



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# News Release

*Pacific Islands External Affairs Office*

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## **Draft Revised Recovery Plan Released for Guam Micronesian Kingfisher**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today published a draft revised recovery plan that identifies recovery actions needed for the Guam Micronesian kingfisher. A notice of availability regarding the document appears in today's *Federal Register*, and the public may comment on the draft plan until close of business on June 27, 2004.

The draft plan focuses on actions that will coordinate and monitor recovery efforts, restore populations, control predators, protect and manage habitat, and increase public awareness of the bird to ensure the long-term survival of the species.

The Guam Micronesian kingfisher, known in Chamorro as "sihek," is native to the island of Guam. The Service listed the sihek as an endangered subspecies in 1984; it is also officially recognized as endangered by the Territory of Guam. The sihek was last observed on the island in 1988, and is now considered extinct in the wild. Only 60 captive individuals remain. Three of those birds were returned to Guam last year and the rest are in captivity in 11 zoological institutions on the mainland.

"Although the sihek is currently gone from the wild, we still have a chance to save this beautiful bird from extinction," said Gina Shultz, acting field supervisor for the Pacific Islands Fish and Wildlife Office. "Thanks to the efforts of our partners on Guam and in the zoological institutions, we look forward to working with the people of Guam to someday restore this bird to its natural habitat. The road to recovery will be long and difficult, but with the protection of habitat and the control of introduced predators, the sihek will someday call Guam its home again."

Sihek are relatively small kingfishers measuring about 8 inches in length and weighing 1.8 to 2.7 ounces, with females being slightly heavier than males. The adult male has a cinnamon-brown head, neck, upper back, and underparts. A black line extends around the nape and the eye ring is black. Some of the lower back, wing, and shoulder feathers are greenish-blue, and the tail is blue. The feet and eye are dark brown, and the bill is black except for some white at the base. The female resembles the adult male, but the upper breast, chin, and throat are paler, and the remaining underparts and underwing linings are white instead of cinnamon.

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Historically, the sihek occurred throughout Guam in all habitats except pure savannah and wetlands, and as late as 1945 it was considered a fairly common forest bird. Factors that may have led to the decline of the sihek include habitat loss or degradation, pesticides, competition with the non-native black drongo, disease, and predation by non-native predators such as cats, rats, monitor lizards, and brown treesnakes.

Predation by the brown treesnake appears to be the overriding cause of the wild population's decline and extirpation. Brown treesnakes probably arrived on Guam prior to the 1950's as stowaways on salvaged material. The snakes are native to coastal Australia, Papua New Guinea, and the northwestern islands of Melanesia, but their presence on Guam has caused the extinction of most native bird species on the island.

The primary threats to the captive populations of sihek are high mortality and low productivity, which limit population growth and erode genetic diversity. The underlying causes of these threats remain unknown.

The goal of the recovery plan is to develop criteria to downlist the species from endangered to threatened status, and to identify prioritized actions necessary to recover the species and remove it from federal protection. The criteria for downlisting the species are: To establish two subpopulations of at least 500 individuals each (one in northern Guam and one in southern Guam); To ensure both subpopulations are either stable or increasing for a period of at least five consecutive years; To ensure that sufficient habitat is protected and managed; and to control brown treesnakes and other non-native predators for at least five consecutive years.

The criteria for removing the species from federal protection are the same as those for downlisting, except that the subpopulation numbers are increased to 1,000 individuals each, the time frames are extended to ten consecutive years. Also, a monitoring plan has been added to ensure recovery efforts continue for a minimum of five years after delisting.

Copies of the draft revised recovery plan are available on the Service's website at <http://pacificislands.fws.gov> or by calling the Service's Honolulu office at 808-792-9400. A limited number of copies also are available at Guam National Wildlife Refuge at Ritidian. Written comments may be submitted to the Acting Field Supervisor, Pacific Islands Fish and Wildlife Office, 300 Ala Moana Blvd., Room 3-122, Box 50088, Honolulu, HI 96850.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 544 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 63 Fish and Wildlife Management offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.