

Researchers help save rare venomous mammal from extinction

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Hispaniolan solenodon (Image by Gregory Guida)

Scientists at the University of Bath are working with the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust to study an endangered large shrew-like mammal that kills its prey with a venomous bite.

The Biodiversity Lab research group of the University's Department of Biology & Biochemistry will be playing a key role in the new project that aims to help conserve two types of endemic land [mammal](#) in the Dominican Republic.

The Hispaniolan solenodon and the Hispaniolan hutia are two of the few surviving land mammals in the Caribbean Islands, and both are endangered with extinction through habitat loss and introduced mammals.

As a member of a distinct lineage which diverged from all other mammal groups almost 80 million years ago, the Hispaniolan solenodon represents a significant amount of unique evolutionary history and is one of the very few venomous mammals. However, little is known of the basic ecology of both [species](#), or the effectiveness of existing measures in meeting their [conservation](#) requirements.

The project led by Dr Richard Young of the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, a collaborator of the Biodiversity Lab, recently received funding from Defra's UK Darwin Initiative and will conduct research to investigate the species' population status, habitat requirements and human-driven threats.

Dr Mark O'Connell of the University's Department of Biology & Biochemistry will act as a consultant on the project, providing valuable technical support on Geographical Information Systems, and species distribution modelling to map threats and identify key conservation zones for the species at a national scale.

He said: "The project is of global conservation significance. It is an excellent example of how an academic and practitioner partner can work effectively together to generate much-needed knowledge to guide the conservation of threatened species."

The project will work with the Dominican Republic government and other stakeholders to develop scientifically sound Species Action Plans, and a monitoring programme, to provide a framework for delivering conservation activities and for evaluating their outcomes.

A programme of intensive training with host country project staff in research and conservation planning will ensure skills are left behind to continue the project over the longer term.

Provided by University of Bath

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