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### **Near-extinct Caribbean reptile makes epic comeback**



The population of the Sombrero ground lizard has increased from fewer than 100 individuals in 2018, to more than 1,600 today, a new survey has revealed.

The critically endangered reptile was on the brink of extinction before conservationists stepped in to help the species in 2021. Since then, experts from the [Anguilla National Trust](#), [Fauna & Flora](#) and [Re:wild](#) have been working to help the species and its island habitat to recover, with promising results.

The Sombrero ground lizard is endemic to Sombrero, a 38-hectare (94 acres) island situated 54 km (34 miles) from Anguilla. While small, this Caribbean island is a globally important area for biodiversity and forms the heart of the Sombrero Island Marine Reserve. Several other extremely rare species are unique to the island, including the Sombrero Island bee, a pygmy gecko, and the Sombrero Island wind scorpion, a harmless but fearsome-looking invertebrate. Sombrero also supports large seabird colonies and is designated as an Important Bird Area and a Ramsar Site.

Due to historical mining for phosphates, invasive mice, and severe hurricanes, Sombrero Island was on the verge of ecological collapse. Completely deforested, it was hard to imagine this island used to have an endemic giant tortoise. Since 2021, conservation efforts have focused on removing the invasive rodents and planting native species.

Today, Sombrero Island has been declared pest-free, and is looking much greener and healthier than before efforts began, with reintroduced native plants such as sea bean, seagrape and prickly pear already showing healthy new growth.



Farah Mukhida, Executive Director at Anguilla National Trust, comments: "In 2018, following yet another severe hurricane, we feared it might be the end for the Sombrero ground lizard. Fewer than 100 were left and the island was in ruins. The past three years have seen painstaking restoration activity, with hands-on efforts by both our international partners and local conservation heroes to remove the invasive pests and restore natural plant cover – not an easy feat on such a remote and rocky island like Sombrero."

Jenny Daltry, Caribbean Alliance Director, Fauna & Flora and Re:wild, who co-led the ground lizard surveys, adds: "This is a remarkable turnaround for this cheeky and charismatic lizard but while we celebrate this recovery, we recognise that there is much more to be done to secure their future and that of other Caribbean wildlife. The combined impacts of biodiversity loss and climate breakdown are being felt with greater intensity every year in the Caribbean and around the world. Indeed, we are still busy helping our partners in Jamaica and St Vincent and the Grenadines to recover from the devastation wreaked by Hurricane Beryl earlier this year."

Arica Hill, Caribbean Lead for Fauna & Flora agrees: "Global action to tackle climate change has never been more urgent, but it is also incredibly important that we help the Caribbean to adapt to its impacts. The ecological restoration we have implemented on Sombrero, Redonda and many other islands across the Caribbean is important for establishing a more secure future for these islands and the many species and people that rely on them. Protecting and restoring healthy natural ecosystems is key to resilience to a changing climate."

Justin Springer, Caribbean program officer for Re:wild, adds: "The Caribbean is one of the most biodiverse places in the world with thousands of islands that are home to more than 10,000 species, but it has the highest extinction rate in the world. Recoveries, like the one that the Sombrero ground lizard is making, are beacons of hope. They are proof that if we make the effort to address the threats, nature has an amazing capacity to bounce back."

The Sombrero Island restoration project was made possible through financial support from King Charles III Charitable Fund, Betty Liebert Trust, Darwin Plus, the John Ellerman Foundation, US Fish & Wildlife Service's Neotropical Migratory Birds Conservation Act, and Fauna & Flora's Species Fund. Wildlife Management International Limited was contracted by Fauna & Flora to provide technical assistance to the project.

Nikki Jeffery, Executive Director, King Charles III Charitable Fund, comments: "We are proud to have supported this vital restoration project on Sombrero Island, a globally important site for biodiversity. The recovery of the endangered Sombrero Island ground lizard is testament to the efforts of all those involved and we hope will inspire further action to restore habitats and reduce biodiversity loss across the world."

To find out more about this work, please visit: <https://www.fauna-flora.org/case-studies/saving-sombrero-the-race-to-save-a-unique-caribbean-wildlife-haven/>

## ENDS

High res images and video can be downloaded [here](#)

**Image caption 1:** Sombrero ground lizard © Richard Brown / Fauna & Flora

**Image caption 2:** Sombrero island, before and after - June 2018 to June 2024 © Jenny Daltry / Fauna & Flora / Rewild

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### **About Fauna & Flora**

Fauna & Flora is a nature conservation charity protecting the diversity of life on Earth. For the survival of species and habitats, the planet and people. As the world's first international conservation charity, Fauna & Flora has been shaping best practice in community-focused conservation for over 120 years. Today, the charity works closely with local conservation partners in almost 50 countries to protect habitats, revive the ocean, reduce extinctions, stop illegal wildlife trade, combat climate change and influence global policy and corporate sustainability. [www.fauna-flora.org](http://www.fauna-flora.org)

### **Re:wild**

Re:wild protects and restores the wild. We have a singular and powerful focus: the wild as the most effective solution to the interconnected climate, biodiversity and human wellbeing crises. Founded by a group of renowned conservation scientists together with Leonardo DiCaprio, Re:wild is a force multiplier that brings together Indigenous peoples, local communities, influential leaders, nongovernmental organizations, governments, companies and the public to protect and rewild at the scale and speed we need. Learn more at [rewild.org](http://rewild.org).

### **Anguilla National Trust**

The Anguilla National Trust (ANT) was founded in 1988 with the mandate to sustain the island's natural and cultural heritage through active management and education for the benefit of today's and tomorrow's generations. Since its formation, ANT has been instrumental in the creation and management of Anguilla's national parks, conservation areas and heritage sites. ANT conducts essential research and conservation work, including rewilding, and we work year-round to raise public awareness about the fragility, complexity, and beauty of the island's natural and cultural resources. Learn more at [axanationaltrust.com](http://axanationaltrust.com)