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The World's Most Endangered Anole?

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Photographs by the author unless otherwise indicated.



*Norops utilensis*¹ is endemic to the Isla de Utila (Islas de la Bahía, Honduras). Discovered in 1995, it is a poorly known member of the *N. pentaprion*-group. In contrast to the other members of the group, all of which live in broadleaf tropical rain forests, *N. utilensis* dwells exclusively in a highly spe-



Because suitable nesting holes are a limited resource in the mangrove forests, Utila Anoles may lay their eggs communally. The two shells in this nest hole in a hollow Red Mangrove root are remains of eggs that were undoubtedly laid by two different females.

¹ In 1987, Craig Guyer and Jay Savage (*Systematic Zoology* 35: 509–531) proposed a classification of anoles that included formal recognition of several distinct genera within the group. One of these genera was *Norops*, to which the Utila Anole has been assigned. Although recognition of those genera has been strongly advocated by some authorities, others, who would refer to the Utila Anole as *Anolis utilensis*, prefer a more conservative approach until a number of concerns regarding generic relationships among anoles have been addressed. Those concerns were best summarized by Ernest Williams in 1989 (In: C.A. Woods (ed.), *Biogeography of the West Indies: Past, Present, and Future*. Sandhill Crane Press, Gainesville, Florida).



An adult female Utila Anole (*Norops utilensis*).

cialized habitat – the salty mangrove swamps of Isla Utila (see *Iguana* 12:142 for detailed descriptions of the habitat).

Norops utilensis is a medium-sized anole, reaching about 150 mm in total length, most of it tail (maximum known

snout-vent length = 59 mm). They are well-camouflaged due to a lichenose gray-brown dorsal pattern, which makes them difficult to detect as they adhere closely to the surface of mangrove trunks and branches. A red dewlap is present in both



Natural habitat of *Norops utilensis* at the type locality: A mixture of Black (*Avicennia germinans*) and Red Mangroves (*Rhizophora mangle*).



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A Common Black Hawk (*Buteogallus anthracinus*) in the Big Bight, one of the areas where *Norops utilensis* is known to occur. Although these hawks typically prefer larger prey (including iguanas), they might occasionally take an anole. Predation pressure from visual predators may contribute to the cryptic coloration and shy behavior of Utila Anoles.



One-day-old hatchling Utila Anole at the egg-laying site (tree hole in a *Rhizophora mangle* root).



JOE BURGESS

Utila Anoles are associated strictly with mangrove stands near the Big Bight.



Utila Anoles rely heavily on crypsis to avoid predators and rarely extend their dewlaps (see also inside front cover).

males and females, but is much larger in males and forms a bright shining signal flag when they respond to intruders or advertise their presence to females. Utila anoles are entirely arboreal and live and behave in a gecko-like fashion, pressing their bodies tightly against the substrate as they cling closely to the surface of mangrove trunks and twigs at heights ranging from 1–7 m above the waterlogged ground.

Like most anoles, females lay a single egg at a time, using suitable, detritus-filled tree holes. These tree holes are a limited resource within the mangroves; consequently, communal nest-

ing appears to be common. Although the local climate is strictly seasonal (with distinct wet and dry seasons), *N. utilensis* reproduces throughout the year. Most reproductive activity occurs during the rainy season (when food is presumably most plentiful), but individuals quickly become reproductively active during periods in the dry season when favorable conditions exist.

Norops utilensis is not common in the mangrove swamps. Since its discovery, only 13 specimens have been detected at two localities. Due to the specialized and severely limited habitat, apparently low population sizes, and ongoing human threats to the habitat (e.g., deforestation and use of the mangrove swamps for solid waste disposal), *N. utilensis* meets all of the IUCN Red List criteria (http://www.redlist.org/info/categories_criteria.html) to qualify for critically endangered status. As for so many other threatened insular endemics, the best chances for long-term survival lie in controlling the size of the human population, education, and preservation of critical habitats (see *Iguana* 10:28–37 and *Iguana* 11:206–211 for additional pertinent information).

References

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