

## VOLUME 5, NO. 2 Summer 1987

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### Congress Acts on Proposal for National Park in American Samoa

In January 1987, congressional hearings were held in American Samoa to consider BCI's proposed national park, which would protect the area's unique flying foxes and the rain forests they require. In July 1986, Governor A. P. Lutali already had sponsored BCI recommended legislation that now protects American Samoa's flying foxes from the commercial hunting that was causing an alarming decline (see *BATS*, December 1986). The continuing progress is very encouraging.

Participants at the recent hearings included Governor Lutali, Lt. Governor Eni Hunkin, many prominent Samoan Chiefs, Congressman Bruce Vento, Chairman of the National Parks and Recreation Committee, Congressmen Daniel Akaka, Jaime Fuster and Fofu Sunia, Dale Crane, Staff Director for the Subcommittee on National Parks and Recreation, and Gary Barbono of the National Park Service. Dr. Merlin Tuttle and BCI members Dr. Paul Cox and Verne and Marion Read testified at the hearings, assisted with field trips to see the unique diurnal flying foxes and proposed park land, and appeared on a half-hour Samoan television program to explain the values of flying foxes and the need for a national park.

Most participants seemed to be favorably impressed and crucially important chiefs, who own the land being proposed, expressed enthusiastic support. The National Park Service was directed to conduct a feasibility study, which is now in progress, despite a major typhoon that struck just days after the hearings.

BCI's conservation activities in Samoa already have proven extremely timely. The typhoon destroyed all man-made structures on the Manu'a Islands and left trees so stripped of foliage that areas of the forest looked more like war zones. The islands support some of the most beautiful and pristine rain forests imaginable and are under consideration for inclusion in the proposed park. Dr. Cox, an authority on Pacific Island botany, was immediately sent by BCI to evaluate the damage and its probable impact on remaining flying foxes and our park proposal.

Dr. Cox surveyed the damage, finding that many flying foxes apparently had been killed, but that there were some very hungry survivors. He requested assistance from villagers who agreed to help feed them for the five to six week period required for trees to produce new flowers and fruit. He also found that, though stripped bare, the trees quickly were producing new foliage and estimated that the forest would be well on its way to recovery within six months. Interviews with some of the older chiefs indicated that all of the largest rain forest trees had already survived numerous previous typhoons. Although it is assumed that flying foxes also have a long history of surviving, there are concerns about their future chances as their populations and the area of rain forests decline.

In addition, Dr. Cox learned on arrival that, without any scientific investigation, the Soil and Conservation Service in Hawaii had requested \$1.5 million in emergency aid in order to cut the stripped forests and reseed the area with exotic plants. If completed, this project would have permanently destroyed one of the world's most unique rain forests. Fortunately, Dr. Cox was able to meet with Samoan chiefs and other officials in time to ensure that such

a devastating project would not be carried out.

*BCI is extremely grateful to Verne and Marion Read for their personal participation and for funding our efforts in American Samoa. We also thank Dr. Paul Cox for his crucial emergency evaluation and the Governor, Lt. Governor, Congressmen and the National Park Service for their continuing efforts.*

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*A lone Samoan Flying Fox soars over the rain forest in the mid-day sun.*  
PHOTO BY MERLIN D. TUTTLE

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