

Notes on the Cuban Iguana¹

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Barbour and Ramsden (1919, *Memoirs Mus. Comp. Zool., Harvard Univ.*, 47[2]: 72–213) list six mainland localities for the Cuban iguana, *Cyclura macleayi macleayi* Gray [= *C. nubila nubila*], and comment on the gradual extirpation of the species. Their records represent all the Cuban provinces with the exception of Santa Clara, now Las Villas.

During September, 1955, Mr. Daniel Lyons, of the Natural History Society of Maryland, and the author observed a number of iguanas on the Cuban mainland near the city of Trinidad, Las Villas Province. These observations add a new provincial record to the list of Barbour and Ramsden.

Five individuals were observed on the mainland in typical limestone associations as described by Sutcliff (1952, *Notulae Naturae, Acad. Nat. Sci. Philadelphia*, 243 1–7) in his discussion of the species as observed on Cayo de la Piedra. In such areas dense vegetation occurs on a thin soil lying over a limestone base. Prickly pear and trailing cactus are typical plants. Iguanas occupying such areas live in natural cavities of the limestone.

Observations were made on Cayo Macho de Tierra on September 12, 1955. The island is approximately one-quarter-mile long and reaches a width of 200 yards. It consists of a low, sandy hill almost completely surrounded by dense mangrove swamps. Vegetation is sparse in the open, sandy central area and consists chiefly of beach grasses. Besides the iguanas, numerous aquatic birds, land crabs, and *Anolis sagrei* were distributed throughout the area. A small colony of *Ameiva auberi* occupied a sandy beach on the west end of the island.

A total of seven iguanas was observed between 10:00 A.M. and noon, five of which were captured. In all cases they were

flushed from thick clumps of beach grass.

There are apparently no accounts of *Cyclura macleayi macleayi* entering water as a means of escape. Two individuals entered burrows whereas the other island-dwelling iguanas sought escape by entering the sea. Each one ran parallel to the shore, sometimes for more than one hundred yards, then, turning swiftly, entered the water, swimming out about twenty yards, and remaining motionless beneath eight to ten inches of water. One individual entered the water from an open beach, but in an area where heavy wave action was inhibited by a thick growth of seaweed. The others entered the mangrove swamps in which the water was clear and quiet.

The island-dwelling iguanas inhabit long, shallow burrows similar to those dug by large land crabs. Burrows were observed in the more elevated regions of Cayo Macho de Tierra as well as on three small unnamed islands southeast of Casilda, and could be distinguished from crab burrows by their larger size and the long groove-like tail marks at their entrances.

Of the three burrows opened, two contained iguanas. All ran downward at a moderate angle for about two feet and then continued parallel to the surface for six or eight feet. Two ended blindly, whereas the third was found to have two entrances approximately eight feet apart. The actual dwelling place of its occupant was a small tunnel extending no more than two feet from one of the entrances.

Local observers insist that iguanas invariably leave the burrows tail first. This is perhaps true in view of the size and structure of the burrows, the diameters of which vary from four to eight inches throughout their length. In no case was an enlarged terminal room observed. Both of the individuals found in burrows were facing down-burrow in very tight quarters and were collected by grasping the tail.

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Adult male Cuban Iguanas facing off in a territorial dispute. Photograph by Glenn Gerber.