

## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

The 16th annual meeting of the IUCN/SSC Iguana Specialist Group (ISG) was held in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic (see the article on p. 3 of this issue). During the two-day meeting, presentations were made on the status of the 16 taxa in the genus *Cyclura* found throughout the Caribbean. Many of the species are declining due to multiple factors. On the positive side, many species have people and institutions who have developed specific programs aimed at reversing those trends.

Immediately following the meeting, a two-day workshop was held to develop a species recovery plan for one of the two species endemic to Hispaniola, Ricord's Iguana (*Cyclura ricordii*). Combining the broad range of expertise from participating ISG members with local knowledge of the species' distribution and natural history, a recovery plan was formulated and will soon be published (see p. 9 for a draft of the recovery plan). Implementation hopefully will lead to a resurgence in Ricord's Iguana population numbers.

The trip to the Dominican Republic wasn't all work. Prior to the meeting, some of us arranged to take a field trip to Lago Enriquillo. From the ranger station, a boat took the participants to Isla Cabritos, an island where Ricord's Iguanas and Rhinoceros Iguanas (*Cyclura cornuta*) live sympatrically. Rhinoceros Iguanas are quite common and habituated to people. Several dozen individuals hang out at the ranger station and at the boat dock, where they patiently pose for photos. In contrast, *Cyclura ricordii* is very flighty, rare, and rarely seen. One can only imagine the excitement and anticipation of encountering these animals in the wild.

Much of my work and lecturing activity centers around conservation techniques and, upon arrival on



Rhinoceros Iguanas are quite common and habituated to people. Photograph by Joe Wasilewski



Ricord's Iguana on Isla Cabritos. Photograph by Joe Wasilewski

the island, we observed a very successful conservation technique — an armed guard patrolling the area. The Dominican Republic takes the concept of wildlife conservation very seriously.

Even though I was representing the IIS and the organization is dedicated to iguana conservation, I must admit to feeling a little more anticipation at the thought of viewing American Crocodiles (*Crocodylus acutus*), a population of which survives in Lago Enriquillo. As a wildlife biologist working with endangered crocodiles in Florida, seeing the species in a different country would be a special treat. I must admit that I asked the ranger to show us where the crocodiles were (even before the iguanas), and we soon were observing approximately 20 individuals.

The group (people, not crocodiles) then split up to search for the elusive Ricord's Iguana. After seeing many fresh drags and burrows, I came upon a huge male and snapped a few photos, but as I attempted to maneuver for a better shot, he retreated into his burrow. We saw two other Ricord's Iguanas and heard several more crashing through the brush, apparently impervious to the cacti. In fact, the cacti on the island were so abundant that we renamed it the "Isla de Needles."

The subsequent conference was successful and memorable for all the participants. The hospitality and food were excellent — and I, for one, had to diet after returning home.

*Joe Wasilewski*