

The Critically Endangered Fijian Crested Iguana *Brachylophus vitiensis*

The Pacific iguanas have suffered dramatically since human arrival 2800 years ago with some species eaten to extinction. The Fijian iguanas are the only known species of its kind that exist outside the Americas. There are now only three known species of Fijian iguanas, the Fijian Crested Iguana and two banded iguanas, one of which is now highly endangered. The Fijian Crested Iguana is listed as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List with only a single secure population remaining at the Crested Iguana Sanctuary island of Yadua Taba, administered by the National Trust of Fiji Islands.

The Crested iguana is no longer found on many islands and has been heavily impacted by habitat loss and the introduction of feral cats, rats, continuing forest degradation due to goat grazing, forest fires and the spread of the invasive vaivai tree. The iguana is an arboreal herbivorous species restricted to islands with stands of dry forest, Fiji's most critically endangered habitat. This distinctive forest type exists only on the leeward dry islands of Fiji, and most of these islands has been burnt and cleared to make way for coconut plantations, gardens, grasslands for goat grazing or tourist resorts.

The crested iguana population on all other islands will continue to decrease in the absence of immediate action, and will presumably become functionally extinct within the next few years.

Achievements To-date

- In 2004, a workshop held by the National Trust of Fiji and the Iguana Specialist Group brought together researchers and stakeholders to develop a species recovery plan.
- In 2005, the International Iguana Foundation awarded a grant to Peter Harlow and Suzanne Morrison to study the conservation biology of the iguana, which provided important support to ongoing natural history study and understanding of the ecological importance of the this iguana.



- During the study, an initial 265 iguanas were tagged to provide a base population for future studies.

Further Actions needed

- More extensive surveys and genetic testing to determine species, population sizes and obtaining natural history data
- Development of a microsatellite library to document and further examine the genetics of the entire genus and to assist in future conservation and management of wild and captive populations.
- Identification of healthy populations where quality habitat exists so that appropriate land protection can occur to ensure their survival
- Management plans with appropriate conservation priorities must be developed to ensure long-term survival.
- Establishment of education, awareness and ecotourism programme.
- Engage, involve and educate the communities to take pride and ownership of the protection of the rare and endangered iguana
- Project funding will result in a comprehensive management and recovery plan
- Identify uninhabited islands free of introduced predators and goats; prioritization of islands most suitable for long-term survival.