

# Biosecurity Newsletter



MINISTRY OF  
AGRICULTURE

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## Frog legs anyone!

On the 28th of January 2022, Biosecurity officer Greta Remuera received a call from staff at the CITC Building Center. They had found a “LIVE frog” at the very back when they were devanning a 20ft container.

Biosecurity Officer Tamarua Teroi responded immediately and rushed to the



site and conducted a further inspection of the container. Thankfully there was the only one frog.

CITC staff had trapped the reptile in a box which was then transported to the Ministry of Agriculture Plant Health Laboratory to be euthanized and further identified.

The Biosecurity team contacted MPI NZ to assist with identification of this species of frog.

The Ministry also informed Fiji’s Biosecurity Authority on non-compliance under IPPC obligation and fumigation treatment for all containers.

To further protect our border, ALL incoming containers from Fiji will be “put on hold” for Biosecurity inspection prior to release by Customs.



**Above:** Toad was captured and contained.



**Above:** Toad contained in a smaller container, ready to be euthanized.

# Cane the Toad!

MPI Consultant Dylan Vanwinkel identified the captured frog specimen as a Cane Toad (*Phinella marina*), based on following characteristics:

- its robust body form;
- warty supraocular area (distinct from interorbital prominent parotial glands); and
- Webbed toes.

This identification was also supported by Graham Wragg who visited our lab to view the toad.

There are no native or naturalized exotic amphibians in the Cook Islands and therefore this specimen is clearly an arrival.

Our Biosecurity team has only been aware of one other case of a Live Cane Toad detected on Rarotonga in 1986. This was found a kilometer from the Nikao International Airport.

**Below photos:** Cane after being euthanized. "Strike a pose".



More details on the Cane Toad can be obtained from the Ministry of Agriculture in Arorangi.

# The Juvenile House Sparrow

On Wednesday 26th January 2022, Biosecurity received a call from Air New Zealand Cargo reporting a dead and squashed bird on a loading palette that came off a flight from Auckland, New Zealand.

Biosecurity officer Tamarua Teroi received the information, retrieved the bird and returned it to the Ministry Laboratory in Arorangi and placed in a specimen container.

The identification of the bird was later confirmed by consultant Graham Wragg who was visiting the Ministry, as a Juvenile House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*).

On further research and according to “Dr Google”, the house sparrow is of the sparrow family Passeridae, and found in most parts of the world. It is a small bird that has a typical length of 16cm (6.3 in) and a mass of 24-39.5g (0.85-1.39 oz).

Females and young birds are coloured pale brown and grey, and males have brighter black, white and brown markings. The house sparrow is native to most of Europe, the Mediterranean Basin and a large part of Asia.

Its intentional or accidental introduction to many regions, including parts of Australia, Africa and the Americas make it the most widely distributed wild birds.



**Above:** A LIVE juvenile house sparrow.

**Below:** The retrieved dead and squashed juvenile house sparrow.

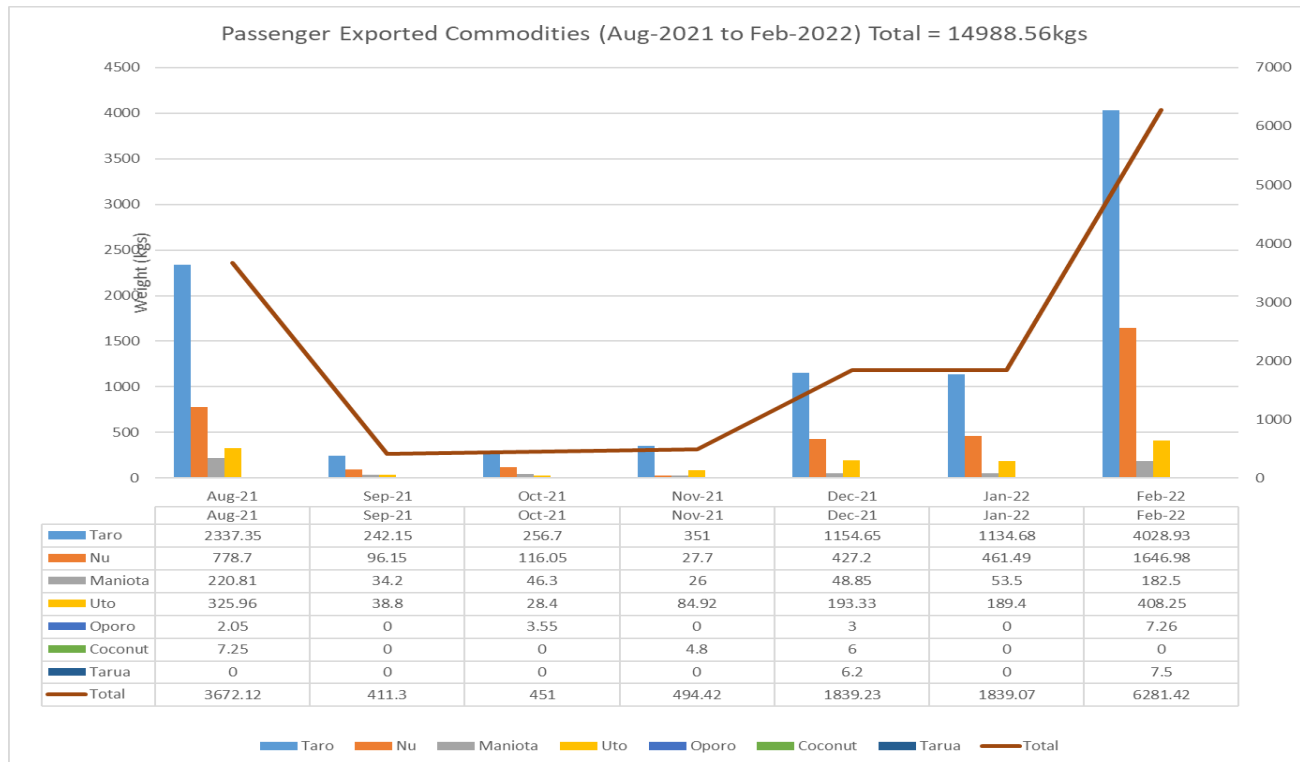
We apologize for the graphic details.



More details of the Juvenile House Sparrow can be obtained from the Biosecurity Division of the Ministry of Agriculture.

# Export Commodities

The biosecurity is pleased to report the export of food items taken out of the country by private passengers from the months of August 2021– Feb 2022.



As shown in the graph above, following the border closure in September 2021 and the reduction of flights to one a week, there was a significant decline in the export of fresh commodities via private passenger travel to New Zealand during the last quarter of 2021.

Following the re-opening of our international travel border on the 13<sup>th</sup> January 2022, the amount of private passenger exports increased again. This was further boosted by the change of one flight a week, to one flight a day.

We predict a continuing increase in the export of fresh commodities via private passenger travel to New Zealand with the added consideration of more exports when direct flights to Australia resume.

## Total weight of commodities exported by private passengers (AUGUST 2021 to FEBRUARY 2022)

Commodity	Total weight in Kgs
Taro	9,505.46
Nu	3,554.27
Maniota	612.16
Uto	1,269.06
Oporo	15.86
Coconut	18.05
Tarua	13.7
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>14,988.56</b>

For the past 7 months and as we navigate our way through this COVID-19 pandemic, a total of nearly 15 tons of fresh, non-commercial commodities have been exported to New Zealand by private passengers.