UPDATE ON THE STATUS OF THE SAN SALVADOR ROCK IGUANA, *CYCLURA RILEYI RILEYI*

DAVID BLAIR

The San Salvador Rock Iguana, *C. rileyi rileyi,* is a small, brightly colored form of rock iguana restricted to a few small cays off the coast and within the land-locked saline lakes of the Bahamian island of San Salvador. This subspecies of *Cyclura rileyi* is listed as endangered by the U.S. and its numbers are thought to be precariously low. The most recent information available on the status of this species has been from a survey conducted by Auffenberg (1982).

To update the status of *C. rileyi rileyi*, Cindy and David Blair spent eight days on the island in June of 1990. Visits were made to several offshore cays and to some of the islands in San Salvador's large, highly saline, inland lakes. Juveniles and adults were seen on most of the same cays where they were present in 1982. In fact, the populations seemed little changed from the previous study. One, however, Pidgeon Cay in Great Lake, where the iguanas were reported as abundant in the earlier study, now supports only a very small population. Only five animals were seen during several hours on the cay, and all these individuals appeared to be relatively thin in comparison with iguanas on other cays. In fact, the cay itself appears to provide very little suitable habitat for rock iguanas as most of it is a dense tangle of mangrove marsh.

Low Cay, off the southern coast of San Salvador, still supports one of the largest populations of *C. rileyi rileyi,* and at twelve hectares, is the largest cay still populated by iguanas. The Low Cay population was reported by Auffenberg in 1980 to be affected by a disfiguring skin disease, but it appeared to be in remission when rechecked in 1982. We are pleased to report that apparently there has not been a reoccurrence of this unknown pathogen. A few animals observed had suffered some digit loss, but it is possible that this is the result of intraspecific conflicts.

Because of the extreme difficulty in procuring a suitable boat and motor on San Salvador and a lack of sufficient time, we were unable to confirm the report by G.K. Ostrander (1982), of a newly discovered population of iguanas. "Guana," a small cay within Hermitage Lake, was reported at that time to support more than eighty iguanas, and should be investigated further.

Contrary to some earlier reports that iguanas no longer exist on mainland San Salvador, we were able to confirm that they are still present on the south end of the island in the vicinity of Snow Bay. Sightings are reported at the rate of "once or twice a year" by local residents and are usually made as iguanas dash across the road in front of oncoming vehicles. Within recent years iguanas have also been encountered on the east side near the settlement of Holiday Tract and along old survey trails in the remote interior of the island. We were also informed that iguanas are occasionally killed by dogs. Apparently, all lizards seen on mainland San Salvador in recent years have been adults.

Previous reports place the entire population of *Cyclura rileyi rileyi* at little more than 100 individuals. While numbers are certainly quite low, and declining, we feel a more accurate estimate would be closer to 500 individuals. If this figure is correct, it is still precariously low, and this subspecies certainly deserves endangered status. On many of the small cays that supported viable populations of iguanas within the last two decades, they have been extirpated. We recommend that all cays still supporting iguanas should be set aside as preserves with a resident warden to enforce protection. Low Cay, Green Cay and "Guana" Cay are perhaps the most important of these cays. Investigations should be made to determine the role of introduced

non-native animals, such as rodents and cats, in the decline of these iguanas. Introduced plants may also be a contributing factor. A low-growing succulent appears to be spreading across several cays, and may be choking out native vegetation. Once decimating factors have been removed or brought under control, it may be possible to re-introduce iguanas to cays that are known to have supported them in the past. With the increasing success that captive breeding programs for other *Cyclura* have shown in recent years, it may be advisable to establish several breeding groups at qualified locations. Currently there is no effort being made to breed *C. rileyi rileyi* in captivity. The AAZPA Lizard Advisory Group (LAG), at their meeting in April, 1990, at Gainesville, Florida, concluded that "Captive management of *Cyclura* species can be an important hedge against their extinction." This must, of course, be in addition to protecting wild populations and providing financial support for their conservation.

Table 1. The status of *C. rileyi rileyi* on the cays of San Salvador, current June 1990.

Locality	Status	Reference
Low Cay, Snow Bay	abundant	Blair, this study
"Guana" Cay, Hermitage Lake	abundant	Ostrander, 1982
Green Cay, Grahams Harbor	small population	Blair, this study
Man Head Cay, Rice Bay	small population	Blair, this study
Goulding Cay, Greens Bay	small population	Auffenberg, 1980
Mainland San Salvador	small population	Blair, this study
Pidgeon Cay, Great Lake	v. small population	Blair, this study
Catto Cay, Grahams Harbor	extirpated	Blair, this study
Gaulin (Little Green) Cay, Grahams Harbor	extirpated	Blair, this study
White Cay, Grahams Harbor	extirpated	Auffenberg, 1980
High Cay, Snow Bay	extirpated	Auffenberg, 1982
Pokus Cay, Snow Bay	extirpated	Auffenberg, 1980
Cut Cay, Rice Bay	extirpated	Auffenberg, 1982
Barn Cay, Long Lake	extirpated	Auffenberg, 1982

Literature Cited

Auffenberg, W. 1982. Project Report: Conservation of Bahamian Rock Iguanas (Cyclura sp.).

Gicca, D. 1980. The status and distribution of Cyclura r. rileyi (Reptilia: Iguanidae), a Bahamian rock iguana. Carib. J. Sci. 16(1-4): 9-12.

Hudson, R. 1990. Memorandum from the Lizard Advisory Group (LAG) of the A.A.Z.P.A. to WCMC Chair.

Ostrander, G.K. 1982. Discovery of an isolated colony of Rock Iguanas. Bahamas Naturalist 6(2): 22-24.

San Salvador Rock Iguana, *Cyclura rileyi*. David W. Blair photo.