



## Part 1

# Eradication of Invasive Species in Fernando de Noronha, Brazil

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Report 1 of 3



## Report 1

Fernando de Noronha is a volcanic archipelago located nearly 350 km off the Brazilian coast. Due to its remote location, it did not appear on maps until the early 16th century. Although its exact discoverer is unknown, shortly afterwards, Amerigo Vespucci and his crew became the island's first inhabitants when their ship ran aground on nearby reefs. During this time, Vespucci described the island. His descriptions of this paradise on Earth were enough to inspire the thinker Thomas More in coining the term "utopia."

But Fernando de Noronha is real. However... this natural utopia turns into a dystopia with the arrival of humans, as its discovery coincides with the extinction of the island's first endemic species (*Noronhomys vespuccii*).



Although there are many other invasive animal and plant species on Fernando de Noronha that threaten the island's ecology, my project focused on the tegu.

This reptile can grow up to 2 metres long and weigh as much as 15 kilograms. It is native to South America, ranging from central Brazil to central Argentina.

But... how does such a large reptile end up on an island so far from the mainland?

According to what we were told, in the mid-20th century, Fernando de Noronha had a serious problem with rats (a species introduced by humans). It was decided that the best solution to this problem was to introduce a predator that would feed on the rats.

But, to their surprise, the plan backfired – and where there was once one problem, many more were created.

To begin with, the lizards are diurnal, while the rats are nocturnal. Because they have different activity patterns, the tegus were not interested in the rats.

It is very important to highlight that Fernando de Noronha is a sanctuary for seabirds and sea turtles. After spending most of their lives along the continental coast, they return each year to the island's beaches to lay their eggs.

So, the tegu: Began preying on the eggs and hatchlings of birds and turtles;

Also feeds on other endemic animals of the island, which evolved over thousands of years without predators, making them very trusting and easy prey for the tegu;

Consumes fruit from invasive plant species, spreading their seeds across the island and worsening the environmental issue; Can become very aggressive if threatened, and its bite can transmit salmonella to other animals, including humans;

And to top it all off, the rats are still very abundant. Invasive species are a major ecological problem worldwide, and one that is very difficult to solve – not to mention, a particularly sensitive issue. But behind every problem, there is a solution. In this case, it lies in the hands of ICMBio, where Tunan (an ICMBio staff member who showed us the island), Taysa (the scientist in charge of the tegu eradication plan), Julia (a local volunteer), and Lucas (a bird specialist) taught us about the island's issues with invasive species, and how efforts are being made to eliminate these problems.

Throughout the text, I speak in the first-person plural because Josh Clarke was the cameraman and my travel companion on this incredible adventure.



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