Blue Iguana "YOB" (bead tag: yellow-orange-blue), moments after release back into the wild after being fitted with a PIT-tag, bead-tag, and radiotransmitter.

Blue Iguana Update

Frederic J. Burton

Director, Blue Iguana Recovery Program
P.O. Box 10308 APO, Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands (fjburton@blueiguana.ky)

Photographs by the author.

"Team Blue 2005," a rotating team of international volunteers, is in the midst of an ambitious field season working with the Blue Iguana Recovery Program on Grand Cayman. As the Grand Cayman Blue Iguanas (*Cyclura lewisi*) reach the peak of the annual mating season, program staff and the Team Blue volunteers are capturing and attaching radio transmitters to wild Blue Iguanas in the deep interior of Grand Cayman's East End, and to 23 captive-bred Blues released in December into the Salina Reserve, a protected area in northeastern Grand Cayman.

The work in the Salina Reserve builds on two months of radio-tracking that commenced immediately after these iguanas were released. At that time, they were still subadults. Now, in May, they have grown to the point that some at least appear to be in breeding condition, and aggressive interactions are driving the males into the rocky shrubland surrounding the small soil patches where we hope the females will nest.

The elusive remnant wild population in the eastern interior is only slowly revealing its secrets to dilligent observers. In previous years, this has been the only known site where unmanaged wild iguanas still appeared to be breeding. Very few individuals seemed to be involved, with possibly only one nest per year — but the nest site(s) and the locations of the breeding adults were completely unknown. This year for the first time in many years, no new young have appeared in this home of the last wild Blues. Most likely, all were drowned in the nest during the floods that accompanied Hurricane Ivan last year.

Team Blue 2005 volunteers (left to right) Ae Nash, Nick Louis, and Lorraine Scotson carrying YOB back to the site of his capture.

BARBARA WATKINS

Male iguana (green-red-blue) receiving a pit tag.

Team Blue members struggled to make the first contact, but in late April eventually managed to trap a young but mature male, who was bead-tagged Green-Red-Blue (GRB), fitted with a radio transmitter, and released. Over the next two weeks, twice-hourly triangulations of his position showed him spending most of his time in six small areas within his large home range, providing the team with indications as to where they should focus their efforts. Using blinds at these locations, two more wild iguanas were first spotted, and then eventually, on 9 May, these also were trapped and radio-tagged. One was a young mature female, laden with eggs, the other a young male scarred from fights, probably with GRB. The female (tagged Green-Green-Red) and the second male (Yellow-Orange-Blue) are now also being tracked by triangulating their radio signals throughout each day, hopefully leading the team to more wild Blues, and to their nesting sites in June.

By the end of June, the Blue Iguana Recovery Program hopes to be incubating eggs from these wild iguana nests, as well as from nests in the Salina Reserve and from the released and captive populations in the QE II Botanic Park.

References

Binns, J. and F. Burton. 2004. Status of the Blue Iguana (*Cyclura lewisi*) Recovery Program. *Iguana* 12:27–28.

Burton, F. J. 2004. Battling extinction: A view forward for the Grand Cayman Blue Iguana (*Cyclura lewisi*). *Iguana* 11:233–237.