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RWU and Grupo Puntacana to Partner in Building Ornamental Fish Hatchery in Dominican Republic

Hatchery will focus on raising Caribbean species, aiming to spur economic growth in Punta Cana aquarium and tourism trade



The Sharknose Goby is one of the many species that will be raised during the ornamental fish hatchery pilot project.

August 29, 2017 | Juan Siliezar

BRISTOL, R.I. – Tourism development company [Grupo Puntacana](#), its nonprofit arm [Grupo Puntacana Foundation](#) and Roger Williams University have formed a unique partnership to develop the first commercial ornamental fish hatchery in the Dominican Republic.

The hatchery, which will be located within the Puntacana Resort and Club, will test the feasibility of raising cultured Caribbean reef fish at a commercial scale for export while restoring some depleted ornamental fish populations on the Punta Cana coral reefs.

The hope is to increase the availability of aquacultured animals in the aquarium trade – without removing resources from their natural environments – and to draw more tourists to visit the reefs, potentially spurring economic growth in the area.

Other goals of the two-year pilot project include integrating local fishermen and their families in new sustainable livelihoods through the hatchery and creating a viable business model that could be replicated in other regions of the Dominican Republic and Caribbean.

"We're very thankful and happy for this partnership with Roger Williams," said Frank Elias Rainieri '99, a trustee at RWU, a vice president of Grupo Puntacana and son of Frank Rainieri, who founded the resort. "As an alumnus, it's a dream come true."

The initiative complements over three decades of work in coastal management and coral reef restoration by the Grupo Puntacana Foundation, which has created one of the largest coral reef restoration projects in the Caribbean.

"We are thrilled to expand our reef restoration efforts to include ornamental fish species in collaboration with Roger Williams University," said Jake Kheel, vice president of the Grupo Puntacana Foundation. "The health of our coral reef is fundamental to the success of our resort now and in the future. We think this project is a natural progression in our expanding efforts to provide viable solutions to the challenges facing the marine coastal area of Punta Cana."

For Roger Williams, the project provides an opportunity to apply technology and knowledge developed by the university's Center for Economic and Environmental Development to the social and environmental challenges presented by the rise of tourism and related development in the Punta Cana region. By implementing its research methods of culturing aquatic animals for commercial scale, the CEED will be able to expand the development and capabilities of its marine ornamental fish hatchery, opening that experience and learning to students.

"We'll be able to give students an experience at Roger Williams where they can go from just learning about the species to commercially producing them," RWU Assistant Professor of Marine Biology Andrew Rhyne said. "That's a very rare thing to be able to do. At the same time, we'll be able to expand species that are in the aquarium trade. This will maybe inject new species into the trade, as well, since many of the species that will be raised are not cultured at commercial levels."

RWU faculty and students at CEED will serve as consultants for the pilot project and assemble the hatchery grow-out systems that will then be shipped to the Dominican Republic for installation. Potential exists for onsite summer internships at the hatchery.

Rhyne, who oversees the ornamental fish hatchery at RWU, helped initiate the partnership with Rainieri after a site visit to the resort's marine lab.

Ground breaking for the hatchery is under way. The state-of-the-art facility is scheduled to be operational in early 2018. The hatchery will follow industry best practices and will not introduce exotic or invasive species to the region.

The foundation plans to hire a hatchery manager who will be based at RWU before transitioning to Punta Cana. Funding for the hatchery pilot program will come from Grupo Puntacana as well as a grant awarded to the foundation by the Inter-American Development Bank for coral reef restoration. The bank is the largest source of development financing for Latin America and the Caribbean.

Some of the species targeted for culture include the royal gramma (*Gramma loreto*), various gobies (e.g., *Elacatinus hortsi*) and peppermint shrimps (e.g., *Lysmata jundalini*).

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