



Media release – **UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL 00:01 GMT, 22 MAY 2014**

Dog Island, Anguilla, declared rat-free

22 May 2014 – Following an intensive five-month programme to eradicate black rats and two years of careful monitoring, Dog Island in Anguilla – a UK Overseas Territory in the Caribbean – has been officially declared rat-free. This is the largest Caribbean island to be successfully cleared of non-native rats to protect the island's threatened wildlife, which is already showing promising signs of recovery.

Covering 207 hectares, Dog Island is an internationally-recognised Important Bird Area, with over 100,000 pairs of nesting seabirds. It also supports lizards found nowhere else on earth and endangered sea turtles, which nest on the island's white sandy beaches. Until recently, the island was also infested with thousands of invasive, non-native black rats, which caused severe damage by suppressing native flora and preying on eggs, chicks, and other animals.

The rats were eradicated to allow the recovery of Dog Island's globally-important wildlife. The eradication took place between November 2011 and March 2012 and was a collaborative initiative among the Anguilla National Trust, the Government of Anguilla (Department of Environment), Fauna & Flora International, the RSPB, and the island's owner – the Anguilla Development Company.

To target every rat on Dog Island, over 42 kilometres of trails were cut through dense thorn scrub and over two tonnes of rodenticide were applied by hand. More than 30 staff and volunteers worked under the technical direction of Elizabeth Bell, a rat-eradication expert from the New Zealand-based Wildlife Management International Ltd. Difficulties faced by the rat eradicators included high temperatures and large groves of toxic manchineel trees.

“The volunteer team and I spent eleven weeks camping on Dog Island to complete the black rat eradication, working long hours in hot and difficult conditions. As I am sure all of the volunteers will agree, one of the worst parts of the project was having to cut tracks through nearly 30 hectares of manchineel,” said Elizabeth (Biz) Bell, Senior Ecologist from Wildlife Management International Ltd. “Despite this, it was fantastic to live and work amongst the native species such as ground and tree lizards, frigatebirds, boobies and tropicbirds that the project was working to protect. It was a real pleasure to return to the island this February to confirm that the project was a success and see species beginning to recover already.”

The last rat was removed on 18th March 2012. However it is international practice only to declare an island rat-free after two years have elapsed since the last rat was detected. No native wildlife were harmed during the eradication operation on Dog Island and any bait remaining quickly breaks down into harmless components.

Hon. Minister of Environment, Government of Anguilla, Mr Jerome Roberts, recognises this partnership and national accomplishment. Minister Roberts stated, "This milestone of an achievement is a testament to the calibre and commitment of the persons who work on behalf of Anguilla and is a reflection of Anguillian tenacity for success. This achievement is only the beginning, now our innovation must create sustainable opportunities for the future."

Supported by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the Anguilla Governor's Discretionary Fund and Syngenta, this is the largest and most difficult rodent-eradication project to have been successfully completed in the Caribbean.

"Tackling invasive, non-native species is vitally important for conserving native Caribbean wildlife, protecting human health and even building resilience to climate change," said Dr Jenny Daltry, Senior Conservation Biologist with Fauna & Flora International. "Removing the rats from the wonderful Dog Island has been well worth all the effort— amazingly, some of the native species have already doubled in number!"

In addition to helping native wildlife, this project has also built Anguilla's capability to plan, implement, and monitor invasive, non-native species-eradication projects. Given the level of national and international interest to undertake similar initiatives on other offshore islands and cays, the development of national capacity is particularly relevant.

"This is an extremely significant accomplishment for Anguilla and indeed the rest of the region in our ongoing efforts to safeguard and restore our territories' biodiversity," said Avon Carty, President of the Anguilla National Trust. "I am very proud of the work done by the team at the Anguilla National Trust and I'm grateful to all our partners for their support, assistance and expertise in helping us to bring this project to a successful conclusion."

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For further information, high resolution images or to arrange an interview with Dr Jenny Daltry, please contact:

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Notes to Editors:

About Dog Island

Dog Island covers 207 hectares (511 acres) and is 15 kilometres (nine miles) from the main island of Anguilla, a UK Overseas Territory in the West Indies. It has 10 breeding species of seabird and is recognised as an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA) because of regionally- and globally-important populations of sooty terns (>110,000 pairs), brown boobies, laughing gulls, magnificent frigatebirds, brown noddies, masked boobies, and red-billed tropicbirds. Dog Island is also important for migratory waders, and provides nesting beaches for the globally-threatened hawksbill, leatherback and green sea turtles. Its terrestrial reptiles include four species of lizard that occur only on Anguilla and surrounding islands. The island is privately owned and uninhabited. Black (or ship) rats were accidentally introduced to the Caribbean by early European settlers but it is not known when or how they first colonised Dog Island. As well as preying on a wide range of Caribbean flora and fauna, black rats can have severe economic and health implications for humans.

About the Dog Island Restoration Project

The Dog Island Restoration Project began in 2007 with the completion of a feasibility study to eradicate rats from Dog Island, funded by the Overseas Territories Environment Programme and implemented by the Anguilla National Trust and the RSPB. The operation followed a standardised methodology for island restoration that carefully applies bait to all rat territories on the island. No other animals were harmed during the baiting and surplus bait was removed or harmlessly decomposed. The tracks cut to improve access on the island have already begun to grow over. The 2011-2012 rat eradication was a collaborative initiative among the Anguilla National Trust, the Department of Environment (Government of Anguilla), Fauna & Flora International, and the RSPB. The project was funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the Governor of Anguilla's Discretionary Fund, with Klerat™ rodenticide donated by Syngenta. Additional funding for biodiversity monitoring and post-eradication monitoring was provided by the RSPB, BirdsCaribbean, the Rufford Foundation for Nature and the European Commission.

About the Anguilla National Trust (ANT) (www.axanationaltrust.org)

The ANT is a Statutory Body established by the Government of Anguilla through the Anguilla National Trust Act (1988). The membership-based organisation is the island's largest and most active environment and cultural conservation organisation and is mandated with conserving, protecting, and promoting Anguilla's natural and cultural heritage.

About the Department of Environment (DOE) (www.gov.ai/doenvironment)

The DOE was created in 2006, its overall mandate is to implement and establish a holistic and participatory system of sustainable environmental management, including the conservation of biodiversity, so as to improve the quality of life in Anguilla. The department has the lead responsibility for protecting and conserving the nation's environment on behalf of the people of Anguilla. Its key responsibilities include conserving biodiversity, protecting and managing the nation's national environment and nature reserves, regulating and assessing many aspects of the use of the nation's natural resources.

About Fauna & Flora International (FFI) (www.fauna-flora.org)

FFI protects threatened species and ecosystems worldwide, choosing solutions that are sustainable, based on sound science and take account of human needs. Operating in more than 40 countries worldwide, FFI saves species from extinction and habitats from destruction, while improving the livelihoods of local people. Founded in 1903, FFI is the world's longest established international conservation body and a registered charity.

About the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (www.nfwf.org)

Chartered by the United States Congress in 1984, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) protects and restores the nation's fish, wildlife and habitats. Working with federal agencies, corporations, foundations and individual partners, NFWF has funded more than 4,000 organizations, has supported conservation efforts in all 50 states, U.S. territories and abroad, and has committed more than \$2.1 billion to conservation projects since its founding.

About Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) (www.rspb.org.uk)

The RSPB is the UK's largest nature conservation charity, inspiring everyone to give nature a home. Together with our partners, we protect threatened birds and wildlife so our towns, coast and countryside will teem with life once again. The RSPB supports partner organisations including NGOs, National Trusts and Government Departments in the UK Overseas Territories to protect the Territories' unique and threatened wildlife and special places.

About Wildlife Management International Ltd. (WMIL) (www.wmil.co.nz)

WMIL is a New Zealand-based ecological consultancy company that specialises in island restoration and seabird research. We have completed over 30 island restoration projects around the world including the eradication of invasive species such as rats, mice, feral cats, rabbits and hares. WMIL also completes scientific research projects on endangered seabirds, landbirds and amphibians. We work closely with New Zealand and international Government departments, non-Government organisations, conservation agencies and local communities. Many of our projects involve working with local organisations and communities in a partnership approach, which we see as critical to achieving long-term conservation gains.