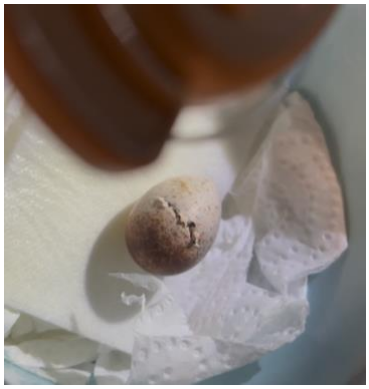
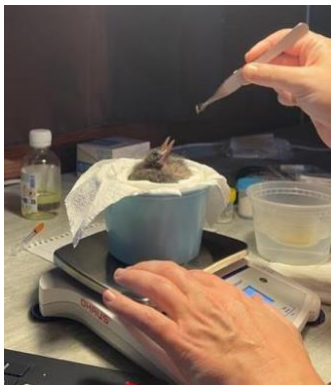
PRESS RELEASE

Tuesday 24 november 2026

New hope for the Fatu Iva monarch, one of the world's most threatened birds


A fourth Fatu Iva monarch has been successfully reared at the island of Fatu Iva's captive breeding centre in the Marquesas Islands. This marks a major step forward in the efforts to save this endemic species from the brink of extinction. The achievement is a part of the LIFE STOP EXTINCTION project, managed by SOP Manu, in partnership with Copenhagen Zoo and other local partners, and further empowered by numerous dedicated supporting institutions both nationally and internationally.

A precious new arrival for a Critically Endangered species

Recently, fourth Fatu Iva monarch (*Pomarea whitneyi*) young hatched successfully at the island's conservation breeding centre, following the collection of the egg from a wild breeding pair two days earlier.

Hand-reared for several weeks, the young bird fledged at 22 days old. The juvenile is now doing well and moving freely and safely around its naturalistic aviary.

The four young Fatu Iva monarchs which carries the hope of their species through a captive breeding programme keeping them safe from the threats still faced in the wild are a male nearly three years old, two females approaching one year of age and this latest youngster, which sex has yet to be determined.

Dedicated people, scientific expertise and close global cooperation make the difference

This achievement is the result of exceptionally demanding work in one of the world's most remote locations. During hand-rearing the young of insect eating passerine birds face a particular risk of aspiration — food entering the airways — at every feed. Feeding them without a single mistake, as fatigue builds day after day, requires a high level of acute concentration.

Photographs : © SOP Manu



For six weeks, from early morning to late evening, Amber Zelmer, a bird-rearing expert from the USA, supported the local team during the collected egg's incubation and hatching and the chick's hand-rearing bringing the needed experience and confidence to the team during the most critical periods.

A volunteer network of vets, experts and keepers from institutions around the world were an invaluable knowledge-resource, standing by to support the team with advice day and night as they have also done during previous hand-rearing of chicks remotely. This enables knowledge exchange and continues to strengthen the local team's skills and capacity to respond to intervention emergencies.

This collaboration demonstrates the importance of sharing knowledge and working closely together both internationally and locally to deliver on conservation programmes. Successfully rearing a fourth bird marks another encouraging achievement on the long and challenging path to success for the Fatu Iva monarch recovery programme.

LIFE STOP EXTINCTION:
A vital conservation programme for some of the worlds most threatened bird species

Found only on Fatu Iva, the Fatu Iva monarch, or Ômaò keekee, is classified as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. In 2024, just 16 adults were recorded in the Tai'u Valley, highlighting the extreme vulnerability of this population. Thanks to conservation efforts and the good survival of wild-born young, the species now numbers 22 individuals. Its long-term survival nevertheless remains a major challenge.

With this population threatened by introduced black rats, feral cats and avian malaria (transmitted by introduced mosquitos), captive breeding is considered an essential conservation measure to buy time for the conservation efforts on the island's rainforests to take effect. Established in 2023, the Fatu Iva Monarch Conservation Breeding Centre — the first of its kind in French Polynesia — aims to establish an insurance population protected from these threats. The centre also helps build scientific knowledge and strengthen the skills of local teams and zoo staff in breeding threatened birds.

This approach goes hand in hand with ongoing monitoring and conservation work in the wild. A mosquito sterilisation project, developed in collaboration with the Institut Louis Malardé (ILM), is being developed to help combat the transmission of avian malaria through introduced mosquitos. The ultimate aim is to reintroduce young captive-bred birds once more favourable conditions are in place.

These activities are carried out on site by the SOP Manu through the LIFE STOP EXTINCTION project, co-funded by the European Commission's LIFE programme and the French Government's Fonds Vert — managed in close partnership with Copenhagen Zoo, l'Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD), l'Institut Louis Malardé (ILM), Jean-François Butaud and the French Polynesia Government. These actions also receive financial or in-kind support from the Fatu Iva Municipal Council, the French Office for Biodiversity (OFB), Zoos Victoria, the French League for the Protection of Birds (LPO), Beauval Nature, Air Tahiti and Air Tahiti Nui. Several organizations continue to contribute their expertise: EAZA Silent Forest, San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance, Wuppertal Zoo, the University of Giessen, ZSL London Zoo, Pacific Bird Conservation, Pacific Rim Conservation and Pendl Lab.

Co-funded by the European Union

Press contact

- **SOP Manu – Polynesian Ornithological Society**
  In French Polynesia & France: www.manu.pf · com@manu.pf · +689 87 03 76 44
- **Copenhagen Zoo**
  Internationally: www.zoo.dk/en/projects/life-stop-extinction · sb@zoo.dk · +45 30 16 73 50

Photographs : © SOP Manu

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Fatu Iva, a remote island in the Marquesas

Located approximately 1,100 km north of Tahiti, Fatu Iva is the southernmost island in the Marquesas archipelago in French Polynesia. Accessible only by boat, it covers approximately 85 km² (8,400 hectares) and has around 600 inhabitants. The islands name is frequently spelled “Fatu Hiva” but respecting the indigenous communities on the island we accept their preferred spelling Fatu Iva.

The Fatu Iva monarch, a Critically Endangered bird

The Fatu Iva monarch (*Pomarea whitneyi*), or Ômaò keekee, is a territorial, insect-eating forest bird found nowhere else in the world. It is endemic to the island of Fatu Iva. Once widespread across the island, it now survives in just 29 hectares of the Tai’u Valley, within a 600-hectare predator management area.

Its population has declined by 97% in 21 years, primarily because of introduced mammalian predators. The black rat, which arrived on the island in the 1980s, spread across the entire island in less than 20 years. Feral cats and, more recently, avian malaria pose additional threats.

The species is currently classified as Critically Endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature’s Red List.

A particularly slow breeding rate

The Fatu Iva monarch, as an island species has a very slow reproductive rate. It generally starts breeding at two to three years of age, lays just one egg per clutch, and both parents care for their chick for four to six months. Fortunately, the species is long-lived for a small passerine bird and can live for more than 20 years.

These characteristics make population recovery particularly difficult and underline the importance of every chick. By collecting an egg for artificial incubation and rearing the parents will produce a replacement clutch potentially maximizing the number of offspring produced.

About the SOP Manu

Founded in 1990, the Polynesian Ornithological Society (SOP) Manu works to improve knowledge of, and protect, the birds of French Polynesia. “Manu” means “bird” in Polynesian. A partner and local representative of BirdLife International, a global network of conservation organisations, Manu has run a conservation programme for the Fatu Iva monarch — Ômaò keekee — since 2008.

About Copenhagen Zoo

The non-profit institution has a strong focus on public learning, conservation management and research. Using wildlife management skills based on zoo experience the Zoo operates conservation projects and partnerships around the world and have co-developed the Life Stop Extinction project with SOP Manu and staff members of the two organisations have maintained close relationships since 2018.

Find out more

Further information is available at:

- **Fatu Iva monarch:** https://manu.pf/projet-stop-extincti/monarque-de-fatu-iva/
- **LIFE STOP EXTINCTION project:** https://manu.pf/nos-projets/stop-extinction/
- **Manu:** https://www.manu.pf
- **Copenhagen Zoo:** https://www.zoo.dk/en/projects/life-stop-extinction