

Air Rarotonga's **Natural History Expedition**  
to Mangaia, Atiu and Miti'aro

with **Gerald McCormack**

visit the living highlights and investigate the hidden natural treasures  
of the Cook Islands on an exciting 3-day expedition



Photo: Phil Bender



Our expedition leader **Gerald McCormack** has been studying Cook Islands natural heritage for 28 years, initially as the science advisor for the Education Department. Since 1990 he has been

the director and researcher for the Cook Islands Natural Heritage Trust.

Gerald initiated the Rarotonga Flycatcher (*Kakerori*) recovery programme in the 1980s on Rarotonga, and undertook research in Rimatara in 1993 that resulted in the reintroduction of the Rimatara Lorikeet (*'Ura*) to Atiu in April 2007. On Mangaia he initiated surveys of the endemic Mangaia Kingfisher (*Tanga'eo*) and lead the field work to investigate if mynas were causing its extinction.

Gerald is a regular lecturer on eco-tourism expedition ships, including the *World Discoverer*, *National Geographic Endeavour* and *Clipper Odyssey*. Between Rapanui and Fiji he has lead natural history tours on many Polynesian islands, and on board he has given multimedia presentations on ethno-biology, biodiversity and geology.

**For bookings and departure dates:**

Air Rarotonga, phone 22 888, [www.airraro.com](http://www.airraro.com)  
Single NZ\$1499, twin share NZ\$1379 per person  
Price includes flights, accommodation, guided tours and all meals (excluding drinks).

**Day One:** (approximate programme and times)

8:00	Check-in at Rarotonga airport
9:00 -10:00	Air Rarotonga flight to Mangaia
10:00 -13:00	Field trip to beach, cave, lookout, makatea track, reef pool
13:00 -14:00	Lunch at Babe's Motel
14:00 -16:30	Field trip to lake, taro swamp, rock shelter and kingfisher study area
16:30 -18:00	Relax and refresh at hotel
18:00 -20:00	Dinner and presentation on geology

**Day Two:**

7:30 - 8:30	Breakfast
8:30 -10:30	Field trip to sandalwood, ancient marae, historic track and beach
10:30 -12:00	Transfer to airport and flight to Atiu
12:00 -13:30	Transfer to Atiu Villas and lunch
13:30 -17:00	Forest walk to swiftlet cave
17:00 -18:30	Refresh at hotel
18:30 -19:30	Biodiversity presentation
19:30 -	Dinner

**Day Three:**

7:30 - 8:30	Breakfast
8:30 -11:45	Field trip to lake, Captain Cook's Landing, west coast and bird watching
11:45 -12:30	Picnic at Taungaroro Beach
12:30 -13:30	Transfer to airport and flight to Miti'aro over the wildlife sanctuary Takutea.
13:30 -17:00	Field trip to fan-palm, foodlands, lake and Vai Nauri cave
17:00 -18:00	To airport, flight to Rarotonga.

On each island, we will be accompanied by local guides who will share their special knowledge.

Please take: walking shoes and reef shoes, sunscreen lotion, hat, raincoat, water bottle, mozzie repellent, binoculars, camera.

The Natural History Expedition requires average fitness and is suitable for anyone from 6 to 80 years.

This expedition is operated by Air Rarotonga  
phone 22 888  
[www.airraro.com](http://www.airraro.com)



The expedition starts at the Rarotonga airport at 8 am with check-in for the flight to **Mangaia**, home of the endemic Mangaia Kingfisher (*Tanga'eo*). We will also see the lively native warblers (*Kerearako*) and the little mannikin,



which recently flew from French Polynesia to Mangaia. We will visit the oldest settlement site in the Cook Islands and the marae of Rongo, who demanded human sacrifices to maintain peace. From high makatea cliffs, overlooking ancient taro plantations, Gerald will introduce us to Mangaia's spectacular geology. Mangaia is the oldest island in the Cook Islands Southern Group, and during the last two million years it has been slowly uplifted 75m above sea level. Inland, the erosion of the raised fossil reef has created dramatic vertical cliffs, swamps, a lake and caves, and we will investigate how and when the coastal terraces have formed.



We will visit the site where four of Captain Cook's men landed in 1777 and had a rather nerve-racking encounter with the locals. The road through the wild and romantic rainforest on the west coast will bring us to the lake where frigatebirds have been seen to drink freshwater. The last stop on Atiu will be for a picnic at the beautiful Taungaroro beach with its white sand and black makatea cliffs.

On **Miti'aro** we will take a short walk through rugged makatea to look at the unique Mitiaro Fan-palm (*Iniao*). A road across the swampland will lead us to the Taka'ue foodland on a pocket of volcanic soil in the center of the island. The Miti'aro lake is not to be missed, and before returning to the airport, we will have time for a refreshing swim in the enchanting Vai Nauri cave.

In the evenings on Mangaia and Atiu, the field trips will be complemented by Gerald's multimedia presentations on the biodiversity and the geology of the Cook Islands.

On **Atiu** we will find out why the island still deserves its ancient name: '*Enua Manu* - Island of Birds. Its most beautiful bird is the reintroduced Rimatara Lorikeet (*Kura*), although the Cook Islands Fruit-dove (*Kukupua*) is a close second. The most unusual bird is the endemic Atiu Swiftlet (*Kopeka*), which breeds in the dark interior of caves, and during the day remains airborne, hunting all over the island for flying insects. Of special interest is the introduced Rarotonga Flycatcher (*Kakerori*), thriving in the bush and gardens of Atiu.

