



## DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES

### News Release

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GOVERNOR

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### **CONSERVATION PARTNERS MARK 10 YEARS RELEASING ENDANGERED HAWAIIAN BIRDS INTO KAUA‘I FORESTS**

*San Diego Zoo, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, DLNR Division of Forestry and Wildlife,  
and United States Geological Survey Biological Resources Division*

Twelve, small, dark endangered birds were released into the forest of Kaua‘i yesterday, a milestone in the conservation of native Hawaiian birds. Through collaboration of private and government organizations, the puaiohi, or small Kaua‘i thrush, has been captive-bred and released annually into the forests of Kaua‘i for the last 10 years. The puaiohi is an elusive bird only found on the island of Kaua‘i, where it makes its home in the high elevation forests of the Alaka‘i Wilderness Preserve.

Prior to release, each puaiohi was banded for identification and fitted with a radio transmitter. The birds will be monitored for 30 days, the lifespan of the batteries in the transmitters, to monitor the birds’ movements and determine their survival rate. With Tuesday’s release, there have been 188 captive-bred puaiohi released into the wild.

“The release of captive birds is one strategy to ensure that the puaiohi does not go extinct; however, it cannot be the only strategy,” said David Leonard, biologist for the Department of Land and Natural Resources’ Division of Forestry and Wildlife. “Restoration efforts also need to include long term and landscape scale control of alien plants and non-native predators, and we are exploring innovative and cost effective approaches to achieve these. For example, we are determining if puaiohi will use rat-proof structures for nesting.”

Before the release of these 12 birds, staff worked to reduce the rat population near the release site. Rats are known to kill nesting puaiohi females, chicks and eggs. Other non-native species,

including pigs, deer and goats in the reserve impact the birds' habitat and mosquitoes carry avian malaria and avian pox.

In 1994, it was estimated that 200 puaiohi survived in the wild. The extremely low numbers of puaiohi prompted a collaboration of researchers and scientists from DLNR's Division of Forestry and Wildlife, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, United States Geological Survey Biological Resources Division and the San Diego Zoo.

To help the species recover, in 1996 eggs were taken from the Preserve to the San Diego Zoo's Keauhou Bird Conservation Center, where they could be raised in a protected environment. "While we're celebrating our 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of rearing and releasing the endangered puaiohi, we know there is still a long way to go before this species can be declared 'recovered,'" said Alan Lieberman, director of field programs for the San Diego Zoo's Institute for Conservation Research. "We are proud of our 17 years of restoring the population of Hawaiian forest birds and are committed to the ongoing stewardship of the puaiohi's forest habitat."

Using state and federal funds, DOFAW established the Kaua'i Endangered Forest Bird Recovery Project. This team of biologists collects information on the puaiohi that informs management actions, assists in the release of captive birds, and tracks newly released birds to document their movement and survival.

Because the puaiohi is federally listed as an endangered species, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service provides financial support and scientific collaboration to the State of Hawaii to support the recovery effort.

"We congratulate our partners for reaching this 10-year milestone in successfully reintroducing endangered puaiohi into the wild," said Loyal Mehrhoff, field supervisor for the Service's Pacific Islands Fish and Wildlife Office. "Captive propagation is labor-intensive and expensive, but well worth the effort when it contributes toward the recovery of a species."

At least 21 species of Hawai'i's endemic forest birds have become extinct, another 26 species are facing extinction, and most, including the puaiohi, are dependent on intensive conservation measures. The Zoo's Hawai'i Endangered Bird Conservation Program (HEBCP) manages the state-of-the-art Keauhou and Maui Bird Conservation centers, which work with avian species that are dependent on captive propagation for recovery and survival.

The San Diego Zoo's Institute for Conservation Research is dedicated to generating, sharing and applying scientific knowledge vital to the conservation of animals, plants and habitats worldwide. The work of the Institute includes onsite research efforts at the San Diego Zoo and the San Diego Zoo's Wild Animal Park, laboratory work at the Beckman Center for Conservation Research, and international field programs involving more than 180 researchers working in 35 countries. In addition to the Beckman Center, the Institute also operates the Griffin Reptile Conservation Center, the Botanical Conservation Center, the Keauhou and Maui Hawaiian Bird Conservation Centers and the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center. The Zoo also manages the 1,800-acre San Diego Zoo's Wild Animal Park, which includes a 900-acre native species reserve, and the San Diego Zoo. The important conservation and science work of these entities is supported in part by The Foundation of the Zoological Society of San Diego.

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