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St. Croix Ground Lizard, the Ameiva Polops, Returns to Island For First Time in 50 Years

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The St. Croix Ground Lizard (Ameiva polops). By. The DEPT. OF PLANNING AND NATURAL RESOURCES

The V.I. Dept. of Planning and Natural Resources on Wednesday announced the experimental return of the St. Croix Ground Lizard (Ameiva polops) to the main island of St. Croix for the first time in 50 years.

The St. Croix Ground Lizard is only 3.5 inches in length as a fully grown adult and is one of the world's most endangered reptiles, D.P.N.R. said in a release. In an effort to help recover the species from being endangered, D.P.N.R.'s Division of Fish and Wildlife has reintroduced two experimental populations to St. Croix.

This project was organized by the Division of Fish and Wildlife with support from a wide range of collaborators including the University of the Virgin Islands, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. National Park Service, D.P.N.R., the Coastal Zone Management Division, St. Croix Environmental Association, California Academy of Sciences, and Texas A&M University.

D.P.N.R. said the indigenous lizard was last seen on the main island in 1969 at Fort Frederik. It was only left on the offshore cays of St. Croix. “This project introducing small populations to enclosures for monitoring over the next year at the University of the Virgin Islands wetlands and the Sandy Point National Wildlife Refuge is the first small step towards recovering an indigenous species of the Virgin Islands,” said agency Commissioner Jean-Pierre Oriol.

According to the release, the endangered species of St. Croix Ground Lizard (*Ameiva polops*) should not be confused with the introduced species of the Puerto Rican Ground Lizard (*Ameiva exsul*) on St. Croix, which is found across the Puerto Rican Bank but was inadvertently introduced to St. Croix in the mid-1990s. The introduced Puerto Rican Ground Lizard was first reported in Estate LaGrande Princess and has slowly expanded over the last 25+ years. The Puerto Rican Ground Lizard is much larger than the St. Croix Ground Lizard and eats native lizards and insects.