



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Agriculture and Environment
and

Senate Committee on Water and Land
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By

Nicholas Comerford

Dean, College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources

And

Michael Bruno

Interim Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs

Vice Chancellor for Research

University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

SB 964 – RELATING TO SPECIES CONSERVATION

Chairs Gabbard and Kahele, Vice Chairs Ruderman and Keith-Agaran, and members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Environment and Committee on Water and Land:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on SB 964 relating to species conservation that authorizes the issuance of general obligation bonds and appropriates funds for the construction of an invertebrate and plant propagation facility and baseyard improvements on O'ahu, a predator proof fence on O'ahu, and a predator proof fence on Maui. The University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources supports the intent of this bill and we respectfully provide the following information to substantiate our position.

We are supportive of actions to prevent extinction of Hawai'i's iconic and valued land snails, and are pleased to see continuing support of this effort through the appropriation of funds in SB 964.

In Hawaiian storytelling, when all was right in the world again the kāhuli would sing. In the last two years the remaining populations of kāhuli have precipitously declined from hundreds or thousands of individuals per population down to dozens or less. It is perhaps the most dramatic example of a rapid decline toward extinction in recent times. We have the tools available to prevent extinction of any more species in this group, but funding is needed to build predator-proof fencing and provide additional captive-rearing facilities, which provide a hedge against extinction.

Because of the precipitous declines in the wild, the Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources' (DLNR) Snail Extinction Prevention Program (SEPP) has been evacuating many of the remaining populations to the captive rearing facility in Kawainui, and it is reaching capacity. It is necessary that new facilities for captive rearing, as well as in-situ predator-proof fencing, if the state wishes to prevent extinction of any more kāhuli. SB 964 would fund these actions, which are known to be effective in preventing extinction of these species.

Kāhuli provide important ecosystem services in the form of feeding on biofilms, composed of fungus and bacteria, on leaf surfaces. Other land snails help with decomposition of dead leaves and detritus on the ground, similar to the way earthworms function on mainland systems. In this capacity they help to keep our forests healthy. Unfortunately introduced predators such as rats, the Rosy Wolf Snail, and Jackson's Chameleons are eating them much faster than they can reproduce, leading to declines in population size. Extinction is forever. The actions funded under this bill will allow kāhuli to be enjoyed by future generations, and will allow them to serve their important role in Hawai'i's ecosystems.

In sum, the research funded under SB 964 will provide the required tools for the DLNR SEPP program to prevent extinction in any more of Hawai'i's iconic land snails. The one concern we have is to the future of the species and how, beyond fencing, the species will be promoted given the wide ranging nature of its predators.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of the intent of SB 964 provided that its passage does not replace or adversely impact priorities as indicated in our Board of Regents Approved Budget.