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Cook Islands celebrates Year of Biodiversity

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This is the International Year of Biodiversity. The local theme for the Cook Islands is '*E Tango Maori Te Ao Ora Natura: Our Biodiversity, Our Foundation.*' Biodiversity is simply defined as the variety of living things on earth...it is the birds in the air and trees, the fish and coral in the sea, the plants, the insects and humans. It is the variety of life that makes up valuable ecosystems such as forests and wetlands and coral reefs. Biodiversity plays an essential part in our lives. It has helped shape our cultures and traditions, formed who and what we value as island people, and have helped bring us the identity and heritage that we are proud of today. Biodiversity is still a major source of livelihood for Pacific people. Many in our community rely on biodiversity for housing, traditional medicines, handicraft production, costumes and food. "We want to celebrate our biodiversity and value it, rather than looking at the negative aspect all the time. We need to celebrate what we have and be grateful and aware of the link between biodiversity and the way we live in the Cooks." Tania Temata, Deputy Director, National Environment Service said during the launch earlier this year. This year's National Environment Week (Monday 31 May-Friday 4 June) and Lagoon Day (May 27-28) also have a Biodiversity focus which will create a greater understanding of the importance and value of biodiversity and how it relates to daily life in our islands.