

FOCUS ON CONSERVATION

Saving Grand Cayman's Blue Iguana (*Cyclura lewisi*)



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The strategic plan to save Grand Cayman's Blue Iguana (*Cyclura lewisi*) has been updated for the third time and provides hope that the long-term goal of the Blue Iguana Recovery Program (BIRP) can be achieved. The newest version of the plan hinges on promised action by the Cayman Islands Government to grant protected status to an area of Crown land in the east interior of Grand Cayman.

The renewed Species Recovery Plan calls for continued education and awareness, as well as captive breeding and iguana releases along with establishment and management of protected areas. Many aspects depend on the new protected area proposal, including an EU-funded project to build a visitor center and shrubland education center within the reserve, forming a major new nature tourist attraction in the East End.

BIRP Director Fred Burton believes the program to restore a viable population of 1,000 Blues in the wild is at a pivotal stage. "We have over 100 hatchlings this year that will be ready for release by 2010, and unless we can secure some more protected shrubland habitat, these animals will have nowhere to go." Specifically, the iguanas require 300–500 acres of shrubland, a rugged, almost harsh, landscape where they can be safe and the population can expand unthreatened. Two potentially suitable parcels of land exist, both supporting unique plant life found nowhere else in the world. With development in the eastern districts proceeding at an exponential rate, the time to secure appropriate habitat is now.

The Blue Iguana Recovery Program is supported by the Department of Environment and the National Trust of the Cayman Islands along with international partners, the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust (Jersey, UK), and the International Reptile Conservation Foundation (California).

For more information or to make a donation to help save the Grand Cayman Blue Iguana, see the IRCF website or www.BlueIguana.KY.