



In Celebration of World Wildlife Day 2023

**under the theme,
"Partnerships in Conservation"**

The Department of Forestry presents

"Katjilé Kouwés"

**Saving the Saint
Lucia Racer Snake**



About the Project

The Saint Lucia racer is considered the most threatened snake species in the world. Having been wiped out from the Saint Lucia mainland by mongooses and other invasive alien mammals by 1869, this species now survives only on Maria Major, an arid 9.4-hectare islet off the Southeast coast. It is believed the population is less than 50 adult individuals. A partnership between the Government of Saint Lucia's Forestry Department & Wildlife Unit, The Saint Lucian National Trust and international wildlife organisations Fauna and Flora International and Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust are working together to save them.

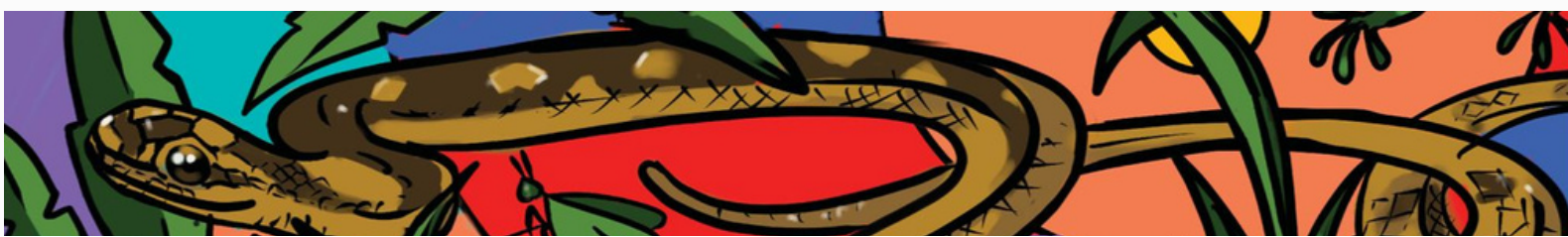
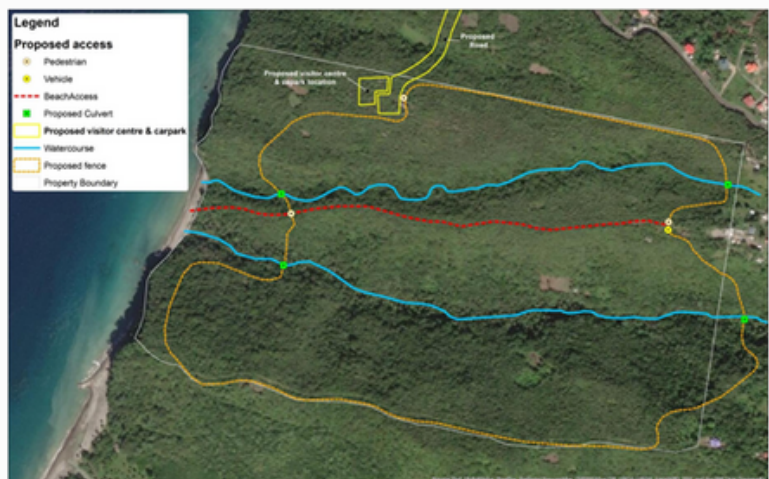


Whilst the implementation of essential biosecurity measures (developed through 2012–2014 CEPF project “Islands without Aliens”); the protection of Maria Major in policy, and the Saint Lucia racer by law, have served to secure the species for the short-term, the risk from invasive alien species remains high. Mongooses, rats, cane toads and cats are all still abundant on mainland Saint Lucia and could feasibly spread to Maria Major. Commercial development of the area remains a real threat and would significantly increase this risk. This combined with the inherent risks of such a small, isolated single population i.e., inbreeding, genetic drift, and the potential impact of observed stochastic changes or events (e.g., drought, hurricanes, wildfires, and tsunamis) to the habitat, which will be exacerbated through climate change, mean that the racer is currently at an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild within the short to medium term unless ambitious targeted interventions are taken. Such targeted interventions have been developed by the partners and outlined in the Saint Lucia racer Conservation Action Plan 2015–2024. Critical amongst these is establishing additional populations of racers.

A secure in-country captive breeding centre has been constructed in Saint Lucia on Department of Forestry grounds and a Lead Technician recruited through Durrell to oversee this work. The captive breeding centre consists of two facilities: racer breeding facility and live food facility. The Department of Forestry provide power and water to the facilities as part of the project agreement.

Plans for creating a mainland island (MI) on Saint Lucia are currently in development (Saint Lucia racer Conservation Action Plan Objective 4). A mainland island is an area of land surrounded by a pest/predator-proof fence and kept free of harmful invasive alien species where threatened native species can persist. There are numerous examples of mainland islands globally in New Zealand,

Australia, Hawaii, the Azores and Mauritius, with the largest being 3,363Ha. Such a mainland island represents an opportunity for establishing an additional racer population in the wild and reducing the species overall extinction risk. Prior to this however a captive breeding population, that will act as a secondary population for the species, needs to be established (Saint Lucia racer Conservation Action Plan Objective 2), this will act both as a safety-net population and source population for future reintroductions.



Frequently asked questions

Q: Are Saint Lucian Racer Snakes Dangerous? A: Saint Lucian Racer Snakes are completely harmless to humans and actually very gentle when handled.

Q: Where can we find them? A: They used to be found all over Saint Lucia, although now they can only be found on the Maria Islands where they are protected under law.

Q: How many remain alive in the wild? A: They are the worlds rarest snake, we believe only 18-100 individuals remain in the wild.

Q: Why are they extinct on the mainland? A: Mongoose introduced in the late 1800's from India were intended to kill fer-de-lance, however the mongoose went for easier prey killing the defenceless racer and driving it and many other species to extinction.

Q: Why should we protect them? A: This snake is an important part of our ecosystems and our natural heritage as Saint Lucians, it can be found nowhere else in the world and is a unique selling point for our island, it's culture and heritage.

Q: Is the Racer Snake venomous? A: No, the only venomous snake on Saint Lucia is the Fer-de-Lance.

Q: How big can they grow? A: The Saint Lucian Racer is a relatively small snake with the largest individuals only reaching 1m from the top of their head to the tip of their tail.

Q: What do they eat? A: Saint Lucian Racer Snake are reptile specialists eating lizards, frogs and other small vertebrates.

