

# THE SOUTH WEST PACIFIC

were also seen ashore, perched in low shrubs on the seaward slopes and in small trees growing in one of the old craters.

The wedge-tailed shearwaters had departed several weeks previously on their northward migration. Everywhere their vacant burrows honeycombed the soft tuff.

The herald petrel was a new find for Fonualei. These tubenoses were engaged in high speed courtship chases above the island. Odd birds were flushed from dense cover on the crater escarpment. This species almost certainly breeds locally.

Common noddies, white terns, and both species of tropicbirds were seen also. Forest birds were few. We encountered only four species, the Pacific pigeon, friendly ground dove, wattled honeyeater and Polynesian starling. Although Fonualei is very arid, pukekos, banded rails and spotless crakes were also found. Apparently in the Whitney Expedition days there was a shallow lake in one of the craters. However this must have dried up many years ago.

Fonualei is another of the Tongan volcanoes that would make a superb reserve. Along with 'Ata, Hunga Tonga and Hunga Ha'apai, and Late it already has some degree of protection because it is so isolated.

From Vava'u the expedition headed north eastwards the 500 kilometres to Tutuila, the largest island of American Samoa. There we anchored in the spectacular but rather badly polluted Pagopago Harbour. We were joined here on 21 June by Beth Brown of Papakura, who stayed with the *Derwent* team during the voyage through the Samoas.

Although much of Tutuila is heavily forested, the island has its fair share of introduced mammals, eg rats and cats. The giant African snail is widespread and does considerable damage to crops.

We carried out five minute bird counts along the ridge top from Mt Alava to Fagotogo and surveyed wader habitats in the extensive Pala Lagoon near Pagopago Airport. Forest birds were seen and heard

in moderate numbers in the steep valleys north of Mt Alava. Apparently the giant honeyeater, the ma'o, formerly occurred on Tutuila, but it has not been reported there for many years.

The wildlife of American Samoa has recently received considerable study by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, who have produced a comprehensive report. It appears that the most valuable remaining wildlife habitat in eastern Samoa is in the Manua Islands, especially the high (1000 m) island of Tau, where several species of tubenoses still breed in large numbers.

It was an easy overnight sail the 120 kilometres from Pagopago to Apia, which lies on the northern side of Upolu, the most populous island of Western Samoa.

The high volcanic islands of Western Samoa because of their size and topography, (Upolu measures 70 km by 25 km, and Savai'i 70 km by 40 km), still have large tracts of primeval forest, especially on the higher country of the hinterland. Upolu is the older island of the two geologically, being much more dissected than the young basaltic volcanoes of Savai'i, which rise to a spectacular 1800 metres.

Forest birds are numerous. Possibly only one species has been lost from Samoa since the days of ornithological discovery — the enigmatic Samoan wood rail, which looked like an oversized and flightless spotless crake.

Several valuable reserves have already been created in Western Samoa. The most accessible of these is the attractive Tusi Tala Historic and Nature Reserve, only a few kilometres inland from the centre of Apia. It was here that Robert Louis Stephenson built his homestead, Vailima. Stephenson's tomb is located nearby atop forested Mt Vaea.

Two well formed tracks lead from an information centre to the grave, which is sited on a small cleared spur about 350 metres up on the slopes of the mountain.

Forest birds are common in the Tusi Tala Reserve — it is an excellent place for the naturalist first visiting Samoa to become acquainted with some of its birds.



A red-footed booby on its nest.



Adult brown booby at Fonualei.



Adult male lesser frigate bird, showing its distinctive white flank patches — Fonualei.



The crater formed by the 1952 eruption on Fonualei, Tonga. Purple swamphens (pukekos), and banded rails were found in the dry, scrubby forest on the slopes.