. Where to look? You never were too sure, everything was pleasing to the eye. Nature once again filled my heart with joy.

New to voyaging we learn that the crew must dedicate their time into looking after ‘Mama Maru’. It is believed that if we take great care of our vaka, she’ll take care of us on our journey. And so it was that maintenance was an everyday norm.

Well that was the theory – I just finished cleaning the bathroom when I almost lost my finger after jamming it in a hatch! I wasn’t too fazed about the finger but gutted that I was limited to not being able to do pretty much anything that required my hand.

Anyways, on the plus side I was treated like royalty and slept 14 hours through a storm, waking up in Takutea. I couldn’t really complain I suppose.

Determined to step foot on Takutea, I listened to everyone’s advice not to risk jumping over the reef. So I duct taped almost five layers of gloves to my hand and next thing you know I was waving to the crew from the shore. Not a single regret in the air!

Without a doubt we tend to forget how fortunate we are to call this place our home. Over this past year I have developed a clear understanding that voyaging is something you must actually experience to truly understand the stories we are told as tamariki.
We tend to take simple things for granted, like the wind, stars, currents, swells etc. It’s not until you’re present in the eye of the Pacific Ocean do you begin to appreciate the knowledge of traditional navigation that has been passed down. It is a blessing to say I have and will continue to follow the footsteps of my ancestors sailing the path that was once journeyed with ease, like a freeway on water.

Unlike any other crazy/random experiences I’ve had before, this by far tops them all.

Alanna Back from the Cold

I never really intended on following through with a Master’s degree after completing my undergraduate degree in environmental management. But after having worked four years with Te Ipukarea Society, the work I was exposed to, the opportunities I encountered and the people I met made me reconsider the idea of studying more.

I was introduced to the Masters of Conservation Biology programme at Vic Uni by a Department of Conservation colleague based in NZ who visited Rarotonga to conduct a population survey on the Kakerori in the Takitumu Conservation Area and in Atiu. The next thing I knew I was based in Wellington at the start of this year embarking on a journey which seemed very last minute, but nevertheless, very exciting to be getting back into studying again.

The Conservation Biology programme provided a good range of ridge to reef skills. The programme also provided courses that were field based which enabled students to conduct research of their own and produce reports that were of value to local communities.

One paper involved visiting various forested reserves and sanctuary’s in the Hawkes Bay and the top of the South Island. Here, we were able to learn about the different styles of conservation management approaches used within New Zealand (fenced ecosanctuaries, open reserves and off-shore island reserves) as well as issues around invasive species, endangered species and land issues.

Another neat paper I took part in involved a trip to the Great Barrier Reef where our small team of students were able to stay at Queensland University’s research centre on Herons island (about the size of Palmerston island). This course covered three marine ecosystems; seagrasses, mangroves and corals. It also touched on investigations around those environmental stressors affecting these ecosystems from pollution, climate change, tourism and the impacts of Queensland’s coal mining industry.

It wasn’t all field based courses however, there was plenty of reading, writing and more reading back at the classroom.

Alanna and fellow Master’s students learning about seagrass in the Hawkes Bay

It was interesting though; I much preferred my learning experience this time around with postgrad studies compared to my undergraduate experience. This time I
actually enjoyed all the report readings and writings I had to do. I guess because postgrad studies are more specific to your area of interest it really makes a difference in an individual’s learning experience. I also found the learning experience at postgrad level involved less of having to memorise different theories and concepts (which completely did my head in at undergraduate level) but more of a focus on developing a way of critical thinking, new ideas, and asking new questions which I feel is a lot more useful for the working world.

Having just recently returned home, I am already back into the Te Ipukarea Society niche, in our little corner of the world, and bringing some new ideas to the team and kick starting some exciting conservation initiatives for 2020 and beyond.

Mary’s Fellowship with Pacific Ocean Finance

Our Finance Manager, Mary Macdonald has been accepted into the Pacific Ocean Finance Fellowship programme. She spent 2 weeks in Fiji in November being inducted into the fellowship and attending a conference and workshops.

The program involves selecting, training, and mentoring a cohort of 13 fellows from the Pacific region in order to expand local knowledge of conservation finance and blue economy.

Mary is developing a sustainable finance plan to find funding for the ‘core’ costs of Te Ipukarea Society.

Project or grant funding generally covers only minimal core operating costs such as staff and office expenses. As a not for profit NGO our funding for operating costs comes mostly from donations and membership.

Sustainable core funding would ensure security for staff and enable more non-project based community activities, such as working with schools and the advocacy work that we do.

The fellowship is funded by the World Bank and the Global Environment Facility - and implemented through the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) and the Office of the Pacific Ocean Commissioner (OPOC).

Kelvin speaks at Cook Island’s Oceans Dialogue

This month our Technical Director, Kelvin Passfield participated in a panel discussion on the topic of ‘Blue Economy’ at the Dialogue on Cook Islands approaches to International Engagement to secure Sustainable Oceans.
matched by actions on the ground at home, for example the push for seabed mining.

Integrated oceans management does not just mean integration from a ridge to reef or sectoral perspective. Integration also requires meaningful consultation with all stakeholders. And no, not just a sales pitch by the relevant minister and government department that is pushing for the legislation, as in the case of the seabed mining bill for example. This was not meaningful consultation, just ticking the boxes.

We need more transparency from Government, more freedom of information, more discussion about the real reason decisions are being made. For example, in fisheries, we should have access to the same information from Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP) agencies that is provided to Government, unless there are genuine reasons why not (and these reasons need to be explained).

We try to educate the Government to the fact that Blue economy goes beyond viewing the ocean economy solely as a mechanism for economic growth. It focuses on the sustainability of our ocean resources and health. Therefore, blue economy encompasses ecological aspects of the ocean along with economic aspects. This is why, for example, we are supporting a 10 year moratorium on seabed mining, in conjunction with the UN decade of Ocean Science, so that more research on the potential impacts of seabed mining can be undertaken.

Finally, we are grateful to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Immigration for recognising the non governmental organisation network as valid stakeholders in this dialogue”.

Local and NZ Youth learn about Cook Island’s Biodiversity

Over this past month, we took a large number of both local and visiting NZ students to visit the Takitumu Conservation Area (TCA).

A massive group of 80 students comprised of year 9 and 10 students from Titikaveka College and NZ Northland school, Huanui College came on a tour. It’s difficult to hear the birds with that many students but they did their best to be quiet!

The church youth group from Pathfinders came after school another day and were especially interested in plant life. Below is some of what they learnt from local botanist Joseph Brider from the Natural Heritage Trust.

The path to the start of the TCA is layered with lush green vegetation and tall Albizia (Ārapitia) trees. These are native to the Indonesia-Solomon Islands area and were introduced from Fiji to the Cook Islands in the 1930s to provide wood materials to make crates for our then booming export fruit industry. After the industry declined, the Albizia remained as a moderately invasive tree in the inland valleys of Rarotonga and was also used to control soil erosion from the abandoned plantations.

Soon we came across another plant of interest, the Mato, a native Homalium tree found on
Rarotonga and Mangaia. The Mato can grow up to 15m tall and has a central thick trunk with a few narrower trunks reaching to the sky from its base. It also stabilises soil and is good for controlling erosion on slopes. The Mato has pink flowers but will only bloom after it has been disturbed, for example by a cyclone.

Pressing on further into the green vegetation, the track comes across the Ana’e, our native King Fern. With its massive fronds, sometimes reaching 2.5m in length, this fern is very common in the mountains of Rarotonga.

Deeper into the forest we spotted a small patch of the ‘Ora Päpua also known as Derris. The ‘Ora Päpua is native to South Burma through to the Philippines. It was introduced right across the Pacific and has been widely used as a fish poisoning agent. The fishing method was once used in the Cook Islands but is not practiced anymore due to its destructive nature, not only killing fish but all marine species which come into contact with its poisonous solution.

From poisonous plants to medicinal plants, we came across the dark green glossy Kavakava-ātua. Kavakava-ātua received its name because it was once used as an offering to the traditional gods. The Kava Māori which is less shiny, has an interesting local population being made up of sterile individuals incapable of bearing seeds. As a result Kava Māori requires some human assistance to ensure its continued survival. This is achieved by people cutting stems of the plant and replanting them.

The find of the day however went to a new species of orchid that has been recently discovered in the TCA! The orchid was found growing on the trail path, having fallen from tree branches up high in the forest canopy, since then three other specimens have been recorded.

Bridger and his team from the Natural Heritage Trust are still trying to determine what species of orchid it is and how it reached our shores. It is so far assumed that its tiny seeds have been transported here by the wind. We have to patiently wait until the orchid flowers to discover the secrets of this mysterious new plant.

Bank of the Cook Islands – Walking the Talk

Bank of the Cook Islands (BCI) has a strong community sponsorship philosophy, supporting not-for-profit groups throughout the Cook Islands. As a gold corporate member of Te Ipukarea Society, we are especially grateful for their support for the work that we do.

It is especially great to see our corporate sponsors also getting out there to ‘walk the talk’. Every staff member receives a reusable stainless steel bottle, meaning less plastic bottles are purchased. All cleaning products are now bought in bulk and concentrate for use in refill bottles, hence reducing plastic waste.

Old furniture is first repurposed in the offices or otherwise offered to staff for personal use at home or in the community. Also, paper has been replaced with digital, thanks to online banking, paperless statements and similar transactions.

For its 18th birthday, a large number of BCI staff opted to clean-up the Social Centre beach in Nikao. A shocking amount of waste was collected.

Meitaki ma’ata for all of your continued support. We hope you have a wonderful Christmas!

Ka kite, e kia manuia

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