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CONSERVATION OPPORTUNITIES FOR ISLAND BIRD SPECIES: REMOVING FERAL CATS

Invasive species are a leading cause of extinction and endangerment. Impacts of invasives are greatest on islands, which support perhaps 15-20% of terrestrial plant and vertebrate biodiversity yet make up only 3% of the earth's surface. Feral cats are one of the most widespread and damaging invasive species. Their impacts are especially acute on birds: feral cats on Kerguelen Island were estimated to kill 1.2 million individual birds annually and on Marion Island 450,000 per year. Fortunately, feral cats can be eradicated from islands. Cats have been eradicated from more than 75 islands and where data are available the benefits are dramatic. On Natividad Island, Mexico, mortality of black-vented shearwaters was reduced from over 1,000 birds per month to a sustainable natural mortality of 100 birds a month after cats were removed. New technologies, like aerial baiting developed in Australia, will enable the removal of feral cats from larger and more biodiverse islands. As a result, significant bird conservation efforts, like the reintroduction of the Socorro Island dove or the Floreana Island mockingbird are now possible.

ABSTRACTS



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