

Disney's Animal Programs Forms Partnership to Preserve the Guam Rail

The Island of Guam (found at the southernmost end of the Mariana chain in the South Pacific) is home to a number of bird species that can be found nowhere else in the world. Among them is the Guam Rail (*Gallirallus owstoni*). This small, grouse-like, flightless brown bird, at one time inhabited the Island's forest, woodland, scrub and grasslands. Unfortunately, wild populations haven't been seen since 1986 and it's believed to be extinct in the wild. Scientists believe this is primarily due to the introduction of the brown tree snake (*Boiga irregularis*). This tree-dwelling, nocturnal reptile feeds primarily on eggs and young birds and has had a devastating impact on many of Guam's native birds.

But the Guam Rail's future is not entirely bleak. Since 1987 captive breeding of this species has had great success, thanks to a strong partnership between the field-based Guam Rail Recovery Program, The Department of Aquatic and Wildlife Resources, US Fish and Wildlife Service and the American Zoo and Aquarium Association (AZA) Species Survival Plan (SSP) program. Through this partnership, the Guam Rail SSP has developed an exchange and release program in which captive- hatched birds from U.S. AZA institutions are returned to Guam where they continue to breed and raise offspring in a breeding facility or are released into the wild.

To enhance the future of this endangered species, Walt Disney World Animal Programs veterinarians and animal care professionals have formed a unique partnership with the Guam Rail recovery team. During visits to the Island, the Disney team has shared their expertise and skills regarding captive avian care and management while learning more about the management of the species in the wild. The team also completed a health survey of the captive population of rails on Guam, including physical exams, blood and fecal analysis. This is the first medical assessment of this type to be completed since the recovery program began.

Information gained from this health survey will enhance the medical care and the ultimate survival of this unique bird both in captivity and in the wilds of Guam.