

## Charcoal-burning industry affects J'can iguana survival

**A**ccording to a report on German news site Deutsche Welle, the rare Jamaican iguana is fighting for survival as the illegal charcoal-burning industry in Jamaica destroys its last remaining habitat.

The article reports that access to the most remote parts of the Hellshire Hills region, outside of Jamaica's capital Kingston, is still only possible by boat.

But, with its crystal clear coastal waters and old forests, the area is starting to become a target for housing developments.

Then, there is a unique industry scarring the landscape as well.

"As the wave of destruction moves inwards, the last remaining habitat for local animals is a big tree right in the middle of the peninsula," says Byron Wilson, a lecturer and conservation ecologist at the University of the West Indies.

In this area, a number of endemic animals still live and prosper but, according to Wilson, it's the fate of the Jamaican iguana that is of real concern.

The habitat of the species once

covered much of the southern belt of Jamaica including Kingston but, as the landscape changed, development brought non-native predators like the mongoose, as well as cats and dogs.

Measuring over one metre in length and with a distinctive ridge of frills down its back, the Jamaican iguana seemed to disappear in the late 1940s as it fled from introduced predators into remote parts of the island. It was rediscovered again in 1990. It's still in the top 100 most-threatened species in the world. The IUCN Red List, the international index for endangered animals, lists the species as 'critically endangered'.

The demand for wood as fuel means that the protected forests, where the iguana should be safe, are now also being cut down illegally.

The wood in Hellshire is ideal because it comes from rare tropical dry limestone forest. There's limited soil so the trees grow out of the rock and are small enough to be cut down with saws, or chain saws, by one person.