

## **Saving Indigenous Flora and Fauna in the Anthropocene**

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I am considering questions of indigeneity in relation to biodiversity conservation and the various methods undertaken for such preservation on a number of islands in the Southern Pacific, from the tropics to the sub-Antarctic. Since at least the nineteenth century, islands have been regarded as important “evolutionary laboratories”; arguably, they offer us the greatest opportunities to preserve biodiversity through strict conservation measures, minimizing further arrivals and targeting so-called pest species for eradication.

Yet the very concept of indigenous ecosystems imposes an artificial stasis on evolutionary processes which have, in the long term, neither beginning nor end. Moreover, in a world of human overpopulation and the threats of climate change—that is, where human presence and its effects, such as the (euphemized) “habitat loss,” environmental pollution, and global transfer of species are the major culprits—attempting to eradicate (surrogate) invasives may be both unwise and potentially counterproductive.

How then do we attempt to best preserve biodiversity at those sites—*islands*—which seem to offer us the greatest chance of so doing? Using methods such as 1080 poison drops by helicopter—the current favored method of eradicating rats and rabbits, for instance, on islands in the Southern Pacific—involves unconscionable bykill of non-target species who have arrived in the natural course of evolution, but not within an (arbitrary) time period which could confer “indigeneity” on them. What may be the long-term effects—as yet virtually untested—of 1080 poisons on marine ecosystems, terrestrial water supplies, and soil quality?

Given that a number of scientists are rethinking the very nature of what constitutes (and may in future constitute) wilderness on a planet where one species—*Homo sapiens*—is gradually taking over the territories of all others, should we not be looking at the conservation of other species in ways which do not invoke fundamentalist concepts of the indigenous, or employ methods of what has been termed “cruel conservation” arbitrarily if, with the best of intentions, we select the survivors and victims ourselves? As a number of recent articles and monographs demonstrate, we may in future even become dependent on some of those we now consider destructive of biodiversity for its very preservation.

During my short stay at the RCC, as well as investigating these theoretical issues, I will focus on case studies of the Henderson, Oeno, and Lord Howe Island eradications (or proposed eradications) and the environmental and social issues involved.