



News

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ST. LOUIS ZOO'S STAFF VETERINARIAN TAKES PART IN REINTRODUCTION OF ENDANGERED MICRONESIAN KINGFISHERS TO THEIR NATIVE GUAM

Dr. Randy Junge, staff veterinarian of the St. Louis Zoo, leaves September 23 as part of a national plan to re-introduce Micronesian kingfishers to their native island of Guam. The Micronesian kingfisher was considered extinct in the wild by 1988. It was at this time that the last of the species in the wild, 29 birds, was collected to form a captive breeding population in the U.S.

A number of U.S. zoos, including the St. Louis Zoo, joined together to save the Micronesian kingfisher as part of a Species Survival Plan (SSP), sponsored by the American Zoo and Aquarium Association (AZA). Today there are 60 birds in 11 U.S. zoos.

Junge has served as veterinary advisor to the AZA's SSP for the Micronesian kingfisher since 1993. He and Beth Bahner, the SSP coordinator and the Animal Collections Manager at Philadelphia Zoo, will travel to Guam to help establish care procedures for three U.S.-born male kingfishers. The new arrivals will be housed at aviaries managed by the Guam Department of Aquatic and Wildlife Resources.

When care of the three male kingfishers is well established, the SSP's next step may include sending either a female kingfisher or an established breeding pair to Guam. Then, when a captive breeding program becomes established there, the long-term goal is to reintroduce kingfishers back into the wild. The AZA, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the Guam Division of Aquatic and Wildlife Resources work as a team. They have established a healthy captive population of will



micronesian kingfisher
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kingfishers, studied the natural history of related species on nearby islands and developed population control methods for the kingfishers' enemy, the brown tree snake.

The decline of the Micronesian kingfisher began during World War II, when the Mariana Islands were the center of much military activity. Transports routinely made their way between the islands and neighboring Australia, New Guinea and the Solomon Islands.

A deadly stowaway, the brown tree snake made its way to Guam and thrived on the large supply of birds. The snake population may have peaked at around 30,000 snakes per square mile. Like many oceanic birds, the Guam or Micronesian kingfisher and nine other species of native birds had evolved with an absence of land predators.

The St. Louis Zoo has hatched close to 25 Micronesian kingfishers since 1986, according to Michael Macek, the Zoo's curator of birds and member of the Micronesian kingfisher SSP. Most of the chicks have been hand-reared by St. Louis Zoo Department staff. This summer alone, the St. Louis Zoo has raised six Micronesian kingfishers, four reared by hand and two by parents.

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