

The International Iguana Foundation: Providing Critical Support to Endangered Iguanas

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When a group of iguana biologists and conservation professionals gathered in Fort Worth, Texas, in August 2001, it signaled the beginning of a new era for iguana conservation. The group convened to address the critical need to provide a reliable source of funding for iguana conservation, particularly to support ongoing recovery programs for some of the critically endangered iguanas of the genus *Cyclura*. Shortly thereafter, the International Iguana Foundation (IIF) was formally established as a registered non-profit organization and with it, the futures of a number of endangered iguanas grew more secure.

The IIF is a diverse group of conservation professionals, combining years of experience with multidisciplinary expertise. With a governing board comprised of research scientists, zoo administrators, professional fund-raisers, field ecologists, captive managers, private breeders, and veterinarians, the IIF brings a uniquely broad perspective to iguana conservation. Currently the IIF has 14 board positions with individuals representing zoos and aquariums, corporations, wildlife trusts, and foundations. Largely U.S. based, the majority of Board members represent zoos that have made long-standing commitments to *Cyclura* conservation, including Audubon, Columbus, Fort Worth, Gladys Porter, Houston, Indianapolis, San Diego, Sedgwick County, Shedd Aquarium, Toledo, and the Wildlife Conservation Society. Disney's Animal Kingdom is our sole corporate partner, and Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust (formerly Jersey) is our lone foreign member. However the IIF is currently making a strong push to recruit more participation from both Europe and Australia. The single private sector representative is the California-based International Reptile Conservation Foundation (IRCF), a relatively new nonprofit that publishes the journal *IGUANA* and that has been instrumental in developing the IIF's web site: <www.iguanafoundation.org>. The President of the IIF is Dr. Allison Alberts, newly appointed Director of Conservation & Science for the Zoological Society of San Diego, and an accomplished iguana research biologist with a remarkable body of published work to her credit.

The IIF mission is to ensure the survival of iguanas and their habitat through conservation, awareness, and scientific programs. This translates to one simple overarching goal: zero iguana extinctions.

The IIF's primary purpose is to raise the financial resources essential to implementing iguana conservation programs. Working in tandem with the Iguana Specialist Group (ISG) of the World Conservation Union (IUCN), the IIF provides critical support to initiatives prioritized in the ISG's Conservation Action Plan and in the various Species Recovery Plans drafted under that group's auspices. In addition, IIF works to generate public awareness of the many threats facing iguanas.

Prior to the formation of the IIF, the conservation of Caribbean rock iguanas was largely handled by the ISG. Formed as the West Indian Iguana Specialist Group in 1996, the group expanded its mandate to include all iguana species in 2000. The ISG did an admirable job of prioritizing and facilitating iguana conservation work, primarily in the West Indies. The group achieved remarkable success in terms of fund-raising and grant writing, matching resources with project needs, providing logistical support and scientific oversight to recovery programs, developing headstarting facilities, conducting field research and predator control and a host of other activities.

The strength of the ISG rests with their ability, through the international recognition that comes with IUCN affiliation, to forge working relationships with foreign governments, trusts and conservation NGOs (nongovernmental organizations). The ISG has developed a Species Recovery Plan (SRP) process. Since 2001, the group conducted workshops for the Grand Cayman Blue, Anegada Iguana, Ricord's Iguana, Turks and Caicos Iguana, Andros Iguana, and recently (and the first venture outside the Caribbean) the Fiji Crested Iguana. These SRP workshops are conducted in conjunction with the ISG annual meeting, where the group reviews the ever-changing list of priority species and projects. This list is made available to the IIF to use as they award funds and grants for projects.

Where the ISG is long on expertise, they are short on financial resources, which is where the IIF steps in. The close working relationship between these two groups is essential to ensure that the limited funds available for iguana conservation are used wisely and reflect the current prioritized needs. The strength of this process is that all decisions, both regarding funding (IIF) and species priorities (ISG) are made with consensus and under peer-review, which assures a broad and disciplined perspective.

Since its inception, the IIF has raised more than \$484,000, primarily through direct board member annual contributions from supporting partners. The IIF also receives grants and public donations. Each supporting partner contributes from \$2,500 to \$10,000 annually; additionally, partners respond to requests for special project assistance or appeals for emergency needs such as those wrought by Hurricane Ivan in 2004 or the Blue Iguana extinction crisis of 2002.

The IIF applies for annual Disney Wildlife Conservation Fund (DWCF) grants that are earmarked for special large-project needs. Since 2002, the DWCF has been especially generous to the IIF, having awarded \$68,750 for projects in Grand Cayman, Jamaica and the Turks and Caicos islands. The IIF has administered over \$142,000 in grants from sources, including the Morris Animal Foundation (MAF), the SSC Sir Peter Scott Fund for Conservation Action, AZA's Conservation Endowment Fund, USFWS, and Conservation International. The largest of those, a \$46,440 grant from MAF, funded medical evaluations on five *Cyclura* species, including pre-release health screening and establishing normal physiologic values on free-ranging animals.

The IIF is able to manage these conservation funds effectively because they have no overhead or paid employees. As one of the IIF's founding partners, the Fort Worth Zoo supports me to devote 40% of my salaried time to iguana conservation activities, including serving as the group's Executive Director. The zoo likewise supports the IIF's administrative office, one of two nonprofit rep-



From top left, clockwise: ► Glenn Gerber, PhD (San Diego Zoo CRES) collects data on a Stout Iguana, *Cyclura pinguis*, prior to being released in October 2004. ► The first group of 24 *C. pinguis* was released in October 2003, in two distinct habitat types on Anegada, BVI. In total, 101 iguanas have been repatriated from 2003 to 2006. ► A *C. pinguis* male, indicated by the red paint mark, rests on a dead tree following release on Anegada, October 2003. ► Kelly Bradley (Dallas Zoo), with help from a local Anegadan student, applies a white paint mark to a female iguana prior to release in 2005. Kelly successfully radiotracked 72 iguanas on Anegada from 2003 to 2006 and obtained overall survivorship data of ~85%. ► Rick Hudson (Fort Worth Zoo) and Rick Van Veen (field coordinator for the Jamaican Iguana Recovery Team) apply a paint mark to a female *C. collei*, prior to release in the Hellshire Hills, February 2005. 67 *C. collei* have been repatriated since 1996.

tile conservation organizations (the Turtle Survival Alliance being the other) headquartered here, reflecting the zoo's strong tradition of commitment to herpetological conservation.

Conservation funds are allocated annually through a grants program. Since 2002, the IIF has awarded a total of \$210,000 in four grant cycles to the following high priority projects: Blue Iguana Recovery Program, Grand Cayman; Jamaican Iguana Recovery Program; Anegada iguana research and conservation, British Virgin Islands; San Salvador Iguana translocation, Bahamas; St Lucia field research and conservation; Ricord's Iguana field research, Dominican Republic, Mona Iguana population monitoring and Fiji Crested Iguana field surveys.

The intent of the IIF is to address critical conservation needs, and three of the mainstays that fall into this category are the ongo-

ing recovery programs for the Jamaican (*Cyclura collei*), Grand Cayman Blue (*C. lewisi*) and Anegada (*C. pinguis*) iguanas. All three are ranked Critically Endangered by the IUCN Red List and are considered conservation dependent; that is, the risk of extinction is too high to ignore the annual program needs. Intervention is necessary to offset the major threat, primarily high juvenile mortality associated with invasive feral predators. Not funding these programs is simply not an option. Therefore, the board recognizes that there will always be certain fixed costs associated with the grants program, however a solid proposal based on good science is still expected.

The IIF reached a major milestone in 2005: 100 individual iguanas of three species (Jamaica, Grand Cayman, and Anegada) returned to the wild with IIF funding since 2003. The October 2005 and 2006 releases of 24 and 29 Anegada iguanas respectively, surpasses that milestone, bringing to 224 the number of iguana repatriated to the wild with funding support from the IIF. In recent years the IIF has emerged as a major force for iguana conservation. And though the IIF has successfully raised a considerable amount of money, the group is constantly faced with worthy projects that are in serious need of financial support, but remain unfunded. Spiny-tailed iguanas of the *Ctenosaura melanosterna* complex fall into this category and will require considerable conservation funding in the coming years if they are to persist. Difficult choices have to be made. Such decisions are even more difficult with the realization that tried and tested conservation solutions exist for some of the highly endangered iguana species.

The expertise and techniques are available to help them; however, the pace of recovery is dictated by funding. For many species, rather than boldly forging ahead, the best that can be done is "holding the line" because of funding limitations. The IIF faces the challenge of reversing this situation, and to become better positioned financially to allow iguana conservation to move ahead at the pace that matches the need. For endangered iguanas worldwide, the IIF offers a fighting chance at survival.

The IIF is 501 c (3) nonprofit foundation registered in the State of Texas. Tax deductible (for U.S. taxpayers) contributions can be made with checks made payable to the IIF and sent to Rick Hudson, IIF, 1989 Colonial Parkway, Fort Worth, Texas 76110, USA, or on-line at <www.iguanafoundation.org> and click on contribute.