

Trip report for IUCN MTSG Oceania Region Colleagues 15-24 May 2016

George Balazs, Thierry Work and his wife Allison Beale travelled to Fiji on a busman's holiday to check out sea turtle activities in Fiji. Prior to the trip, George had made valuable contacts at Treasure Island, Mamanuca Islands, Mamanuca Environmental Society, and Fiji Department of Fisheries to alert them of our arrival and our interest in learning about sea turtle activities in the region. What follows is a brief synopsis of highlights of our visit.



Locations referred to in narrative: A) Nadi, B) Treasure Island Resort, C) Mana Island resort, D) Suva, E) Leleuvia Island resort.



We flew into Nadi (A on map), and our first stop was Treasure Island Resort (B on map) where we met with Sophie Clay, Natural Resources Manager for the resort. The island has several nesting sites for hawksbill turtles, and we were able to visit with Sophie and see her pools where she holds rescued hatchling turtles that are being raised for release.

Photos (clockwise upper left): Thierry chatting with Sophie, Thierry & George disembarking on Treasure Island, an exhausted Thierry and Sophie holding court with George, captive hawksbill hatchlings at the resort.



Our next stop was Mana Island (C on map) in the Mamanuka group. There we met with Marica Vakacola, Ilisapei Sokidi, Kolinio Mataiyagoa, and Karalaini Rereavosa of the Mamanuka Environmental Society (MES), a Fijian group dedicated to outreach for conservation of natural resources in the

islands (including a strong turtle program). We also met with the environmental crew of the Mana Island Resort headed by Suka Blake. MES also has an effort to rescue hawksbill hatchling turtles from nests laid at the resort. [Photos clockwise from upper left: Arrival at Mana Island, Thierry discussing captive turtles with Marica, George holding hawksbill eggs from excavated nest \(flanked by MES members\), Thierry and MES crew on lookout site of Mana Island, Marica, Ilisapei, Karalaini \(MES\), George, Thierry \(both in Fijian traditional sulu\) on their way to give a lecture to local school children, Kava ceremony with Suka Blake and MES crew.](#)

From Mana, we returned to Nadi, and went on to Suva (D on map) by car on the Queen's Highway (southern route) with a visit to the Sigatoka Dunes National Reserve. In Suva, we met Aisake Batibasaga and Saras Sharma from the Fiji Department of Fisheries. From there, we took a boat to Leleuvia island resort (E on map) and were hosted by Colin Philp, Traditional canoe



voyager and Manager of the Leleuvia Resort. There, we met students from University of the South Pacific (USP). With Aisake and George's guidance, Saras and the students deployed a satellite tag on a hawksbill especially captured for the occasion. The tag was kindly supplied for cooperative

research and conservation education by Cecile Gaspar and Matthieu Petite of Te Mana O Te Moana in French Polynesia.

[Clockwise left to right: Leleuvia crew with satellite tagged turtle, Saras Sharma holding turtle, turtle on its way to sea, checking the tag prior to release.](#)

After our sojourn to Leleuvia, we returned to Suva where George and I gave a seminar to USP students on Hawaiian green turtles and turtle tracking from Tahiti, Samoa and the Cook Islands to Fiji (Balazs) and wildlife health (Work). We also met with Susanna Piovanno, a faculty at USP mentoring several students on sea turtle projects. We then returned to Nadi via the King's road (northern route of Viti Levu) and flew back to Honolulu.

We will have fond memories of this trip. Our hosts in Fiji were most gracious, and we very much appreciated the opportunity to learn about Fiji, its culture, its wonderful people, and not least, their fascinating marine turtles.