Small Indian Mongoose: The Example Of Invasive Species

Across the world, animals are going extinct or becoming critically endangered. One main reason for this is the introduction of invasive species in the habitats of these animals. An invasive species is any living organism that is not native to an environment and causes harm to endemic fauna (“Invasive Species”). Invasive species are one of the biggest threats to wildlife and 42 percent of endangered or threatened species are harmed or at risk due to invasive species (“Invasive Species”). The small Indian mongoose is an animal with short legs, a long tail and grows to 20-26 inches while weighing around 2 lbs (Hodges 2014). This tiny animal is one of the invasive species threatening the habitat and populations of many other animals in North America.

The small Indian mongooses’ native origin is in India and South Asia, but in 1872, they were brought to the Caribbean to control rats that were destroying the sugarcane crop. Due to this, in the late 1800s, more sugar growers in Hawaii and Puerto Rico began to acquire the small Indian mongoose to help solve the rat problem. Ever since then, they have been found invading Hawaii, Puerto Rico, the Caribbean, and the Virgin Islands. Researchers began to notice that the rats were becoming more nocturnal to avoid predation by the mongoose (Peters 2011). So, while the mongoose did eat some rats, they had little impact on the overall rat population (Peters 2011). The mongoose than began to look to other food sources, like the native wildlife. This is a major concern because these animals eat reptiles, amphibians, birds, invertebrates, plants, seeds, fruits, and carrion, and have been known to eat turtle eggs and damage the populations of endangered or threatened sea turtles (Hodges 2014). Their wide variety of diet makes them a threat to many native species. Furthermore, this mammal is also known to carry rabies and other human diseases. Both rats and mongooses carry leptospirosis in which their droppings invade water sources, threatening human habitats (Hodges 2014). How should we cope with this invasive species? In India, the mongoose faced natural predators, such as that hindered their survival, but in a place like Hawaii, that predator doesn’t exist.

Due to there not being a natural predator of the small Indian mongoose being present, it is up to humans to control the spread of this invasive species. One way humans can help to control the population of this mammal is by trapping them, but there is very little animal control taking place (Hodges 2014). In the past, humans got rid of the small Indian mongoose by using live traps and then shooting the animal or carbon-dioxide poisoning them after capture (Peters 2011). However, that was not the most humane way to address the invasive species. As a result, the DOC 250 kill trap, shown in Figure 1, was introduced. This type of trap passed the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (NAWAC) humane guidelines for use against mongooses (Peters 2011). This trap was specifically designed to catch the small Indian mongoose. Each trap was baited with sardines or cat treats (Peters 2011). Research was done in Hawaii, and they confirmed that the DOC 250 trap was more efficient and effective than a normal cage trap and would be a more humane way of solving this crisis.

Invasive species are a serious threat to wildlife and are a problem that needs to be taken care of soon, or more species will become endangered or even extinct. The small Indian mongoose, one of the top 100 world’s worst invaders, is only one of the many species invading habitats (Peters 2011). The introduction of one animal in a place they don’t belong can be detrimental to

the well-being of the other wildlife in that area.