



Media Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Slimy residents fill gated community

SCHOFIELD BARRACKS, Hawaii—Army staff welcomed the last of incoming residents to a gated community high atop the Waianae Mountains, Tuesday.

The Oahu Army Natural Resources Program (OANRP) staff, joined by personnel from the University of Hawaii’s Rare Snail Conservation Laboratory and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), flew the remaining half of more than 300 kahuli tree snails (*Achatinella mustelina*) to their new home in a one-of-a-kind snail enclosure. Previously the snails had spent the last two years in a temporary home at the UH snail lab.

“It’s very satisfying. We’re bringing them back to either where they came from, or where their ancestors came from,” said Vince Costello, OANRP rare snail conservation specialist.

Costello and group introduced the first half of the snails, Feb. 8, but waited to introduce the second half to make sure the snails were doing okay in their new habitat

The habitat consists of an enclosure almost the size of a basketball court. Army and industry professionals designed it to safeguard the kahuli from the voracious predators that have pushed this tiny Hawaiian native to the brink of extinction.

Predators like the cannibal rosy wolf snail (*Euglandina rosea*), mice, rats and the Jackson’s chameleon shouldn’t be able to snack on the kahuli inside the enclosure, thanks to its 4-foot tall surrounding wall with multiple layers of built-in protection: a buried wall portion, curved fence hood, solid-wall construction, electric wiring and special sections of wire bristles that cannibal snails can’t cross.

“I describe it as the management tool of the future,” Costello said. “It’s a unique project—one that’s never been built before—and we hope we’ll learn from it and be able to build others.”

The Army started monitoring the kahuli in 1995 as part of its mission to support Soldier training through the management of threatened and endangered species. As the years passed, Army biologists noted an increase in snail predators and a nearly 50% decrease in the Waianae Mountains kahuli population, spurring them to action.

-MORE-

SNAILS 2-2-2

“This area is exceptional in its (kahuli) richness (but) also exceptional in its astronomical numbers of (rosy wolf snails). It deserves an exceptional response to preserve what snails remain,” Costello wrote in his 2010 report detailing the situation.

The proposal to save the kahuli included temporarily relocating them to the care of the UH snail lab, with the intention of building the snails a home safe from predators. Today that vision is a reality with the help of conservation professionals from New Zealand and agencies like the USFWS.

“The Service is excited about the completion of this snail enclosure because it provides a protected area where Oahu tree snails can once again thrive,” said Jess Newton, leader of the Endangered Species Recovery Program for USFWS’s Pacific Islands Fish and Wildlife Office. “Currently, 73% of these snail species are extinct, and the remaining species are near extinction. To lose them, would be to lose a special piece of our local heritage.”

The kahuli were an important part of native Hawaiian culture: prized for their beautiful shells, referenced in folklore and songs, and used in lei and other ornaments.

“This effort could be the difference between extinction and survival,” Costello said.

He and other team members hope the enclosure will be a model for other agencies to use in the conservation battle.

In total, the OANRP manages more than 100 threatened and endangered species on Oahu and the Island of Hawaii. The team recently received an environmental award from the Secretary of the Army for their innovation and commitment to preserving Hawaii’s natural resources.

Visit <http://www.garrison.hawaii.army.mil/sustainability> to view photos, videos and learn more about Army natural resource efforts in Hawaii.

MEDIA NOTE: All images are available as separate jpg files. Additional images and video are also available on www.dvids.hub.net, keyword “snail.” Contact USAG-HI Public Affairs at 808-656-3160 or 808-542-9489, for assistance or questions.

-MORE / *IMAGES-

SNAILS 3-3-3



1. Photo1.SNAILrelease.holland.jpg

Brenden Holland, principal investigator, University of Hawaii Rare Snail Conservation Laboratory, joins Army biologists in relocating endangered kahuli tree snails to an enclosure in the Waianae Mountains, Feb. 8. The snails have spent the last two years in safekeeping at the UH snail lab while Army biologists designed their new home. The enclosure features multiple barriers to keep carnivorous rosy wolf snails, rats, mice and Jackson's chameleons away from the defenseless kahuli.

Photo credit: DOD photo by U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Michael R. Holzworth/Released



2. Photo2.SNAILrelease.kahuli1.jpg

Young kahuli tree snails explore their new home, Feb. 8. Oahu Army Natural Resources Program staff, joined by personnel from the University of Hawaii's Rare Snail Conservation Laboratory and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, released more than 300 endangered kahuli, Feb. 8 and 21, into a unique enclosure designed to protect the snails from predators.

Photo credit: DOD photo by U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Michael R. Holzworth/Released

-MORE-

SNAILS 4-4-4



3. Photo3.SNAILrelease.costello.jpg

Vince Costello, rare snail conservation specialist, Oahu Army Natural Resources Program, U.S. Army Garrison-Hawaii, releases endangered kahuli tree snails into an enclosure in the Waianae Mountains, Feb. 8. Army biologists designed this first-of-its-kind enclosure to protect kahuli from multiple predators that feed on it.

Photo credit: DOD photo by U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Michael R. Holzworth/Released



4. Photo4.SNAILrelease.kahuli4

Kahuli tree snails, often referred to as “jewels of the forest,” were once an important part of Native Hawaiian culture. Today, the tiny species is on the brink of extinction. According to Army biologists, management tools like their new snail enclosure in the Waianae Mountains may be the key to the snails’ survival.

Photo credit: Oahu Army Natural Resources Program, U.S. Army Garrison-Hawaii

-MORE-

SNAILS 5-5-5



4. Photo4.SNAILrelease.chameleon

The Jackson's chameleon is one of several invasive species who prey on the endangered kahuli tree snail. Army biologists regularly partner with other conservation-minded organizations to combat the threat of these invasive species.

Photo credit: DOD photo by U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Michael R. Holzworth/Released



5. Photo5.SNAILrelease.langerrohrer

Tim Langer (left), branch chief, Consultation and Habitat Conservation Planning Program, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Pacific Islands Field Office, and Joby Rohrer, senior natural resource management coordinator, Oahu Army Natural Resources Program, U.S. Army Garrison-Hawaii, release endangered kahuli tree snails, Feb. 8, in the Waianae Mountains. The snails have spent the last two years in safekeeping while Army biologists designed a multiple-barrier enclosure to protect them in the wild.

Photo credit: DOD photo by U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Michael R. Holzworth/Released

SNAILS 6-6-6



4. Photo5.SNAILrelease.exclosure

The Army biologists designed a multiple-barrier snail enclosure in the Waianae Mountains to protect the endangered kahuli tree snails. The enclosure is approximately the size of a basketball court and was designed to keep out the kahuli predators, to include the carnivorous rosy wolf snail, Jackson's chameleons, rats and mice. The Army protects endangered species, like the kahuli, to support Soldier training and to comply with the Endangered Species Act.

Photo credit: Oahu Army Natural Resources Program, U.S. Army Garrison-Hawaii