

IGUANA NEWSBRIEFS

Stout Iguana Conservation

Facing near extinction in the 1980s, the Stout Iguana (*Cyclura pinguis*), the only remaining natural population of which is found on Anegada in the British Virgin Islands, has been championed by two groups of scientists with different strategies to preserve the species. Human population growth and introduced animals such as cats, dogs, and goats had decimated populations which once roamed throughout the species' historical range that included Puerto Rico and all of the Virgin Islands.

A group led by Skip Lazell and Numi Mitchell chose to relocate animals to other predator-free islands. With the cooperation of the BVI Ministry of Natural Resources, an initial group of eight animals was translocated to Guana in 1984. It has since expanded to more than 300 individuals. With abundant vegetation and freed of competition, the animals are able to flourish. Further translocations to Necker and Norman islands have also proven successful.

Other scientists are seeking to restore the Stout Iguana to reasonable numbers on Anegada itself. Since 1997, the BVI National Parks Trust has operated a headstart facility. Iguanas could be raised until they were large enough to be



Skip Lazell on Guana with *Cyclura pinguis*.
Photograph by Gad Perry.



Anegada Headstart facility. Photograph by John Binns.

safe from most predators. To date, 24 adult iguanas have been released back to the wild and another 66 remain at the facility.

Rick Hudson, co-chair of the IUCN/SSC Iguana Specialist Group, points out that headstarting has been successfully used in both Cuba and Jamaica to help preserve iguana species. However, the underlying problems on Anegada remain to be addressed. Feral cats still prey on hatchling iguanas, while wild goats and other livestock compete for the limited available vegetation.

Long-term survival for the Stout Iguana can only be ensured by the creation of a national park. However, the long-standing legal quagmire of land ownership on Anegada must first be resolved. Historically, people on the island survived by farming, fishing, and raising livestock. Land ownership was well-defined by a series of stone walls, which contained the livestock and kept the iguanas safe from predators. In 1961, the crown assumed ownership of almost all of the land and leased it to a development company, which began by tearing down the stone walls. Public outcry put an end to development, but the damage had been done. With livestock roaming free, devouring any available vegetation, the iguana population rapidly plummeted. Although creation of a national park was approved by the Executive

Council as early as 1981, the land disputes have yet to be resolved. Most Anegadians support such a move, yet wish to retain the right to use resources such as wood, salt, and fish within the park.

Condensed from an article that appeared in the StandPoint (BVI), 18 November 2003

Iguana Farms Produce Meat

A recent article appearing in the Christian Science Monitor described the sale of frozen iguana meat to Central American immigrants living in the United States. Importer Frank Rodriguez, an American businessman who owns *Distribuidora Cuscatlan*, imports the meat from iguana farms in El Salvador and supplies it to 60 markets in the Washington, D.C. area at \$14 a pound. Iguana meat has long been a staple in Central America, where it has a reputation "as a cure-all for everything from colds to poor sexual performance."

Iguana hunting is prohibited in El Salvador, where populations have been decimated by overhunting. Farming iguanas, argue proponents of the practice, provides much-needed jobs, helps keep the tropical rain forests intact, and even rebuilds wild populations as farmers release part of their stock.

Businesses are eager to create increased demand for their products, not



Traditional method of preparing iguana in southern Mexico. Photograph by Robert F. Wilkinson.

just among immigrants in the United States, but in Asian markets, where an interest in exotic foods is a strong tradition. Some entrepreneurs, going beyond supplying frozen meat, are seeking to perfect a recipe for canned iguana soup. The Food and Drug Administration has yet to issue a license for the sale of this product.

Iguanas on Boca Grande

A report by Wendy Fullerton (newspress.com, 26 April 2004) noted the abundance of iguanas and described some of the resultant problems faced by residents of Boca Grande, Florida. A community growth and development plan being developed for the 7-mile long resort island seeks to address iguana population control. The report claims that the approximately 1,000 year-round residents are outnumbered by more than 2 to 1 by the non-native Spiny-tailed Iguanas (*Ctenosaura similis*). The iguanas cause damage to both ornamental and native vegetation and concerns have been raised regarding their impact on native endangered Gopher Tortoises, with which iguanas may compete for food and whose burrows they share during winter cold spells.

The article described how these fearless climbers find their way into attics, air conditioning ducts and dryer vents, and

are even known to plod through the plumbing and emerge through toilets. Residents have armed themselves with pellet guns for protection and are ready to stomp out these invasive pests, which were described as being as thick as palmetto bugs but a lot more difficult to kill.

Joe Wasilewski, President of the International Iguana Society, agreed that some intervention is necessary. However, sensationalizing the presence of introduced animals is hardly an appropriate response, as their very presence is due to human agency. Overstating the threat also does little more than inflame emotions, which can lead to actions that will serve neither humans nor reptiles. A rational control plan must be humane as well as effective, and all responsible parties should invest the time and energy to implement a program that meets both of those criteria.

IIS Draws Attention to Statian Iguanas

The Lesser Antillean Iguana (*Iguana delicatissima*) is found only on a very few West Indian islands. Although some populations are doing better than others, evidence suggests that all populations are in decline. The principal causes include encroachment by humans on already small ranges and limited nesting areas, habitat degradation by introduced herbivores (e.g., goats and cattle) with which the iguanas compete, often unsuccessfully, for limited forage, predation by

introduced carnivores (e.g., dogs, cats, mongooses), active hunting, and, on at least a few islands, hybridization with introduced Green Iguanas (*Iguana iguana*).

St. Eustatius (= Statia) supports one of the remaining populations of *I. delicatissima*. Despite relatively little development, compared, for example, to St. Maarten, where the population has been extirpated, and a much smaller human population than other islands of comparable size, iguanas are not faring well (see *Iguana Times* 8(1): 3–6). Although many of the factors listed above are operative (although *I. iguana* is not present on Statia), ongoing hunting pressure may be responsible for the inability of the population to grow. Although some animals persist in the rugged and largely inaccessible Boven Hills and a few remain on the slopes of the Quill, an inactive volcano, a number of individuals survive within privately held properties solely at the pleasure of the landowners.

In an effort to increase awareness of the precarious status of Statia's largest native land animal, the IIS, in cooperation with the St. Eustatius National Parks Foundation (STENAPA), has funded educational signs that will be posted at STENAPA headquarters, the botanical garden, all trail heads, the tourist bureau, airport, hotels, and dive shops. In combination with educational programs planned for June of this year, the hope is that Stadians will develop a greater pride in their natural heritage (symbolized by the Iguana) and succeed in preserving this unique population.

Jamaican Iguanas Get a Lift from Down Under

Beginning with its "re-discovery" in 1990, the Jamaican Iguana has been the subject of a recovery effort that is now in its 15th year. Despite some notable achievements — particularly the continued protection of known nesting sites, the control of exotic predators, and the establishment of a successful headstart-and-release program — much work remains to be done.

A chronic problem plaguing the recovery effort in Jamaica remains the availability of biologists willing to devote the large blocks of field time needed to





South Camp in the Hellshire Hills is the command center and living shelter for Byron Wilson (shown) and Rick van Veen. Sheltered deep in the upper region, conditions are blazingly hot, rugged, and an acid test of the researchers' stamina. *Photograph by John Binns.*

accomplish research objectives. Here, two issues are of relevance. First, accessing the remote field site in the central Hellshire Hills is time consuming (over half a day round-trip); hence, day trips and "week-end warrior" research efforts do not provide the opportunity to conduct intensive investigations. Second, the remoteness and the ruggedness of the Hellshire environment has made it difficult to recruit personnel willing to camp out and work for extended periods, often alone.

Fortunately, the project has recently obtained the services of Rick van Veen — an enthusiastic, if not maniacal, iguana biologist. By way of Australia, Rick passed through the Fort Worth Zoo, where Rick Hudson nudged him south toward Jamaica. With funding from the Audubon Zoo and the Miami Metrozoo, Rick joined the iguana project

in late January 2004, and within weeks was residing in central Hellshire for a nearly 40-day stint. With significant help and training from John Kunna (who returned for a 3rd consecutive field season), Rick coordinated the completion of an 8th year of pitfall trapping, part of a long-term assessment of the relative abundance of ground reptiles on mongoose-free versus mongoose-infested plots.

The best news for the iguana is that Rick has proved to be especially adept at dealing with the threat posed by introduced mammals. Indeed, Rick has made few friends among the local rats, pigs, and mongooses. Perhaps most significantly, Rick has rendered central Hellshire a decidedly less pleasant and more risky environment for feral cats — unquestionably the most insidious threat to the iguana's persistence.

*Byron S. Wilson
Jamaican Iguana Project*

International Iguana Foundation Announces 2004 Grants

The Board of Directors of the International Iguana Foundation (IIF) held their annual meeting at the Miami

Metrozoo in Florida on 3 April 2004. The Board evaluated a total of seven proposals and awarded grants totaling \$48,550 for the following five projects:

- (1) Establishing a second subpopulation of released Grand Cayman Blue Iguanas, *Cyclura lewisi*. Fred Burton (Blue Iguana Recovery Program), \$11,000.
- (2) Conservation of the critically endangered Jamaican iguana, *Cyclura collei*. Peter Vogel and Byron Wilson (Jamaican Iguana Research and Conservation Group), \$11,300.
- (3) Maintaining and optimizing the headstart release program for the Aneгада Iguana, *Cyclura pinguis*. Glenn Gerber (San Diego Zoo CRES) and Kelly Bradley (Dallas Zoo and UTA), \$11,250.
- (4) Translocation, Population Surveys, and Habitat Restoration for the Bahamian Iguanas, *Cyclura r. rileyi* and *Cyclura r. cristata*. William Hayes (Loma Linda University), \$7,500.
- (5) Conservation Biology and Management of the Saint Lucian Iguana, *Iguana iguana*. Matt Morton (Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust) and Karen Graham (Sedgwick County Zoo), \$7,500.

*Rick Hudson
IIF Program Officer*

Help is desperately needed to secure equipment for Byron Wilson's and Rick van Veen's efforts in Hellshire Hills, Jamaica. Please visit:
<http://cyclura.com/Jamaica.php>



New International Iguana Foundation logo.

Species Recovery Plan Workshop held for Aneгада Iguana

In response to the need for a unified conservation strategy for the critically endangered Aneгада Iguana, *Cyclura pinguis*, a Species Recovery Plan (SRP) workshop was recently conducted at the Miami Metrozoo on 1–2 April 2004. Workshop participants represented the IUCN Iguana Specialist Group (ISG) and the National Parks Trust of the British Virgin Islands (BVINPT) and included Joseph Smith-Abbott (BVINPT Director), Allison Alberts (ISG co-chair, San Diego Zoo), John Binns (International Reptile Conservation Foundation), Quentin Bloxam (Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust), Kelly Bradley (Dallas Zoo), Fred Burton (Blue Iguana Recovery Program), Steve Conners (Miami Metrozoo), Rick Hudson (ISG co-chair, Fort Worth Zoo), and Lee Pagni (San Diego Zoo). To insure consistency in the ISG Species Recovery Planning process, Fred and Quentin were brought in as facilitators. This team previously ran successful SRP workshops in Grand Cayman (2001),



Species Recovery Plan Workshop participants from the left: Kelly Bradley, Allison Alberts, Quentin Bloxam, Lee Pagni, John Binns, Rick Hudson, Steve Conners, Joseph Smith-Abbott, and Fred Burton.

the Dominican Republic (2002), and the Turks & Caicos Islands (2003).

An SRP workshop had been conducted in July 2001 in Tortola, but that plan was never finalized or formally rati-

fied, and was largely out of date. Also, although significant progress has been made toward saving *Cyclura pinguis* on Aneгада, a number of “big picture” issues were not being addressed. A coor-

Rob Dorson (1970 – 2004)

By Jill R. Dorson

Barking dogs announce your arrival at my brother's house. Then there are the cats, birds, spiders, turtles, tortoises, terrapins and a por-bellied pig. But even after meeting these critters, you still haven't met the gentle, scaly, fascinating creatures that were his passion. In cages he built himself in a large, lush yard in Jacksonville, Fla., six Green Iguanas and three Rock Iguanas, lounge in huge cages filled with branches to climb, greens to eat and shade to sleep in.

My brother, Rob Dorson, died suddenly on May 16 of coronary artery disease. He was 34. Besides his family - my mother, Marilyn, my father, Lee, my husband, Sam, his life partner Lee Hanks, and me - Rob left a family of critters, as he called them. His passion, though, was the iguanas, which had fascinated him since he was a kid.

When Rob and I were growing up, he had some tiny pet lizards, which created quite a ruckus in our childhood home, particularly when one got out of its cage and we spent days looking through the kitchen, the bathrooms, the bedrooms, and the laundry room before it was rescued.

Little did we know that that little lizard had started a love affair. Rob took in animals of all kinds, from stray dogs and cats to a pig that lived at an animal farm he had worked at to exotic birds. He was also an avid fisherman,



who enjoyed his time on the water much more than his time on land. But in all the years he fished, my brother never ate a fish, always catch and release. He had a soft spot for all the earth's creatures and gave them more love and attention than many people give their own families.

In 2000, Rob and Lee decided to turn their passion into a business and Creature Features, an exotic pet store in Jacksonville, was born. They started on a shoestring and built a successful business that was also a meeting place for friends and acquaintances that shared that special enthusiasm for four-legged creatures.

In the more than two years that Rob and Lee owned the store, it grew from a business to a community, a place they used to educate as well as place animals. Rob took every opportunity to teach customers and friends about his animal kingdom and he always welcomed customers with a smile.

Since closing the store, Rob and Lee dedicated their efforts to their animal family at home. Rob worked for my husband and I this last year and not a day passed by that he didn't regale us with a story of one of his pets. And he was always looking for ways to make them more comfortable - in fact, a large branch that he had hoped to use in an iguana cage still sits in my backyard.

Since Rob's death, my family has been working with the International Iguana Society, which has started a trust fund in his name. We know that he would have loved the idea of helping to save the reptiles that brought him so much joy.

Please help us keep Rob's memory alive by making a donation to the International Iguana Society's Rob Dorson Trust Fund. Proceeds will benefit the Blue Iguana Recovery Program on Grand Cayman.

dinated plan of action, specifically dealing with local public awareness and perceptions, land development plans and protected areas, and invasive species control, was lacking. Thus, the purpose of this workshop was to review the 2001 report and condense it into prioritized action components. Crucially important to this process was that each actionable component have a time line, a potential funding source if needed, and a point person who would be responsible for implementation.

The next step is for BVINPT staff member Nancy Woodfield to compile the document for review and publication; it will then go to John Binns for layout and creative design (envisioned as resembling the Ricord's Iguana SRP). Funds to publish a high-quality document have been identified and a late 2004 publication date is anticipated. This document will prove useful on a number of fronts, including guiding the recovery plan process, providing accountability, heightening local and international awareness for the plight of the iguana, and highlighting critical funding needs for granting agencies. However, the most important immediate goal for this document is

that it be accepted and publicly ratified by the appropriate governmental agencies in the British Virgin Islands. This action is vital to saving the Aneгада Iguana on Aneгада, and is essential to this species' long-term survival.

Rick Hudson
ISG Co-chair, Fort Worth Zoo

Triangle Iguana Rescue

Started over four years ago, this group of over 70 volunteers is scattered throughout North Carolina and has affiliates in surrounding states. Our main foci are on husbandry education and striving to prevent neglect and abuse. Over 20 iguanas are currently available for adoption within our limited network of foster/rehabilitation homes.

Since we are self-funded at this point, individual foster homes carry the burden of veterinary costs, food, added utility bills, etc. We have a hard time finding good adoptive homes and sometimes end up keeping foster animals for over a year. We have decided that rather than taking in more iguanas and placing them less selectively, we will only take as many

animals as we can provide with proper care and place in truly good homes.

We do require a home visit before leaving an iguana in a new adoptive home, and we have an adoption contract, which new owners must sign, agreeing to keep us updated on the iguana's progress and health.

We can be found online at TriangleIguanaRescue.com. Locate an affiliate in your area in the "TIR



Triangle Iguana Rescue actively promotes responsible iguana husbandry; from left to right: Mark Boudreaux, Al Johnson, Sherry Johnson, Darryl Conner, Dominick Giorgianni.

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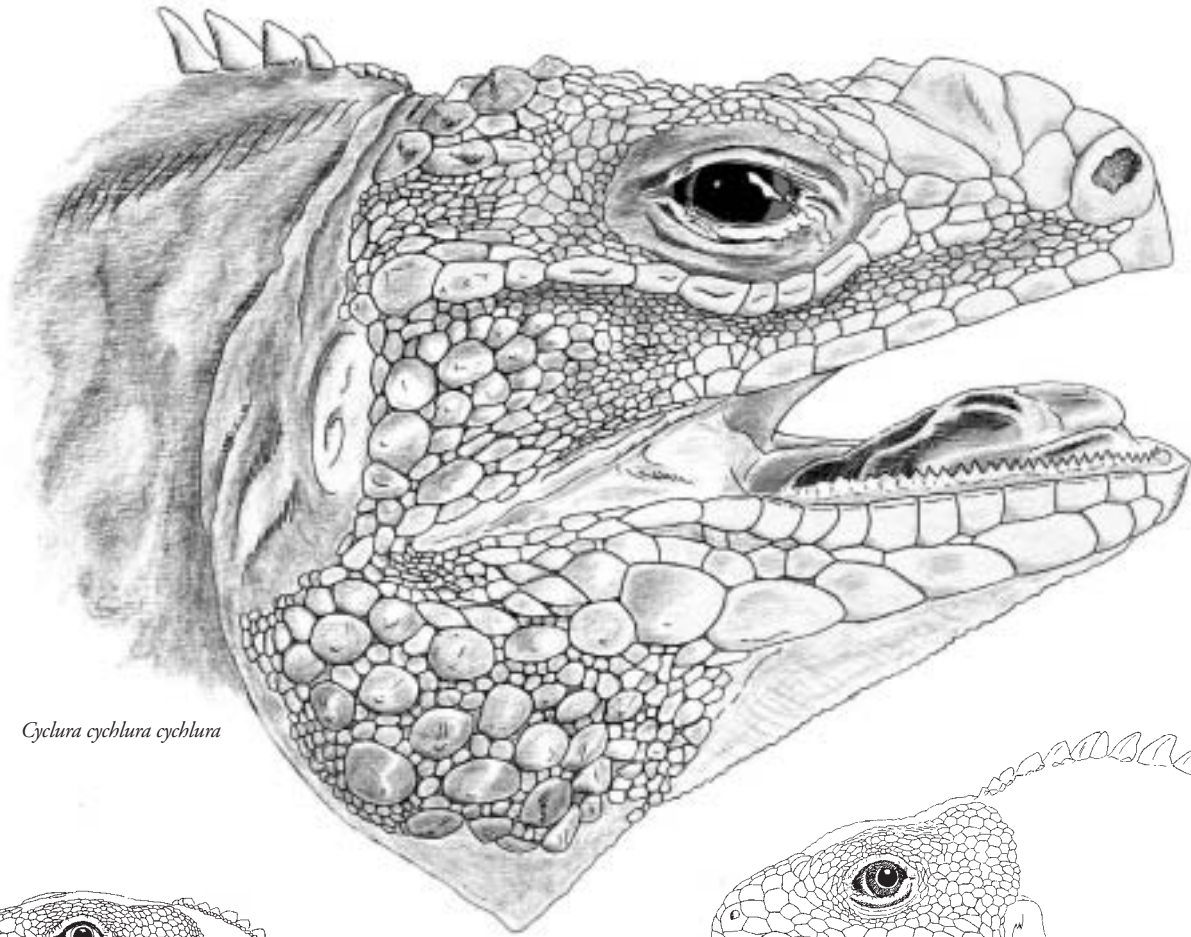
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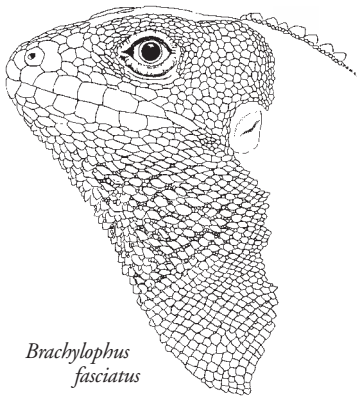
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John Bendon at the ISG Annual Meeting on Grand Cayman (November 2001). Photograph by John Binns.



Brachylophus vittensis



Cyclura nubila nubila

John Bendon, long-time IIS member, actively supports iguana conservation. A regular contributor to IGUANA, he frequently assists with efforts to conserve threatened populations, most recently on Isla Mona (see p. 98). In addition, John's beautiful and anatomically accurate renderings of iguanas have contributed greatly to many feature articles. Sales of individual prints have helped fund iguana work by John and others, and his drawings have been used as chapter headers in recently published books edited by Alberts et al. (2004. *Iguanas: Biology and Conservation*. Reviewed in IGUANA 11(1):60-61) and Henderson and Powell (2003. *Islands and the Sea: Essays on Herpetological Exploration in the West Indies*. Reviewed in IGUANA 10(4):151-152).