# Over 7,000 'glow-in-the-dark' snails return to island homes

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**Team behind decades long zoo project celebrate latest milestones for recovery of 'extinct' snails**

THOUSANDS OF 'GLOW-IN-THE-DARK' SNAILS have been reintroduced to French Polynesia as part of global conservation programme to save the snails from the brink of extinction.

The annual reintroduction of zoo-bred Extinct in the Wild and Critically Endangered Partula snails saw over 7,000 snails returned to four islands, making it the largest release of the group of finger-nail sized snail species and subspecies to date.

Before release, conservationists dotted the shell of each snail with a small dab of white UV reflective paint, which glows blue under UV light. As the snails are most active at night, the paint helps the team find released snails and monitor the recovery of the species.

During the releases, the team discovered an unmarked, juvenile *Partula varia* - making it the first wild-born member of this reintroduced snail species to be spotted in over 30 years. This discovery is proof that the Partula species is not only surviving on their native island of Huahine, but that they are successfully breeding - a momentous milestone for the programme.

The exciting find is a promising sign for recovery of the species and comes less than a year after the programme saw the reclassification of another Partula snail species - *Partula tohiveana* - from Extinct-in-the-Wild to Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, the global assessment of extinction risk.

The team also found the first evidence of wild-born *Partula tohiveana* living outside of their original release area on their native island of Moorea, indicating that the tropical snails are both continuing to thrive and expanding their range.

The team hope that future surveys and reintroductions will soon lead to more discoveries of wild-born snails - including *Partula varia* - and allow more species and subspecies to join *Partula tohieveana* in being downlisted.

The snails were part of carefully managed annual reintroductions, led by ZSL conservationists, which has coordinated the release of almost 40,000 snails over the last ten years.

Eleven species and sub-species of the snails, reared at London and Whipsnade Zoos, Akron Zoo, Bristol Zoological Society, Detroit Zoo, Disney Animal Kingdom, Marwell Wildlife, the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, Riga Zoo, Saint Louis Zoo, Sedgwick County Zoo, Woodland Park Zoo, Wuppertal Zoo and Zoo Schwerin travelled more than 15,000km to the islands.

The UV-reflective paint not only helps conservationists find the snails nestled among the leaves and

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branches, but it also allows them to quickly tell apart released snails and their wild-born descendants.

London Zoo's Senior Curator of Invertebrates, Paul Pearce-Kelly, who leads the international Partula conservation programme, said: "This progress is decades in the making. We are not only celebrating the largest release of Partula snails in history, but also the results of over 30 years of dedicated work by conservation zoos and the French Polynesian government to enable the recovery of these precious snails in the wild.

"Wildlife globally faces unprecedented challenges, and every single species is a precious part of the interconnected web of ecosystems that we all rely on - so today's news is not only a moment of hope for these snails, but for nature and people globally."

Also known as Polynesian tree snails, these precious molluscs play an important role in the health of their forest ecosystems; by eating decaying plants and fungi, they help prevent the spread of disease and cycle important nutrients through the food chain.

Wild populations of Partula snails were decimated in the 1980s and early 1990s by the introduction of the invasive and carnivorous rosy wolf snail (*Euglandina rosea*) to control numbers of the previously introduced African giant land snail (*Lissachatina fulica*).

The last remaining individuals of 15 Partula species and sub-species were rescued by conservationists in the early 1990s, launching the international programme to recover the breed these snails and recover their wild populations.

Every visit to London and Whipsnade Zoo supports ZSL's global conservation work, including through the Extinct in the Wild Action Partnership. Visitors can see Extinct-in-the-Wild Partula snails and learn about their reintroduction efforts at the Zoo's Tiny Giants invertebrate house. More at www.londonzoo.org.

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