

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

What a great week we had at the IIS conference on Utila, Honduras. Seventeen IIS members joined Gunther and Elke Köhler, Alex Gutsche, Karsten Gees, and the rest of the staff and volunteers of the Iguana Research and Breeding Station. Our schedule was quite full and included lectures and discussions almost every evening during the week.

The Iguana Station staff arranged several daily field trips of varying degrees of difficulty. Most of the trips involved efforts to find and see the elusive *Ctenosaura bakeri* in its natural habitat. This iguana, unlike the other sixteen varieties of *Ctenosaura*, justly deserves the nickname, "Swamper." On the first trip into the swamps, many of our group members sank past their knees in the mud as they ventured into the Swampers' home range.

In a sense, these animals' comfort with a swampy environment helps preserve the species. The mangrove wetlands that this animal calls home are unattractive to developers, and could well be the last vestige of property remaining on the rapidly developing island of Utila.



A large male Swamper basks next to his tree hole in the vicinity of Rock Harbor. This animal had toe-clips indicating it had been released from the Utila Iguana Research and Breeding Station a number of years ago. It was likely one of the original animals adopted through the Utila Iguana Adoption Program. *Photograph by John Binns.*

However, all is not well in the world of *Ctenosaura bakeri*. Although some local people still hunt iguanas for food, the work of Gunther and his colleagues over the years has had a positive impact and the ban on hunting is commonly observed. Signs throughout the island inform both locals and visitors of the protected status of this endemic species.

By far the greatest threat to the continued survival of *Ctenosaur bakeri* is the rapid loss of nesting habitat to tourist-related development. For example, the group was taken to a 3½ acre beachfront property that has been a nesting site for up to 500 female iguanas. We were later informed that this was one of only two remaining beachfront properties not yet sold, and the other was not part of the Swamper's range! Without a place for the females to lay their eggs, the species would rapidly dwindle and become extinct. As a conservation-minded group, we cannot allow this to happen. The IIS is now concerned with raising part of the \$165,000 for purchasing and preserving this remaining vestige of nesting habitat. This is a tangible goal. Already, donations are approaching \$5000 and fundraising is ongoing.

If you are interested in donating or assisting in raising money for this notable cause, contact the International Reptile Conservation Foundation (IRCF c/o John or Sandy Binns, 3010 Magnum Drive, San Jose, CA 95135) for more information. All donations are tax-deductible.

You should think about joining the group on our next adventure.



Joe Wasilewski

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