

A NEW FUTURE FOR MARINE CONSERVATION

# Papuan Bird's Head Seascape



## ABOUT THE SEASCAPE

The Bird's Head Seascape sits at the epicenter of the 'Coral Triangle' region. It is located in northwest Papua, Indonesia, stretching from Teluk Cenderawasih in its eastern reaches to the Raja Ampat archipelago in the west and the FakFak-Kaimana coastline to the south.

## OUTSTANDING BIOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE

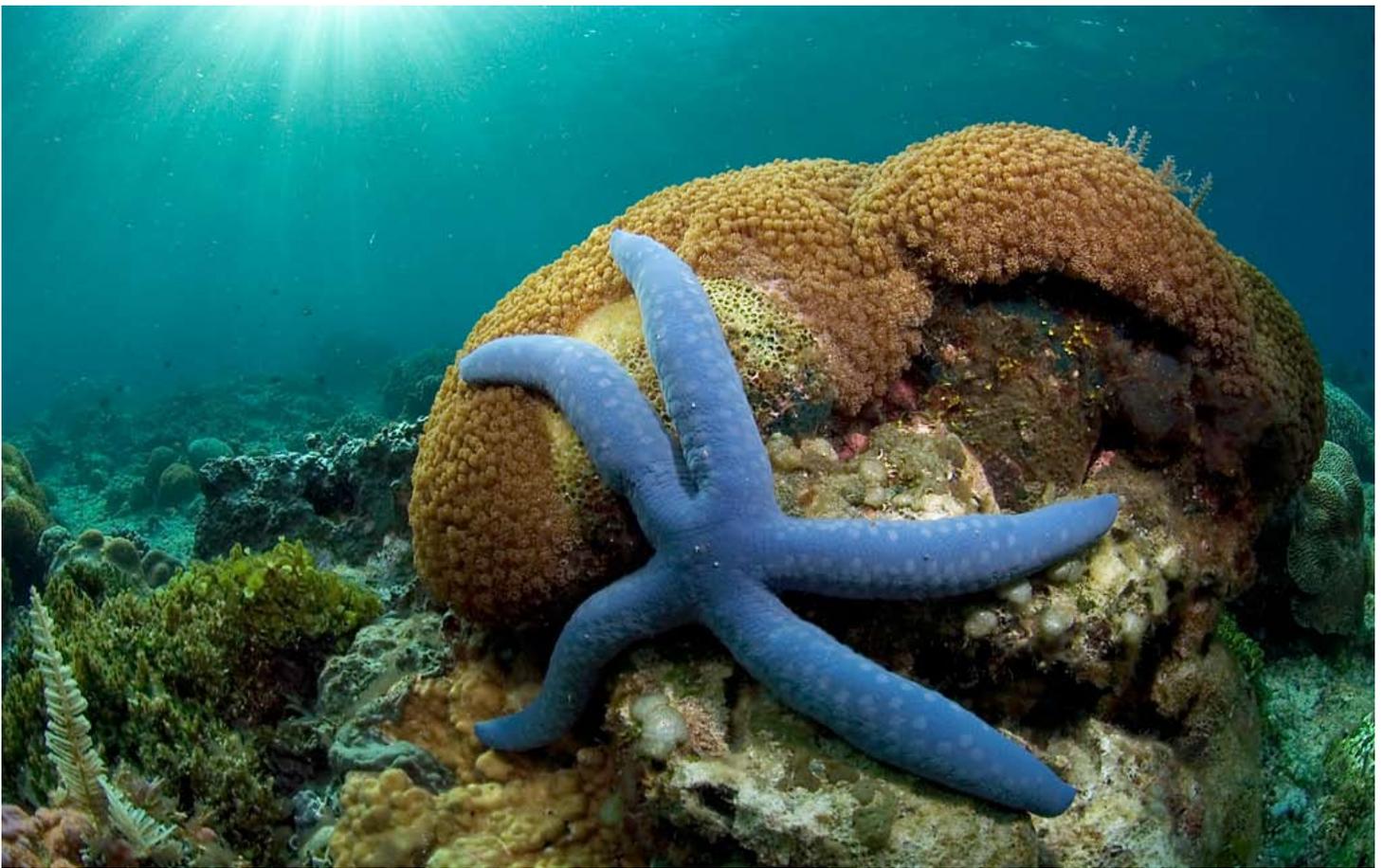
Two recent biological surveys highlighted not only the amazing diversity of marine habitats and species in the Seascape, but also how little we know about these underwater life forms. The surveys uncovered as many as 56 new species of fish, coral and mantis shrimp in less than 6 weeks! Perhaps even more stunning for a Seascape of this relatively small size, up to 50 of the new species appear to be endemic to the Bird's Head Seascape—found no where else in the world.

Research has also shown the Bird's Head Seascape contains critical habitats for globally threatened marine species, including the largest Pacific leatherback turtle nesting site in the world, green and hawksbill turtle rookeries, and migratory cetacean aggregations of sperm and Bryde's whales, orcas and numerous dolphin species. The Seascape also boasts healthy populations of dugongs, estuarine crocodiles, giant clams, and manta rays. Without question, the Bird's Head Seascape ranks as a global priority for marine conservation, particularly given recent biogeographic analyses that suggest the Coral Triangle region exports and maintains the biodiversity of the entire Indo-Pacific marine realm.

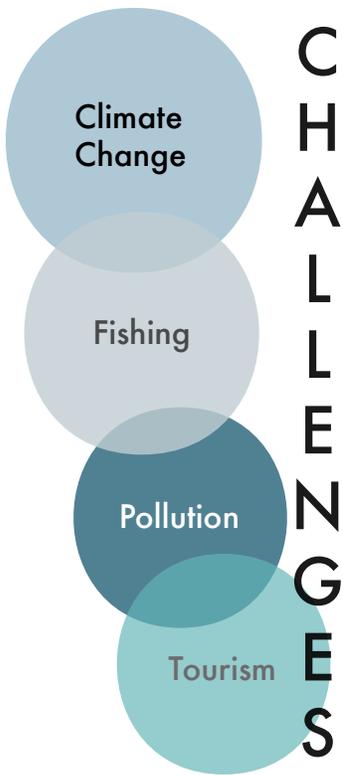


## Bird's Head Seascape helps protect:

-  Over 180,000km<sup>2</sup>
-  More than 2,500 islands and submerged reefs
-  1,323 species of coral reef fish
-  58 species of mantis shrimp
-  Approximately 75 percent of the world's total, or nearly 600, species of scleractinian hard coral
-  The highest coral reef biodiversity recorded for an area of this size anywhere in the world



Above: A starfish (*Linckia laevigata*) holds on tight to the coral reef off the coast of Alor, Indonesia.



### **CRITICAL CHALLENGES**

The Bird's Head Seascape's rich coastal and marine resources make it extremely attractive to fisheries, marine tourism, oil and gas, mining, and forestry interests. Unfortunately, a combination of factors currently tends to favor poorly controlled exploitation of natural resources at the expense of sustainable economic development and conservation. The Seascape is extensive, the islands and reefs are widely dispersed, and human population density is relatively low. Unregulated access to local resources and recent policies supporting rapid exploitation of Papua's natural resources (and even transmigration of fishers from central and western Indonesia) leave many residents feeling powerless and disenfranchised.

### **ABOUT THE SEASCAPE PROGRAM**

During its first three years of implementation, the Bird's Head Seascape Program has focused particularly on its 'crown jewel' of Raja Ampat, though with increasing attention directed to the Kaimana Corridor. The first phase of the initiative has concentrated on elucidating large-scale ecological and oceanographic processes that structure the reefs and associated ecosystems in the Seascape as well as building a strong enabling environment for collaborative management and sustainable economic development of marine and coastal resources. Now entering its second phase, the initiative will soon expand to address the management of a Seascape-wide network of marine protected areas (MPAs).

## MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS

- **Expanded Protections:** On 12 May 2007, the Minister of Fisheries and Marine Affairs and the Raja Ampat Bupati jointly declared Raja Ampat a maritime regency and formally announced the creation of a network of seven MPAs. This new network covers approximately 900,000 ha and roughly 45 percent of the shallow-water coastal ecosystems of the Raja Ampat Corridor.
- **Exciting Research:** Important research conducted within the framework of the Bird's Head initiative include the most comprehensive marine genetic connectivity study yet conducted in the world, satellite tracking of green and hawksbill turtles, aerial surveys of marine resource utilization, site monitoring of grouper and Napoleon wrasse spawning aggregations, and the development of a state-of-the-art dynamic ecosystem model of Raja Ampat's marine resources using advanced computer software.
- **New Discoveries:** Two major surveys of the biodiversity and socioeconomic conditions of coastal villages resulted in the discovery of up to 56 new species of fish, coral and mantis shrimp—most of them endemic to the Bird's Head Seascape.
- **Understanding Local Needs:** Partners CORAL, CI and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) worked closely with villagers, the Raja Ampat government and dive tourism operators to develop a tourism user fee system which has generated over \$100,000 in its first 9 months of operation. The revenues of this system are managed by a multi-stakeholder board including government, NGOs, and villager and tourism sector representatives, with 70% of the revenues dedicated to conservation, health and education programs for Raja Ampat's 89 coastal communities.
- **Communicating with Stakeholders:** A new partnership with the NGO Bengkel Budaya, Radio Republic Indonesia, and the Raja Ampat Student's Association has resulted in the wildly popular weekly conservation show "Radio Gelar Senat Raja Ampat," which has hit upon a successful recipe of exposing hot environmental topics in Raja Ampat through a combination of original Papuan songs and storytelling.
- **Community Involvement:** A turtle nest-guarding team developed by local NGO Papuan Sea Turtle Foundation (YPP) and staffed by local villagers has effectively reduced turtle poaching from an estimated 95 percent mortality of nests and nesting turtles to zero in the Piai Island Rookery, with over 1400 green turtle nests successfully laid and hatched since September 2006.

"The Bird's Head Seascape is the **Epicenter** of Marine Biodiversity and is one of the **most unique** and **beautiful** places on the Planet."

-Mark Erdmann  
Conservation International



Above: Abundant biodiversity and healthy reefs are found throughout the Bird's Head Seascape.



Above: A boy from the local community plays traditional folk guitar while enjoying the sun.

## HOW YOU CAN HELP

If you are interested in learning more or want to support the Bird's Head Seascape please contact:

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[www.conservation.org/oceans](http://www.conservation.org/oceans)  
[www.youtube.com/bluetubetv](http://www.youtube.com/bluetubetv)  
[marine.conservation.org](http://marine.conservation.org)

## UPCOMING PRIORITIES

- Investigate potential impacts of exploratory open-pit nickel mining already occurring on the North coast of Waigeo and in Teluk Mayalibit.
- Launch the Raja Ampat Conservation Education Vessel "Kalabia" (in collaboration with partner TNC) to conduct experiential, hands-on marine conservation education in all 89 of Raja Ampat's coastal villages.
- In close collaboration with partners and stakeholders, facilitate the development of management plans and zonation, enforcement and monitoring systems for each of the seven MPAs in Raja Ampat's newly declared MPA network, while also building local capacity to manage the network.
- Assist the Kaimana local government and national Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries in designating and managing a large-scale, multiple-use Kaimana MPA.
- Work closely with partners TNC and WWF to facilitate and promote the governance of a Bird's Head Seascape-wide MPA network as the primary means of ensuring long-term sustainable fisheries and biodiversity protection in the region.