

IGUANA NEWSBRIEFS

Ctenosaurs in the Red Creek Biological Reserve

One of the activities of the 1999 International Iguana Society Conference in Belize was the establishment of a population of *Ctenosaura similis*, the spiny tail iguana, at the Red Creek Biological Reserve. Although present in the general area of the Reserve, they had not been observed in the Reserve itself, which is located just to the east of the Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary, about four miles inland from the Caribbean Sea. The release site was a hill at the west side of the reserve that was formerly a strip mine for rock fill used in construction of the road through the reserve. The hill is about 100 m above sea level, and is the location of the lodge at Red Creek. Many native trees and shrubs have been planted in beds of soil that have been brought to the site. The hill has been terraced with boulders and rocks to prevent erosion. In several areas, piles of rock have been arranged to provide retreats for ctenosaurs to escape the many local predators. Flowering native trees and fruit trees such as cashew have also been planted to provide food.

In January 1999, a small ctenosaur was released at the site into one of the rock outcrops. On 26 February 1999, four *Ctenosaura similis* were released by an enthusiastic group of IIS members after the animals were marked and blood samples drawn. The population was highly skewed with four males and only a single female. A small animal of unknown sex was released later. The iguanas were caught by society members in Sittee River Village and Hopkins,

except for the first animal released. It was caught at mile 5 on the Western Highway, on the outskirts of Belize City.

The iguanas have thrived at the location and their food supply has been supplemented to allow the vegetation to become well established. Conference participants would be surprised to see the thirty-foot tall trees on the hill. The only fatalities were the three hibiscus bushes that were planted for the iguanas, but did not survive the constant grazing. All of the iguanas have remained wary, except for the original young male who has come to be known as Russell. He has been fed more often than any of the others because he will

allow staff and visitors to approach within a couple of meters. He also will come into the building when the staff is having lunch, knowing that he will be served. Russell relishes chicken and has been fed more tortillas than any other iguana in Belize. He has grown faster than the other ctenosaurs. He was the second smallest and now is the second largest. In addition to the iguanas, the site has become home to many other lizards.

Norops capito, the big-headed anole, *Basiliscus vittatus*, the striped basilisk, *Ameiva undulata*, the rainbow ameiva, and *Sphaerodactylus millepunctatus*, the spotted gecko, have all been seen in the constructed habitat.

In June 2001, hatchling *Ctenosaura similis* were seen at the Reserve for the first time. The most interesting aspect is that none of the "wishwillys," as Belizeans call spiny tail iguanas, have been seen at the hill site. They have been turning up about 300 m away at another restoration area where trees, fruit, and hibiscus have been planted. At least five hatchlings have been observed, although the nest site remains unknown. We are pleased that the project has reached this stage, and two more females will be added to the gene pool in the near future.

Source: Red Creek Biological Reserve, Belize

Green Iguana Produces Clutch of 105 Eggs

Pearl, an approximately seven-year-old green iguana owned by Carole Saucier of Manchester, CT, has produced a possible record size clutch of 105 eggs. Pearl was 1.27 m long and weighed approximately 3.9 kg before laying her eggs. Eighty four eggs were initially laid along with a portion of her left oviduct, which contained one more egg. She was rushed to a veterinarian who removed another twenty eggs along with the right oviduct, which had burst inside her abdominal cavity. Although the iguana survived the surgery, she did not recover from the anesthetic.



Photograph: Carole Saucier