

Progress for *Cyclura rileyi cristata*

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Sandy Cay (a.k.a. White Cay), is a small island at the southern end of the Exuma chain in the south central Bahamas. It is the only home of the critically endangered iguana, *Cyclura rileyi cristata*. The population has always been small, but recently has declined to an estimated 200 individuals. The sex ratio of the population is highly skewed with possibly as few as ten adult females in existence. One of the reasons for the decline of the iguana was a large population of black rats, *Rattus rattus*. The rats compete with the iguanas for the food resources of the island, and are believed to be predators of both iguana eggs and young iguanas. International smuggling and a non-native raccoon are also factors in *C. rileyi cristata* decline (see I.T.6[2]).

In a four week period of April and May, 1998 the island was successfully cleared of rats under a team led by Mark Day of Fauna and Flora International. The effort was a cooperative project of the Bahamian government, the Bahamas National Trust, Fauna and Flora International, and the IUCN West Indian Iguana Specialist Group with technical help from Zeneca Agrochemicals. The removal of the rats from the island will not only benefit the iguanas but also the birds, other reptiles and most importantly the plants.

In 1997 the I.I.S. suggested to the Conservation

Unit of the Bahamian government that translocation of two pair of *C. rileyi cristata* would be the best insurance for the survival of this species.

Iguanas previously populated many islands in the Bahamas. The most inexpensive and efficient method of increasing Bahamian iguana populations is to translocate small groups of iguanas to government owned, uninhabited islands.

This method has already been successful in several cases in the Bahamas. Two small keys have been located that appear to be promising future homes for *cristata*.

Rodents are among the most destructive and widespread threats to small island ecosystems. They may be both predator and competitor at the same time. The iguanas are seed dispersers and enhance biodiversity on a small island ecosystem by their presence.



Cyclura rileyi cristata on Sandy Cay. Photograph: Carl Fuhri

The rat eradication project on Sandy Cay was accomplished using Klerat™ rodenticide. Before the project was started, an environmental risk assessment was conducted by the Government of the Bahamas. The greatest concern was for the iguanas or any of the native species on the island. To avoid exposing any non target species to the rodenticide, the wax and grain based bait was placed in fixed bait stations in 8 in. (20 cm) lengths of PVC down spout which were fitted with hardware cloth covers closed during the daylight hours. The bait stations were placed in a 20 meter grid over most of the 14.9 hectare island and several offshore sandbars. The stations were checked daily and the program continued until all signs of rat activity had ceased.

Almost 20 kilograms of bait was used during the project. After the island was considered free of rats, it was tested with chew sticks (pine treated with vegetable oil). The island is considered rodent free but will need to be tested periodically for two years.

The total cost of the project was about \$10,000 (U.S.), and is likely to be repeated in the future (*see* Booby Cay Update in this issue). The program was widely publicized in the Bahamas and appeared on local television. The program was greeted with enthusiastic responses from both the



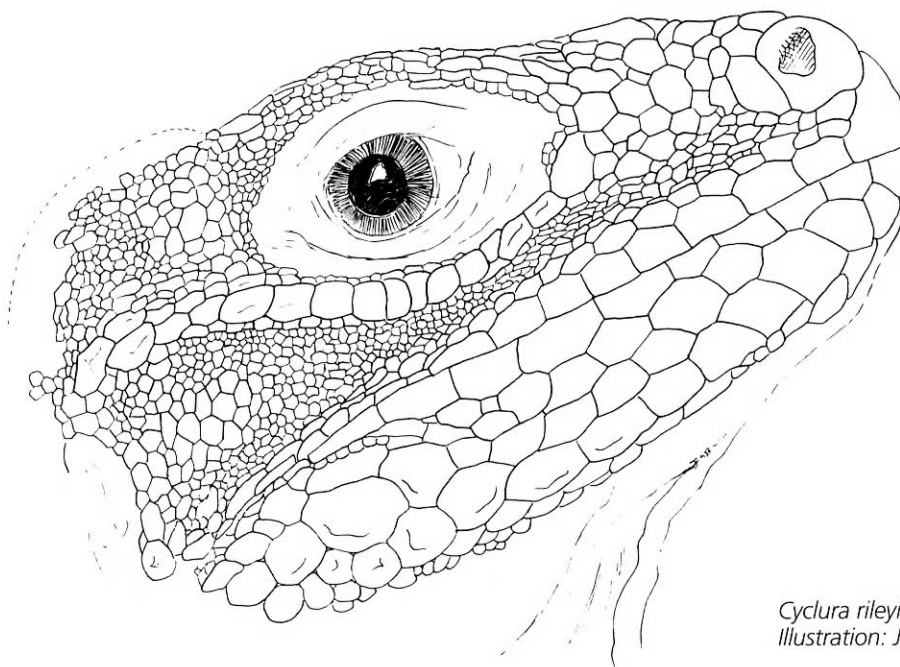
Cyclura rileyi cristata on Sandy Cay. Photograph: Carl Fuhri

public and Bahamian conservationists. It stands as an example of an international cooperation of government and conservationists making successful efforts to act quickly on behalf of critically endangered species. Special thanks to Mark Day, Sandra Buckner (acting for the Bahamas National Trust) Bill Hayes, and Ron Carter, and congratulations on the success of their efforts on this worthwhile conservation action.

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Source: Mark Day and Ron Carter



Cyclura rileyi cristata scalation rendering. Illustration: John Bendon