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As might be expected when three large species with generally similar lifestyles occupy such a small area, they must in some way partition the severely limited resources in order to avoid direct and mutually disoperative competition. In fact, these iguanas are largely restricted to distinctly different habitats. Green Iguanas (*I. iguana*) inhabit the remaining upland forests, where continuous canopies allow them to remain inconspicuously hidden in the treetops — except when the females are forced to descend in order to nest. Black Iguanas (*C. similis*), referred to locally as “Highlanders,” favor more open areas, occupying forest edges and rockpiles, fallen logs, or isolated trees in otherwise open fields. These lizards are quite capable of effectively utilizing heavily disturbed areas and frequently coexist closely with humans (seeing individuals basking on rooftops or along heavily traveled roads is quite common). Unlike Green and Black iguanas, both of which have broad distributions throughout the entire Neotropics and Middle America, respectively, the Utila Iguana (*C. bakeri*) is found only on Utila. Possibly because of their smaller size or more retiring nature, Utila Iguanas are found only in the apparently inhospitable mangrove swamps, where they fare quite well on a diet of mangrove leaves supplemented with small fiddler crabs. Known to the local Utilians as “Swampers,” Utila Iguanas do face a problem when nesting seasons roll around. Since the swamps are regularly inundated and the soils totally saturated with brackish water, they are unsuitable nesting sites. Instead, females must migrate considerable distances to one of the relatively few sandy beaches (only 38 ha on the entire island) to lay their eggs. Interestingly, when they return, they reestablish residence in the very same mangrove they left some weeks before. How they find their homes with such inerring accuracy despite the bewildering similarities of one tangled tree and the next is one of several mysteries surrounding this ecologically unique iguana.

* Upon recommendations by the IIS, consideration is being given to holding hatchlings until two years of age, when chances for survival are greatly enhanced.

Brief History of the Iguana Station

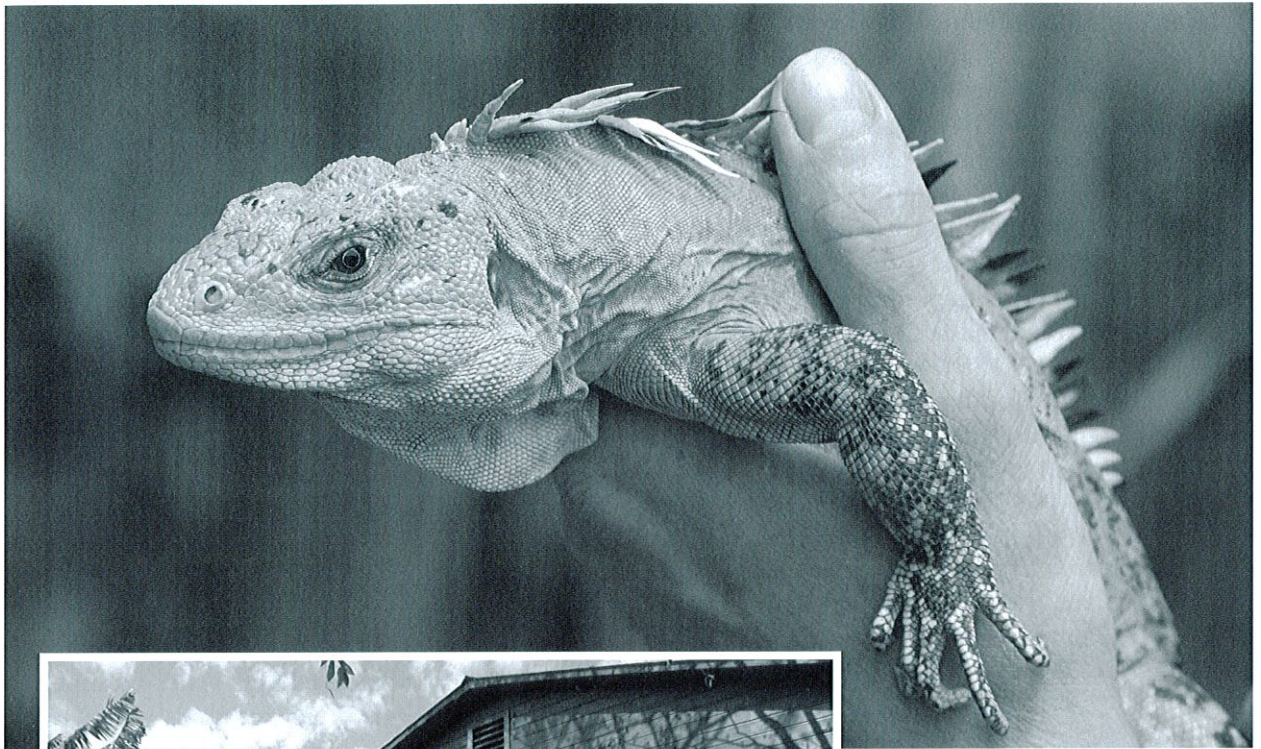
Karsten Gees, Director

Utila Iguana Research and Breeding Station

The story began with an American Consul at the end of the 19th century. While visiting Utila, he collected some iguanas in the mangroves and sent them to the Washington Zoo. The zoo director, a Mr. Baker, sent these animals to the famous herpetologist, Leonhard Stejneger at the National Museum of Natural History in Washington, DC. Stejneger determined that the iguanas of Utila were a new species, and he described them formally in 1901, giving the Utila “Swamper” the name *Ctenosaura bakeri* in honor of Mr. Baker.

The herpetological world essentially forgot about *C. bakeri* until 1994, when a group of German researchers led by Gunther Köhler rediscovered these iguanas in the wild. In the following years, the group determined that *C. bakeri* is endemic to Utila and that its habitat is restricted to the mangrove swamps, with a total area of only 8 km² (see article on p. 28). Furthermore, they found that *C. bakeri* is threatened by hunting and by the unchecked development of infrastructure for the burgeoning tourist industry. Thus was born the Conservation and Research Project Utila Iguana. In 1997, a breeding program was established to support the wild population. Half of the hatchlings each year are released immediately to the wild while the others are reared at the Station for one year* before release. Concurrently, an ongoing research program was initiated for the study of the distribution and behavior of the Utila Iguana. The Zoologische Gesellschaft Frankfurt and the Senckenbergische Naturforschende Gesellschaft Frankfurt have been the principal supporters of the project and enabled the original acquisition of property and construction of the Iguana Research and Breeding Station in 1998.

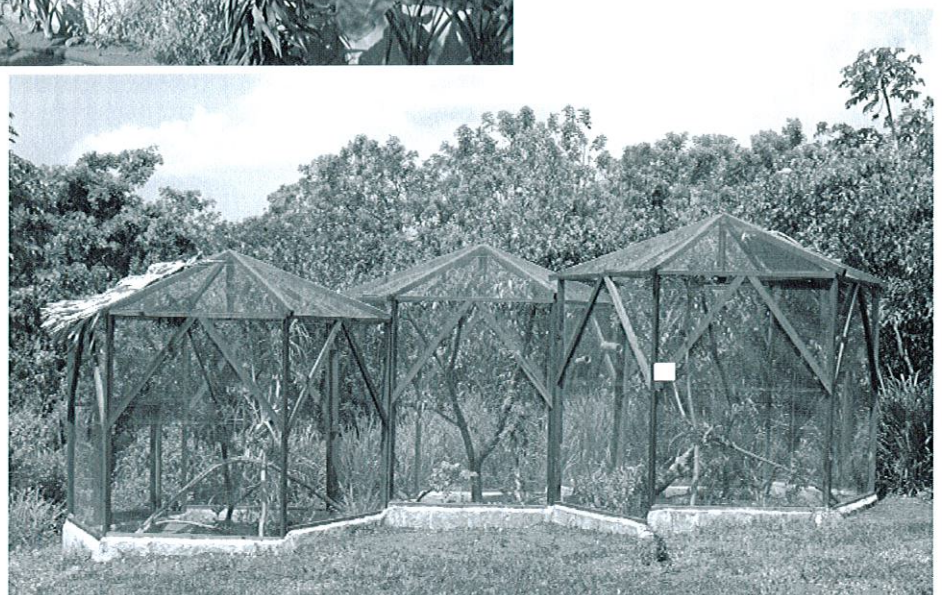
The Iguana Station continues to grow and improve. It now has a visitors' center with exhibits focusing on *C. bakeri*, but also addressing the other reptiles and amphibians of Utila. Spacious cages have been constructed on the grounds for rearing hatchling Swampers, along with cages for Green Iguanas (*Iguana iguana*) and Black Iguanas (*C. similis*), both species of which also are native to Utila. About 100 tourists visit the Station each month.



An adult male "Swamper" (*Ctenosaura bakeri*) at the Research Station. *Photograph by John Binns.*



Main building at the Iguana Research and Breeding Station. *Photograph by John Binns.*



Outdoor enclosures for head-starting iguanas. *Photograph by John Binns.*

In addition to maintaining the breeding and research program, volunteers from all over the world provide environmental education programs for the local schools. In cooperation with BICA (Bay Island Conservation Organization), the other NGO on Utila, all grades have been covered this year. The goal of this outreach program is to enhance the sensibility and feelings of responsibility of the children for their island home, with its phenomenally abundant natural treasures. Last but not least, the Iguana Station is working with the IIS and other organizations to acquire funding for the purchase of beach properties that serve as nesting sites for *C. bakeri* and which are, at the moment, the most critically threatened portions of their habitat (see related story on p. 28).



Organizations that have supported the Conservation Project Utila Iguana: the Senckenbergische Naturforschende Gesellschaft Frankfurt, the International Reptile Conservation Foundation, and the Zoologische Gesellschaft Frankfurt.

John Binns, representing the International Reptile Conservation Foundation (IRCF), installed about \$2,500 in computer and network equipment in the lab at the Utila Iguana Research and Breeding Station. This replaced aged equipment and dramatically improved the Station's ability to communicate while also aiding in its research efforts.

David Nieves and Rick Morrow, representing the Kansas City Herpetological Society (KCHS), donated about \$500 worth of equipment including two electronic scales (full-size for the lab and a miniature version for use in the field), a Gentle Giant Tong[®], and a selection of tools including forceps, hemostats, dosing needles, and probes. All of these items were purchased from Midwest Tongs (www.tongs.com).

The Zen of Swamping — Adventures on Utila

AJ Gutman

What do you do when you're dripping with sweat and knee-deep in fetid swamp mud that threatens to yank the boots off your feet with every step? You scramble to capture another tiny Fiddler Crab to stuff in your cargo pockets (to feed to the young Utila Iguanas in the rearing cages at the Iguana Research and Breeding Station). Eyes alert for an endangered "Swamper" (as the endemic mangrove swamp-dwelling iguana, *Ctenosaura bakeri*, is known locally), you reach for the hand of a smiling friend as you climb onto a sturdy mangrove root, ready to lend a hand to the next person stuck in the mud. As muddy hands meet, you both burst into laughter, repeating "smacks of adventure!"

Perhaps not everyone would answer that question in quite the same manner, but all of the participants in the 2003 International Iguana Society conference on Utila definitely would. Seventeen IIS members and assorted other conservation aficionados from around the world spent a week together on Utila, a small island off the northern coast of Honduras. Much of that time was devoted to trekking through wet and muddy Swamper habitat.

Our hosts included personnel from the Station on the island and Dr. Gunther Köhler, Director of the Conservation Project Utila Iguana (CPUI), from Frankfurt, Germany. I first read about Dr. Köhler and his research and conservation work on



Only true iguana lovers (i.e., IIS members) could have this much fun on a stomp through the swamp. *Photograph by John Binns.*