STOP EXTINCTION IN FRENCH POLYNESIA

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The project

LIFE STOP EXTINCTION IN FRENCH POLYNESIA

French Polynesia has one of the highest proportions of threatened birds in the world. Its birds are disappearing mainly because of invasive alien species (IAS) introduced deliberately or accidentally by humans.

Causing two major waves of historical extinction events linked to the arrival of the Polynesians and the Europeans, in which over-hunting must also have played a significant role. Many IAS are now established and continue to destabilise these fragile island ecosystems.

French Polynesia is a territory the size of Europe, with 118 islands, where these IAS are continuing to spread, mainly by humans from island to island. In this French overseas territory, 50 endemic birds have already disappeared, and two-thirds of the remaining endemic species are threatened, including 10 species which are critically endangered (CR).

Five of these threatened species number fewer than 200 individuals. On behalf of them, it's now time to say:

STOP EXTINCTION!

Critically Endangered CR

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Fatu Hiva Monarch *(Pomarea whitneyi)* or omaò keekee

FATU HIVA MONARCH

This territorial forest bird is the most threatened in French Polynesia, and perhaps even in the world. Strictly endemic and unique to the island of Fatu Iva in the Marquesas archipelago, it was once common throughout the island and is now on the brink of extinction with just 19 birds living in the Tai'u valley. In efforts to safeguard the population using ex-situ conservation methods one young has been hand-reared and survives in a new breeding facility on site in Fatu Iva.

The threats:

- Ship rats *(Rattus rattus)*, arrived in the 1990s, are now very abundant on the island and prey on eggs and chicks in nests, as well as females that brood at night, causing a catastrophic decline in numbers.
- Feral cats add additional pressure to this very vulnerable population.
- In 2022, avian malaria was diagnosed in young individuals. This invasive blood parasite is fatal for island birds that did not evolve a natural defence and is transmitted by the invasive mosquito *(Culex quinquefasciatus)*.

Conservation actions for the Fatu Hiva Monarch:

- Monitoring of each individual and their reproductive success.
- Actions to combat and manage invasive alien species:
  - Strengthening the fight against rats, with an extension of the protected zone.
  - Development and implementation of new innovative predator control methods.
  - Mosquito trapping targeted at limiting rate of transmitted disease.
  - Conduction of advanced epidemiological research on mosquitoes, and birds.
  - Conduction of a feasibility study and action for advanced and non-invasive mosquito control.
- Establishment of an ex-situ population protected from predators and avian malaria.
- Using ex-situ methods to increase population recruitment.
- Develop ex-situ methods like supplementary feeding, training, treatment and population management together with zoos which can be implemented in the wild.

Polynesian Ground-dove *(Pampusana erythroptera)* or tūtururū

POLYNESIAN GROUND-DOVE

This active ground-dwelling dove was once widely distributed on, at least, 24 islands and atolls in the Society and Tuamotu-Gambier Archipelagos. The species was until recently present on five Tuamotu islands: Rangiroa, Morane, Vahanga, Tenarunga and Tenararo with tiny. Since, the Rangiroa population has disappeared following an episode of avian smallpox, and the Morane population is also extinct. Today it is only found on the tiny islands of the Actéon group, of which Tenararo, is the most important. The current population is estimated at 180 individuals.

The threats:

- It only survives on three atolls free of introduced predators, but in close proximity, which are exposed to the same risks of climate change and natural disasters.
- On the island of Tenararo, planted coconut trees grow out of control and harms the natural vegetation.
- Invasive alien species, if introduced, such as rodents cause certain predation and disturbance, and ant's and other species are further potential risks.
- The ground-dove is susceptible to domestic avian diseases.

Conservation actions for the Polynesian Ground-dove:

- Monitoring Tenararo's ground-dove population trends and reproduction.
- Reinforcement of biosecurity around the islands in the Actéon group.
- Create assurance population in a new site further away by translocating 30 individuals to Temoe.
- Ensure the classification of 4 hectares as a private reserve on Temoe.
- Removal of coconut trees from 90 hectares of Tenararo, with the participation of youth from local communities.

Tahitian Monarch *(Pomarea nigra)* or ōmāma'o

TAHITI MONARCH

This small forest canopy species is strictly endemic to the island of Tahiti. Once found all around the island, only 21 individuals were known in 1998 when the Société d'Ornithologie de Polynésie "MANU" began work to rescue it. At the time, the species was on the verge of extinction and thanks to continued rescue efforts over the last 25 years, its population has now reached at least 150 adults in several forest valleys in Tahiti and has become a model of how conservation efforts can turn the tide for threatened species. Its story is not yet fully told.

The threats:

- Tahiti Monarch faces 10 of the 100 species listed as the most harmful in the world
- The Ship rat *(Rattus rattus)* constitutes its main threat as a nest predator.
- Invasive bird species such as Common Myna *(Acridotheres tristis)*, Red-vented Bulbul *(Pycnonotus cafer)*, Swamp Harrier *(Circus approximans)* are competitors and predators.
- Feral cats also prey on nests and adults.
- The quality of their habitat is degraded by highly invasive plants, such as the African tulip tree *(Spathodea campanulata)* and Velvet tree *(Miconia calvescens)*.
- Wild ungulates such as goats and pigs additionally impact the forests ecosystems.
- Since a decade the Little Fire Ant *(Wasmannia auropunctata)*, is encroaching on the forested valleys hosting the Tahiti Monarch.

Conservation actions for the Tahiti Monarch:

- Monitoring and tracking the population and its reproductive success, banding birds.
- Strengthening and widening the fight against invasive species with traditional and innovative methods and eradication of the Little Fire Ants.
- Extension of the protected area through habitat restoration with the removal of invasive plants including 8 emerging species, and planting of at least 2000 native or endemic trees.
- Eradication of rats and goats on the nearby island of Me'etia, which has been identified as suitable for establishing a second population of Tahiti Monarch on a predator free island.
- Formal protection of areas with the classification of 40 hectares as a private reserve on Me'etia.
- Highlighting the ecosystem services provided by protection and facilitating development of innovative and sustainable funding schemes with local landowners.

Rapa Fruit-dove *(Ptilinopus huttoni)* or koko

RAPA FRUIT-DOVE

This spectacular fruit-dove is as dependent on fruiting and flowering forest patches to survive and as they are on its ability as a seed disperser. The doves have been very scarce for decades and continues to decline. Most recent counts and estimates are around 140 individuals remaining. In the remote island of Rapa free roaming hoofstock, particularly cattle and goats have altered the landscape. Only a few patches of native forest remain and if nothing is done, these refuges of endemic species will disappear within a decade.

The threats:

- Goats and cattle cause large-scale erosion and selective grazing.
- The Caribbean pine trees *(Pinus caribaea)* are expanding out of control.
- The Strawberry guava *(Psidium cattleianum)* invasion is smothering native plants in all forested areas of the island.
- The island is still free from the Ship rat. Preventing its introduction is essential for safeguarding Rapa's endemic birds and the health of its inhabitants.

Conservation actions for the Rapa Fruit-dove:

- Installation of a biosecurity system and a rat-detecting dog on the harbour docks.
- Construction of fences to protect the last remnants of forest.
- Intensive population monitoring and studying the species unique biology.
- Removal of Strawberry guava and Caribbean pine trees threatening the Iri valley and other sites with involvement of local communities.

Rapa Shearwater *(Puffinus myrtae)* or kākikāki

RAPA SHEARWATER

Although it wanders far over the open ocean in search of food it is the only sea-bird strictly endemic to French Polynesia. It breeds only on four uninhabited rocky islets off the island of Rapa. It is estimated that around 120 birds still survive. Exact numbers of breeding pairs are yet to be confirmed, but only 7 pairs with active nest borrows were identified in 2024.
Of the four islets which the species use for nesting, only one Karapoo koio is still free of Polynesian rats *(Rattus exulans)*, leaving just 2 hectares out of the 37.5 hectares potential breeding area secure.

The threats:

- Nest predation by rodents is the main cause of the decline in the Rapa Shearwater.
- Deliberate introductions of domestic goats which trample nests and cause erosion
- Invasive plants such as Molasses grass *(Melinis minutiflora)* and Strawberry guava also colonise the islets. The sticky grass impacts the waterproofing of the nesting and resting seabirds' plumage, and the densely growing guava blocks the birds access to the ground and nest borrows with its stems and roots.
- Artificial light confuses the sense of orientation of fledging seabirds.

Conservation actions for the Rapa Shearwater:

- Eradication of rodents on Karapo Rahi and follow-up on the eradication of Rapa Iti and Tauturou performed in 2024.
- Introduce biosecurity understanding with local communities in Rapa
- Combat light pollution to improve the survival of young birds when they fledge.
- Restore the islet habitat and breeding grounds by removing invasive plant and revegetation to limit the regrowth.

Implementing project partners:

Direction de l'environnement

Manu

ZOO COPENHAGEN

IRD Institut de Recherche pour le Développement FRANCE

ilm

JEAN-FRANÇOIS BUTAUD

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To learn more please visit our website and follow our social media:
https://manu.pf/projet/life-stop-extinction/

Do you want to be part of our project?

Help save the 5 most threatened birds!

To achieve all of our ambitious conservation actions we depend on additional co-sponsors to close funding gabs to ensure the realisation of all planned aspects of the project. Additionally new developments and exiting ideas and opportunities developed in the process will require additional funding or other resources.

There is a need and opportunities for subject experts and volunteers to get involved in many aspects of the project not least for zoos in the aspects of ex-situ management and knowledge accumulation around the Fatu Hiva Monarch.

If you are interested, please contact us:

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Current additional co-sponsors of Life Stop Extinction

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