

Re-established: From 'extinct' species to conservation icon

The Antiguan racer was common throughout the islands of Antigua until the late 19th century, when populations were decimated by introduced Asian mongooses and rats. The species was officially declared extinct in the 1930s, but a small number had in fact survived on one mongoose-free offshore island, much to the surprise of conservationists.

Rumours of the snake's demise had been exaggerated, but not greatly. The relict population was small, with only around 50 individuals. More than half bore the scars of their tussles with the island's alien black rats, such as bite marks and truncated tails.

In response, FFI helped to found the Antiguan Racer Conservation Project in

1995 and worked hard to eradicate the invasive rats using innovative techniques. With the rats gone, the racer population more than doubled to 113 and FFI and its partners set about restoring and restocking neighbouring islands too.

Since then, total racer numbers have increased six-fold to well over 300 individuals, now living on four different offshore islands. The project has also succeeded in making a local hero of the totally harmless but once despised snake. Thanks to a nationwide education and awareness campaign, racers are now positively celebrated by local people as a unique Antiguan conservation icon.



J.Darby/FFI

Where your money goes

£5 (US \$10) could pay for a microchip tag to mark a racer permanently and deter illegal poaching by wildlife traders.

£1,000 (US \$2,000) could keep an offshore island rat free for a year, helping racers, sea turtles and seabirds breed in safety.

£20,000 (US \$40,000) could restore another island and prepare it for the reintroduction of Antiguan racers.

Conservation efforts hotting up on volcanic island

Great gains for conservation have been made since FFI first began working on Ometepe Island, Nicaragua.

Made up of two volcanoes linked by wetlands, Ometepe is one of the world's largest freshwater islands. Boasting a range of altitudes and climates – thanks to its volcanic origins and the influence of weather systems from both the Atlantic and Pacific coasts – the island supports a wide range of habitats.

Having helped to build the island's first protected area headquarters, hire and equip its first ever park rangers, and provide vital conservation training to a wide range of groups, FFI is still working hard on Ometepe.

Thanks to FFI support, for example, the Nicaraguan Government has

recently agreed a new management committee for the island's natural reserve, and is developing a financial plan to help the reserve pay for itself. It is hoped that this plan will help Nicaragua's other protected areas to follow suit in becoming self-sustaining.

By supporting the development of a new nature trail, which will raise environmental awareness among tourists, FFI is also aiming to ensure that the island's marginalised communities benefit from their natural resources.

Finally, FFI is helping the island to work towards becoming a UN-recognised Biosphere Reserve. So watch this space for further rumblings from Ometepe!

Did you know?

We stay until our job is done. FFI's work often focuses on building up local conservation skills and resources, ultimately enabling people and governments to manage their own habitats.

Where your money goes

£20 (US \$40) could buy a ranger's uniform .

£100 (US \$200) could pay a ranger's salary for a month.

£150 (US \$300) could sponsor one local tourist guide through an accredited training scheme.