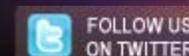


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VIDEO: Guam is Running Out of Options to Stop the Spread of Rhino Beetles and Save Guam's Coconut Trees

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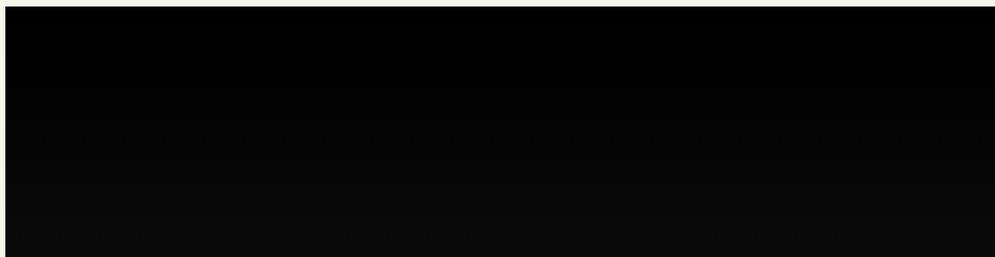
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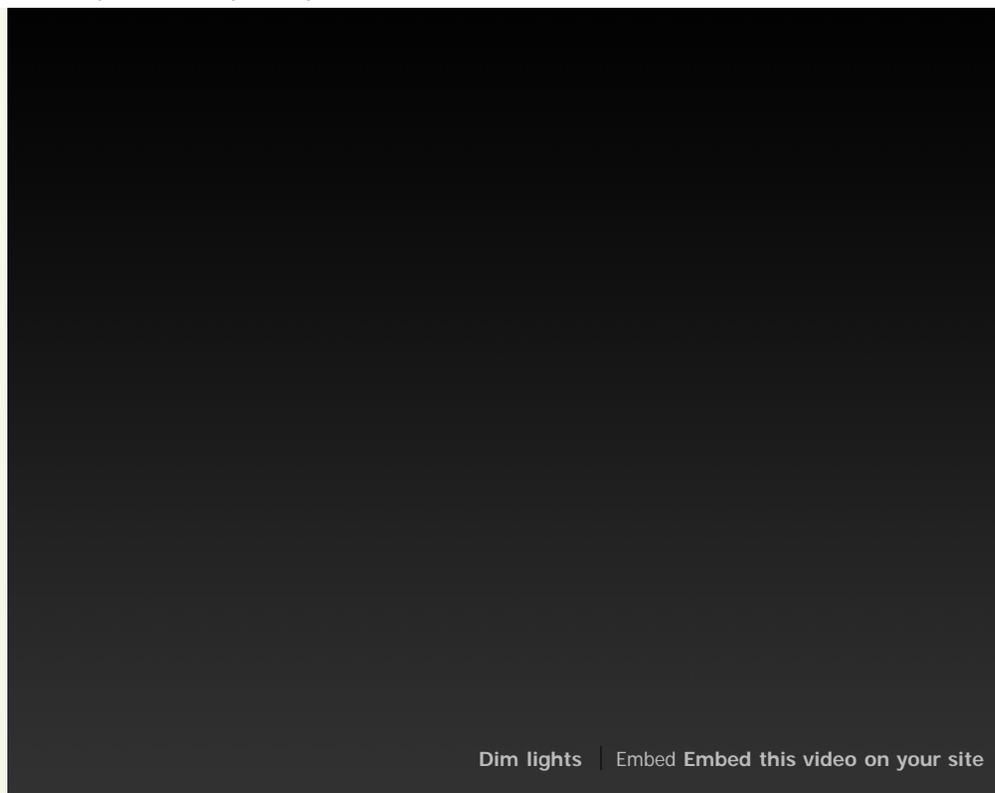
Guam - Guam is running out of options in trying to eradicate the rhino beetle population that is destroying our coconut trees. The head of the Coconut Rhinoceros Eradication Program Roland Quitugua met with village mayors today in an effort to get their commitment in trying to solve this problem that could cost us our coconut trees.

What is the island of Guam without the picturesque coconut tree lining our beaches? An image so ubiquitous, it is even present in our Guam flag. But the idea of a palm-tree less island is not far from becoming reality.

"I want you to know that to date the coconut rhinoceros beetle has spread to all the villages and is present throughout the villages around the island," announced Quitugua.

Quitugua and University of Guam researcher Dr. Aubrey Moore recently came back from a trip to Hawaii where the beetles have recently been found. Like Guam, Hawaii authorities are racing against time to keep the rhino beetle population under control before they too destroy the island's symbolic trees.





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"They found the rhino beetle in Hawaii and so Dr. Moore and myself were sent out there as technical experts to help them with their program and they got some issues over there," he noted.

While the outlook in Hawaii seems promising, on Guam, it's a different story.

"Right now, it is not impossible but it's highly improbable. What truly has to happen if we want to protect the coconut tree and make sure it doesn't disappear off the face of this island then what we need to do is we need to change our management strategy," he told island mayors.

It's not an easy task, says Quitugua, and it will require the involvement of the entire island. Many techniques and strategies have been tried, from using bucket traps to a type of virus to fungus to composting green waste, but none of these methods have been highly effective, he said.

"The reason why it doesn't work is because our eco system is not like other islands," he noted. "If you take a look at our trees and you compare how the trees look like in Palau, Fiji or Samoa or even in Indonesia, the trees do not look as bad as ours do. And part of that reason is because what they have in the other islands are rats and birds who are basically offering some sort of bio control up on the top of trees. We don't have rats and birds foraging on the top of coconut trees."

He also notes that the island has an abundance of green waste which in turn become breeding sites for rhino beetles.

"And because we have all of that, that's also one of the problems why they're not really attracted to these traps because

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the breeding sites are highly attractive, the dead decomposing organic matter. And every one of you mayors have a problem with green waste in your village," said Quitugua.

The key to eradicating the rhino beetle is management of our coconut trees. It's not so much about planting more trees, he says, but in learning how to increase biodiversity by planting a variety of trees.

"So when we take and we plant all these coconut trees in a big bunch, guess exactly what you just did? You just made a buffet line. The reality is because our ecosystem is so impaired, we have to be able to increase that biodiversity by intercropping and changing things out," he said.

He added: "Every mayor here has a problem with green waste. So i believe now what we need to do is implement and islandwide vegetation managemenet plan and we need a green waste management strategy."

One of the solutions he and his team have come up with is to offer netting kits in hardware stores.

"What we are seeing is a lot of people, we all like to bush cut our back yards, trim our trees and then we take all our green waste and then we shove it in the corner. That becomes a rhino beetle breeding site," he explained.

While burning is an option, a more environmentally friendly way to stop the rhino beetle is to use the netting kit so residents could set up their own individual rhino traps. The beetles are small enough to fit into the holes in the net, but as they try to escape, they open their wings making it more difficult for them to get out.

Quitugua says that they are working with DPW and Guam EPA to come up with potential strategies to handle green waste. He says he will also encourage senators to come up with bills to address the green waste problems on Guam.

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