PROJECT ISABELA: UPDATE ON INTRODUCED HERBIVORE ERADICATIONS IN THE GALÁPAGOS ISLANDS

Large-scale conservation efforts are underway on the Galápagos archipelago. Conceived in 1997 and funded in November 2001 by GEF/UNDP (along with additional funding from the Galápagos National Park, Charles Darwin Foundation, Charles Darwin Friends of Galápagos Organizations, and others), Project Isabela includes the largest insular goat eradication campaign to date. To date, two removals have been completed; two others are in progress. After being twice wrongfully declared eradicated, revised ground-hunting techniques and an intensive monitoring program has removed goats from Pinta Island (5,941 ha, Campbell et al. 2004). On Santiago Island (37,941 ha), introduced pigs were removed by combing a systematic poisoning campaign and a sustained ground-hunting effort (Cruz et al. 2005). Learning from these two eradications, Project Isabela is now tackling larger and more complex eradication campaigns in the archipelago.

Goats are currently being removed from Santiago Island and the northern section of Isabela Island (213,096 ha). Donkeys are concurrently being removed from both islands. By leveraging existing and developing new technologies and techniques these large-scale eradications are progressing swiftly. These techniques and technologies include 1) integrating geographic information systems (GIS) tools into all aspects of the campaign, 2) revised ground-hunting techniques, 3) aerial hunting by helicopter, and 4) and advanced Judas goat techniques. Santiago Island is now free of donkeys, and the goat eradication has entered the Judas goat phase, with over 100 Judas goats deployed. On Isabela, aerial hunting has swiftly reduced much of the island to Judas level. In 2005, over 600 Judas goats will be deployed on Isabela.

The Galápagos archipelago has a long history of introduced mammals, with many species beating Darwin to the islands. That history is now being reversed, and ecosystem recovery has been swift and widespread. If the Santiago and Isabela are successful, goat will remain only on inhabited islands. Feral cats have been recently removed from Baltra Island (2,544 ha) with a systematic poisoning and ground-hunting campaign. These conservation actions are large steps toward reversing the damage wrought by introduced species on the Galápagos Islands.

References:

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