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### **Lounging Lizard Wear**

#### **Nike designs vests for iguanas to test at the Sedgwick County Zoo.**

By Jenny Upchrch

Nike is putting its trademark swoosh on the rarest lizards in the world. And the first reptile down the runway Thursday was at the Sedgwick County Zoo.

How did Nike get into lizard ready-to-wear?

The zoo's reptiles curator, Karen Graham, wrote a letter asking the company to, just do it, please. And she volunteered her three iguanas, among only 23 at six U.S. zoos, to test vests designed to hold radio tracking devices.

Fewer than 100 Jamaican iguanas remain in a 38-square mile area on the Caribbean island. To help boost their numbers, baby iguanas are collected as they hatch and raised at the zoo in Jamaica.

Once they're too big for rats or mongooses to eat, the iguanas are released. Researchers track them with battery-operated radio transmitters. But the rocky, thorny underbrush in the appropriately named Hellshire Hills was, well, hell on anything holding the transmitters.

"Our homemade vests didn't hold up," said Graham, who has been to Jamaica twice to help study and release iguanas. "Other vests were stronger but didn't fit the iguanas well."

She thought Nike's All Conditions Gear, its outdoor/hiking products line, could design a vest tough enough to outlast the 18-month batteries on the transmitters.

Damon Clegg, a designer at Nike's Oregon headquarters, says the vests were more of a footwear challenge than a clothing one.

"These little creatures are low to the ground, and there's lots of abrasion," he said Thursday.

Fabric needed to be durable but breathable, so the cold-blooded reptiles could gain and lose heat; and it needed to stretch since the iguanas can grow to 6 feet in length.

The final version has a stretchable, breathable mesh upper and a polyurethane coated leather belly portion. And it has Nike's All Conditions Gear logo.

"We probably went through six rounds of prototypes," Clegg said. "Karen calls this the Armani version because it's got real nice piping around the armholes."

Fourteen vests arrived this week at the zoo in west Wichita. The zoo's three iguanas, who won't be released, will wear them constantly so Graham can test the vest's fit and durability.

But if you go to the zoo, don't expect to see Edith, Ida, and the unnamed male strutting their stuff. The life of a fashion-conscious iguana is stressful enough. To encourage the lizards to breed, zookeepers don't stress the lizards by putting them on view.

If the vests pass the tests, Nike will produce about 100 for the Jamaican release program at no charge.

No, it's not a product Nike thinks could have commercial applications, Clegg said with a chuckle.

"We have some knowledge and ability, and I thought that it would be nice to pass along. It's been a real fun project," he said.

To learn more:

The Jamaican iguanas are not on display at the Sedgwick County Zoo. The zoo created a Web site about them, and 18 other West Indian iguanas, at:

<http://www.scz.org/iguana/meet.html> . To see an iguana wearing an earlier vest in the wild, access: <http://www.scz.org/iguana/images/release2.jpg> .