



KIBCA

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Media Release

Monday, 19 October 2010

Scientific Expedition to Kolombangara Surveys Mt Veve

Last week a scientific expedition surveyed the summit area of Mt Veve, the highest peak on Kolombangara Island in Western Province.

The expedition, hosted by Kolombangara Island Biodiversity Conservation Association (KIBCA), aimed to improve the knowledge of plants and animals in the summit area and to plan for visitors wishing to climb the summit and explore the crater forests.

The party of 18 consisted of leading local and international scientists. Local scientists included Patrick Pikacha who surveyed for frogs and mammals and WWF's Myknee Sirikolo who sampled plants from the 400m level to the mountain summit. Visiting international scientists included Chris Filardi, Director of Pacific Studies from the American Museum of Natural History who studied birds and mammals.

"This was a rapid survey of the area to capitalize on the construction of a new trail network to Mt Veve (1779m) summit area from KFPL's Imbu Rano Lodge near Ringgi in the south east and from Poitete in the north east," said Ferguson Vaghi, KIBCA Coordinator.

"Kolombangara Island has the highest mountain areas in the Solomon Islands outside Guadalcanal. The Mt Veve summit area has not been studied by scientists in recent times. Recent studies on Kolombangara have instead focused on Mt Rano (1698m) on the southern side of the crater rim."

Mr Vaghi said, "This short scientific survey will provide good baseline information about the conservation values of the summit area."

"Preliminary results of the survey held between 10 and 14 October show useful findings. The summit area has a healthy population of the high altitude endemic Kolombangara White-eye, many Red-breasted Pygmy Parrots and a resident pair of an unusual form of Peregrine Falcon. A new species of frog was found, and two other new species of frogs, heard but not seen, were also suspected. Native bats and rats were also identified."

"We also used the expedition to plan the design of a new track and campsite network and to train local rangers and guides. This will allow visitors to access the north side of the Kolombangara Crater rim and Mt Veve area starting from Ringgi."

"These tracks now provide a convenient way to access high altitude rainforests and mossy cloud forests that have endemic birds and frogs and spectacular views of the Kolombangara Crater and surrounding Western Province islands."

"We believe the walking route from Ringgi to Poitete via Mt Veve will become one of Solomon Islands' premier trans-island treks."

"The first tourist used the newly cut trail to Mt Veve earlier in October as part of a three day trek from Imbu Rano Lodge. We are keen to organize further visits and will have a website promoting the area up and running in the coming month."

“We are grateful to the communities of Kolombangara Island for agreeing not to log forests above the 400m level, allowing other uses for these important forests. It is this agreement that secured a five-year schools scholarships program for the people of Kolombangara via the SI Community Conservation Partnerships.”

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