

IGUANA NEWSBRIEFS

Iguana Specialist Group and Fiji National Trust Co-Sponsor Conservation and Management Plan Workshop for Fijian Iguanas

On 10–11 November 2004, the IUCN SSC Iguana Specialist Group and the Fiji National Trust co-sponsored a Conservation and Management Plan workshop for Fiji's native Crested (*Brachylophus vitiensis*) and Banded iguanas (*B. fasciatus*). The workshop was held on the Laucala campus of the University of the South Pacific, and was attended by 50 participants from both within and outside Fiji. The purpose of the workshop was to develop a comprehensive strategy to guide the conservation of Fiji's native iguanas by identifying and prioritizing the actions needed to ensure their future survival. For Crested Iguanas, participants identified a series of key objectives, including prioritization of islands most suitable for long-term survival, implementation of a comprehensive management plan for the Yadua Taba Crested Iguana Sanctuary, recommendations for field research on iguanas and their habitats, development of captive breeding and reintroduction strategies, and establishment of education, awareness, and ecotourism programs. For Banded Iguanas,



Rick Hudson, Co-chair of the IUCN SSC Iguana Specialist Group, with a Crested Iguana on Yadua Taba, Fiji. *Photograph by Jone Niukula.*

about which much less is currently known, participants developed a research agenda that focuses on collection of baseline data, genetic studies, and education needs. Results of the workshop will be published early next year.

Following the workshop, participants had the opportunity to visit a traditional

Fijian village on Yadua Island, home to the custodians of the Crested Iguana sanctuary on nearby Yadua Taba. Following a traditional sevusevu ceremony, permission to visit the sanctuary was given, and participants had the rare treat of viewing an extraordinarily dense population of Crested Iguanas in the wild. After return-



Participants in the Conservation and Management Plan workshop for Fiji's native iguanas at the Laucala campus of the University of the South Pacific. *Photograph by Joe Burgess.*

ing to the main island of Viti Levu, the Iguana Specialist Group met in Suva on 15 November. The meeting centered on planning discussions for a number of key taxa, as well as special sessions on public relations and the media, iguana friendly development guidelines, and funding priorities for 2005.

*Allison Alberts and Rick Hudson
Co-Chairs, IUCN SSC Iguana Specialist
Group*

Residents of Boca Grande Seek to Exterminate Introduced Spiny-tailed Iguanas

Citizens attending a meeting of the Gasparilla Island Conservation and Improvement Association overwhelmingly favored ridding the island of the increasingly numerous Spiny-tailed Iguanas (*Ctenosaura similis*), which they regard as no better than rats. Jerome Jackson, a scholar at the Florida Gulf Coast University, believes the iguanas pose a serious threat to several endangered species, consuming everything from turtle hatchlings, mice, and native vegetation to the eggs of Gopher Tortoises and birds. Suggestions for exterminating the animals included rounding them up and selling them to high schools for dissection or selling the meat as an exotic delicacy and hides for purses. Bob Janes, Lee County Commissioner, said that no timetable had been established, nor were cost estimates or formal plans for the removal of iguanas in place. According to one study, iguanas on the island number around 10,000 (see also IGUANA 11(2):130).

Gopher Tortoises and Feral Iguanas do not Compete for Food

Ray Ashton of the Ashton Biodiversity Research and Preservation Institute (www.AshtonBiodiversity.org) is the author of a forthcoming book on Gopher Tortoises (*Gopherus polyphemus*). He recently was asked whether the increasing number of feral iguanas in Florida poses a threat to the endangered Gopher Tortoise by competing for the same food plants. Ray reported that he is frequently asked this question by individuals concerned about possible ecological consequences of feral iguanas in



Florida Gopher Tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*) diets probably are not affected by the presence of introduced iguanas. *Photograph by Joe Burgess.*

southern Florida. He further stated that his in-depth studies on the diet of Gopher Tortoises (in press) indicate that the average tortoise forages on 80–165 species in a yearly cycle and that more than 400 species of forage plants are documented in its range. Furthermore, coastal diversity studies indicate that about 120 species are commonly available for tortoises on Florida beach strands. By bulk, about 80% of the diet of tortoises (all size classes) is composed of grasses and sedges. He concluded: “I doubt very much that there is competition with the lizards.”

Long Island Reptile Museum Closed

The Long Island Reptile Museum in Hicksville, New York went out of business on 9 November when the unheated building was condemned. Workers from the Suffolk County SPCA and volunteers

from a number of rescue organizations evacuated 182 reptiles and amphibians, including two 6-foot alligators, a 250-pound Aldabra Tortoise, and over a dozen venomous snakes and lizards. The International Fauna Society housed animals temporarily until they could be released legally to adoptive homes.

The closure of the Museum was the culmination of more than two years' effort on the part of reptile rescue groups in New York and Connecticut working in cooperation with local police and SPCA officials (see also IGUANA 11(1):72–73). A recent article on iguana rescue (IGUANA 10(4):121–126) euphemistically referred to the Museum as the “Alternative Reptile Institution” while describing the horrific conditions in which iguanas had been kept. Another 19 Spiny-tailed, Rock, and Green iguanas still resided at the Museum until the recent closure. All of these iguanas are currently in rehabilitation or have been placed in permanent adoptive homes.



Digger, a “Cuban” Iguana rescued from the Long Island Reptile Museum, proved to be a hybrid Blue Iguana once he was cleaned and examined carefully. *Photograph by Carole Saucier.*



Spiny-tailed Iguanas (*Ctenosaura similis*) are considered pests by some residents of Boca Grande. *Photograph by John Binns.*