

IGUANA NEWSBRIEFS

Pillaged Iguanas

Thousands of Guatemalan iguanas are being sold in Honduras because these reptiles are the main entrée in a typical dish. The lack of vigilance and police protection have made it easy for the pillagers to commercially gain profit from the sale of iguanas.

More than 300,000 reptiles are being sold on the Honduras black market. Honduran pillagers are illegally coming into the country to hunt for the iguanas that inhabit the communities of San Francisco del MAR, Puerto Barrios and Izabel according to Yvonne Ramirez, manager of the organization for conservationist Mario Dary.

Ramirez indicates that year after year this situation occurs during the egg-laying period of the iguanas from February to April. These reptiles lay their eggs along the local beaches and people from the area and surrounding countries come into the country illegally by boat across the open sea.

According to Mr. Edgar Rodas, engineer in charge of deep sea fishing for the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food, more than 300,000 reptiles have been sold on the black market over a period of three months.

In addition, evidently the pillagers arrive in national territory pretending to be visitors and there is nothing that is being done. In Ramirez' opinion, because it's an open sea, illegal shipments leave the country.

Rodas stated that the Hondurans come into the country as tourists and later they go out to set traps to catch the iguanas alive. He also indicated that there is an effective operation of control in the area. The operation has managed to

stop a boat en route to Honduras containing one thousand two hundred iguanas and was able to return them back to shore. It was unknown how many survived after being released because of injuries while in captivity.

The job of capturing the iguanas is very easy according to Ramirez. These reptiles are full of eggs and it's hard for them to move fast. She also added that a lot of Guatemalans are collaborating with the pillagers.

Geron Alvarez, assistant to the forest region, indicated that not only is there illegal traffic of iguanas but also of monkeys and turtles. The lack of personnel and the excess of work have made it very hard to keep control of the plundering.

Source: Prensa Libre: Guatamala, April 12, 1999. Translated by Lupe Lewis.

Iguana Lovers Unite over the Internet!

Iguana lovers united over the internet to help raise money for the critically endangered Grand Cayman Blue Iguana (*Cyclura nubila lewisi*).

International Iguana Society member, **Marie Eguro** of Los Angeles, CA, made home videos of her pet iguana documenting the entire egg-laying process to help other pet owners deal with their gravid iguanas. She sold these videos over the internet, and the profits from these sales as well as other donations were given to Grand Cayman's National Trust to help their Blue Iguana Captive Breeding Facility. Through this fundraising, a \$300 donation was given to the Breeding Facility in the spring of 1999. Next year's goal is \$500!!

The Blue Iguana, *Cyclura nubila lewisi*, is one of the most critically endangered lizards in the world, numbering less than 100 individuals in the wild. The Captive Breeding Facility directed by Mr. Fred Burton (Scientific Program Manager), releases captive bred pureblooded *lewisi* into protected areas for endemic Cayman Island wildlife. The Facility also educates the public about the importance of preserving native flora and fauna for future generations. They are in need of cage repairs as well as manpower to care for the iguanas, and can use any help they can get. If you are interested in purchasing an Iguana Egg-laying home video, please visit:

<http://the.ThoughtShop.net/~meguro/sapphire/sapphire.html>

To make cash donations directly to the National Trust, please contact:

National Trust for the Cayman Islands
P.O. Box 31116 SMB
Grand Cayman
(345) 949-0121

Iguanas Banned in New York City

Amendments to New York City Health Code
Amendments to New York City's Health Code prohibit the sale and ownership of many native and exotic animal species including all members of the family Iguanidae. The new legislation will be in effect as of August 9, 1999.

The portions of the new regulations pertaining to reptiles were drawn up based on comments received from the New York Herpetological Society. The NYHS suggested a ban on several varieties of poisonous and constricting snakes, many of the larger monitor

species and on common green iguanas. These are the species that are most commonly relocated by their owners once they attain a certain size and which would benefit the most from being excluded from the pet trade. Unfortunately, the original list was expanded by the drafters of the legislation to include ALL species of iguanas and a number of other reptiles. Further changes have been proposed to regain the original intent of the NYHS proposal. However, the changes cannot be enacted until city legislators resume sitting in the fall.

The current amendments to the Board of Health code state that "no person shall sell or give to another person, possess, harbor or keep wild animals other than in a" zoo, a laboratory, a circus or other place licensed by the Department of Health. Native wildlife rehabilitators licensed by federal or state agencies are exempt from these restrictions. The Board "authorize[s] seizure of prohibited animals by officers of the Department and authorize[s] the Commissioner to determine disposition of a prohibited animal that has been seized, offering the owner an opportunity to be heard and present proof as to whether an animal is a prohibited animal.... Owners [are allowed] the opportunity of arranging to remove the animal from the City of New York to another jurisdiction where such animal may be lawfully possessed."

Reptiles currently prohibited include gila monsters and Mexican beaded lizards, all venomous snakes, teids, iguanids, snapping turtles and crocodylians, as well as certain boid, pythons and varanids.