

# OUR ENVIRONMENT OUR HERITAGE

## APPRECIATING OUR TU'AIMEO BIRD



Stuffed female ground dove collected 2003 from Vaiala

### Tu'aimeo Bird Facts

**Scientific Name:** *Gallinolumba stairi*  
**Samoa Name:** Tu'aimeo  
**English Name:** Friendly Ground Dove

**Identification:** A 26 cm, medium-size brown ground-dove. Males has rufous-brown upper parts with a bronze-green iridescence, the crown and nape are grey and the wings rufous with a purplish luster. The tail is dark brown. The abdomen and belly are dark brown olive, whilst the breast shield is vinaceous pink with a white border. Female Friendly Ground Doves are dimorphic in Fiji and Tonga but apparently not in Samoa and American Samoa where only the pale phase occurs. The brown phase has completely tawny under-parts with no breast shield, whilst the pale phase is similar to males but rather duller. Immature birds are similar to adults but are uniformly brown.

**Flight:** Friendly ground doves prefer to escape by running, but when forced to fly do so with an explosive start, accompanied by a clatter of wings and swift agile flight through the sub stage of the forest.

**Voice:** Not a vocal dove, but produces a characteristic call - a short, mournful monosyllabic cooouk, monotonously repeated, often in series of 10-13.

**Habits:** The Friendly Ground Dove occurrence anywhere is unpredictable for it may be found not only on the larger and medium sized islands but also on very small offshore and quite remote islands. By no means confined to mature forest, it may be found in disturbed dry forest areas with sparse undergrowth, and on some small islands can be found at very high density in open scrubby habitats. Food consists of seeds, fruit, buds and young leaves and shoots taken on the ground or in the sub stage. An insubstantial nest of interwoven twigs, vines stems and rootlets usually constructed between one and three meters from the ground. One or two pure white eggs are laid.

**Distribution:** A regional endemic, widely distributed throughout the region with the exception of Tuvalu, Tokelau and Niue.

**Remarks:** The Friendly Ground Dove was once widespread and common, it is noticed that on uninhabited islands with no introduced mammalian predators it is tame and confiding.

But with the introduction of predators - dogs, cats, rats and mongoose its survival is coming under threat. As a result it is now rare and declining. It is currently threatened throughout the region and its conservation is the regions collective responsibility

**Conservation Significance:** Regional Endemic - Vulnerable (IUN Global Status) - At risk in Tonga, Samoa, American Samoa and Wallis & Futuna - Conservation Concern in Fiji.

### SAMOA'S INITIATIVES: Tu'aimeo field work

Nu'utele Island 18-20 August 2006



Photo of *Gallinolumba stairi* (Tu'aimeo) Friendly Ground Dove taken 19th August 2006 at Nuutele Island by Samani Tupufia.

Has anyone seen this dove? Probably not! This little dove exists only on the uninhabited islands off the Aleipata coast, Nu'utele and Nu'ulua and deep within some of our mountain ranges in Upolu and Savaii. Nu'utele and Nu'ulua are located on the southeast coast of Upolu off the coast of Aleipata District.

The restoration of the Islands of Nu'utele and Nu'ulua is a priority of the Government of Samoa and the communities of Aleipata District. Planning is well advanced on a key element of this, the eradication of Pacific Rat (*Rattus exulans*) and the Yellow Crazy Ant (*Anoplolepis gracilipes*) by aerial spreading of toxic baits hopefully by the end of 2006. The tu'aimeo has been identified as a non-target species that may be at risk of taking the baits and one for which the Nu'utele and Nu'ulua populations are significant.

The complete loss of these populations would threaten the survival of the taxon in Samoa. Some authors consider the Samoan doves to be a separate race (*Gallinolumba stairi*) from those in Fiji and Tonga (Watling, 2001). Outside Samoa, the race is only found on the small island of Ofu, American Samoa where it is threatened. So the loss of Nu'utele and Nu'ulua birds could threaten the race with extinction.

During the first week of September 2005 when everyone in Samoa was busy with the Teuia Festival a group of nine dedicated Ministry of Natural Resources, Environment & Meteorology (MNREM) staff members and two consultants from New Zealand made the journey to Nu'utele in hopes of capturing the tu'aimeo. They spent six and half days on Nu'utele undertaking

fieldwork. During the entire period there only one dove was seen at a distance during searches of the island and no birds were heard. It was concluded that the population is now very small, maybe no more than 5-10 pairs, and that catching sufficient birds immediately prior to the rat eradication was impractical.



Photo taken last year September 4-11th 2005 by Yoshichika Akasaki

Nearly a year later, on the weekend of August 18-20th 2006, four staff members from the Ministry of Natural Resources Environment and Meteorology once again made the journey to the island of Nu'utele in hopes of capturing the elusive tu'aimeo.

The trip was a major success as they managed to capture a tu'aimeo and remove some of its feathers. The feathers will be sent to America where DNA analysis will be done on them to find out if the tu'aimeo race here in Samoa is different from those in Fiji and Tonga. While there on the island they managed to identify six breeding pairs, therefore twelve (12) bird's altogether.

The survey to Nu'utele was clearly a success, showing great improvements in techniques used to capture the bird. The Tu'aimeo Task Team are now planning on carrying out another expedition to the islands, both Nu'utele and Nu'ulua in hopes of capturing all the birds before the aerial baiting at the end of the year. Once captured the birds will be transported back to Upolu where they will be held in captivity at our Vaiala office. The birds will be released back to the islands once a conservation period of about 18months has lapsed.



Photo taken 18th-20th August 2006 by Samani Tupufia

If anyone has sighted this bird or would like more information please contact the Division of Environment & Conservation (DEC); we are located at Vaiala or you can phone: 31197, 31198 or 30100.

# OUR ENVIRONMENT OUR HERITAGE



## Children's Corner



Children aged 9-14 are invited to answer the following corner. The name of 3 students with top scores at the end of every month will be posted under the "Children's Corner" for special prizes. "Children's Environment Awareness 2006 Awards will be given to 10 students with top total scores in November during the 2006 National Environment Week".

### CONGRATULATIONS

To our July and August winners - please come down to our main office at Tamaligi to collect your prizes.

#### July:

- Deborah Ututau
- Jake Fruean
- Brenetta Pogi

#### August:

- Christine Mapusua
- Julie Ioane
- E.J Kelly



"some of the wonderful and educational prizes for our winners - kids there are more great prizes to give away"

### Bird Word Find

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archaeopteryx	duck	nene	rhea	
bill	emu	nest	roadrunner	
birds	falcon	oriole	robin	
bluebird	goldfinch	ostrich	sparrow	
canary	flamingo	owl	swan	
cassowary	goose	parakeet	tern	
chicks	gull	parrot	toucan	
cockatoo	hawk	pigeon	turkey	
crane	hen	plover	vulture	
crow	hummingbird	puffin	xenops	
dodo	ibis	quail	wings	
dove	kakapo	quetzal	woodpecker	

R E N A R C D R I B G N I M M U H  
 O Q U C A E T Z A L P U F F I N E O H  
 A U C A N A R Y R A W O S S A C A  
 D A X B I R D S P A R R O W D D G  
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 U L C N O C K A T O O C O E V W J O  
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 N G O O S E T E R N D Z I H A G D  
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 A P I G E O N K U A S V A E D S N  
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| dark blue = 1 | orange = 6      |
| yellow = 2    | red = 7         |
| black = 3     | light green = 8 |
| brown = 4     | dark green = 9  |
| pink = 5      | light blue = 10 |



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- Samoa Biscuits.



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