

# The San Juan Star

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## Slaughter of 18 iguanas reported on Mona Island

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Department of Natural Resources Secretary Santos Rohena said Tuesday he was "very worried" about the apparent slaughter of endangered ground iguanas on Mona Island.

Rohena also reported wholesale vandalism on the 13,000-acre natural reserve, which lies off Puerto Rico's west coast.

**'There has been so much vandalism — we don't know what's left.'**

**Santos Rohena**  
Secretary, Department of Natural Resources

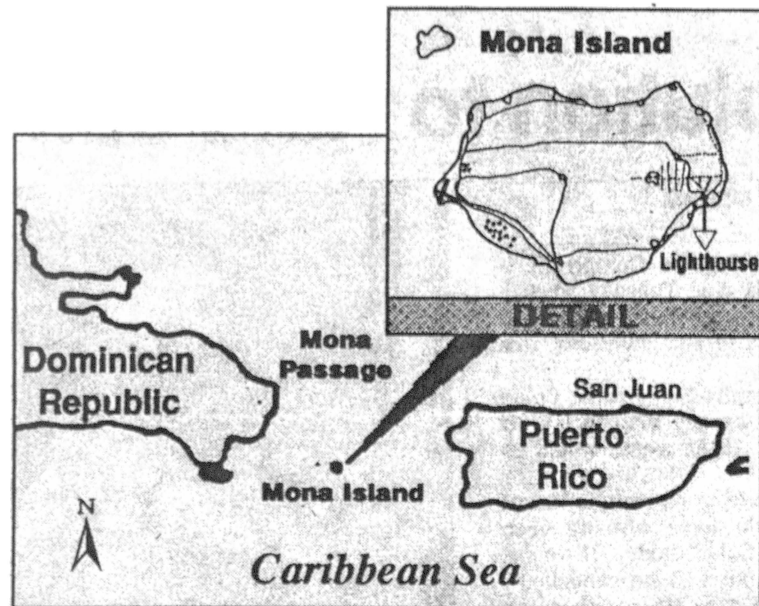
"The iguanas are unique to Mona Island," said Rohena, who spent Friday and Saturday visiting the island, located midway between the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico.

Island fisherman said they found 18 iguanas that had been shot to death. Rohena was given a photo of one bullet-riddled reptile as proof.

The deaths of the 3 to 4-foot long iguanas further accentuate the perilous future of much of Puerto Rico's bird and wildlife — threatened by development, human ignorance and disregard.

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The endangered iguana, like one shown at right on Mona Island, faces a new danger. Reptile carcasses full of bullet holes have been found on the island.



## Mona Island Slaughter

The *San Juan Star* reported on May 8, 1991, that 18 Mona Island iguanas, *Cyclura cornuta stejnegeri*, were shot by vandals on Mona Island during the last part of the hunting season for goats and wild pigs. It appears now that the number of lizards killed may have been less than was originally reported. The Puerto Rican Department of Natural Resources found only two carcasses on the island during a recent investigation. The DNR has been criticized in Puerto Rico for being slow to control vandalism on the Mona Island reserve. In response, the Department of Natural Resources has discussed plans to monitor hunters on the island more closely. The DNR estimates that there are 3,500 goats and 400 feral pigs on the island. The pigs destroy iguana and sea turtle eggs, and the goats directly compete with iguanas for food and seriously degrade the natural vegetation. The hunting of feral animals on Mona is beneficial to the iguanas; unfortunately, the presence of hunters on the island has put the iguanas at risk. The slaughter of these lizards is both senseless and unacceptable on this nature reserve. Iguanas have long been extinct on Puerto Rico itself, and the government needs to provide greater protection for its rare and endangered native wildlife.

I.I.S. member, D. Scott Gallagher of Ohio, who has spent considerable time on Mona Island, has offered a \$1,000.00 cash reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the person or persons responsible for the crime. The International Iguana Society has offered an additional reward of \$200.00. The total monetary reward could be an adequate incentive to help solve the killings. At the very least, the people of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico should realize that members of the I.I.S. are very concerned about Puerto Rico's rhinoceros iguanas.

Sources: Puerto Rico DNR, *San Juan Star*, and Thomas A. Wiewandt

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The iguanas are one of 45 island species on the federal list of species near extinction. The DNR's own list adds 13 more endangered species. Many of the species on both lists are endemic to Puerto Rico.

Nine percent of all endangered species nationwide are from Puerto Rico.

Rohena also found the empty shell of an endangered sea turtle on the island, as well as shredded cactuses, shattered windows and bullet-scarred walls of the light house there.

Hunting season for goats and wild pigs on Mona island runs from December through April, he said. Hunting of turtles is illegal.

• "I would like to establish a dynamic

education program and stricter regulations," said Rohena, who ordered an investigation into the killing and vandalism on Mona Island.

He was visiting as part of an island-wide investigation of natural reserves and areas of environmental concern, as he finishes his fourth month as DNR head.

He said Tuesday he would like to impose "... jail terms and fines together," which would be "applied with all vigor."

Commonwealth penalties for destroying or killing an endangered species are maximum fines of \$500 and/or to six months imprisonment, while federal penalties for the same crime are up to a \$50,000 fine and/or one year in jail.

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Cover Photo: *Cyclura cornuta stejnegeri*. Thomas A. Wiewandt

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