

Lessons on our environment

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Miss Cook Islands contestants pictured at the National Environment Service office on Monday.

On Monday evening the 11 Miss Cook Islands contestants turned their heads to learning about our environment.

National Environment Service (NES) personnel Elizabeth Munro, Moana Vaevae-Tetauru and Mii Matamaki were the well-equipped tutors.

They covered topics like biodiversity as a whole, plus endemic and invasive species, protected areas, wetlands, waste, climate change and adaptation and mitigation.

From Elizabeth Munro the girls learnt about biodiversity as a whole and how important it is that we try to protect and preserve our endemic species - plants, animals etc that are only found in the Cook Islands.

They also heard how invasive species can contribute towards destroying endemic species.

Elizabeth also spoke about protected areas such as the raiu, using the upcoming project in Mauke as an example.

A team from NES will travel to Mauke soon to survey a large rauī area for the preservation and conservation of the unga. Elizabeth also used Suwarrow as an example of a protected area and a conservation park.

Moana Vaevae-Tetauru spoke about the importance of wetlands to the many species that live in and around these areas and why such areas must be conserved.

In the past wetlands (ie pai-taro) were used every day as it was part of Cook Islanders' livelihoods. Ten or 15 years ago you would see men and their families working on the pai-taro both during the week and on Saturdays.

Nowadays though, people use machinery to turn the soil as it is much faster and less labour intensive. The downside is it damages the many species on and around this area, as the wetlands are habitats and breeding grounds for young animals.

Moana also spoke about waste, and how it can affect marine and birdlife and the environment. She mentioned the effect waste has on our people and the island's landfill, and also discussed the amount of waste collected from the Clean Up the World day and the importance of education and awareness.

Mii Matamaki spoke about climate change, adaptation and mitigation.

Her presentation was based around the effects climate change can have on Small Islands Developing State and how countries like the Cook Islands are adapting to climate change by way of making buildings more cyclone proof.

The contestants left the tutorial determined to become environment champions