



PRESS RELEASE

Date: 12/10/02, for immediate release

Subject: **Super Typhoon Pongsona Lays Waste to Brown Treesnake Program**

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Super Typhoon Pongsona Lays Waste to Brown Treesnake Program

The massively devastating Super Typhoon Pongsona will continue to imperil islands for many months to come. Hawaii and other snake-free islands in the Pacific and Indian oceans are in danger—from the threat of invasion by brown treesnakes (*Boiga irregularis*).

(Note: *See attached letter for direct quotes and comments—this letter was sent by email to all officials who play a role in brown treesnake prevention*).

Brown treesnakes are recognized as an extreme threat to Hawaii's remaining native birds, its tourist and electrical industries and quality of life. Federal and State of Hawaii government efforts have worked to exclude brown treesnakes from air and ship cargo, including construction equipment and vehicles, which are regularly moved between Hawaii and Guam.

Federal USDA-Wildlife Services conducts control efforts at all military and commercial ports of exit, including 17 private pack/ship companies, commercial sea and airport, and Naval and Air Force bases to keep snakes out of the transportation network. Wildlife Services personnel conduct trapping, search of outbound cargo with snake-detecting dogs and erect barrier fences around ports of exit. In FY 02 there were an average of 3200 brown treesnake traps in use, and 41 full time employees and 13 full time canine teams providing 24/7 coverage. This resulted in 13,000 brown treesnakes removed in FY 02—thereby preventing the spread of this invasive pest to any air or sea port receiving flights, ships or goods from Guam. Additional measures in

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Hawaii by Hawaii Department of Agriculture include detector dog inspections of all flights arriving from Guam and other similar measures. These efforts have resulted in the discovery of 4 brown treesnakes in Hawaii since 1990.

An emergency meeting has been called tomorrow at 1:00 p.m. at HDOA for officials to discuss the situation and plan for increased surveillance and control measures.

Brown treesnakes were introduced to Guam in the 1950's and within 20 years they decimated Guam's native and alien bird fauna. Population densities have been recorded at 40 snakes per acre. The snakes have switched prey to lizards and skinks in the absence of their preferred prey. Additionally, these venomous snakes will bite people, preferring infants. Brown treesnakes cause an average of one power outage every four days as they climb on wires. The impacts (on public health, agriculture and electrical industry) could add up to \$123 million in annual costs to Hawaii if these snakes were to become established.

9 December 2002

To all:

Please excuse the cross-posting of this message. I was requested by Mike Pitzler (State Director, USDA - Wildlife Services Hawaii/Guam) to post the following information to collaborators who are concerned with the brown treesnake issue and brown treesnake control/interdiction as broadly as possible. The following information was passed from Dan Vice (Assistant State Director, USDA - Wildlife Service Guam) to Mike Pitzler earlier this afternoon. I have edited the commentary presented below with Mike's permission.

"On Sunday, 4:00AM Guam time, a "Super Typhoon"(180+MPH) hit the island with Direct Eye Passage. Dan Vice was able to locate a working telephone today, and from his information, it is clear that the devastation to the island is great. There were no injuries to our personnel, however, several employees (six) lost everything to include their homes; most employee housing has severe water damage. USDA - Wildlife Services sustained significant damage to Government vehicles, snake traps and office equipment. Dan estimated that the program lost several thousands of traps, worth over \$100,000.

Currently, the island is without power or water (and parts of the island may be out of these resources directly to their homes or offices for weeks/months), USDA - Wildlife Services is in need of some 30 generators for our personnel to include other necessities such as food and blankets. As far as USDA - Wildlife Services vehicles and other equipment, we do not have the resources to cover the costs from the damage sustained."

It is clear that the damage to the island of Guam, it's people and resources is massive. The island was hit by another typhoon earlier this year and basic resources were just getting back on line following that storm when I visited in November (the water still was safe to drink or wash babies in many places on island). During the last typhoon, the USDA - Wildlife Services program was off line for several days. During this time period, a brown treesnake was found dead at Elmendorf Air Force Base (Alaska) associated with a plane that left Guam and a snake sighting was reported on Diego Garcia that

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caused significant concern.

Though several sites that are potentially at risk from brown treesnakes coming from Guam have some type of brown treesnake program, it should be made

clear that the relative risk of brown treesnakes leaving Guam will be much higher until such a point that the USDA - Wildlife Service BTS interdiction program is functional again. It is clear that brown treesnake management and research programs on Guam provide bulk of protection for sites like Hawaii and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. Due to the size and scope of the devastation on Guam, brown treesnake programs need to be operational/functional prior to the removal of a disaster relief equipment from Guam by FEMA.

If you have comments or concerns dealing with this situation please contact Mike Pitzler via e-mail (Mike.E.Pitzler@usda.gov).
Sincerely,

Earl W. Campbell III, Ph.D.
Alien Species Program Coordinator
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Honolulu, Hawaii

CGAPS is a statewide partnership of government agencies and NGOs working together to close the gaps in Hawaii's biosecurity. CGAPS partners meet regularly to discuss the most threatening alien pests, current actions on existing pests, and plan protection systems capable of detecting and keeping out the next silent invader.

The Invasive Species Committees are grassroots partnerships of government agencies, private businesses and non-profit organizations working together to control or eradicate the worst pest species that threaten each island. The ISCs are:

Kauai Invasive Species Committee (KISC)

Oahu Invasive Species Committee (OISC)

Maui Invasive Species Committee (MISC) and the Molokai subcommittee MoMISC

Big Island Invasive Species Committee (BIISC)

For more information on CGAPS or the ISCs, visit www.hear.org

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