

SMUGGLING...

THE GREATEST THREAT TO ENDANGERED BAHAMIAN IGUANAS!

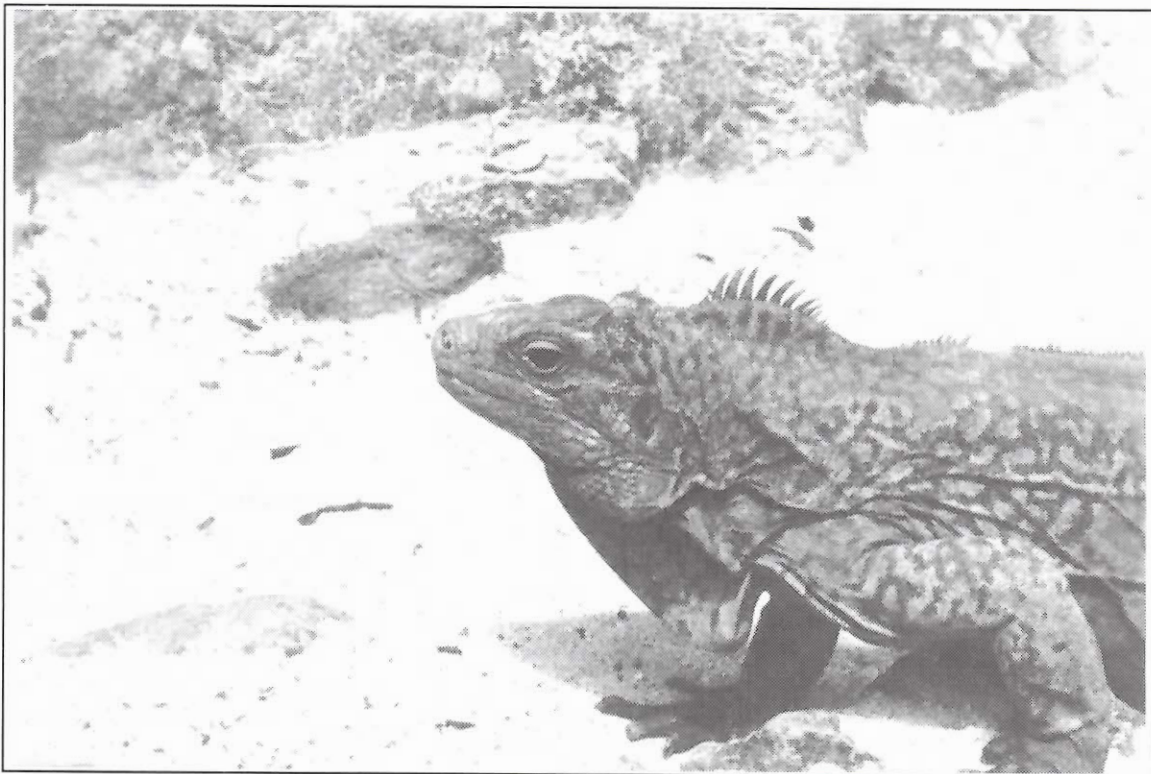
An alarming development has been occurring in the live reptile trade over the past 18 months in Florida. Endangered Bahamian iguanas are now included on the price lists of several reptile dealers. *Cyclura cychlura figginsi*, the Exuma Island iguanas, have been offered for sale as captive bred offspring, despite the fact that this species has not been known to have been bred in captivity.

This situation has taken a turn for the worse, with the recent appearance of the critically endangered, San Salvador rock iguana, *Cyclura rileyi*. IIS members have reported *Cyclura rileyi* turning up at two Florida reptile dealership showrooms in December. At least ten iguanas have been offered for sale in both south and central Florida. Again the iguanas were supposedly bred in captivity. Only two *C. rileyi* are previously known to be on

US soil, both in private collections in different states. These animals were probably smuggled from San Salvador in the early 1980s, although not by their present owners. The Bahamian government reports that no *Cyclura rileyi* have ever been legally exported from the Bahamas.

Most species of *Cyclura* are threatened with habitat degradation and loss. Predation by a number of introduced predators (mongoose, dogs, and cats) and loss of eggs by nest-raiding feral hogs are problems faced by many species. Severe competition from introduced feral herbivores (goats, sheep, horses, cows, and others) is a continuing problem as well.

Until recently, the Bahamian iguanas were the exception to the dilemmas faced by the rest of the genus. Only the Andros Island iguana, *Cyclura cychlura cychlura*, was still being hunt-



The San Salvador rock iguana, *Cyclura rileyi rileyi*, male. Photograph: R.W. Ehrig

ed in any numbers by local inhabitants. This iguana was fortunate to have a large and mostly inaccessible habitat.

The other Bahamian iguanas were the only *Cyclura* whose populations seemed at least stable and possibly increasing during the 1980s. As a result of increasing protection and greater public awareness some populations were thriving. Several eco-tourist enterprises utilize the Allan's Cay iguanas (see *I.T.*, Vol. 1, No. 5) as tour attractions. Bahamian residents increasingly view iguanas as a tourist resource and an economic benefit. Their protected status is well known and their existence is publicized in tourist publications and cruising guides.

Unfortunately the Bahamian iguanas face a new threat—greedy, unscrupulous reptile dealers willing to steal the Bahamas' natural treasures for their own personal gain. The theft of these critically endangered animals is strictly illegal and represents the most serious negative impact faced by already depleted populations.

The arrogant stupidity of these crimes lies in the fact that anyone who could provide proper long term care for the animals would surely know

that they are also highly illegal.

Several dozen young adult and subadult individuals removed from a population of only several hundred animals pushes these beautiful creatures closer to extinction.

The *C. rileyi* appear to have been removed from the population on Green Cay, a satellite island of San Salvador. Fortunately, Dr. William Hayes of Southern College in Tennessee began a study of this population in May, 1993. Blood samples of this population were taken for the RAPDs DNA analyses so identification of these iguanas will probably be possible even years from now.

These activities also threaten the rights of those among us who choose to obtain and keep species legally obtained through captive breeding. Editors of herpetological publications must now be aware that by publishing range distributions, they could be further endangering the taxa. Keeping such information out of print, however, denies scientists, conservationists, and herpetoculturists access to useful information as well.

Board of Directors, I.I.S.



The Crooked Acklins iguana, *Cyclura rileyi nuchalis*, female. Photograph: R.W. Ehrig