

LIZARD LETTERS

UTILA'S BLACK IGUANA BLUES

Last month when I attended the International Herpetological Symposium in San Diego, I had the pleasure of meeting Dr. Gunther Kohler from the Senckenberg Natural History Museum in Frankfurt, Germany. I have followed Dr. Kohler's work with the black spiny-tailed iguana, *Ctenosaura bakeri*, for several years through the International Iguana Society's publication, *Iguana Times*. *C. bakeri* is known only from Utila Island in the Caribbean Sea off the coast of Honduras. This species was thought to be extinct until its rediscovery in 1994. This was partly due to the fact that almost all of the species in the genus *Ctenosaura* are saxicolous lizards, but *C. bakeri*'s distribution on Utila is limited to the mangrove swamps. Upon the rediscovery, the Senckenberg Nature Research Society and the Frankfurt Zoological Society implemented the "Conservation Project of the Utila Iguana, Honduras." A breeding and research station was built which allows for continuous work on the project. Scientists, conservationists and volunteers have done a wonderful job not only breeding and releasing these highly endangered lizards, but, more importantly, educating the residents of Utila about their unique iguana. Under Gunther's direction, the program has been highly successful.



At the Symposium, we all sat in the darkened room anticipating a fascinating slide presentation about *C. bakeri*. Gunther began by telling us that only hours prior to his talk, he received a message from his team on Utila Island. The owner of Utila Lodge was illegally slashing, burning and draining the mangroves. Gunther urged us to help stop the destruction by writing protest letters to the proper parties on Utila. Needless to say, Gunther had the right audience, and numerous individuals approached

him for additional information. Within days, the CHS posted his "call for letters of protest" on our website. At our next board meeting, I was given permission to send such a letter on behalf of the Chicago Herpetological Society.

I encourage our members to write letters as well. This is an opportunity to help with the conservation of a spectacular iguanid. What a shame it would be to sit by while events are taking place that could expedite the demise of this species. Following is a sample letter which may serve as a guideline. Please note that the approach is one of education, not harsh words. The letters do not need to be formal; notes can be sent expressing concern.

Correspondence should be sent to the mayor of Utila:

Mr. Monterrey Cardenas
Isla de Utila
Islas de la Bahia
Honduras, C.A

with a copy to:

Mr. Jim Engel
Utila Lodge
Isla de Utila
Honduras, C.A.

and:

COHDEFOR
Dpto. Areas Protegidas y Vida Silvestre
lug. Angel Barahona
Apdo. Postal 1378
Tegucigalpa
Honduras, C.A.

I have been in touch with Dr. Kohler for several weeks, and he is keeping me posted with the progress of the attempt to halt the mangrove destruction. If you would like to learn more about the Utila Iguana project, you can call me at (773) 477-3645, or access the information on the Internet through the website of the Senckenberg Natural History Museum:

<http://senckenberg.uni-frankfurt.de/fis/herp_ut.htm>

or through the CHS website:

<www.chicagoherp.org>

under "Herp Headlines."

All efforts are greatly appreciated.
Lori King

[SAMPLE LETTER]

(continued on next page)

LIZARD LETTERS (cont.)

August 21, 1999

Mr. Monterrey Cardenas
 Mayor Municipalidad
 Isla de Utila
 Islas de le Bahia
 Honduras, C.A.

RE: Destruction of mangrove forests by Utila Lodge

Dear Mayor Cardenas:

It is with great concern that we are compelled to write to you. Recently, we have learned of the destruction of the mangrove forests of Utila Island. This is unfortunate because the mangrove forests harbor a great many levels of life in the ecosystem. Once such important flora and fauna are destroyed, the negative effect throughout your island will be widespread. Often such destruction is permanent - the ecosystem may never fully recover.

This may have a profound effect in several ways for the inhabitants of Utila. It is our understanding that scuba diving, snorkeling, and deep sea diving are among your most popular tourist attractions. Many important fish species inhabit the mangroves or require them for breeding habitat. Destroying their habitat will eliminate these fish and the reason for divers to visit Utila. The program, "Investigation and Conservation of the Utila Black Iguana" through the Frankfurt Zoological Society and the Senckenberg Natural History Museum is becoming quite well-known. The conservation efforts of this group of scientists on behalf of this endangered iguana species are being applauded worldwide. People are becoming increasingly aware that your spectacular iguana exists nowhere else in the world except in the mangroves on beautiful Isla de Utila. This type of environmental program is excellent in generating international interest in the unique qualities of Utila.

We urge you to make every effort to stop the destruction of Utila Island's mangrove forests immediately. Having the foresight to protect what is unique to your island will insure the future of Utila and its residents for generations to come.

Sincerely,

*Lori King
 Board of Directors
 Chicago Herpetological Society*

*cc: Jim Engel
 COHDEFOR*

Jerry Cole
 Purlands Farm
 Bridport Rd.
 Dorchester
 Dorset, DT2 9DS
 U.K.

Tel: UK 1305 261302

Fax: UK 1305 261446

E-mail: B.J.Herp@natures-image.co.uk

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Attn/ I.I.S.

Further to the appeals I put out on your behalf, to help fund work that benefits *Cyclura*, I have just returned from a boozy weekend at the reptile show in Hamm, Germany, with a British contingent of herpers. During the lively evening conversations, *Cyclura* were mentioned, and some piss-taking was given, to the effect that I must be loaded (just a vicious rumor) to be able to give my money away! In reply I was able to tell them what a bunch of tight wads they were (ugly ones at that), and point out that there are always new projects that need funding, so it wasn't too late. At this point Jim Pether told Terry Thatcher he would match anything that Terry put on the table. Terry reached for his wallet and after the moths had cleared, there was a £20 note on the table. Jim, true to his word, matched it. I joined them and so on around the table they gave what they could afford, with only one exception. I would therefore like to thank the following bunch of reprobates for their generosity and a great weekend: Jim Pether, Terry Thatcher, Jon Coote, Ray Hine, Dave & Lyn Appleton, James Blackburn, Steve Deerham, Richard Haigh, Tim Hallen, Roger Pewtress and Mark Wooton. The unmentioned exception I am sure will send you a donation, next time he sells a Blackhead or Chondro, and has some £ in his pockets. I therefore enclose another donation of \$340 for the I.I.S. to use for the benefit of *Cyclura*.

Best Regards

Jerry Cole