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Blues back from brink

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(CNS): The unique Grand Cayman blue iguanas have taken an official step back from the brink of extinction in the updated International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) threatened species list. As a result of the work of Fred Burton and the National Trust's Blue Iguana Recovery Programme the indigenous iguana which was "critically endangered" is now listed as "endangered." Burton explained that endangered was probably as good as it would ever get for the iconic creatures because of the incredible pressures on their environment but he said that the programme was very close to reaching the goal of 1000 'blues' living in the wild.

While there are still many other conservation issues and significant numbers of species of flora and fauna in the Cayman Islands under threat, Burton's work demonstrates the possibilities when a commitment is made to conservation.

Although the Grand Cayman Blue Iguana (*Cyclura lewisi*) is protected by law and there are now reserves set aside for them to live and breed in the wild, with no national conservation law on Cayman's statute books, the habitat which the blues need to survive outside of the reserves is not protected. As a result 'blues' are unlikely to ever go beyond endangered.

"In IUCN Red List terms, Endangered is the best we can ever hope for as far as the Grand Cayman Blue Iguana is concerned," said Burton, who aside from running the National Trust's 'blues' conservation programme is also a member of the IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) Iguana Specialist Group. "Human impacts on Grand Cayman are now so extensive that there just isn't scope for these iguanas to regain numbers in the tens of thousands. However, we are confident that we will achieve our long term goal of restoring at least 1,000 Grand Cayman Blue Iguanans to the wild," he added.

The iguana is also threatened by free-roaming dogs and cats as well as by habitat loss so conservation must continue, Burton warned.

The latest update to The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species was released in India this week with the blues revised status. In 2002 there were only about 10 to 25 of them in the wild and as a result the iguana was listed as Critically Endangered but the conservation efforts have paid off and there are now 750 individuals living in the east of the island, resulting in the status change.

The recovery programme involves habitat protection, captive breeding and release, research and monitoring, as well as education and outreach, and is an example of how conservation can work successfully.

Jean-Christophe Vié, Deputy Directory, IUCN Global Species Programme said the recovery programme deserves congratulations as the downlisting of the Grand Cayman Blue Iguana is a fantastic achievement. "When people with dedication and good knowledge are supported, success can be expected and this news will boost the morale of people around the world who are working hard to improve the status of other species," he said.

View the new Red List assessment of the blue iguanas [here](#).

<http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/44275/0>

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[Fred Burton should be on the](#)

Submitted by REAL WORLD (not verified) on Sat, 10/20/2012 - 18:31.

Fred Burton should be on the Queen's New Year's, or Birthday, Honours list for a "serious" level