



CHERYL CALAUSTRO
Alumni Rare Conservation Fellow



RARE
Inspiring Conservation

- Cheryl Calastro – Rare Conservation Fellow working for the Guam Department of Agriculture.
- Growing up my grandfather took care of me and his form of babysitting was to take me into the garden.
- I know it sounds cheesy, but he was a strong guiding force and my love of nature came from his influence.



- I knew that I wanted to do something for the Earth and was a zookeeper for years.
- I wanted to get beyond the confines of a zoo and into the world and that's what brought me to the Guam rail – the Koko.



- By the late 80's the territorial bird of Guam, the Guam rail, had gone extinct in the wild.
- When I hear about Paul working on an island to save a bird from extinction it makes me wonder how different the future of this beautiful bird would have been had there been someone like Paul in Guam at the time.
- After World War II snakes arrived on Guam with shipments of equipment.
- At the time no one could have imagined the devastation that the unintentional cargo would have on the island's wildlife.

Boiga irregularis



In some parts of Guam, it is estimated there are 12,000 brown tree snakes per square mile.

This introduced species decimated Guam's avifauna, causing the extinction of six of Guam's 11 bird species and the near-extinction of the remaining five. Luckily, for some of these birds, they are still living on the northern islands. However, some of these birds are now gone for good.

- Now there are about 20 snakes per acre on Guam – the highest density of snakes in the world.
- It's not like the horror movies though, they don't come up in your toilets ... often.
- They are actually quite hard to see: they are nocturnal, well-camouflaged, move quickly..
- And when they arrived on the island they saw a naïve population of flightless birds ready for the taking.
- [Birds huddling on branches story].



- The introduction of the snakes was human caused. It could have been prevented. Maybe humans could also help reverse it.
- It's amazing to me how little people know about what is happening on Guam.
- There is a whole generation of people that do not that there is a snake problem or that Guam's territorial bird no longer lives in the wild on Guam.
- What compels me to do what I do is to raise awareness.



- We also knew that we had the perfect mascot and a great story.
- It took a long time to get a good likeness for the mascot – one of Rare’s signature products. They were really ugly.
- It wasn’t until we got the slippers on it that it became relatable.



In 2007 I applied to become a Rare Conservation Fellow for two main reasons, we needed the tools that Rare teaches to really inspire people and make the rail a symbol of hope and pride on Guam.



Campaign highlights

Barriers: lack of information, mis-information

Due to time and funding constraints, my campaign launched an assault using mass media and face to face tactics that included:

TV, radio a handful of stories and articles online and traditional Newspaper, Magazine articles including the PDN, MV, Triton's Call, Guahan Magazine, Guam Business Journal

PSAs at restaurants, malls, the large electronic billboard at Guam's busiest intersection.

and beyond rareplanet.org, a Facebook page for Che'lu, the Go Native! Ko'ko'" mascot



- Mainland Guam still has too many threats to the birds
- Cocos island – a day resort – was the perfect place.
- It was important to involve the community in the release.



The funds from the alumni grant have gone to:

- continuing the outreach work of the original campaign through more targeted face to face with new audiences
 - Resort workers, vendors
 - Local boaters, visitors to Cocos



- We had a traditional blessing



- Not everyone [explain who was there] could see the first bird released, but they knew what was happening and knew that they were a part of something special.
- They were proud of the fact that they were now responsible for protecting the birds by calling in any sightings of invasive species on a hotline and other measures.



- The birds knew how to be wild birds and foraged and ran into their new wild habitat

WHAT'S NEXT



- Monitoring of Cocos Island continues with community support.
- 10 more released in August
- Awareness campaign about the Brown tree snake.

•Rare has taught me that conservation is about people.

•And the people of Guam are an inspiration to me.

Because of their efforts to create and protect a safe habitat for the rail we now have chicks.

•I don't have a photo – but they are in their ugly phase, but people have seen them

•My next project will be to raise awareness on mainland Guam about the brown tree snake with a grant from the department of the interior. I couldn't have gotten it without the training and experience from working with Rare.



- This experience has taught me that you cannot hide behind the science, you have to talk to people in order to change behaviors and attitudes.
- What I am doing might be because of science, but conservation only succeeds when it touches on pride.
- There is no light bulb, it's a gradual thing, but if you are attuned to the changes in attitude you'll see it. And on the day of the release you could just tell that the attitude had changed.
- People had Pride for the bird and the role that they played in securing its future.

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Thank You!

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