

# Marine Turtle Newsletter

## A Folklore of Turtle Calling in Fiji

In response to our request for intriguing "sea turtle mythology or folklore" [MTN 56:30] to share with Newsletter readers, Michael L. Guinea (Australia) submitted the following text. He wrote, "The custom of turtle calling at the village of Namuana on Kadavu is based on an ancient legend which is still passed on from father to son among the Fijian people of Kadavu." The story was told in the *Fiji Times*, "Turtles surface to the call", on 12 November 1971:

Many, many years ago in the beautiful village of Namuana, there lived a very lovely princess called Tinaicaboga who was the wife of the chief of Namuana village. Tinaicaboga had a charming daughter called Raudalice and the two women often went fishing on the reefs around their home. On one particular occasion, Tinaicaboga and Raudalice went further afield than usual and waded out on the submerged reefs which jut out from the rocky headland to the east of the bay. They became so engrossed with their fishing that they did not notice the stealthy approach of a great war-canoe filled with fishermen from the nearby village of Nabukelevu. This village is situated in the shadow of Mount Washington, the highest mountain on Kadavu Island. Suddenly the fishermen leapt from their canoe and seized the two women, bound their hands and feet with vines, tossed them into the bottom of the canoe, and set off in great haste for home. The cruel warriors from Nabukelevu were deaf to the pleadings and would not listen to the entreaties of the women.

The gods of the sea, however, were kind and soon a great storm arose and the canoe was tossed about by the huge waves which almost swamped it. As the canoe was foundering in the sea, the fishermen were astounded to notice that the two women lying in the water in the hold of the canoe had suddenly changed into turtles and to save their own lives, the men seized them and threw them into the sea. As they slipped over the side of the canoe the weather changed and there were no more waves. The Nabukelevu fishermen continued their journey back to their home village and the two women from Namuana who had been changed to turtles lived on in the waters of the bay. It is their descendants today who rise when the maidens of their own village sing songs to them from the cliffs. The translation of the strange song which is chanted on such occasions is as follows:

"The women of Namuana are all dressed in mourning  
Each carries a sacred club, each is tattooed in a strange pattern  
Do rise to the surface Raudalice so that we may look at you  
Do rise to the surface Tinaicaboga so we may also look at you."

The women of Namuana village still preserve the strange ritual of calling turtles from the sea. All the maidens of the village assemble on the rocks above the water and begin to sing a melodious chant. Slowly, one by one, giant turtles rise to lie on the surface in order to listen to the strange chanting.