
Partula Snail - Partula spp. (11/1/98)

Partula Snail (*Partula spp.*)

PARTULA SNAIL

Partula spp.

Description: The partula snail is a small land snail averaging an inch in length. The nearly 100 species come in various shades of brown or gray; some are more boldly marked than others with their spirals highlighted with a contrasting shade of rusty-brown on a light gray background. There may be a wide variety of color shading within a single species. Six species are currently protected under the SSP.

Range: Partula Snails have colonized many of the tropical South Pacific Islands. Their range extends nearly 5,000 miles from Palau to the Society Islands. It is in the Society Islands where speciation has exploded accounting for over 50% of the known species.

Habitat: Partula snails are tree-dwellers that live in the dense forests of the upper reaches of volcanic slopes. They may also be found at lower altitudes on banana trees and bamboo.

Diet: The specific diet of partula snails in the wild is not known but they are thought to feed on a variety of microscopic plant life that grows on the surface of larger leaves. They may also feed on a variety of decaying vegetation and some new plant growth.

Social Organization: Partula Snails are hermaphrodites and bear live young. One fully shelled baby is produced every six to eight weeks. Self-fertilization is uncommon but apparently has been recorded in few species.

Conservation Status: The partula snails from Moorea and Tahiti are listed as endangered by the IUCN.

Threats to Survival: The biggest threat to the survival of partula snails is the introduction of carnivorous snails from North and South America to South Pacific islands. These carnivorous snails have often been introduced in order to curb populations of Giant African snails, a species that was

either accidentally or intentionally introduced to the islands, which causes damage to banana plantations. The carnivorous snails often prey instead on the smaller native partula snails and are rapidly exterminating them. Human encroachment is also reducing the forested habitat used by the partula snails.

Zoo Programs - SSP: The Partula Snail SSP has almost doubled (2200-4300 individuals) during the last few years. The partula snail is the only invertebrate in the SSP program and will hopefully serve as a base for the addition of other often neglected lower animals which are in as much danger of extinction as the spectacular mega-vertebrates.

Conservation: Efforts are underway to prevent the introduction of carnivorous snails to any more Pacific islands. Not only does this introduction endanger native species; it is largely ineffective in controlling Giant African snail populations.

Reintroduction: It is hoped that some day the carnivorous snails will die out either by starvation or cannibalism, so that partula snails can be returned to at least a portion of their former range. Another option is to establish predator-free zones with suitable barriers and reintroduce partula into these protected areas. A 20 meter by 20 meter area is currently undergoing such a trial on the island of Moorea.

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