

In Memory of Toru, the Guam Rail

Oct 18, 2023



The Sedgwick County Zoo is saddened to announce the death of Toru, the Guam rail.

Toru was chosen to be an animal ambassador and raised to be acclimated to humans from his birth in 2014.

"Toru was specifically raised by AZA professionals at another institution to be an ambassador for his species," Zoological Manager Emma Koepp said. "This is not typical for Guam Rails, as they are shy, secretive, and elusive by nature."

Guam Rails, called "ko'ko" in Chomorro, the native and spoken language of the Chamorro people of the Mariana Islands, are critically endangered in the wild.

During WWII, the brown tree snake was introduced to the island of Guam. Over the following decades, the brown tree snake preyed on the Guam rails, sending their population into severe decline. In the 1980's, the few remaining ko'ko were brought into human care to prevent the complete extinction of the species.

"Through a collaboration of federal, state, and private partners, great efforts to reproduce and maintain a population in human care have been successful," Koepp said.

Two snake-free islands, Cocos Island and Rota, were identified as release sights in 2010. Since that initial release, the Guam rail population has thrived. Cocos Island is home to 60-70 rails and Rota is home to around 200.



Toru with one of his favorite enrichments, a Dixie cup // photo courtesy of Lou Alexander

When Toru arrived at SCZ in 2015, he continued his ambassador training and quickly formed an innate bond with his keepers.

"Toru was very curious and playful. Keepers loved giving him his favorite enrichment, which included shredded paper, Dixie cups, and chin scratches," Koepp said, "Toru loved the extra attention he got from his keepers, and enjoyed any enrichment he could toss around his exhibit."

He often made appearances at events like Coffee Connections, afternoon Tropics feedings and keeper chat, and had even been featured on the Guam news.

"Toru was both sassy and sweet, and always let his keepers know how he was feeling," Koepp said. "There was never a dull day with Toru, he always made us laugh and smile."

Toru the Guam rail touched the hearts of Zoo visitors and keepers alike. He will be sorely missed by all.