TETIAROA SOCIETY

HABITAT RESTORATION PROJECT
RESTORING ISLANDS AND CORAL ECOSYSTEMS

A Special Conservation and Innovation Opportunity

Overview—Restoring islands and surrounding coral ecosystems provides an unrivaled conservation opportunity. We can make unprecedented gains in protecting our world's rare and endangered plants, animals, and corals through work on islands.

We now have a unique opportunity to restore Tetiaroa's native bird population, establish Tetiaroa as a marine and terrestrial bird sanctuary, and for the first time anywhere to scientifically establish the value of invasive rodent eradication on the health and resiliency of coral reefs. In other words, we can undertake valuable restoration work on Tetiaroa while using Tetiaroa as a proving ground that can benefit islands and coral ecosystems around the world.


Tetiaroa Atoll. Photo credit Pierre Lesage

Background—Islands represent a small proportion of our world's land area but a disproportionately large percentage of the world's plant and animal diversity. Most recorded extinctions have occurred on islands, and invasive species are key contributors to those extinctions.

A remarkable 41% of the world's most endangered land animals are found on islands threatened by invasive species – including rodents which have been introduced to more than 80% of the world's island groups (400,000+ islands). Fortunately, we know we can protect 10 percent of the world's most endangered land animals by clearing just 169 islands of invasive vertebrates!

We have the knowledge and ability to stop most extinctions. Island invasive species eradications in particular have demonstrated remarkable and measurable restoration results that protect native species and help prevent extinctions.

Coral reef ecosystems and the vast marine life they support are inextricably linked to the terrestrial ecosystems, and thus are impacted by these same invasive animals.

Tetiaroa Habitat Restoration Project—Tetiaroa atoll is famous for its pioneering environmentally sustainable luxury resort, The Brando, which was inspired by Marlon Brando who purchased Tetiaroa after filming *Mutiny on the Bounty*. However, these islands are also home to important native wildlife. Tetiaroa is the most important seabird and turtle nesting site in the Leeward Society Islands.

For decades, Tetiaroa's islets and surrounding reefs have suffered from multiple invasive species including non-native harmful rats, insects, and plants. To restore the atoll and prevent the spread of invasive rats to more islands, conservationists from around the world have come together to find the most effective means of saving native wildlife on Tetiaroa.

In 2018, after studies found the removal of invasive rats is feasible and will overwhelmingly benefit native wildlife, the first phase of the project was put into place. Informed by similar projects around the world, Tetiaroa Society worked with an international team of experts who removed invasive and harmful rats from one of Tetiaroa's motus, Reiono. This proved the efficacy of the program and its value.

The next bold step is to clear the entire atoll of Tetiaroa – all 12 islands - of invasive rats. This will have an explosive impact on the ground-nesting bird population and set the stage for using Tetiaroa as a marine and terrestrial bird sanctuary. But it's not just a local project; the project plays into global aspirations.

Tetiaroa Society, working with Island Conservation and other partners, have devised an innovative research project on Tetiaroa. One of the key objectives - in addition to restoring native habitat and the local bird population and providing a sanctuary for endangered marine and terrestrial bird species - is to test and scientifically prove the beneficial impact on coral reefs of rat eradication. There is strong evidence of this benefit, but we seek to provide scientific proof. We believe this work will provide a valuable new tool to improve the resiliency of coral reefs to warming waters and ocean acidification.

To help with this important conservation and research project, Tetiaroa Society has now received a commitment of $450,000 in matching funds to help fund the $900,000 project, and Island Conservation is bringing in an additional $100,000. While the remainder of the required funds are being line up, Island Conservation is working on the program details and a group of over 20 scientists from around the world are working on the plans for the concurrent scientific work. Once again, Tetiaroa is serving as a proving ground for a program that we anticipate will have worldwide benefits.