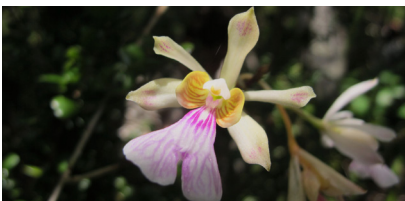




## Mona Island, Puerto Rico



### WHY IS MONA ISLAND IMPORTANT?

- HOME TO 8 VERTEBRATE SPECIES FOUND NOWHERE ELSE IN THE WORLD INCLUDING THE THREATENED MONA GROUND IGUANA
- HOSTS 46 ENDEMIC INVERTEBRATES
- PROVIDES HABITAT FOR 117 BIRD SPECIES, INCLUDING 2 ENDEMIC SUBSPECIES
- SUPPORTS OVER 400 VASCULAR PLANT SPECIES

### PROJECT MISSION

To save Mona Island's unique plant and animal communities from extinction by removing invasive species.

### PROJECT VISION

Mona Island's native plant and animal species are healthy and flourishing.

### THE PROBLEM

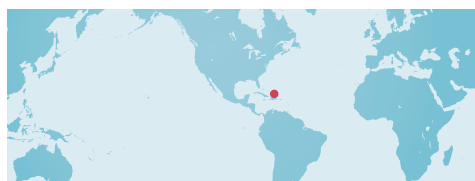
Invasive feral cats, pigs, goats, rats, and house mice on the island threaten Mona's native species, compete for limited resources, and destroy nesting habitat.

### THE SOLUTION

Island Conservation, the Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources (DNER), and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) are working together to protect Mona Island's listed and unique plant and animal species by removing invasive species.

### PROTECTED STATUS

Between 1977 and 1982, the USFWS designated Mona Island and its surrounding waters as Critical Habitat for the Yellow-shouldered Blackbird, Mona Boa, Mona Iguana, and Hawksbill turtle; Mona supports the largest population of nesting hawksbill turtles in the U.S. Caribbean. In 1986, the island and its surrounding waters were designated a Nature Reserve, and in 2004, BirdLife International and the Sociedad Ornitológica Puertorriqueña, Inc. recognized Mona Island as a Important Bird Area. In spite of its protected status, Mona and its native inhabitants have not escaped the devastating impact of invasive species.



**Mona Island** (5,500 ha) is located in the Insular Caribbean between the islands of Puerto Rico and La Hispaniola. Mona has no permanent settlements and, since 1973, has been under the administration of the Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources.



## MONA ISLAND RESTORATION PROJECT

Mona Island has been described as one of the last bastions of biodiversity within Puerto Rico. Situated midway between the islands of Puerto Rico and La Hispañola, this 13,590 acre limestone island remains a stronghold for numerous species unique to the island. Its isolation and limited human access have allowed a high diversity of rare plant and animal communities to persist on Mona, literally making the island a treasure trove for biodiversity. However, a suite of invasive species present on Mona are destroying the island's rich plant and animal species.

Island Conservation is working with the Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources (DNER), and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to remove invasive species from Mona Island, Puerto Rico. A restored Mona will provide safe habitat for the island's endemic species, such as the Mona Ground Iguana which is listed as Threatened under the U.S. Endangered Species Act (ESA), Mona Yellow-shouldered Blackbird (ESA Endangered) and the Mona Boa (ESA Threatened), increase populations of Hawksbill Sea Turtles (ESA Endangered), and protect a significant population of Higo Chumbo Cactus (ESA Threatened).

### RESTORING A BIOLOGICAL CROWN JEWEL

**1. MONA GROUND IGUANA** Population numbers for the Mona Ground Iguana (ESA Threatened) are estimated at around 5,000. Juveniles are scarce and represent only 5 - 10% of the population, resulting in an aging and declining population. Feral cats and pigs present on the island are the main cause of this species decline; both invasive species directly prey on young iguanas and their eggs. With considerable impacts to their nesting habitat due to pig predation, habitat modification and sometimes, limited availability of suitable nesting areas (large depression forest patches comprise only about 3% of total land area), it is essential we remove invasive species from Mona to protect this threatened species from extinction.

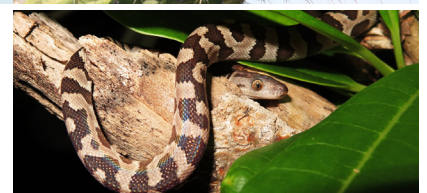


Photo: Alcides L. Morales

**2. MONA YELLOW-SHOULDERED BLACKBIRD** The population and range of the Yellow-shouldered Blackbird (ESA Endangered) has declined drastically since the middle of the 20th century. This Endangered bird is currently confined to a small region in southwestern Puerto Rico and on Mona Island (where it is a unique subspecies). Due to nest predation from invasive rats on Mona, the Mona Yellow-shouldered Blackbird is further restricted to breeding only on steep inaccessible cliffs on the island. Removal of invasive rats from Mona Island will provide much needed habitat for this endangered blackbird to expand its breeding range and increase in population.



**3. MONA BOA** The Mona Boa (ESA Threatened) is endemic to Mona Island. Due to its nocturnal habits and retiring nature, the Mona Boa, has been spared as victims of direct human persecution. However, like other boas in the Caribbean, the Mona Boa suffers from habitat modification and the impacts of invasive species, like predation by feral cats. Removal of invasive species from Mona Island will relieve the boa of this threat and provide the opportunity for recovery.



**4. HIGO CHUMBO CACTUS** The Higo Chumbo Cactus (ESA Threatened) is found naturally only on only three islands of Puerto Rico: Mona, Monito, and Desecheo, with most individual plants found on Mona. Feral goats and pigs on Mona Island eat the cactus, while the larvae of an introduced cactus moth severely damage it. A multi-year project to remove invasive species from Desecheo Island is underway by IC, DNER, and USFWS to help protect the cactus. With every passing year, the Higo Chumbo Cactus numbers continue to increase. Removing invasive species from Mona Island will have a similar positive impact and protect an important stronghold population of this threatened species.



All photos (unless marked otherwise) by Cielo E. Figuerola