

IGUANA NEWSBRIEFS

Wildlife Smugglers Arrested in Grand Cayman

German nationals Joachim Schmidt, Harald Endig, and Jürgen Geisler were detained by Customs officials after checking in at Grand Cayman's international airport on 30th January 2001. They were attempting to depart for Berlin via Miami with luggage packed with live reptiles, plants, and other wildlife from the Bahamas and Grand Cayman. Schmidt presented a local export permit, which was apparently forged, to an official.

The three came under suspicion when the National Trust for the Cayman Islands was alerted to Schmidt's presence on the island by a local resident who remembered concern over collecting by the same individual in the mid 1990's. After inquiries and further reports, the Trust learned that the three men were posing as academic researchers while collecting live reptiles in considerable numbers, but had made no recent contact with local officials and had not been issued with export permits.

As the Trust, the Departments of Environment and Agriculture, and local enforcement agencies began to assess the situation, a local security firm, Intelsec, agreed to donate services and placed the men under continuous surveillance. Evidence rapidly mounted that this was an illegal animal smuggling operation. This assessment was reinforced by information provided to the Trust by Traffic International on Schmidt's record of international trading in endangered species.

In a closely coordinated operation involving Intelsec, the Trust,

Department of Agriculture, Customs, Immigration, Department of Environment, and Civil Aviation, all possible routes for illegal export were monitored and the men were followed until they checked in at the airport. Bags seized by Customs after they were checked for international transfer contained 930 endemic Grand Cayman anole lizards, 140 Curly-tailed lizards from the Bahamas, and 112 Curly-tailed lizards from Grand Cayman. In smaller numbers were other reptiles and amphibians, marine life, terrestrial invertebrates, and a collection of bromeliads, cacti, and ferns. CITES restricted material included four endemic Ground Boas, and 13 endemic Banana Orchids, all from Grand Cayman.

Communication with the Bahamas Government revealed that no export permit had been issued for the reptiles collected in the Bahamas, nor had any corresponding import permit for these animals been issued in Grand Cayman.

On 2nd February in Summary Court, Schmidt, Endig, and Geisler were remanded in police custody on a series of smuggling charges. The three were returned to court on 7th February, when Schmidt also was charged with forgery: several charges under environmental legislation may soon be added. A trial date is expected to be set shortly.

Once photographed by police as legal evidence, the wildlife was identified and documented by the Trust working with the Departments of Environment and Agriculture. Zoology professor Sandy Echter-nacht from the University of Tennessee was flown

down by the Cayman Islands government to assist in identification of the reptiles from the Bahamas. By the evening of 3rd February, all the Grand Cayman wildlife had been released back to the wild.

For the full list of seized wildlife, and photographs including the suspects preparing lizard nooses while in Grand Cayman, visit the Trust's web site at www.caymannationaltrust.org

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8th February, 2001

Cyclura cornuta and C. ricordii in the Dominican Republic

The Parque Zoológico Nacional of the Dominican Republic, The Toledo Zoological Gardens, and the Indianapolis Zoo are collaboratively coordinating a conservation project designed to collect baseline values for blood chemistry and vitamin D levels in wild populations of *Cyclura ricordii*'s iguanas, *Cyclura ricordii*, and Rhinoceros iguanas, *Cyclura cornuta*. Blood samples were collected from the populations of both species at Parque Nacional Isla Cabritos, an island in Lago Enriquillo near the Haitian border. A comparable study is being done by the Departamento de Recursos Naturales y Ambientales of Puerto Rico and the Toledo Zoological Gardens on Isla Mona, Puerto Rico, for the Mona Island iguana, *Cyclura stejnegeri*.

Both *Cyclura cornuta* and *C. ricordii* occupy the approximately 24 km² Isla Cabritos, which sits in the middle of the hypersaline Lago Enriquillo. The

habitat is typical of subtropical dry Antillean forest, with several species of cacti and trees such as *Bursera*, *Consolea*, *Guaiaacum*, and *Prosopis*.

Cyclura cornuta are far easier to snare than the wary *C. ricordii*, which bolt for their burrows at the first sight of a human. Fifteen *C. cornuta* and nine *C. ricordii* were processed during a recent trip. Animals were sexed, weighed, and measured. In addition to a general health examination, fecal samples were taken to determine bacterial species inhabiting the lower gastrointestinal tract.

Ed. Note: Please see The *Cyclura* of Parque Nacional in *Iguana Times* 8(2).

Source: *ISG Newsletter* 4(1), Spring 2001

International Iguana Foundation Established

First introduced at the Iguana Specialist Group's annual meeting in 2000, the International Iguana Foundation has now been incorporated as a Texas not-for-profit corporation. The Board of Directors and several guests from zoological societies and wildlife conservation organizations across the U.S. held their inaugural meeting at the Fort Worth Zoo in August 2001.

The IIF will effectively replace the iguana conservation funds administered through the Fort Worth Zoo that have helped operate the recovery programs in both Jamaica and Anegada (British Virgin Islands). The Foundation will provide a peer review process to evaluate funding requests from a greater array of iguana projects. With \$42,000 in commitments from 13 organizations, the Foundation will

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be in a position to encourage long-term planning. Additional corporations and zoos in Europe, Australia, and North America have been identified as possible contributing members.

The IIF will take its funding priorities from those identified by the IUCN/SSC Iguana Specialist Group. The mission of the IIF is to promote the conservation of all species of iguanas.

Source: *ISG Newsletter* 4(2)
Fall 2001

Morris Animal Foundation Grant Awarded

In July 2001, the Fort Worth Zoo received a \$46,440 grant from the Morris Animal Foundation entitled "Health Assessment of Free-Ranging and Headstarted West Indian Iguanas."

This grant will provide funds to:

- Establish baseline health parameters for five species of free-ranging iguanas.
- Perform health screening on headstarted iguanas prior to release into the wild.
- Provide training and technology for local veterinarians and biologists to carry on this work.

The proposal is a collaborative effort involving the Fort Worth Zoo, the Wildlife Conservation Society, the San Diego Zoo, the Indianapolis Zoo, and the Toledo Zoo. The goal of the project is to compile and publish a comparative physiological database for use by researchers on various species of *Cyclura*.

Rick Hudson
Fort Worth Zoo

Source: *ISG Newsletter* 4(2)
Fall 2001

The Impact of Hurricane Floyd on the Bahamian rock iguana, *Cyclura rileyi rileyi*

Less than 700 endemic *Cyclura rileyi rileyi* remain in a small number of locations on and near San Salvador Island. The iguana population continues to decline due to predation of eggs and young by feral rats, competition with a cactus-eating moth, and smuggling. In September 1999, Hurricane Floyd lashed San Salvador with 155 mph winds and a substantial storm surge. Adult iguana populations were generally unaffected, but much of the nesting habitat on offshore cays was swept away and most of the 1999 hatchlings were destroyed. Some of the cay populations may have been extirpated by the storm. Long-term damage to vegetation due to soil loss should be monitored and immediate nesting habitat restoration needs to be considered.

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Iguana *delicatissima* Martinique

Iguana delicatissima populations on the various islands of Martinique remain healthy. Measures have been taken to expand some of the nesting sites where late-arriving females had previously been observed excavating the eggs of other females. Populations of introduced *Iguana iguana* are being controlled to prevent problems with competition and hybridization.

Petite Terre (Guadeloupe)

A particularly intense dry season in the area has had an adverse effect on the *Iguana delicatissima* population. In one area, only two iguanas were seen alive where thirty adults are usually found. In another area of one hectare that was historically inhabited by twenty or more iguanas, no live animals were seen — but 25 carcasses were found. The mortality may be due to starvation or overheating as all the animals found dead were mummified. The trees were leafless. In two and a half hours, 321 dead adult iguanas were counted in various vegetation types. An estimated 2500 adults may have died during this dry spell. This does not include animals that could have died at the beginning of the drought and were eaten by hermit crabs. This estimate also does not include those individuals expected to die because they are unable to walk and feed. Such animals were found hanging in the trees, barely alive. The adult loss may therefore be as high as 4000 animals. With surviving adults weakened and unable to lay normal clutches, the impact on effective population size may be substantial.

Unfortunately, no collecting permits were issued for the dead individuals so that studies might be performed.

Saint-Barthélemy

A small remnant population of *Iguana delicatissima* survives. The dry season was responsible for the death of several goats that competed with iguanas for food.

Michel Breuil
Paris Museum of Natural History

Source: *ISG Newsletter* 4(2)
Fall 2001

Booby Cay Update

The first trip to Booby Cay in two years was planned for November 2001, to allow Joe Wasilewski, John Bendon, and two other investigators to continue research on the endemic *Cyclura carinata bartschi*. Unfortunately, due to a hurricane, the mail boat didn't arrive on Mayaguana and no gasoline was available to power the small boat needed to get to the cay. John Bendon stayed on Mayaguana until the gas arrived and took a day-trip to Booby Cay to assess damage from the wind and storm surge. All appeared to be well and several previously marked iguanas were sighted.

Since the previous trip in 1999, a letter has been written by Mr. James Knowles of the Ministry of Agriculture in Nassau to the police on Mayaguana asking them to remove the remaining goats from the cay. The letter was delivered and funds should be available to assist the police. A return trip by the Booby Cay team is planned for March 2002 and the researchers hope to find the island free of goats. Annual trips are proposed in order to continue the iguana census and ensure that the cay remains free of the goats that compete with iguanas for the limited vegetation. An application for a grant to cover the cost of investigations for three years is being made to the newly formed IIF (International Iguana Foundation). In addition, further funds should have accrued from the sale of T-shirts and artwork (by J. Bendon) to facilitate future research.

John Bendon