Once it began to rain daily, Grand Cayman Anoles (*Anolis conspersus*) were visible everywhere in the branches and rummaging through leaf litter on the ground.

TRAVELOGUE

Tales of a Blue Dragon Tracker: Grand Cayman Blue Iguana Fieldwork 2007

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Photographs by the author unless otherwise indicated.

3 May 2007
I left Milwaukee on an early morning flight to Georgetown, Grand Cayman. Despite a half-hour delay leaving Charlotte, I arrived and slipped through customs with ease, primarily due to a special letter from the National Trust detailing the electronic "toys" I was bringing for use in our fieldwork. Fred Burton, Director of the Blue Iguana Recovery Program (BIRP), and Doug Bell, my partner in the field, met me at the airport. After a quick trip to West Bay for some business, we were off to Fred's home in Newlands.

GG, a handsome adult male Grand Cayman Blue Iguana (*Cyclura lewisi*) strikes a pose.

After unloading the "toys" at Fred's house, Doug and I were off to Boddentown to set up house for the next 13 days. We made a quick trip to the grocery store for two weeks worth of "creative" cooking (cost of groceries and lack of energy at the end of the day make me a less-than-vigorous chef), followed by a stop at a local spirits store to stock up on Red Stripe and rum. These went down well over good conversation while Doug and I got to know each other.

4 May 2007
Fred had prior commitments at the Blue Iguana Recovery Program (BIRP) captive facility in the Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park (QEIIBP) as a large group of volunteers were due to arrive to assist with some "gardening" tasks in the adult iguana pens. The volunteers included employees from the Governor's office escaping the grind of the office for a day, and Mariko Jack, the Governor's wife. The main task was to remove unwanted vegetation, mainly grasses, from the pens, where they choke out other desirable (i.e., edible) species of plants. Removing the largely dried grasses now would allow the coming rains to reach the remaining food plants more easily.

The enthusiastic group vigorously cleared the pens, and an added bonus was the donation of numerous new and incredibly useful tools, such as garden forks, shovels, pruners, loppers, and rawhide gloves. BIRP staff greatly appreciates such tools to assist

The completed nest mound constructed by Chris Carr, Doug Bell, and the author.

with regular enclosure maintenance as well as other tasks necessary for the husbandry of the Blue Iguanas.

Another important task on our list was the construction of a nesting site for one of the Park's free-ranging females. In 2006, her eggs had been spoiled by rainwater pooling in the spot where she had chosen to lay her clutch. The nest-building crew was made up of Chris Carr (BIRP warden), Doug, and me, and involved relocating (shoveling!) 1.5 pick-up beds full of soil into this female iguana's preferred nesting area. This upgrade should improve the chances for survival of her next clutch.

After lunch, Fred and Doug started preparations for the first day of fieldwork in the Salina Reserve. Aside from the normal planning, Fred and Doug introduced themselves to some of the new electronic equipment I had brought for the numerous research endeavors. That evening, we attended a ribbon-cutting ceremony in Boddentown to commemorate the rebuilding of the Boddentown Mission House. After decades of decay, this culturally significant early 20th Century historic building had been destroyed by Hurricane Ivan in 2004. Although the evening was typically warm by Grand Cayman standards and I was required to wear pants instead of shorts (in Wisconsin, I start wearing shorts once it hits 45 °F), witnessing some of the cultural history of the island and touring the rebuilt house was a great experience.

5 May 2007

After an early rise, we were off to the Salina Reserve. As eager as I was to begin our fieldwork, I still felt some hesitation approaching the treacherous beauty of the Salina. The thought of seeing individuals of one of the world's rarest iguanas roaming through the bush as they should is quite the incentive. On a more personal note, seeing some of the "children" growing up and doing well is also very rewarding. This is my fifth tour of duty on Grand Cayman to assist with the recovery of the species, and besides watching the many released iguanas grow and mature, the fieldwork provides me with a bit of professional sanity.

RYB, a four-year-old female Blue Iguana was our first and easiest capture.

RYB felt quite comfortable alongside members of Team Blue '07 in the Central Zone base camp.

RYB modeling her newly attached antenna accessories.

Our goal was to collect tracking data for a group of 20 Grand Cayman Blue Iguanas of varying demographics (males and females, two to five-year-old age classes) to add to the data bank Fred has been building over three years of tracking in the Salina's Central Zone (CZ). First, we needed to catch iguanas to which we would attach the radio antennas. Our first capture was almost expected and would have been a very safe bet. RYB, or "Rib," as we like to call her (officially she is known as red-yellow-blue, which are her bead colors read from outside in), a four-year-old female with a history of being a "trap magnet," was trapped almost immediately after she was seen. She very casually sidestepped a lizard noose, and actually oversaw the setting of her own trap from two meters away! The traps used were the common metal live animal traps in three sizes.

Overall, we had a very successful first day, with six iguanas trapped and "processed." Processing consists of verifying identity (beads, PIT, and sex), checking/noting physical condition (sheds, injuries/scars, missing toes or tail tips, etc.), measuring snout-vent length and tail length, weighing, and applying a radio antenna. Fred diligently takes all notes for his data stores on the population. When females are captured, we also palpate for early signs of egg production. Finally, we release the iguana where we trapped it, and reset the trap in a spot where another iguana was seen or "rumored" to be traveling.

The process of trapping can be very challenging. If you check the trap too soon, you could inadvertently chase away an interested iguana, but if you do not check soon enough, the iguana could perish in the severe tropical sun/heat (it was in the mid-90s with matching humidity). Traps are baited with a tasty iguana treat, incredibly overripe banana. Very disgusting! I have a fairly strong stomach due to the great variety of animal feces I have cleaned up in my zoo career, but this was a tough one. However, to an iguana searching for food, this is intoxicating, and almost 100% irresistible. Some iguanas were caught multiple times.

While checking the circuit of traps, I took the time to reacquaint myself with the system of paths we had hacked out of the bush in previous sessions. I find it interesting how quickly the terrain and vegetation types can change from visit to visit while

The author baiting a trap with pieces of banana that are hard to resist (if you're an iguana).

Geckos known locally as Woodslaves (*Aristelliger praesignis praesignis*) were frequent guests at our lodging in Boddentown.

hiking through the network of paths. The paths also take on a different look as shadows change through the day. The Grand Cayman Banana Orchid (*Schomburgkia thomsoniana* var. *thomsoniana*) was sending up new flower spikes, and many of the paths were in need of trimming.

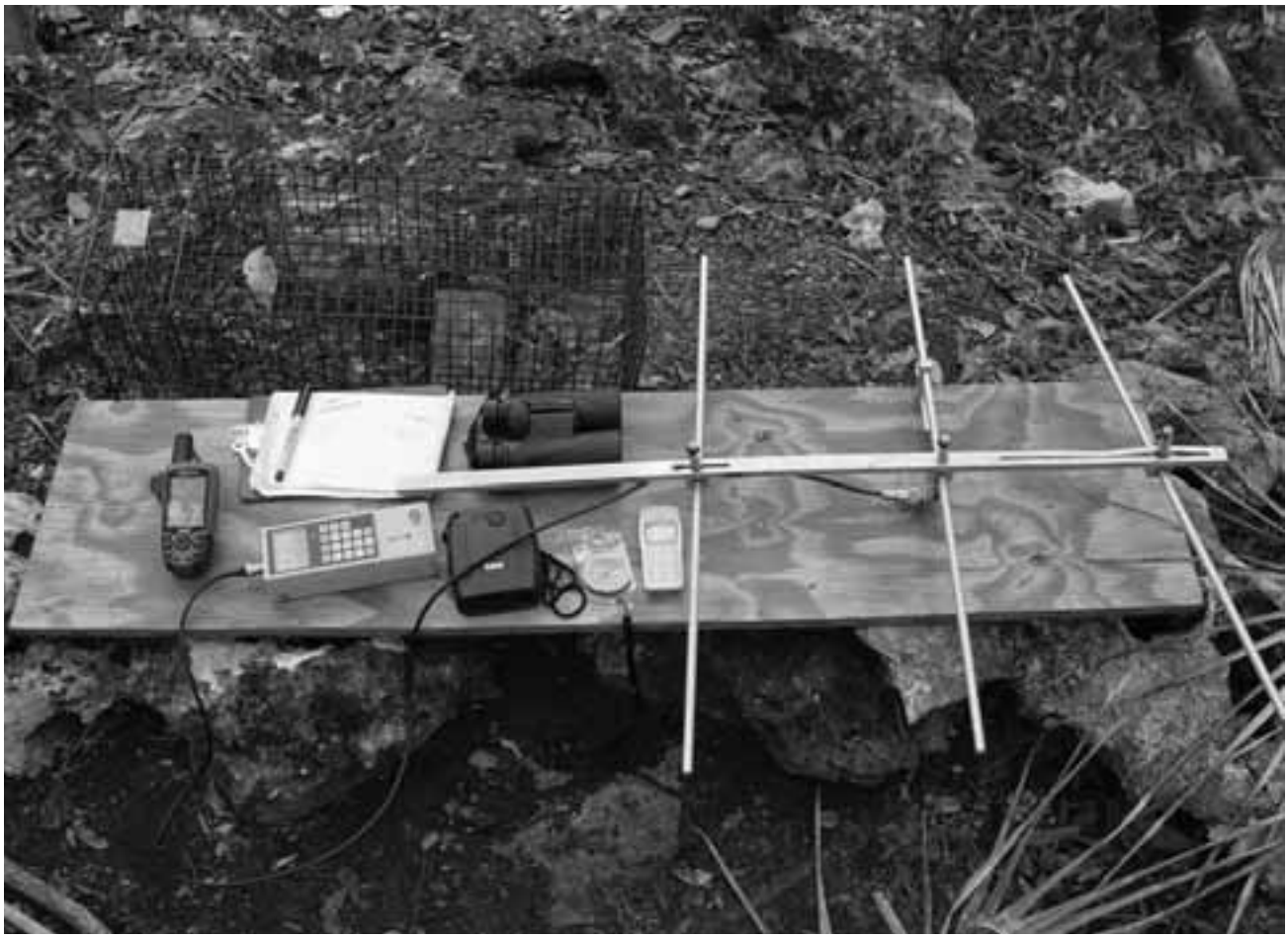
Aside from looking for more iguanas to trap, I also look for other indigenous wildlife, especially reptiles. On one round, I spotted a large gecko (*Aristelliger praesignis praesignis*), sometimes called a "Woodslave," and a large male Grand Cayman Anole (*Anolis conspersus lewisi*). This subspecies differs from the more common nominate species as it tends to have a whiter ground color with a paler pattern. Fred mentioned that they are rather tough to find and, of course, I had chosen not to tote my cumbersome camera on that particular round. My "tough find" proceeded to position himself head down and perform his territorial ritual, complete with extensive head bobbing and dewlap extension. Must carry the camera at all times!

A male Grand Cayman Anole (*Anolis conspersus*).

We exited the Salina after 6 pm, exhausted, extremely warm, sweaty, quite smelly (!), and in need of cool drinks and a functioning shower. However, we were quite satisfied with our catch for the day, which would allow us to begin radio-tracking the next day.

6 May 2007

Once again we were off to the Salina. We try to begin radio-tracking at 8 am, so we needed to be at the roadside entrance no later than 7:30 am to begin our hike to the CZ "base camp." Fred began tracking the six iguanas that we had trapped the previous day while Doug and I began setting up traps. Doug devised a plan for trap placement based on some of his observations the previous afternoon and they paid off immediately. By 10:30 am, we had three iguanas caught and processed, including a two-year old (all iguana ages used in this writing were based on how old they would be as of August 2007). At that point, Fred began training Doug in the fine art of tracking Blues through the Salina. I continued trapping.



Essential equipment (minus the trap) to be hauled through the bush on every tracking round.

One particular iguana managed to continuously elude my attempts to nab her. At one point, she was actually in the trap eating the banana bait while I watched. When she finished the banana, she casually walked out of the trap, and then, with a quick burst, vanished behind an agave. Another iguana that had been "playing" with me for the last two days was "Wiggly Worm," more officially known as WGW (white-green-white). Once again, he had the last laugh of the day. He was analyzing the large trap specifically set for him by the large Manchineel Tree (*Hippomane mancinella*) while I went on my final round to check and close traps. He then casually inspected another trap I had just shut down. The only thing that made me feel better is that he probably would not have fit into that one, as he is growing into quite a hulking specimen. I believe tomorrow he will be in our hands.

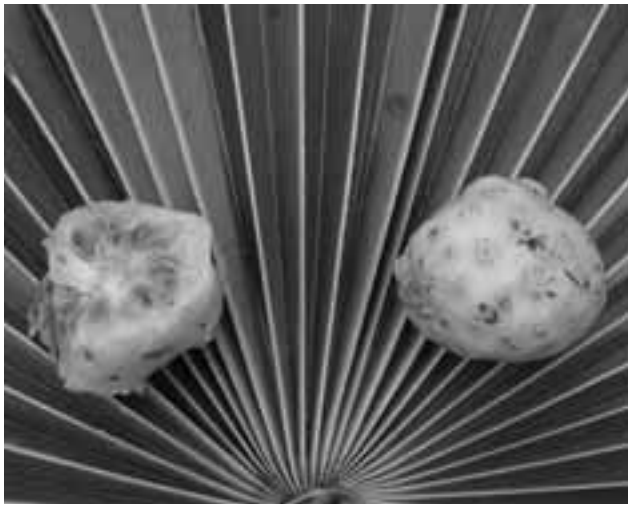
Throughout these exercises, I had noticed that I did not seem to be handling the tropical temperatures and humidity as well as I have on past trips. At noon, I took a reading of a palm frond that was elevated about 4 in off the ground, and had been in shade all morning beneath our newly constructed white-sheet canopy. Now I know why I felt so poorly. My TempGun informed me that it was 96.4 °F; the ground in the shade was 98.4 °F. At 4:30 pm, the same palm frond was down to 88.4 °F. That was a far cry from the mid-50s with a lake wind that my wife had reported that day for Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Spring in Wisconsin this year was actually more like prolonged winter, so my body was not used to anything approaching tropical temperatures.

7 May 2007

Once again we were on our way into the Salina. Doug and Fred really set a pace this morning. Fred believes it's like riding a bike, the faster you go, the easier it is to balance. Doug concurred. I prefer to set my own pace to avoid premature crucifixion on the dreaded razor-sharp karst rock.

Today I was trapping more iguanas while Fred and Doug shared radio-tracking responsibilities. Trapping started off pretty slow, and my confidence was on the brink until Fred called with good news. After some mild tweaking of my trap placement, OGO had been apprehended. After processing him, I moved the trap to the southwestern part of the CZ where a small iguana hovered while I set and baited the trap — and started moving in as I walked away. I decided to wait on this one, and was not disappointed. Not more than five minutes later the trap was sprung and iguana #2 was caught. By the end of the day, two more were caught, including a valuable two-year old. Iguanas in this age class, the youngest presently in the Salina, are so far underrepresented in our data. The only disappointment was my continuing inability to nab "Wiggly Worm." I believe I would have had the big male if he hadn't been trying to get some Noni fruit (*Morinda citrifolia)* from a trap that was too small for him. He apparently triggered the trap, but backed himself out, and was spooked for the day. We'll get him tomorrow.

Tracking data sheets, zone map, and data code descriptions.



The author found the Noni fruit (*Morindra citrifolia*), with its rotten cheese smell, incredibly repulsive, but the Blue Iguanas found it to be an irresistible bait.

Noni fruit really stinks! Rotting blue cheese comes to mind, yet the iguanas flock to it, and other animals enjoy it as well. Fred said that a juice made out of it is supposed to cure all that ails you, and is thought to enhance sexual prowess. I can't help but think, based on the smell, that it would have the opposite effect on me.

Hard to believe, but it actually was hotter today. My 12:30 pm reading was 97.4 °F in the shade. I am handling the tropical weather better today, having drunk water like a camel this morning. My real nemesis now appears to be the dreaded Maiden Plum (*Comocladia dentata*). I feel I have been doing quite well in avoiding it, yet I have the tell-tale red itchy blotches all over my forearms. After an incredibly refreshing shower, I realize I must have rubbed some Maiden Plum sap inadvertently around my right eye. This is only my third day in the Salina with many more to go, and I already have a serious case of plant poisoning and a bit of heat rash as well.

During one of PRP's many advances, RYB exhibits the "no" posture.

PRP catching the early morning sun.

PRP, a five-year-old male, introduces RYB to the rough and tumble world of *Cyclura* courtship with a nuchal bite.

RYB (foreground) guarded by her mate PRP (background).

PRP, a five-year-old dominant male.

8 May 2007

A new task for me in the Salina today; aside from trapping, I was going to begin some rounds of iguana tracking. While this is rigorous, I was eagerly anticipating it, as the busy pace makes the day go faster. Because of my trapping duties, I was only responsible for tracking three iguanas, while noting any other iguanas seen, antenna or not.

Most of the excitement occurred right in the base camp as PRP (pale blue-red-pale blue), a five-year-old dominant male, made his first advances on RYB (red-yellow-blue), who is large enough to breed for the first time. PRP's advances were typical of male rock iguanas. He bobbed his head, jaws gaping, and colored as bright blue as he could get. RYB was not receptive, but this did not thwart PRP as he continued to chase, bite, and appear very threatening as we observed the spectacle from front row seats.

PRP courting RYB just outside the Central Zone's base camp. This pair was completely unconcerned by human presence.

PRP patrolling his territory.

Dark clouds had begun accumulating and thickening, by 11 am we heard thunder in the distance. By 11:30 am, the Salina and its inhabitants were receiving a much-needed soaking as the sky poured forth, leaving us scrambling to cover non-waterproof items and equipment. I hastily cut numerous fan palm fronds to use as mini-umbrellas for backpacks and gear. When the rain let up, Fred placed a call to get a weather report for the rest of the day — bad news for tracking. Aside from cooling temperatures, which caused iguanas to seek shelters, carrying large metal antennae during a storm is rather risky. We packed our gear, and beat a soggy retreat from the Salina.

9 May 2007

The Salina was absolutely beautiful today. The vegetation was still beaded with rain drops. The temperature was a pleasant 81.1 °F, but the humidity had to have been 100%. After the long stretch of dry weather, you could almost hear the Salina sucking it up.

The real beauty of the morning was from the sounds that were heard, and the sounds that were not. With no wind rustling dry palm fronds, we could hear the birds so much more clearly. The most prominent was the call and response of Northern Flickers (*Colaptes auratus*). The stillness of the air also improved our ability to hear iguanas for tracking. The rains brought out the anoles, which could be heard as they bounced from plant to plant, sometimes fooling us into thinking they were passing iguanas (yes, they can sound that loud). I witnessed a pair of male Grand Cayman Anoles (*A. conspersus*), one brown, the other gray, act out a territorial ritual of headbobbing and full extension of their bright blue dewlaps. I frequently have seen Black Crabs (*Gecarcinus ruricola*), but today was the first time I saw the Land Crab (*Cardisoma guanhumi*), which is considerably bigger and more menacing. I don't startle easily, but this crab got me good as it sidestepped across the path where I was not expecting anything but an iguana. Everything was coming alive after a refreshing drink of water.

Tracking was fairly uneventful due to the previous day's storm, with cooler temperatures and only partly sunny skies. Many of the iguanas spent the night where they were caught in the rain yesterday, instead of returning to their normal retreats. Then the rains came again. As the skies opened up, we were discussing our exit plan after another half-day of data collecting. As I closed traps for the day, I did see "Wiggly Worm" duck into the rocks where he had been hanging out. I followed his trail and at last discovered the location of his retreat, a large fissure in a mound of karst rock. This will be priceless knowledge as we continue our attempts to trap him for the radio-tracking study. The day was not a total loss!

Another great discovery was the sight of "Egypt" (GYP, green-yellow-pale blue) as we slogged our way from the CZ to the North Zone (NZ) on our way to the Queen's Highway. Fred had been wondering where this male had been. Was he displaced by "Wiggly Worm" or did he just not make it? Now we know. He casually crossed the trail in front of us during the downpour, barely acknowledging us, but providing us ample chance to visu-

A spectacular Cuban Tree Frog (*Osteopilus septentrionalis*) that inhabited the garden outside the Boddentown residence.

ally check his proportions and to breathe a sigh of relief on seeing this guy alive and clearly doing well.

10 May 2007

Today was not a banner day. Equipment shortages and losses slowed us down. I was the designated trapper today, and came up with a goose egg. The only other days during which I was skunked could be attributed to the weather (and were not my fault!). A ten-hour day in the Salina seems never-ending when you are hot, sweaty, and feel like you are not contributing.

We had a "guest" in the Salina today, a Master's degree student from Exeter University who was shadowing us to learn some of the basics of radio-tracking animals. His project will involve the introduced Monk Parakeet (*Myiopsitta monachus*) on Grand Cayman. He handled the terrain fairly well for his first time, but I think he managed to develop a healthy respect for what we do.

One of the few positives of the day was the return of other forms of wildlife to the Salina after the recent rains. The anoles came out in force, with many large adult males displaying to their rivals. The bush seemed alive with birds, and for the first time I heard Grand Cayman Parrots (*Amazona leucocephala caymanensis*) chattering in large numbers. They inhabit the thicker forests in the Salina, but today they were heard throughout the xerophytic scrub. I also heard one of my favorites, the croaking of the Cuban Tree Frog (*Osteopilus septentrionalis*), which reminds me of some of the carbonation-generated noises produced by my son.

grW displaying the beadwork that helps trackers with binoculars to easily identify individual iguanas.

DOUG BELL

A racer (*Alsophis cantherigerus*) captured by the author at QEII Botanic Park.

The "engineered" trap created to catch Wiggly Worm (WGW), a very large and cunning male Blue Iguana.

11 May 2007

I was going to be tracking all day along with my trapping duties. Things were not looking good in the morning, when a large gray cloud seemed to literally cover the Salina Reserve. I went to re-bait my traps around 11:30 am to give them something fresh during the "dead hours" of the day. While I was engineering a "chute" for a young iguana, grW (small green-small red-white), to go directly from its retreat to a trap, I received a call from Fred that I had an iguana in another trap. It was YBY (yellow-blue-yellow), a male we had yet to see during our jaunts through the Salina, and a needed candidate for the study. I carefully (more for my health than the iguana's) removed him from the trap and carried him back to the processing center at base camp when I received another call from Fred that I had yet another iguana! It was the trap I had just baited with the engineered chute! Things were rolling now. Fred and I rapidly processed the pair of iguanas so we could get back to our tracking rounds, but all were pleased with the trapped pair, especially another much-needed two-year old.

Another interesting result of recent rains seemed to be the hatching of anoles. Very small hatchlings were everywhere, leap-

ing from branch to branch like monkeys. Sightings of racers (*Alsophis cantherigerus*) also began to increase. These are beautiful snakes that are opportunistic feeders, which unfortunately includes young iguanas. Interestingly, if you are fast enough to catch one of these snakes, they never bite, unlike their cousins in North America in the genus *Coluber*. However, you will be generously coated with some nasty smelling musk.

Tracking was fairly uneventful today due to the large gray cloud that continued to hover over us. The exception was Doug's iguanas, which continued to have him running madly through the bush. We actually had a cool ocean breeze hitting us in the afternoon, which is wonderful for us endothermic bipeds, but not so good for iguanas. Temperatures in the mid-80s make them want to head for shelter.

We continued to track Wiggly Worm, the big old male we had yet to trap, monitoring him visually as well as we could. He seemed more interested in cruising his territory than eating the "treats" we left for him. We also believe he may be trap-shy as he may have triggered a smaller trap, wiggling his way out unharmed but full of newfound wisdom. Fred decided that we needed to engineer a chute that would give him no option but to be funneled into a trap when he heads out in the morning.

We were optimistic for tomorrow as we started our long trek out of the Salina. To cap our day, Fred found the GPS unit we had lost the day before.

12 May 2007

Saturday morning, and Doug and I feel as though we have been hit by a truck (possibly the same one). This would be our eighth straight day in the Salina. Other than two days cut short by storms, we had no time off to lick our wounds. Even on the half days, we had to hike in and out of the Salina, which is half the battle. However, we are eager to see if we caught ourselves a Wiggly Worm.

We did our first round of tracking at 8 am. Afterwards, I set some traps and checked Wiggly Worm's status. No iguana in the overnight trap — but, while I was nearby setting a mid-sized trap, I heard the distinct sound of claws on metal coming from his retreat. We set out again for our 9 am round, and, when I returned, there he was looking quite sedate in his metal trap. I immediately phoned Fred so that he could meet me at base camp after his current round and help process the big male — and big he was, measuring in at almost 1.5 kilos. He was the biggest iguana we had processed, and I actually put on a leather glove to remove him from the trap for fear of having my hands and wrists shredded by powerful claws as he struggled to free himself.

The author and Wiggly Worm (WGW) just before his post-processing release.

Whitewood flowers, a natural food source and bait item for Blue Iguanas.

Meanwhile, in the west end, Doug continued to observe fascinating inter-iguana social dynamics among the several resident males and females. Imagine Blue Iguanas playing the parts on the "Bold and the Beautiful." One of the iguanas on my circuit, OGO (orange-green-orange), decided to explore a new "frontier," which left me doing a lot of bush-whacking to find him. I traversed a specific route so many times that in the process I inadvertently started a new trail, breaking numerous branches to get to him.

I heard a new bird call today, which sounded quite bizarre. It was the Mangrove Cuckoo (*Coccyzus minor*), which sounded more like a frog call than a bird. Fred said that they are often called "rain birds," since many Caymanians believe that you hear them before it rains, but he believes that they are more likely to call after the rain. Today, however, they called before the rain, although we received only a light sprinkle at midday. Nevertheless, storm clouds were within sight (and sound).

A major thunderstorm north of us brought clouds and cooler weather in the afternoon, leading to an early bedtime for most iguanas, so we called it quits an hour early to avoid the collection of unimportant data points. We decided that the next day

would be a day of rest, as both Doug and I needed to give our aching feet and ankles a break from the razor-sharp karst rock.

13 May 2007

A day of rest in Boddentown gave me a chance to relax and enjoy some of the local wildlife not found in the Salina. The beach is well-populated with Curly-tailed Lizards (*Leiocephalus carinatus varius)* or "Lion Lizards," which offer a great deal of entertainment during daylight hours. Last year when I stayed in Boddentown, a pair inhabited a large concrete structure in the middle of the beach. Sure enough, another pair (possibly the same pair?) was residing in the same location. This time, however, many neighboring curly-tails caused the dominant male to be constantly on the alert to defend his territory. Once he took a break to breed the female, who, judging by her reaction, was quite receptive to his advances.

Another distraction came from a horde of hatchling Black Crabs. They are everywhere, crawling on the floors and walls of structures, and likely in the dried grass outside. I even found some in my clothes and hair! I couldn't help but think of the enjoyment my son would have with all of these baby crabs.

A major storm moved through in the afternoon, extinguishing any pangs of guilt at not being in the Salina. Unfortunately, it put a damper on our plans to take an afternoon snorkeling trip to Smith's Cove, because the rough water persisted for the rest of the day. By the end of the afternoon, I noticed that the swelling in my feet and ankles had subsided, and my numerous Maiden Plum spots were starting to fade. This day off was just what I needed to build up some vigor for my last two days of fieldwork.

14 May 2007

Back to the Salina, where the number of iguanas in the study now stood at 18, so we decided to divide them into groups of six based on their apparent territories. Of course, some of the dominant breeding males travel all over the CZ, so the divisions didn't always help a tracker's hourly rounds as much as one might hope. Doug especially can attest to this unfortunate reality.

The clouds stayed away for the most part, allowing the iguanas to toast up for the day's activities. For the trackers, it was another story. The humidity was higher than normal, especially after the rain the day before. The strong breeze that occasionally blew cool air off the ocean was bitter-sweet, as it felt refreshing but also stirred our stench. Regardless, we all collected a great deal of data for Fred's research.

A nesting test hole at QEII Botanic Park.

The author releasing YOY after the iguana was trapped and processed.

One of my four-year-old females, GOP (green-orange-pale blue, "the Republican"), was out and about, which was nice, as she seems always to be hunkered down in her rocky retreat. Unfortunately, her adventures were interrupted by a hormone-driven Wiggly Worm, who was intent on either breeding or mate-guarding her. The nervous GOP quickly made for another hole, and didn't reappear for the rest of the day.

Amazingly, I caught my first anole as we began our last round of the day. On all of my previous visits, I could never catch one, but I caught a large male as he was displaying to another. I think I was more shocked than he was, but he quickly answered with a loud squeak and surprisingly strong bite to the palm of my hand. Luckily, Doug was there to capture the moment with his camera.

15 May 2007

Today is my last day in the Salina, so I am trying to soak it all in as I hike into the CZ. Fred has a bruised knee, so for once we get there before him. The leaves have finally dried from Sunday's heavy rain, but the humidity is still much higher than normal, and the continuous stream of sweat has my shirt completely soaked by the time I get to base camp. Because we are early, I am able to set a trap before my 8 am round of tracking.

Today turns out to be a very odd day of tracking, as we all get many peculiar readings. A lot of this is expected and attributable to signals bouncing off the large blades of karst rock, but some new problems are cropping up. The antennae and the worn cords on the receivers are starting to show some wear and tear. At one point, Fred is getting a 99% reading, which would indicate that the iguana is just under your nose, but instead I see the iguana around 10 m away in the opposite direction. Similar conflicting signals have me going the wrong way quite frequently, which proved very frustrating.

Can you see the iguana?

Doug calls us with good news. He has BYB (blue-yellow-blue), a five-year-old male who has joined the already interesting behavior dynamics of 2.2 iguanas in the western part of the CZ. He was originally released in the NZ and has migrated south, putting our study group at 19, one shy of the goal of 20. Interestingly, Doug did not trap the large male, but instead, simply grabbed him. Apparently, BYB was so focused on breeding OPY (orange-pale blue-yellow) that he did not even notice Doug moving in. Very impressive on Doug's part (nice grab, mate!), but this set Fred and me back as we had to take the time to process BYB, and then do our own round of tracking. Because the middle of the day is when iguanas are most active, this had us running straight for about two hours in the tropical steam of the Salina.

Our clear blue skies turned to storm clouds in mid-afternoon, which sent the iguanas into their retreats for the day. We finished our last round at 3:30 pm as it started to sprinkle, so we cut our day short and began what would be my last hike out of the Salina during this tour of duty. I couldn't help but have mixed feelings of relief and sadness as we trekked out.

I spent my last night at Sunset House, a dive resort in southern Georgetown on the edge of the sea. Doug, Fred, and I enjoyed a great meal while watching the sea swallow the sun.

16 May 2007

I am now sitting at Owen Roberts International Airport, awaiting my departure from Grand Cayman and left to contemplate the past two weeks. I'm always excited about escaping my job at the zoo to take in some fieldwork. I like to think of it as great therapy for my "professional sanity reclamation project." Playing a role in a field project such as that run by BIRP is also very rewarding. I'm proud to have been part of a great team that is working to save an endangered species, especially one as beautiful and charismatic as the Grand Cayman Blue Iguana, the Blue Dragon of the Caribbean.