

Norfolk Island Endemic Snails

Norfolk Island is one of Australia's richest hotspots of land snail diversity, with 70 recorded endemic species on the island. However, the larger species in particular have suffered from predation by rats and, more recently, chickens, and now there are five species listed as Critically Endangered and several more believed to be extinct.

After carrying out land snail surveys here in 2020, researchers from the Australian Museum realised that two of the Critically Endangered species were at high risk of extinction, each reduced to a single population. So a collaboration was set up between the Australian Museum, Taronga Zoo, Parks Australia and the Norfolk Island Regional Council, to establish a captive breeding program. Having now received grants to support the program from the Australian Museum Foundation and National Geographic, Team Snail are on the island this week to collect the first snails for the breeding program. The collecting team consists of Isabel Hyman and Mandy Reid from the Australian Museum, and Andrew Daly from Taronga Zoo.

Team Snail can report that both species are doing well, having clearly responded to wetter conditions over the past six months. In particular, *Mathewsoconcha belli* from Hundred Acre Reserve has made a remarkable recovery from extremely low numbers six months ago, when only three live specimens were found. In contrast, 50 live specimens were counted in the current survey.

On this first trip, 15 founding members of each species will be taken back. The snails have all been collected, weighed and measured, and will be transported back to Taronga Zoo where they will be kept in tanks. Updates on significant milestones will be shared with the Norfolk Island community, and Team Snail will be back in October to check on the wild populations.



Photo of Critically Endangered species *Mathewsoconcha belli*



Team Snail out at Hundred Acre (left to right: Andrew Daly, Isabel Hyman and Mandy Reid)

Tara Patel

SENIOR ENVIRONMENTAL OFFICER

20 May 2021