

Tokoriki Island Resort Surface Interval

...keeping you in touch with Tokoriki's latest environmental, diving and general excursion news...

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2009 Great Fiji Butterflyfish Count

Between the 10th and 17th October guests and dive crew at Tokoriki conducted 30 minute long counts on both scuba dives and snorkel trips throughout the week. We took in a variety of dive sites and merily counted butterflyfish ...but what you may ask is the significance of all of this? Well the count is of scientific interest on many levels.

Firstly there does appear to be a correlation between numbers of butterflyfish and the state of coral cover on a reef. This is because butterflyfish are coral eaters. Their pointy faces are designed perfectly for nibbling on coral polyps; from which they extract nutrients without damage to the polyp itself. One could possibly assume therefore that lots of butterflyfish would indicate a healthy reef; reduced numbers an unhealthy reef.

Secondly different species of butterflyfish frequent different areas. It does appear that around Tokoriki we have many species of butterflyfish – up to 18 varieties were counted in the 2008 count and as many again this year. However other species are totally absent. The count therefore highlights regional variations.

It is interesting to note that although not counted on the official Butterflyfish count; two species of butterflyfish previously not seen in this area have been observed by both Will and Alex on their dives. By getting to know their butterflyfish they were able to note the new arrivals into the area. First up is the stunning Ornate Butterflyfish with its brilliant golden stripes previously only seen by us far too the east of Tokoriki around 200kms away off the small island of Toberua. This eye catching fish has been spotted at The Supermarket, Edenville and Monuriki Gardens. Also at Monuriki Gardens, Alex has now seen on three occasions the very elusive Black Butterflyfish which we have never seen anywhere else in Fiji and Will is still yet to see!

Birdlife at Tokoriki

In common with many isolated island groups, Fiji has relatively few species of birds, around about 90. Nevertheless, Tokoriki and the surrounding islands are home to some interesting birdlife.

A favourite Tokoriki resident is the white collared kingfisher. This is heard screeching at daybreak from a high vantage point. They often perch in the trees above the reading room. Despite their name, they feed mostly on insects, and are very partial to the green tree skinks.

Delighting guests by drinking, on the wing, from the swimming pools, is the Pacific swallow. They roost on the moored boats and for a small bird make a lot of mess!

At the top of the hill, near the telephone mast, lives a colony of Fiji wood swallows. They are not a true swallow, but look similar, with striking black and white markings. They pluck insects from mid air, and are outstanding acrobats.

Several species of small woodland birds live in the resort grounds- the green coloured white eye, the red headed parrot finch (the juveniles have blue caps), the orange breasted honeyeater (a flash of colour zipping from bush to bush), and the endemic Vanikoro broadbill. A brood of broadbills has successfully fledged from a nest just in front of the dive shop in the last week.

Hunting these small birds is the Fiji Goshawk, a handsome bird of prey with grey and pink plumage.

The other larger predator, often seen quartering the hillside behind the resort, is the Pacific harrier.

This feeds on rodents and small birds, but on Tokoriki it's main prey would seem to be bats.

Stalking the beach is the reef heron, mostly the brown colour phase on Tokoriki, but also seen in white.

21. Saddled butterfly

Chaetodon ephippium Limited range



Pale grey-green body
Large black white-edged spot on back quarter
Orange chin



26. Black butterfly

Chaetodon flavivestris Unusual



Black body
Gold tail and fins
Gold wedge on back
Grey face with orange nose

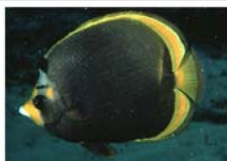


Photo by Randall, J.E. Fishbase

12. Ornate butterfly

Chaetodon ornatissimus Limited range



White oval shaped body
Thick yellow lines on body
Black bars through eye

