

Seacology Mission: Described as “arks of biodiversity,” the world’s islands harbor vastly more endangered species than any other region on earth. The United Nations declared 2010 the International Year of Biodiversity, bringing the critical mission of species preservation to the forefront of the global environmental movement. Seacology is an international organization working exclusively on islands for benefit of *island peoples and biodiversity*.



Island environments provide homes and livelihoods for fully one tenth of the world’s population, including many developing nations and indigenous communities struggling to make simple gains in their quality of life. Seacology’s intimate collaboration with islanders is the most effective way to rescue these vanishing cultures, wildlife, and habitats. *Our funds go directly to island communities and local organizations*, using a grassroots, win-win approach that tackles environmental problems at their core. Seacology believes conservation and humanitarian aid are indelibly linked. We work with island communities to establish nature reserves while supporting basic needs such as renovations to schools, provision of medical supplies, or construction of fresh water systems. Our projects defend species and ecosystems, uplift island communities, promote locally based conservation, and foster long-term environmental stewardship.

The United Nations identifies three critical pillars for maintaining biodiversity and sustaining communities: conservation, sustainable development, and fair use of resources. Seacology fulfills these objectives and more with our innovative island projects, which resonate deeply with all who encounter our mission. Our efforts grow in geographic range, scope, and importance each year as island villages grapple with ever increasing hardships while watching their wildernesses dwindle, their species disappear, and their resources ebb.

Papua New Guinea Project and Celebration Summary

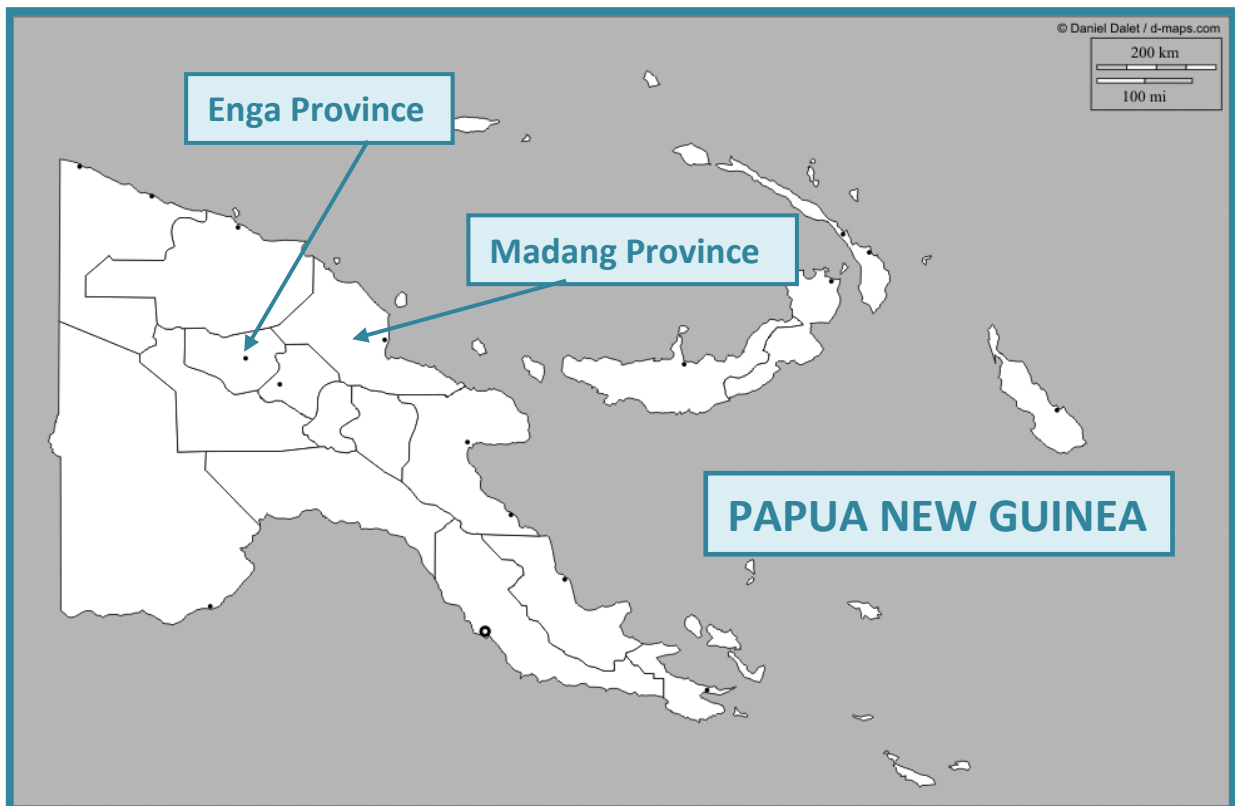
Location: Lai River, Baiyer, Jimmi and Lai Valleys, Enga and Madang Provinces, Papua New Guinea

The forest of the upland slopes of the Papua New Guinea highlands, descending to the northern coastal plains, contains high endemism of both flora and fauna, with several endangered or threatened species, such as: the Fire-maned Bowerbird (PNG’s rarest bird); Goodfellow’s Tree Kangaroo; and the Long-beaked Echidna. The region is also home to several indigenous clans living in a series of small villages scattered along the Baiyer, Jimi and Lai valleys on the northern slopes of the highlands. Due to the remoteness of the region, the only way for the local people to reach any critical services, such as the nearest government health post, is to trek for several days through the forest slopes. Along this path was a 262-foot long cane bridge, which was the only way to cross the Lai River. The bridge needed to be rebuilt every three months as the cane wore down, which was an expensive and dangerous operation for the villagers. In October 2007, Seacology’s field representative, Sam Moko, met with village leaders to discuss a project for constructing a permanent footbridge in exchange for the conservation of the local forest. The clans’ leadership agreed to establish a community-conserved protected area, the Kengai Kitenga Park, encompassing over 10,329 acres of primary montane forest for the next 30 years. In support of their commitment, Seacology agreed to fund the construction of the Ruti Footbridge using concrete and metal cable, allowing the people of this remote region of Papua New Guinea to cross the Lai River safely for many years to come.

After surmounting a few engineering challenges, construction of the bridge commenced in mid-2009 and was fully completed in December 2009. The official opening of the permanent footbridge was scheduled for 2010 after final evaluations were completed.



Above from left to right, three of Papua New Guinea's endangered species of the Central and Western Highlands: Goodfellow's tree kangaroo, Sir David's long-beaked Echidna, and the Fire-maned bowerbird.



2010 Ceremony: On August 17th 2010, the people of Ruti Village congregated at the newly completed footbridge to celebrate its official opening. The local councilor of Ruti, Keu Rumints, proceeded over the festivities, cutting the customary coconut leaf ribbon and announcing the Ruti Footbridge officially open for use by his people. Traditional chants, cries of delight and shouts of enthusiasm were heard from the villagers as they expressed their excitement and appreciation. The councilor thanked Seacology for funding this project in exchange for preservation of a portion of the community's forest, and praised his people for looking after the conservation area, protecting it for future generations. Seacology's field representative for Papua New Guinea, Sam Moko, was given an opportunity to speak to the villagers. He thanked them for their participation in completing this important community project. He also applauded their commitment to safeguard the forest by ensuring it will not be used by the community or outside developers for the duration of their agreement with Seacology.

After the opening ceremony at the project site, the crowd filtered back to the village where a stage was set up for invited guests and leaders from the surrounding communities. A delegation comprised of area tribal chiefs, representatives from the local Member for Parliament, government councilors, and village leaders were welcomed by five different traditional dancing groups. Following the performances, village leaders took the stage and gave a number of speeches praising the innovative project. They thanked Seacology and the local people with great sincerity for their hard work in completing the footbridge. The community leaders also expressed their deep gratitude that a U.S. organization like Seacology took the initiative to work with such a remote village in Papua New Guinea. They praised both for investing in the future of their community and environment. Inspired by this project, the local Member of Parliament, Hon. Sani Rambli, then pledged to fund another needed footbridge down the same river, construct a new classroom for the elementary school, and renovate the community health center. He also donated 10,000 PNG kina (\$4,000), to support the dancing groups, in appreciation for providing such an exceptional welcome. After the formal ceremony, the village hosted a large traditional feast with roasted pigs and vegetables, followed by more dancing well into the night.

This project and the ensuing celebrations in 2010 reflect the epitome of what the International Year of Biodiversity represents: engaging people in the preservation of biodiversity and celebrating the beauty and treasure of the natural world around them. The indigenous people of this remote area of Papua New Guinea have a profound living connection to the forest around them and a deep-rooted desire to protect their ancestral lands. Increasingly, struggling rural communities are forced to make hard choices between preserving their environment and improving their standard of living. Seacology's win-win project encouraged these communities with the knowledge they could do both. Seacology and the people of the Baiyer, Jimi and Lai valleys celebrate the United Nations decision to mark 2010 as the International Year of Biodiversity, and we hope many others throughout the world have also been inspired to make a difference.