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'Sihek' chick hatched on Guam

By Bryan C. Sualog

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The Department of Agriculture recently welcomed a new Guam Micronesian kingfisher baby chick.

The chick hatched on April 7 as part of the department's captive breeding program.

"Any Guam Micronesian kingfisher hatch is so significant just because of the numbers. Then to have one hatch here I think is more exciting," said Kate Karagiannis, a bird keeper with the St. Louis Zoo.

Karagiannis is teaching the department's staff how to care for the chick. The chick's mother was one of several female siheks that arrived from the St. Louis Zoo last October.

"It's new territory for us," said Suzanne Medina, a wildlife biologist with the Department of Agriculture. "We're learning and it's great having experts like Kate come out here and point us in the right direction."

Medina said this was the first Guam Micronesian kingfisher, or "sihek" in Chamorro, chick to hatch on Guam since 2005, when the program's only female bird died.

The breeding can start up again with the females that were brought in from the states last year, Medina said. "We've actually been in kind of a waiting period for the last couple of years waiting for females."

It is unknown whether the bird is a male or female, but it will join Guam's breeding population once it matures.

The staff is hoping that it's a female. Medina said female Guam Micronesian kingfishers are in high demand because the population on both Guam and in the states are skewed towards males.

"But whatever it is, we're very happy," she said.

The Guam Micronesian kingfisher is one of the 11 endemic species threatened with extinction following the accidental introduction of the brown tree snake during World War II, according to Pacific Daily News files. Twenty-nine Guam Micronesian kingfishers were captured from the wild in the mid-1980s and transferred from Guam to various zoos on the U.S. mainland to begin the Micronesian Kingfisher Species Survival Plan and increase the population, files state.

The Guam Micronesian kingfisher is currently extinct in the wild and the captive population totals about 100, files state. The Department of Agriculture now has 11 Guam Micronesian kingfishers, including the chick.



First since 2005: St. Louis Zoo bird keeper Kate Karagiannis holds a two-week-old Micronesian kingfisher, or "sihek," at the Guam Department of Agriculture in Mangilao yesterday. The chick is the first one born at the department since 2005, the department's wildlife biologist Suzanne Medina said. The sihek is an endangered species and is extinct in the wild, though once very common on Guam. (Masako Watanabe/Pacific Daily News/mwatanabe@guamp)



Baby kingfisher: St. Louis Zoo bird keeper Kate Karagiannis lifts a 2-week-old Micronesian kingfisher, or "sihek," from its nest at the Guam Department of Agriculture in Mangilao yesterday. It's the first sihek born at the department since 2005, wildlife biologist Suzanne Medina said. The sihek is an endangered species and is extinct in the wild. (Masako Watanabe/Pacific Daily News/mwatanabe@guamp)