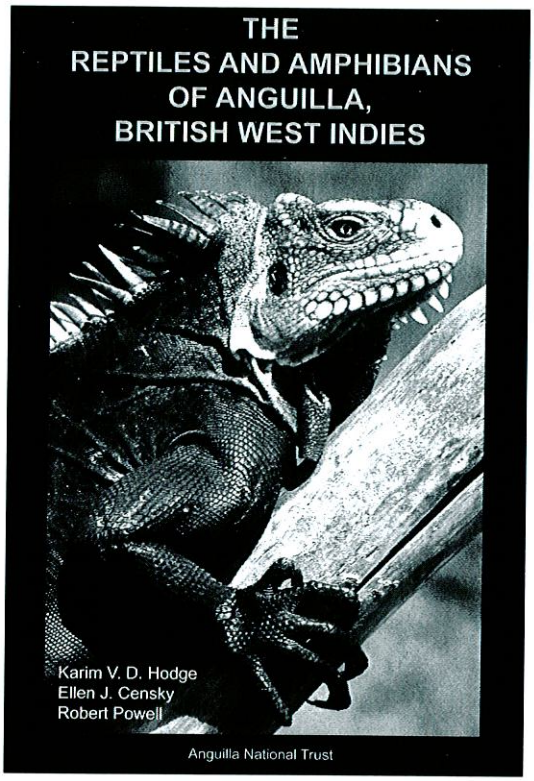
BOOK REVIEW

Hodge, Karim V. D., Ellen J. Censky, and Robert Powell. 2003. ***The Reptiles and Amphibians of Anguilla, British West Indies.*** **Anguilla National Trust, The Valley. Softcover, $15. 72 pp., over 90 illustrations, nearly all in color.**



This delightful volume is the second in a series of guides published by the Anguilla National Trust on their native flora and fauna. The nation of Anguilla is composed of one main and several small islands, which collectively form the northern end of the Lesser Antilles (the island chain that extends from the Puerto Rico Bank to South America). Unlike most other Lesser Antillean islands, which are mountainous, much of Anguilla is low-lying and dry. Rather than accumulating on the surface, rainfall tends to seep through the karst limestone from which the islands are formed. Thus the native forest must be both drought and hurricane resistant. What remains, after extensive foraging by the ubiquitous goats, is mostly degraded scrub forest, yet the islands still host over 500 varieties of plants and, surprisingly, over 20 species of reptiles.

The guidebook features species accounts of Anguilla's three frogs or toads (all introduced), four sea turtles, one terrestrial turtle (possibly introduced), three snakes (two introduced), and 13 lizards. The lizard accounts address two iguanas (one native and one introduced), three ameivas (all native and two endemic), two anoles (one native and one introduced), a skink (native), and five geckos (one endemic species has not been formally described and one species is probably introduced). These subjects range in size from massive Leatherback Sea Turtles to tiny Dwarf Geckos. My personal favorite is the Lesser Antillean Iguana, *Iguana delicatissima,* of which an excellent photograph by Glenn Gerber graces the cover. Of particular interest is the conservation status of this animal. Although threatened throughout its range, the Anguillian population is critically endangered. The usual factors (habitat destruction and competition with feral animals) are responsible, but these may be exacerbated by potential competition and hybridization with Green Iguanas, introduced as pets or on a raft of floating debris that arrived on Anguilla shortly after Hurricane Luis in 1995.

This book is an excellent resource for both herp enthusiasts and newcomers. A brief description of the nature of reptiles and amphibians and an excellent glossary of terms provide help for the uninitiated. Each species account includes colorful photographs and illustrations along with notes on the distribution, origin, biology, and conservation status of each animal. I particularly liked the sections on the origins of the various species. Aside from mentioning the usual methods of introduction (e.g., rafting, land bridges, or human mediation), one notation suggested that some geckos may have been "purposely introduced by sorcerers to some islands in order to terrify their subjects."

Most significantly, a section on conservation describes the reasons why many species have become threatened and suggests measures for improving the situation. Among other things, the authors suggest sustainable land use and the conservation and enhancement of animal habitat. Perhaps the most important measure suggested, however, is increasing public awareness, and, in this, the book itself provides an excellent resource. In fact, the Trust intends to utilize it in Anguillian schools to enhance an awareness and appreciation of the nation's natural resources.

Because printing costs were covered by a grant from the United Kingdom's Foreign and Commonwealth Office Environmental Fund for Overseas Territories, all proceeds from the sale of the book will support the efforts of the Anguilla National Trust to preserve that nation's natural and cultural heritage. Copies may be ordered directly from the Trust (Anguilla National Trust, P.O. Box 1234, The Valley, Anguilla, B.W.I.; axanat@anguillanet.com) or from Bibliomania! (http://www.herplit.com/) for US $15 (EC $40) plus shipping and handling.

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Adult male St. Lucian Iguana (*Iguana iguana*) (story on p. 71). *Photograph by Matt Morton, Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust.*