

IGUANA NEWSBRIEFS

Ecuador Urged to Maintain Order in Galapagos

The World Wide Fund For Nature called on the Ecuadorean government to guarantee the rule of law and the safety of personnel and researchers in the Galapagos Islands, after a National Park employee was shot in the stomach following a week of unrest due to a government crack down on illegal sea cucumber harvesting.

Park warden Julio Lopez was shot in the abdomen March 19 while participating in the inspection of an illegal sea cucumber-processing camp on the western coast of Isabela Island. According to a Galapagos National Park press release, the inspecting party was attacked by a group of approximately 20 heavily armed men who opened fire on the wardens, wounding Lopez in the stomach. He was last reported in serious but stable condition.

The attack follows a series of incidents that have tarnished the image of Ecuador's main tourist attraction in recent times. On March 16, a party held in a bar by local officials to celebrate the new independent administrative status of Isabela island was abruptly brought to an end when masked men assaulted the group, injured a bar employee and threatened to kill the captain of a park patrol boat.

On March 6, a fishing boat was captured off the coast of Isabela with an illegal cargo of about 40,000 sea cucumbers, worth approximately \$200,000. The seizure of the fishing boat was the first ever since the government outlawed sea cucumber extraction in 1995.

"It is totally inadmissible that lawless acts of this nature should happen in a place with such an international profile like Galapagos," said Teodoro Bustamante, Executive Director of Fundacion Natura, the Ecuadorean associate of WWF. "If things are going to be kept under control, the government must make it a priority to continue the trend of successful enforcement it has had in recent times and apply all the weight of the law on the people responsible for these acts."

One of the world's most renowned natural protected areas and a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Galapagos Islands have been in a state of undeclared emergency ever since the Ecuadorean government abolished non-artisanal fishing around the wildlife-rich islands early in 1995, after a legal sea cucumber harvesting trial quota was repeatedly violated by hundreds of boats lured from the mainland by the creatures' high international market price. Following the decision, groups of the angry newcomers reacted by holding staff from the Charles Darwin Research Station and National Park personnel hostage for several days.

"It is in the best interest of Ecuador to ensure that the law enforcement situation in the islands improves," warned Miguel Pellerano, Galapagos Coordinator for WWF. "Conservation activities cannot take place when the well being of the people working in the field is constantly under threat. And without conservation there won't be much of Galapagos left to show the world in a few years time."

In the meantime, Galapagos National Park Director

Elicier Cruz vows to pursue legal actions against Lopez's attackers. "The National Park rejects the violent demeanor of the illegal fishermen and we ask the National government to act in order to guarantee that we'll be able to carry out our conservation activities in Galapagos in all safety."

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International Reptile Smug-gler Sentenced to Nearly 4 Years in Jail

On January 10, 1997, one of the most severe sentences ever handed down in a reptile smuggling case was imposed against a German national for his involvement in an international smuggling ring. In Orlando, Florida, Federal Judge Ann Conway sentenced Wolfgang Michael Kloe, 33, of Rauenberg, Germany, to serve 46 months in jail for his role in a reptile smuggling scheme. Kloe was also fined \$10,000. Simon David Harris, 25, of Blairgowrie, South Africa, and a partner in the smuggling conspiracy, received 3 years probation and 6 months in a community corrections facility for his role in the conspiracy.

Kloe, Harris, and four others, were indicted by a Federal grand jury in August 1996 for participating in an international wildlife smuggling conspiracy. They moved hundreds of protected reptiles from Madagascar through Europe and Canada into the United States. In October 1996, Kloe pleaded guilty to charges of smuggling,

conspiracy, Lacey Act violations, money laundering, and attempted escape.

Their most recent smuggling attempt was intercepted at the Orlando International Airport on August 14, 1996, when officials found 61 Madagascar tree boas (*Sanzinia madagascariensis*) and 4 spider tortoises (*Pyxis arachnoides*) concealed in Harris' personal baggage. Harris had arrived on a commercial flight from Frankfurt, Germany, to attend a large commercial reptile trade show. Harris cooperated with the investigators and identified Wolfgang Kloe as a partner in the conspiracy and the intended recipient of the smuggled reptiles. Kloe was arrested 2 days later.

In this case alone, the wildlife had an estimated commercial value of more than \$250,000. The United States is the world's largest importer of wildlife and the demand for live reptiles has increased rapidly in the past few years. During a 2-year period, the individuals involved in this conspiracy smuggled at least 107 Madagascar tree boas, 25 spider tortoises, 51 radiated tortoises (*Geochelone radiata*), and 2 Madagascar ground boas (*Acrantobis dumerili*) into the United States where they are prized by collectors of exotic reptiles and commercial reptile breeders.

These species occur naturally only in Madagascar. They are each protected under CITES. The radiated tortoise is also classified as endangered on the U.S. Endangered Species list. It is considered one of the most brilliant species of tortoises, with a bright yellow head and high-domed black shell with yellow starburst designs.

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Four additional defendants in the case remain outside this country. The United States has begun formal extradition procedures against defendant Enrico Joseph Truant of Windsor, Ontario, Canada. The other defendants not yet arraigned are Frank H. Lehmeier, Roland Werner, and Olaf Strohmann, all of Germany.

This case was investigated by special agents from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The prosecution was led by the United States Attorney's Office in Orlando, Florida, and assisted by the Wildlife and Marine Resources Section of the Environment and Natural Resources Division of the U.S. Department of Justice.

Source: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Small boa leads to big smuggling operation

MIAMI — It started with one little boa and blossomed into a major smuggling operation carrying more than 1,100 reptiles from Argentina to a Hollywood, FL pet store, federal prosecutors charge. The snakes, tortoises and lizards were carried onto jets by the smugglers or hidden in their luggage, destined for Strictly Reptiles Inc., an indictment charged. For the squeamish, the reptiles tended to be small, well-fed juveniles—conditions that make them easier and less risky to transport. “Smaller ones are more easily concealed or docile. If they’ve been fed recently they’re incredibly docile,” Assistant U.S. Attorney Thomas Watts-FitzGerald said Monday. “They’ll almost go into a torpor.”

STRICTLY REPTILES, its president Michael Van Nostrand and employee Dale Marantz were charged in a sealed indictment Jan. 30 with illegal trade in wildlife protected by international treaty and fraud conspiracy.

The indictment charges that the smuggling started with a rainbow boa constrictor on Nov. 19, 1990. Eleven trips later, in March 1992, a shipment consisted of 347 red-footed tortoises, 14 rainbow boas and three Argentine boas.

Van Nostrand is accused of placing orders for the reptiles, and Marantz allegedly paid cash for the deliveries and was told when the animals had been packed and when they arrived. He needed the information because he took care of the pets-to-be after their arrival. Federal agents intercepted some later shipments, but “some

of those were successfully smuggled, entered the stream of commerce and are long gone these four or five years,” Watts-FitzGerald said. All of the shipments were governed by an endangered species treaty setting strict import regulations for animals threatened by or in danger of extinction.

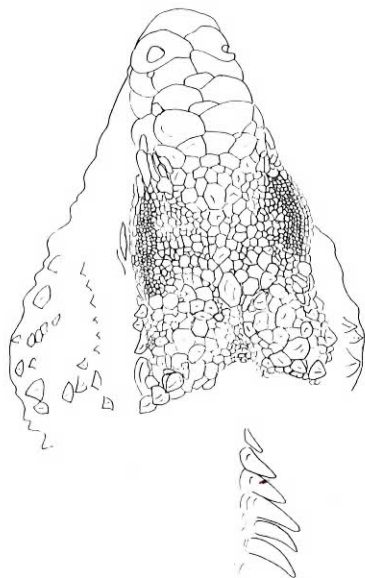
In addition, all animals reaching The United States must be inspected by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Customs Service, but none of the 12 shipments listed in the indictment was examined.

The two men each face 12 counts of illegal reptile trading and one count of conspiracy, carrying a possible sentence of 49 years in prison and a \$2.65 million fine. The company faces the same charges and a \$5.3 million fine.

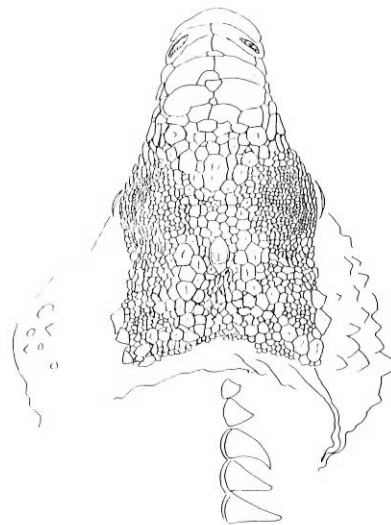
Source: The Tampa Tribune

Correction...

In the previous issue of *Iguana Times* (Volume 5, No. 4), two of the scalation renderings by John Bendon on pages 80-81 were reversed. Below are the correctly labeled top views.



Cyclura nubila lewisi



Cyclura nubila nubila