



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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INTERIOR SECRETARY CLARK ORDERS EMERGENCY LISTING OF GUAM RAIL AS ENDANGERED SPECIES

Interior Secretary William Clark today announced that he has ordered the emergency listing of the Guam rail as an endangered species.

Fewer than 100 Guam rails are estimated to remain in the species' only known habitat, upland grassy areas in the vicinity of Anderson Air Force Base, Guam. Habitat modification, predation by an introduced snake species, and disease are suspected as contributing factors to the species' overall decline in recent years. An Air Force proposal to clear brush for security purposes in an area inhabited by the rails could have resulted in further loss of habitat.

"I alerted Secretary Weinberger of our concerns that the Air Force proposal could result in further loss of rail habitat and he assured me no action will be taken that would harm the birds," Secretary Clark said. "The emergency listing will ensure protection of the rail habitat on Guam while we confer with the military on how best to improve security at the base without causing further loss in the number of Guam rails."

Under the emergency listing, the Guam rails will receive the full protection of the Endangered Species Act for 240 days. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposed the species for listing as endangered under regular rulemaking procedures on November 29, 1983, and had already concluded a public comment period on the proposal. The emergency listing will ensure protection of the Guam rail until such time as a final rulemaking under normal procedures can be completed.

The Guam rail is a flightless bird with relatively long legs and small wings. The upper parts are largely dark in color, the throat and upper breast are near gray, and the lower parts are blackish with white barrings. The species is known only from the Territory of Guam in the Western Pacific Ocean. It formerly occurred in grassy areas, forests, and marshlands throughout the island. A drastic numerical and distributional decline began about 1971. A 1983 survey indicated that fewer than 100 individuals survive and that these are distributed in several small, discontinuous groups in extreme northern Guam. The reduction probably has resulted in part from destruction of native habitat by human activity, but the overall rapid decline in recent years is suspected to involve some factor in addition to habitat loss, such as predation or disease.