

INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM AND WORKSHOP ON THE JAMAICAN IGUANA

by Dr Peter Vogel, Department of Zoology

The plight of the Jamaican Iguana has stirred up a vivid interest in the conservation community both locally and abroad. According to **Rick Hudson**, Chairman of the Lizard Advisory Group of the American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums, the re-discovery of a small remnant population of the Jamaican Iguana in the Hellshire Hills in 1990 was one of the most important conservation news in recent years. Many individuals and organizations from all over the world have since expressed their concern for the continued survival of the species and its habitat.

An international workshop and symposium on the conservation of the Jamaican Iguana was held at the Terra Nova Hotel in Kingston from February 22-26. Over 25 specialists from the Caribbean, the United States and Great Britain joined the local experts to discuss a conservation strategy for the iguana. The event was organized by the Jamaican Iguana Research and Conservation Group (JIRCG), the Department of Zoology at the Mona Campus, University of the West Indies, and the Captive Breeding Specialist Group and Species Survival Commission of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

The opening session was chaired by the Executive Director of the Natural Resources Conservation Authority, **Mr. Franklyn McDonald** who expressed his agency's commitment to the conservation of the iguana and its habitat. Senior Dean of the University of the West Indies, **Prof. Ken Magnus** emphasized the important role of the University in the management and conservation of Caribbean natural resources. He described the long-standing involvement of UWI in environmental projects including the conservation of tropical biodiversity. **Ambassador Don Mills** outlined the political and socio-economic framework both locally and abroad within which responsibilities for environmental conservation must be defined.

Dr. Peter Vogel, Lecturer in Zoology and chairman of the JIRCG discussed the status of the Jamaican Iguana. He stressed that the process of

extinction which led to the disappearance of the species elsewhere is now operating in the Hellshire Hills. Conservation measures must be implemented now if we want the iguana to survive into the next century. **Mr. Rick Hudson** outlined an international strategy for the captive breeding of the

sumptions. The results strengthened the previous conclusion of the local JIRCG: Now is the last chance to conserve the Jamaican Iguana and its habitat, the unique tropical dry forest of the Hellshire Hills. Human encroachment and intrusion of exotic predators into the forest have progressed to a stage beyond



A fieldtrip to the Hellshire Hills opened the International Symposium on the Jamaican Iguana. **Dr. George Proctor** (second from left) discusses the Hills' unique tropical dry forest with some of the participants.

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Jamaican Iguana. This programme will be a joint effort of the local Hope Zoo and several renowned Zoological Parks in the USA. **Dr. Ulie Seal** from IUCN and **Dr. Robert Chippley** from the Nature Conservancy addressed the threats to biodiversity within an international framework. As an important message to Jamaica, **Dr. Chippley** ranked the unique plant and animal community of the Hellshire Hills as one of the most significant neotropical dry forests. The opening session closed with the revealing of a Jamaican Iguana poster by **Ms. Rhema Kerr**, Curator of the Hope Zoo, and a vote of thanks by **Dr. Elaine Fisher**, Director of the Natural History Division, Institute of Jamaica.

During the workshop, the local and foreign experts discussed the threats to the Jamaican Iguana and its habitat. A computer model developed by IUCN was employed to assess probabilities of the species' survival under varying as-

which recovery appears impossible.

The last day of the workshop was dedicated to all West Indian iguanas. A total of 11 species occur in the region which thus represents a major centre of evolution for this group of giant lizards. Many of these iguanas are seriously threatened with the Jamaican species being most critically endangered. The participants decided to form an iguana interest group which will assist and lobby for conservation efforts at both local and international levels.

All participants felt that the conference was highly successful. A final report is now in preparation which will further strengthen the commitment for the conservation of the Jamaican Iguana. The final test of the conference's success, however, has still to come: the securement of funds to support the urgently needed research and conservation efforts.

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