

Manatees head to Caribbean in first ever repopulation scheme

July 25 2016

A gentle creature which can grow to up to 4.5 metres (15 feet) in length, manatees' natural habitats are warm coastal waters, mangrove swamps and estuaries where they graze on plants

Singapore's zoo said Monday it will send two manatees to Guadeloupe as part of the world's first repopulation programme for the animal, which became extinct on the French Caribbean island in the early 20th century.

Males Kai, seven, and Junior, six, will be the first [manatees](#)—which are also known as sea cows—on the island since the [species](#) died out.

Another 13 manatees of both genders from zoos around the world will follow the pair to the Grand Cul-de-Sac Marin, a 15,000 hectare (37,000 acre) protected bay, the Asian city-state's [zoo](#) operator said.

Any offspring from the group will be reintroduced into the wild as part of the repopulation programme.

The species is listed as "vulnerable" on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List of Threatened Species, with the West Indian variety becoming extinct in the Caribbean due to overhunting.

During the 30-hour journey, the mammals, from the River Safari park next to Singapore's main zoo, will be placed on canvases in custom-built open-top crates lined with thick sponge and periodically sprayed with water to keep their skin moist.

Aquarist Sebastien Rives hand feeds manatees Males Kai and Junior with high fibre pellets at Singapore's River Safari theme park on July 23, 2016

"We have been very successful in breeding manatees in our care for the past 20 years. We are very happy that this success will now contribute to restocking part of the species' historic range in the Caribbean where it has been extinct for the past century," Cheng Wen-Haur, deputy chief executive of zoo operator Wildlife Reserves Singapore, said in a statement.

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