



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

News Release

Pacific Islands External Affairs Office

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Plan to Recover Endangered Guam Micronesian Kingfisher Released *“Recovery Efforts Reach Milestone of 100 Birds”*

A revised plan that describes the actions needed to recover the Guam Micronesian kingfisher from the brink of extinction was released today by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Since the mid 1960s, nine of the 11 species of native forest-dwelling birds from Guam have gone extinct, primarily due to predation by the non-native brown treesnake. The kingfisher, known as “sihek” in Chamorro, is one of the few remaining native bird species from Guam.

The sihek was originally listed as endangered in 1984. By 1988, the species no longer existed in the wild, and now is found only in captivity. Captive breeding efforts to save the species began in 1983 with the start of the Guam Bird Rescue Project. During the first two years of the project, 29 sihek were moved from Guam to several mainland zoos; by 1990 the captive population was up to 61 birds.

The first captive-reared sihek were returned to Guam in 2003. More birds were returned in 2004 and in 2008 bringing the captive population on Guam to 10 individuals. The program has expanded to include 17 captive propagation facilities on the U.S. mainland and Guam. Hindered by high mortality rates and poor reproduction, progress has been slow; however, this year the goal of 100 individuals was finally reached, bringing the sihek one step closer to re-establishment of a wild population.

“The sihek may be gone from the wild, but it is not too late to save this colorful bird from extinction,” said Patrick Leonard, field supervisor for the Fish and Wildlife Office in the Pacific Islands. “Our goal is to bring this species back to Guam and its people. Thanks to the efforts of the Government of Guam, American Zoological Association and our other partners, the bird has been saved from extinction. However, the future and its reintroduction back into the wild depend in large part on the involvement and commitment of the people of Guam.”

The revised recovery plan focuses on actions that will coordinate and monitor recovery efforts, restore populations, control predators, protect and manage habitat, and increase public awareness to ensure the long-term survival of this bird species. An example of a recovery action is extensive predator control, especially control of brown treesnakes, throughout habitat where the bird has been reestablished.

The purpose of the recovery plan is two-fold: to outline criteria to downlist the species from endangered to threatened status; and to identify prioritized actions necessary to recover the

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species and remove it from federal protection. Criteria for downlisting the species are to establish two subpopulations of at least 500 birds each (one in northern Guam and one in southern Guam); ensure both subpopulations are either stable or increasing for a period of at least five consecutive years; ensure sufficient habitat is protected and managed; and control brown treesnakes and other introduced predators

The criteria for removing the species from federal protection are the same as those for downlisting, except that the subpopulation numbers are increased to 1,000 individuals each, the timeframes are extended to ten consecutive years, and a monitoring plan has been added to ensure recovery efforts continue for a minimum of five years after delisting.

Historically, the sihek occurred throughout Guam in all habitats except pure savannah and wetlands, and as late as 1945 it was considered a fairly common forest bird. Factors that may have led to the decline of the sihek include habitat loss or degradation, pesticides, competition with the introduced black drongo bird, disease, and introduced predators such as cats, rats, monitor lizards, and brown treesnakes.

Sihek are relatively small kingfishers measuring about 8 inches in length and weighing 1.8 to 2.7 ounces, with females being slightly heavier than males. The adult male has a cinnamon-brown head, neck, upper back, and underparts. A black line extends around the nape and the eye ring is black. Some of the lower back, wing, and shoulder feathers are greenish-blue, and the tail is blue. The feet and eyes are dark brown, and the bill is black except for some white at the base. The female resembles the adult male, but the upper breast, chin, and throat are paler, and the remaining underparts and underwing linings are white instead of cinnamon.

Copies of the final revised recovery plan may be downloaded from the Service's website at <http://www.fws.gov/pacific/ecoservices/endangered/recovery/plans.html> or by calling the Fish and Wildlife Service's Honolulu office at 808-792-9400. A limited number of copies also are available at Guam National Wildlife Refuge at Ritidian.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov.

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Note to Editors: Images are available by calling Ken Foote at 808-792-9535.