

FOCUS ON CONSERVATION

TURKS AND CAICOS IGUANA (*Cyclura carinata carinata*)



TURKS AND CAICOS IGUANA RECOVERY PROGRAM TURKS AND CAICOS

The critically endangered Turks and Caicos Iguana (*Cyclura carinata carinata*) is the smallest of the Caribbean Rock Iguanas and the most vulnerable to predation by introduced mammals. Once widespread, these iguanas now occupy less than five percent of their historic range, and island populations continue to be lost at an alarming rate. In response to this crisis, the San Diego Zoo's Applied Conservation Division, the Turks and Caicos National Trust, and the Turks and Caicos Department of Environment and Coastal Resources initiated an intensive conservation program to restore Turks and Caicos Iguanas to key portions of their former range.

Beginning in 2000, researchers translocated 218 animals from islands where they were threatened to four uninhabited cays within the Turks and Caicos reserve system. The research team is carrying out long-term ecological monitoring of restored populations, nutritional analysis of food plants, health and hormone evaluations, genetic studies, and educational outreach. To date, the translocated iguanas have experienced a 98 percent survival rate and nesting activity has been observed on all of the translocation cays. As a result of low population densities and lack of competition for resources, young iguanas hatched on translocation islands are growing up to four times faster than juveniles of comparable ages on source islands. Ongoing research on restored populations and their respective source populations continues to provide valuable information about iguana population ecology as well as new insights into improved translocation methodologies.

In 2003, the IUCN Iguana Specialist Group partnered with government officials, private businesses, and international iguana conservation experts to produce a detailed five-year management plan to conserve and restore populations of the Turks and Caicos Iguana. With the successful return of healthy iguana populations to four of their island homes, we are one step closer to the plan's objective — to conserve and restore iguana populations and perpetuate them as a symbol of national pride and sound environmental management in the Turks & Caicos Islands.