

# FRENCH POLYNESIA & THE COOK ISLANDS

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Our trip lasted 7 weeks because we stayed some time on Tahiti where we have friends living there. We followed the very good trip report written by Keith MILLAR 2014, and decided to add 1 more night than he did on each site, added Makatea in the Tuamotus, Mohotane and Fatu Huku in the Marquesas, and the Cook Islands. The only other independent trip reports found (on cloudbirders.com) are from Hottola who made short visits in 2011 and added some helpful informations. There is a Dave Sargeant's report from 2006 but with few details, but maps of the Cook islands. And as usual we used the very good Birdquests reports and checklists.

We chose to stay that long because we had enough time, and in case the weather is bad or the swell too important. As there is only 1 flight per week from Tahiti to Rarotonga in the Cooks, you have to spend 1 week there. We skipped the Gambier, deserved only once a week, because we couldn't find how to get to Tenararo island for the *Polynesian Ground-dove* and *Tuamotu Sandpiper*.

If we had no friends in Papeete, we would have shortened by 10 days; Millar stayed 3 weeks, if you add 1 week for the Cooks, and the 3 more islands that we visited, we could say that 5 weeks should be enough to make this trip, knowing that it can be weather dependent.

The association SOP MANU <http://manu.pf/> is doing a fantastic work to protect the endemics, with eradication programs of rats, public sensibilisation, inventories... You can contact their staff before your trip. They have guides in several islands, and you can only go with one of their member to enter the Papehue Valley for the Tahiti Monarch. They have a facebook page.

In the Cooks, Air Rarotonga does not always have flights to Atiu and Mangaia concurring the same week, as it happened for us. The timetable didn't allow us to visit Mangaia, so we missed 2 endemics (Reed-warbler, Kingfisher). Before your bookings, have a look to the site Air Rarotonga flights schedules (<https://www.airraro.com/en/flying-with-us/flight-schedules>) where the flights are detailed for each week during the next months.

**We saw 74 species of which 26 endemics.** In addition to the 2 endemics missed on Mangaia in the Cooks, we couldn't go to Hatutu islands in the Marquesas for the *Marquesas Ground-dove*, and we didn't try the motu in Rangiroa for the *Polynesian Ground-dove* because it has not been seen since 1 year.

Flights are the main expense, international and internal. It should improve because as I am writing, United Airlines is opening flights from North America, following the new company French Bee, and Islands Airline should deserve the archipelagos in 2019. It is best to book the internal flights in advance. Keep in mind that polynesians have holidays 1 week every 8 weeks. During these periods some flights and hotels can be full.

The boats are an expense too, the prices are detailed in each chapter.

In many places the hotels are upmarket tourists resorts, but there are many pensions, generally expensive for their comfort, around 40 to 50€ per person with halfboard, many Airbnb too. We saw only 1 or 2 campsites, not enough to justify to bring a tent. In some places it is possible to find a cheaper pension, if you accept shared bathroom. You can find cheap snacks, and small supermarkets have dry chinese noodles.

We paid 1774€ each for the international flight, including the 2 internal flights to and from Rangiroa, with Air Tahiti Nui (French Bee was more expensive at our dates).

The total of internal flights (except Rangiroa, included in the main ticket) was 2561€/pers.

For the expenses (accommodations, food, boats, car rentals), we spent 4030€ per person for the 7 weeks. This means 82€ per day.

Our sightings are posted on Ebird, we follow the **HBW** taxonomy and our videos are posted on <https://www.hbw.com/ibc>. We made a short video of the endemics :

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OFLbh6F6iUI>

Our friend bought a VINI sim card for us. English is not widely spoken, it is important to expose the things very simply, some people don't understand if it is complicated. Don't forget that they speak their dialect between them. In all french Polynesia people don't use the formal "you" ("vous") to others, only "tu".

### VISITED ISLANDS (total 15)

**SOCIETY : Tahiti, Moorea, Huahine**

**MARQUESAS : Nuku Hiva, Ua Huka, Hiva Oa, Fatu Hiva, Tahuata, Mohotane, Fatu Huku.**

**TUAMOTU : Rangiroa, Makatea.**

**AUSTRAL : Rimatara.**

**COOKS : Rarotonga, Atiu.**

### SOCIETY ISLANDS

#### -TAHITI

All the flights between archipelagos transit through Papeete, so you'll probably spend a few nights there between 2 flights. We were housed by our friends and have nothing of help about accommodations and car rentals. Anyway we were told that the Mahana lodge & backpackers in town is very good and clean. We had exchanged several emails with Monique, from MANU association, and had planned an appointment with her, at km18 (PK18) on the west coast. From here we drove up to the entrance of the **Vallée de la Papehue**, where we saw *Tahiti Swallow*, *Tahiti Kingfisher*, and further on in the valley, after crossing the river for less than 1km (it was low level) a family of *Tahiti Monarch* and a colony of *Polynesian Swiftlet*. (bring the scope).

The *Tahiti Reed-warbler* is found in another valley where you don't need to be guided. It is called the **Vallée de la Papenoo**. The entrance road is at -17.513005 -149.423260 and a 4x4 is needed. We made several stops when we found some bamboo patches; this bird can be easily heard but difficult to see, and sometimes very active and obvious along the road. We saw the 2 forms (but not the same day). *Tahiti Kingfishers* were heard too. We drove up until the Relais de la Maroto.

By heavy rain this dirt road can be closed. On sundays locals come to this valley with very loud music. Better to avoid.

The 1st valley (Papehue) can be visited during the morning, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> (Papenoo) in the afternoon, but keep in mind that it can be cloudy and rainy in the afternoon. It is better to allow 2 days.

The *Tahiti Kingfisher* is not uncommon and seen in several places around the island.

One day our friend prepared an outing with one of his friends who has a powerful outboard, with the intention of observing the whales west of Papeete. We could join a big flock of birds with *Brown Noddies*, *White Terns*, 2 *Tropical Shearwaters*, 1 *Grey-backed Tern*, *Brown* and *Red-footed Bobbies*, *Great Frigatebirds*... The Humpback Whales are common along the coast with their youngs and we saw several during our trip.

**-MOOREA**

There are several ferries between Papeete and Moorea, the website for the booking is <http://www.aremity.pf>. Our friends had booked a bungalow (15000CFP/126€ per night, can host 5 persons) at Pension Faimano for 3 days, close to the Hilton. The target is the *Moorea Kingfisher* that you can try to see if you just go there for 1 day. Anyway this bird is not so easy, calling but staying very high in the trees, and we had only a good view the 2<sup>nd</sup> day. The stronghold is on the Belvédère (lookout) road, very busy in daytime, so best to bird in early morning. Anyway when the road is busy there is a trail in the forest. As for Tahiti we had our friend's car, so we have no information about rental cars. The lookout (-17.540369 -149.826763) is 27km from the port at point -17.520183 -149.778649.

If you're on a budget, we think that it is probably possible to rent a car and sleep inside somewhere near a forest, or rent a scooter and try to find a cheap room like Pension Motu Iti.

**-HUAHINE**

We visited this island when we came back from the Marquesas, as the flights concurred with a 2 hours transfer in Papeete. When we arrived the weather was terrible, very windy and rainy. We had booked Pension Ariitere at 13600/114€ the double room without meals, for 2 nights; it is less than 3 km from the airport, where a car from Chloe Locations at 8500cfp/71€/day was waiting for us. We learned later that we could have had a cheaper price with Avis through the pension, so I advised them to say it on their website.

The next day the sky was cloudy but not so windy; we had few informations about the birds *Raiatea Fruit-dove* and *Chattering Kingfisher se tutus* but found both of them only 5 km from our pension, at point -16.701 -150.991 around a huge old banian tree. The entrance of the trail is at -16.698967 -150.993420. We were glad to have 2 nights because we only had a brief view of the kingfishers the 1st day, and observed an excited pair near a tree hole about 100m down the banian the 2<sup>nd</sup> day.

**MARQUESAS ISLANDS**

18/09 to 2/10.

**GENERAL**

We booked the flights as following :

- Papeete to Nuku Hiva
- Nuku Hiva to Ua Huka
- Ua Huka to Hiva Oa (from where there are boats for other islands)
- Hiva Oa to Papeete.

We spent 1 night more than Millar on each island, in case of bad weather, but now that we know the possibilities, it can be done differently.

First of all, we found the contact of **Teiki Richmond**, who is mentionned in the Birdquest reports. Thanks to him we could add several species to our list, he is absolutely reliable and can organise everything, and probably the whole birding in the Marquesas. [teikirichmond@gmail.com](mailto:teikirichmond@gmail.com) - Tel (+698)87703372. He speaks english, so if you don't speak french, he'll help you. Before booking anything, see with him what he can suggest.

Normally there is a regular and cheap shuttle boat between Hiva Oa and Fatu Hiva, Hiva Oa and Tahuata. Sadly it was suspended for maintenance and we had to pay crazy prices for private boat. So check in advance if it is the case at <https://www.codim.pf/fr/te-ata-o-hiva/>

Our luck during our 2 weeks stay in the Marquesas is that the sea was not too bad, with few swell, even like this it was bumpy and rough for the spine, but quite feasible.

Each island has endemic subspecies that can be split one day, so it is best to llok for all that is possible to see.

## NUKU HIVA

The targets here are *Marquesan Imperial Pigeon*, *Northern Marquesan Reed-warbler*, *White-capped Fruit-dove*, and *Marquesan swiftlet se ocistus*.

From the airport there is 1h until the main small village of Taiohae.

We had booked a room in Pension Mave Mai (11000/92€ per night with breakfast for 2). Because they overbooked they lodged us for the 1st night at Pension Moana Nui (less good) and gave us a discount. The transfer for the airport is 4000/33€/1way/pers.

At Pension Moana Nui there is a car rental called Tony Loc, we rent a Suzuki Jimny for 11300/95€/day). Contact [anthonymombaerts@gmail.com](mailto:anthonymombaerts@gmail.com)

The *Imperial Pigeon* was common around wp -8.838 -140.093 on the Hatiheu road, with the *Swiftlets*, some *Fruit-doves* and *Reed-warblers* in the pension's garden and in the village. *Black Noddies* nesting in several places.

***As the Marquesas Imperial Pigeon has been introduced in Ua Huka, if your purpose is only birds, you can skip this island and go to Ua Huka; you'll save some money!***

## UA HUKA

This island holds *Ultramarine Lorikeet*, *Iphis Monarch*, and the introduced *Marquesan Imperial Pigeon* that we observed on Nuku Hiva.

We had booked a bungalow at **Pension Maurice et Delphine** tel (+689) 40 92 60 55 [chezmauriceetdelphine@gmail.com](mailto:chezmauriceetdelphine@gmail.com) in **Hokatu**. It was 5900/50 €/pers/1/2 board). The transfer to and from airport 2000/pers. Their welcome is very friendly and a good experience. The bungalows (-8.928227 -139.524844) are a few hundred meters from their house where the meals are served. We told them that we wouldn't have breakfast the 1st morning and they removed 900/pers from the bill. They wanted to take us to local exhibitions and artisanal shops, but we made them understand that our purpose was purely ornithologist that they didn't insist. The *Imperial-pigeons* are on the Vaikivi plateau, in the valleys of Haahevea and Haavei, an information from Teiki. Maurice should explain how to get there.

Our bungalow was facing the **Motu Hane**. We spend a lot of time on the coast facing the motu for seawatching (-8.931669 -139.525036), sometimes some *Blue Noddies* were passing very close to us. We saw some *Bulwer's Petrels* and *Tropical Shearwaters*, many *boobies* too; around the motu *Grey-backed Terns* and *White-tailed Tropicbirds*, and the *Polynesian Swiftlets* breed there and can be seen from the road at point -8.931694 -139.528779. In the evening we could hear some shearwaters going to the mountains and above the village. There is a colony of *Sooty Terns* on the Motu Teuaua but we didn't go there.

We didn't visit the botanical garden where the groups go for the endemics *Ultramarine Lorikeet*, *Iphis Monarch*, *White-capped Fruit-dove* and *Northern Marquesan Reed-warbler* because they were in the forest behind our bungalow. The *lorikeets* and the *Reed-warblers* were even seen in the garden. Following the tarred road above the bungalows, the road ends and becomes a trail leading in a mix of forest and plantations. At point -8.915 -139.525 the *Lorikeets* were very common and we saw several *Monarchs*. We stayed several hours, and ate a lot of mangos. *Little White Terns* were numerous too, *Brown Noddies* were nesting. Further up after taking a trail left we arrived in an open area where we saw several *White-capped Fruit-doves*.

## HIVA OA

There are taxis at the airport, if not call Jeanne 87 77 19 63, to go to the main village **Atuona**. We had planned 3 nights there, 3 nights on Fatu Hiva and 3 nights on Tahuata. But all can be done from Hiva Oa and the good news is that there are good **communal bungalows** in the center of Atuona, for 2 persons a bungalow with kitchen and bathroom is 4000/34€. There are some bigger bungalows. Book in advance, through Teiki or [jean-francois.adam@commune-hivaoa.pf](mailto:jean-francois.adam@commune-hivaoa.pf).

We finally cancelled 2 nights on Tahuata and 1 night on Fatu Hiva, and stayed more on Hiva Oa, and went birding with Teiki instead.

In front of the bungalows there is a grocery on the other side of the street, and behind, up a small street on the left of the grocery is the Make Make car rental where we rent a Suzuki Jimny at 13000/108€ for one day to visit the island. The majority of the birds are the introduced pest, the *Common Myna*, but we saw a few *White-capped Fruit-doves*, *Southern Marquesan Reed-warbler*, and the *Polynesian Swiftlet*. We didn't find the introduced *Great Horned Owl* but didn't look for it by night, we just checked the cliffs for fun.

There is a powerful wifi at restaurant-pizzeria Relais Mohau, 300 meters from the center, we had the code during a diner there, the days after we could connect from the beach just down the restaurant.

One early morning 2 *Pectoral Sandpipers* and 1 *Sanderling* were along the beach.

From Hiva Oa where Teiki lives, we visited Fatu Huku, Mohotane, and Tahuata (see below).

### **FATU HIVA**

When we prepared our trip, Teiki proposed to go with us to Fatu Hiva, but as it is possible to get there by ourselves, and Manu having a guide for the monarch there, we said no. But as the shuttle was out, we had to find a boat (called bonitier) to take us there. When you know that the shuttle is 4000/pers, it is difficult to accept to pay 40000/334€! But we had no choice, and Teiki was occupied somewhere else, so we crossed with Martin, tel 87 29 16 32, and as we shared with another person we paid 20000. It took 2h1/2 (can be more if the sea is rough). Some groups of birds seen on the way, too far, but we saw a *Wedge-tailed Shearwater*. Conclusion : if the shuttle is not operating, and if you are just 2 persons, it should be cheaper to cross with Teiki.

On this nice island, we slept in Omoa at **Pension Chez Lionel**, [chezlionel@mail.pf](mailto:chezlionel@mail.pf), the bungalow is 13500/113€ for 2 with halfboard, a room with cold water is 11500. The transfer is 500/pers. The *Southern Marquesan Reed-warbler* is in the garden and everywhere else.

In the (rainy) morning we were taken by the MANU guide **Arthur Matohi** (40 92 82 71) who is really a nice person, we went up the road of the pension, then took a track in the forest, (with small river crossings) until a first territory, no bird, then a second territory with a pair feeding a juvenile. Further up the trail we saw an immature very close. Arthur was a pleasant meeting, he makes and sells good organic honey, much cheaper than on other islands. In the evening we spent some time with him at the port for seawatching (10.513852 -138.688779), but the birds (mostly noddies were too far).

During our visit, Arthur was working with the president of Manu, Roberto Luta, browsing the mountains to localise more Monarchs. We were very pleased to meet Roberto.

### **MOHOTANE**

This uninhabited island (-9.983234 -138.830100) holds the unique population of *Marquesan Monarch*. Few swell is needed for landing, and we were lucky. A friend of Teiki was with us and helped us to jump on the rocks. We walked about 1 hour uphill, seeing *Southern Marquesan Reed-warblers* and *White-capped Fruit-doves* in the bushes, and easily found several monarchs in the forest. But the trees there were covered with nests of *Red-footed Boobies*, *Brown* and *Black Noddies*, *Little White Terns*; it was fantastic. Back to the boat we followed the western coast until a beautiful colony of *Great Frigatebirds*. The timing was : left at 7am, had 1 hour of boat, found the 1st monarch at 10, and were back at 5pm after some stops for fishing mahi-mahis. For the complete day we paid 30000/250€. We were really relieved and happy to have visited this magical island.

### **FATU HUKU**

Another uninhabited island, but inaccessible. The *Marquesan Ground-dove* lives on the top, which is too high for a sighting, very frustrating! We wanted to see the *Polynesian Storm-petrels* and Teiki told us that they are around Fatu Huku and proposed a trip for the day, of about 7 hours, for 30000. We followed the south coast for 1h1/2 then turned north to the islet. Approaching Fatu Huku we saw our first Storm-petrels, and saw a tens in total of. Our piece of luck was a dead squid on the water, and 1 *Tahiti Petrel* and 1 *Herald Petrel* were landed on the water and eating.

**TAHUATA**

We had booked a room in **Pension Amatea** for 3 nights, 8000/67€/pers half board, but spent only 1. It is situated in the village near the port and no transfer is needed. Teiki took us there with his bonitier, stopping en route in a bay where his uncle leaves, and where there is a pair of nesting *Marquesas Kingfishers* (they live in the coconuts). After that we had no need to go to sleep on the island, but as we had booked we went there and spent the night. A walk up the road in early morning only revealed some *Polynesian Swiftlets* and *Southern Marquesas Reed-warblers*, and we only heard a Kingfisher, so we were glad to have been with Teiki the day before!

At 2pm Teiki was back, on the way to Hiva Oa we stopped again at his uncle's house and had better views of the Kingfishers.

**AUSTRAL ISLANDS**

15-16/10.

**RIMATARA**

This pretty small island holds the *Kuhl's Lorikeet*, and the *Rimatara Reed-warbler*. We had already seen the *Lorikeet* on Atiu island in the Cooks, where it was introduced, here we observed several birds even in the garden of the pension. The *Reed-warbler*, widespread, is interesting with different plumages.

We stayed at **Pension La Perruche Rouge** in a rather luxurious bungalow, about 13000/110€ for 2 half board, the 2 brothers Kenji and Ishido are very nice. They have a facebook page. They had forgotten our booking and were full the 1st night, so they lodged us in the house of woman, in a simple room (for free of course). She seems to have several rooms and probably that she rents them to locals because it is very basic with shared shower but we had a good sleep.

There is a snack in the village of Mutuaura. It was very windy and a bit fresh. We saw a whale very close to the beach.

**TUAMOTU ISLANDS**

20 to 27/10.

**RANGIROA**

We planned 1 week there because we wanted to give us a chance to go to Makatea if we could find an opportunity, and visit te Blue Lagoon with good weather. The best is to stay on the main motu of Avatoru.

We booked in advance the cheapest room that we could find, it was **Chez Sand**, on booking.com, we paid 42000/352€ the week for a full self-contained bungalow, and can lodge 3 persons. It is situated a few hundred meters to the airport entrance, in front of the Te Mao Bar, but along the road which is a little bit annoying sometimes; the traffic is not too important, and it is quiet during the night. But Sandrine rents also a double room contiguous to her house just behind the bungalow, which should be cheaper.

There are 2 bicycles at the bungalow, and hitchhiking is very easy, no need to rent a vehicle.

We met the representative of MANU on Rangiroa, Ludwig Blanc, who is beekeeper, [merituams@hotmail.com](mailto:merituams@hotmail.com) tel 87200682. Ludwig was too busy to accompany us, but gave us some contacts, and most important, the place to go for the *Atoll Fruit-dove*, the Lagon vert.

He told us that the *Polynesian Ground-dove* had not been seen since a long time and that it was probably extinct here. The last Birdquest report 2017 said that they found 1 male which could be the last one. We decided no save money and skip the visit to the motus.

**-Lagon Vert** : west of Avatoru, the next motu holds the Pension Puuna et Moana at point - 14.944100 -147.715339. The site is really great, a nice bay where to swim (because on Avatoru there is no nice beach), *Tuamotu Reed-warbler* around; following the track west behind the pension, we saw several *Atoll Fruit-doves* and more *Reed-warblers*. To stay in this pension is not a bad choice, the owner's daughter Laeticia told us that she was going to organise trips to the Lagon Bleu and on other motus next year; her brother speaks english. She

is very interested in birds. <https://www.pensionpunuaetmoana-rangiroa.com/>. She said that sometimes they see some *Blue Lorikeets* close to the pension, and rarely the *Bristle-thighed Curlews* come to the coast. We walked along the coast on 2km but saw none.

If you just want to go there for the *Atoll Fruit-dove* as we did, just hitchhike to the marina at -14.945383 -147.715339. Call Laetia (or make somebody call if you don't speak french) at tel 87 79 24 66 and she will come quickly with her boat to cross the pass until the pension. It is possible just to have lunch or drink a coconut, and swim in the lagoon after birding. We paid a fee, but I don't remember how much.

**-Lagon Bleu** (-15.093277 -147.932790) : this trip is only possible in groups, the only boat that we found taking 6 persons maximum was with Manuel, 9000/75€ per person. <https://www.rairoafishingandtours.com/?fbclid=IwAR3v9xkROQ7bPdKGRjsLSM7v77gIh19518s3cwrhhS6OP4peZJTRYtPtxvI>

We had to follow the classic route that all the companies seem to do : leaving around 8:30am, 1h of boat until a sandy beach (-15.100809 -147.937096), close to the motu where the barbecues are installed (-15.096780 -147.937439). During this swimming stop, people from another boat landed on the motu with dogs, and soon we saw 4 *Bristle-thighed Curlews* in flight, disappearing behind another motu and we never saw them again.

At 11am we landed on the motu, until Manuel's barbecue place, and he began to prepare the food while we went inside the woods to observe the *Blue Lorikeets*. A recent fire had probably chased the *Tuamotu Reed-warblers*, because we saw or heard none. Later there was a group of Lorikeets and 1 *Reed-warbler* near the barbecue area. *White Terns*, *Brown* and *Black Noddies* were nesting around. At 12 we had lunch, then we left, stopping en route at a shark place, then towards Avatoru pass at the so called "aquarium", a fish feeding place, then to the pass where a family of Dolphins plays in the waves. Ending at 5:30pm. Manuel is very nice and if you are a group you can book him for the day, check the prices on his website.

### **-MAKATEA** 23/10

We were very concerned about going to Makatea because nobody seemed to have an idea about the crossing. For school holidays (every 8 weeks) there is a shuttle boat for the school children, but you have to contact the town hall and get a permission. Or there are ships coming from Papeete stopping there, or you can charter a pricey sailing boat from Papeete.

Sandrine, the owner of our pension, gave us the telephone n° of a fisherman who goes sometimes to Makatea. It appears that this man was exactly what we needed, his name is **GUITOU, tel 87 22 68 58 or 87 34 91 75**. We contacted him on wednesday morning, he said OK (luckily he was free), picked us up at the pension and we went to the marina. He said that normally he asks 150000/1250€ for 6 persons, but for the 2 of us he asked 80000/666€; very expensive, but really worth it. It includes his night on Makatea, and the risk for his boat to stay anchored in the unprotected port (-15.824223 -148.277714).

He is very jovial and likes to joke, and especially he likes to look for birds and charges each time he sees one to get closer. This way you realise how fast a petrel can fly! He made a fantastic demonstration of harpoon fishing of mahi-mahi.

It took less than 3 hours to join Makatea; once on the island the mayor, **Julien Mai**, arrived with his car and led us to the village, and then to the old village where he left us for birding.

We slowly walked back up the road to the village, passing the caves (that we had no time to visit, a little bit stressed to have only 3h1/2 to find our targets). At point -15.834271 -148.249400 we saw 2 *Polynesian Imperial-pigeons* in flight, crossing above the road several times. We observed a *Makatea Fruit-dove* perched above our head. Following the road up, we took on the right the trail leading to the viewpoint. A fantastic view! We had a nice observation of an *Imperial-pigeon* flying below and close, too bad we saw none perched. The *Makatea Reed-warblers* were singing loudly (we had good views of them in the village too).

We came back for diner to Julien's house, where we had a good room. We paid 6500/54€/pers half board. We watched a documentary about the phosphate extraction and before we left in early morning Julien showed us some relics of this period, old machines and locomotives

covered with vegetation... Our regret was to have no more time to spend there, it was our favorite island.

To prepare your trip to Makatea, we suggest that you contact Julien Mai : [julien.mai@mail.pf](mailto:julien.mai@mail.pf). He'll be able to tell you if there have some possibilities to come to the island with commercial boats, if not you can ask him to call Guitou, he knows him very well of course. Julien Mai tel : (+689) 87 744 522 or 87 757 735. He speaks english. Guitou wanted to leave at 7am, we saw a whale close to the port, on the way back we saw a *White-winged Petrel*.

## COOK ISLANDS

6 to 13/10.

### RAROTONGA

We had rent a car at the airport for 2 days, then for 3 days at our return from Atiu, with Island cars & Bike hire. No special permit is needed anymore. Their office (called Rarocars) is just in front of the airport, but they leave your car on the car park with your name on it, no need to go to the office.

We had booked the Kiiikii Inn and suites through booking.com, 60€ for a budget (and correct) studio. When we came back from Atiu they upgraded us in a newer and more comfortable studio.

Like I said it was impossible that week to combine flights to Atiu and Mangaia from Rarotonga. Our tour was all organised, impossible to change our dates. We could have flown to Aitutaki for one day to see the introduced *Blue Lorikeet*, but we knew that we would see it on Rangiroa. That left us 5 days on Rarotonga, too much on an island without great interest, being very touristic with all the coast lined with hotels and restaurants, giving few accesses to bird the shore. The Dave Sargeant's report (2006) gives plans and details.

We did the most interesting thing : the cross-island trail, that has to be done from the south. The entrance of the road leading to the trail is at -21.208847 -159.787827. Better to go early, before the crowd of tourists. On the way up to the needle we could observe 1 *Rarotonga Starling*, curious but discrete. We heard and saw a few *Pacific Imperial-pigeons*. At the needle 2 *Red-tailed Tropicbirds*. We went several times to check the airport for *Bristle-thighed Curlews*, but there were only *Pacific Golden Plovers*. We also checked all the accesses to the Muri lagoon, but only saw the *Plovers*, the *Egrets* and the *Wandering Tattlers*.

We didn't visit Takumutu Conservation Area, because they never answered to our email, and we didn't know how to access the entrance. But it is the place where the *Rarotonga Monarch* is visible on Rarotongas. When we came back from Atiu, the weather was really bad, very windy with rain, it stopped us. And we had seen the monarch in Atiu.

### ATIU

We liked this island very much. We had booked a bungalow 95NZD/57€ at Taparere lodge, through a person called Mack Mokoroa, but when we arrived nobody was waiting for us and the man of the bungalows was not aware of our arrival. A woman drove us to the place, fortunately the bungalow was free and OK. So I just can give the tel n° found on the net : Ph/Fax 33034.

We birded around the afternoon, the *Chattering Kingfishers* were plentiful and very noisy. Going to the village gave several *Rarotonga Fruit-doves*, *Rimatara Lorikeets*, *Atiu Swiftlets*. At the grocery we tried to rent a motorbike, but the woman asked the special permit that is not compulsory anymore, but she didn't know that, and the police office was closed; so we walked. We went to the Tiroto Lake, in case of Spotless Crake, but couldn't find a good place, and anyway it is all overground around.

The following morning we walked towards the Atiu villas, and soon after entered the forest and found several *Rarotonga Monarchs* at point -20.011869 -158.106641. There was a *Long-tailed Koel* in the area. We went along the coast and saw the usual shorebirds, *Brown Boobies* and *Brown Noddies* passing by.

We had asked to our host to find us a guide to go to the swiftlets caves (Kopeka caves). At 2pm a man came and took us until the Atiu Villas where we picked up 4 persons. After a short drive we stopped and began a nice walk in the forest, until the entrance of beautiful caves. After passing several, we arrived to the nesting site where the *Atiu Swiftlets* were echolocating, great!

**Warning : in many places we had many mosquitoes, and few rooms had mosquito nests, so bring your own.**

Restropectively, the trip could be done in 30-33 days if you add the Cooks and the islands that Millar didn't visit but that we did, skipping Nuku Hiva, trying to optimize your time in the Marquesas with Teiki. Try to skip some nights in Papeete, if you make your flights concure, you can save some time. All this is a long but necessary preparation.

**Red Junglefowl (introduced) - *Gallus gallus*** Widespread and noisy.

**Pacific Black Duck - *Anas superciliosa*** Tahiti (4 on the water retention in the Papenoo), Rimatara, Atiu island.

**Red-tailed Tropicbird - *Phaethon rubricauda*** Fatu Huku in the Marquesas, Rarotonga island in the Cooks.

**White-tailed Tropicbird - *Phaethon lepturus*** On all the archipelagos.

**Rock Dove (introduced) - *Colombia livia*** Tahiti, Ua Huka, Hiva Oa.

**zebra Dove (introduced) - *Geopelia striata*** On many islands.

**Pacific Imperial-pigeon - *Ducula pacifica*** Rarotonga on the cross-island trail, and on Atiu.

**Polynesian Imperial-pigeon - *Ducula aurorae*** Makatea.

**Nukuhiva Imperial-pigeon - *Ducula galeata*** Very good views of at least 15 on Nuku Hiva.

**White-capped Fruit-dove - *Ptilinopus dupetithouarsi*** Nuku Hiva, Ua Huka (*viridior*), Hiva Oa, Mohotane and Tahuata (*dupetithouarsi*).

**Makatea Fruit-dove - *Ptilinopus chalcurus*** Seen well on the road to the old village.

**Atoll Fruit-dove - *Ptilinopus coralensis*** Several seen on the track at Lagon Vert.

**Raiatea Fruit-dove - *Ptilinopus chrysogaster*** Good views of 4 birds on the walking trail, one on a nest.

**Rarotonga Fruit-dove - *Ptilinopus rarotongensis*** Rarotonga (*rarotongensis*), and Atiu (*goodwini*).

**Grey-green Fruit-dove - *Ptilinopus purpuratus*** Tahiti (*purpuratus*) and Moorea (*frater*).

**Atiu Swiftlet - *Aerodramus sawtelli*** Seen above the village and on the nest in the Anatakitaki (Kopeka) Caves.

**Polynesian Swiftlet - *Aerodramus leucophaeus*** Tahiti (*leucophaeus*), Nuku Hiva and Ua Huka (*ocistus*), Hiva Oa, Tahuata, Fatu Hiva (*gilliardi*).

**Long-tailed Koel - *Urodynamis taitensis*** 2 seen on Moorea and 1 on Atiu in the Cooks.

**Polynesian Storm Petrel - *Nesofregatta fuliginosa*** Nice views of 10 near Fatu Huku island.

**White-winged Petrel - *Pterodroma leucoptera*** 1 seen between Makatea and Rangiroa.

**Herald Petrel - *Pterodroma heraldica*** 1 seen well on a squid close to Fatu Huku.

**Phoenix Petrel - *Pterodroma alba*** 1 seen between Rangiroa and Makatea.

**Wedge-tailed Shearwater - *Ardenna pacifica*** 2 seen between Hiva Oa and Fatu Hiva.

**Tropical Shearwater - *Puffinus bailloni*** 2 at sea off Papeete, 1 between Rangiroa and Makatea.

**Tahiti Petrel - *Pseudobulweria rostrata*** Only seen between Hiva Oa and Fatu Hiva, and near Fatu Huku.

**Bulwer's Petrel - *Bulweria bulwerii*** From our seawatching point at Ua Huka and 3 or 4 on the way to Fatu Hiva.

**Green-backed Heron - *Butorides striata*** A nest near the harbour at Papeete, 1 on Moorea.

**Cattle Egret - *Bubulcus ibis*** 1 on Moorea.

**Pacific Reef-egret - *Egretta sacra*** Common along the coasts on all the archipelagos, 1 nest with young on Tahuata.

**Lesser Frigatebird - *Fregata ariel*** A few individuals seen on Tahiti, Nuku Hiva, Hiva Oa, Rangiroa.

**Great Frigatebird - *Fregata minor*** Common on many islands, nesting colonies on Mohotane, Fatu Huku.

**Red-footed Booby - *Sula sula*** common in the Marquesas (nesting), seen on Rimatara, Rangiroa, and Atiu (Cooks).

**Brown Booby - *Sula leucogaster*** between Tahiti and Moorea, Marquesas, Tuamotus,

**Masked Booby - *Sula dactylatra*** Nuku Hiva, Mohotane, Fatu Huku and Rangiroa.

**Pacific Golden Plover - *Pluvialis fulva*** Tahiti, Huahine, Cook Is, Rangiroa.

- Bristle-thighed Curlew - *Numenius tahitiensis*** 4 seen in flight at Lagon Bleu on Rangiroa.
- Sanderling - *Calidris alba*** 1 on Atuona beach, Hiva Oa.
- Pectoral Sandpiper - *Calidris melanotos*** 2 on Atuona beach, Hiva Oa.
- Wandering Tattler - *Tringa incana*** Seen many times on the coasts of many islands.
- Brown Noddy - *Anous stolidus*** Common on many islands, nesting, or at sea.
- Black Noddy - *Anous minutus*** Many were nesting in the Marquesas, and at Lagon Bleu (Rangiroa). Makatea.
- Blue Noddy - *Procelsterna cerulea*** Close views on Ua Huka, many around Hiva Oa (*cerulea*) and Rangiroa (*teretirostris*).
- Common White Tern - *Gygis alba*** Common at sea and nesting on many islands except Marquesas.
- Little White Tern - *Gygis microrhyncha*** Common in the Marquesas.
- Sooty Tern - *Onychoprion fuscatus*** In the Marquesas.
- Grey-backed Tern - *Onychoprion lunatus*** 1 at sea in front of Papeete, common on Rangiroa.
- Greater Crested Tern - *Thalasseus bergii*** Common in the Society islands.
- Swamp Harrier (introduced) - *Circus approximans*** Seen on Tahiti, Moorea, Huahine.
- Chattering Kingfisher - *Todiramphus tutus*** Huahine (*tutus*), Atiu (*atiu*).
- Moorea Kingfisher - *Todiramphus youngi*** Moorea on the belvédère road, keeps perched very high.
- Tahiti Kingfisher - *Todiramphus veneratus*** Tahiti in several places.
- Marquesas Kingfisher - *Todiramphus godeffroyi*** In a bay on the north-west coast of Tahuata.
- Rimatara Lorikeet - *Vini kuhlii*** Rimatara, and Atiu island.
- Blue Lorikeet - *Vini peruviana*** Several seen at Lagon bleu on Rangiroa.
- Ultramarine Lorikeet - *Vini ultramarin*** Good number seen on Ua Huka.
- Tahiti Monarch - *Pomarea nigra*** Good views of 3 in the Vallée de la Papehue.
- Rarotonga Monarch - *Pomarea dimidiata*** On Atiu island.
- Iphis Monarch - *Pomarea iphis*** Several seen on the trail above the bungalows on Ua Huka.
- Fatu Hiva Monarch - *Pomarea whitneyi*** Good views of 4 on Fatu Hiva.
- Marquesas Monarch - *Pomarea mendozae*** Great views of several birds on Mohotane.
- Southern Marquesas Reed-warbler - *Acrocephalus mendanae*** Hiva Oa, Tahuata, Mohotane (*mendanae*), Fatu Hiva (*Fatuhivae*).
- Rimatara Reed-warbler - *Acrocephalus rimitarae*** Very common on Rimatara.
- Tahiti Reed-warbler - *Acrocephalus caffer*** On the track of the Vallée de la Papenoo, 2 morphs, mainly near water.
- Northern Marquesas Reed-warbler - *Acrocephalus percernis*** Nuku Hiva (*percernis*) and Ua Huka (*idae*).
- Tuamotu Reed-warbler - *Acrocephalus atyphus*** Rangiroa (*atyphus*), Makatea (*eremus*).
- Tahiti Swallow - *Hirundo tahitica*** 1 seen at the entrance of the Monarch site, a few in the valley of Te Maru Ata.
- Red-vented Bulbul (introduced) - *Pycnonotus cafer*** Tahiti, Moorea, Rarotonga.
- Silvereye (introduced) - *Zosterops lateralis*** Tahiti, Moorea, Makatea.
- Common Myna (introduced) - *Acridotheres tristis*** Tahiti, Moorea, Hiva Oa, Rarotonga; a real pest.
- Rarotonga Starling - *Aplonis cinerascens*** One seen on the cross-island trail on Rarotonga.
- Common Waxbil (introduced) - *Estrilda astrild*** seen on Tahiti.
- Chestnut-breasted Mannikin (introduced) - *Lonchura castaneothorax*** Tahiti, Huahine, Rimatara + in the Marquesas.
- Red-browed Finch (introduced) - *Neochmia temporalis*** Moorea, Huahine, Nuku Hiva, Hiva Oa.
- Crimson-backed Tanager (introduced) - *Ramphocelus dimidiatus*** Seen on Tahiti.