

From: TheBahamasWeekly.com

INTERNATIONAL

Stolen San Salvador Rock Iguanas Return Home to The Bahamas

By Bahamas High Commission in London

Jul 10, 2014 - 8:58:02 AM



Photos: Bahamas High Commission, London

London, England - A collaborative effort between The Bahamas government, UK Border Force and British Airways led to The Bahamas' 12 San Salvador Rock Iguanas being returned home on July 9th, 2014 at The Lynden Pindling International Airport. The rare Iguanas, part of an endangered species which comes under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), will travel onto San Salvador on Thursday where only a few hundred remain.

On February 3rd, the Iguanas were found by UK Border Force officers on at London Heathrow Airport Terminal 5; two women were charged in connection with the matter.

The Bahamas government and UK officials see the repatriation as a huge success as these critically endangered animals will now be returned to their indigenous habitat.

Minister of The Environment and Housing, The Honourable Kenred Dorsett stated that the Iguanas not only play a critical role in the ecosystem services they provide but that they are vital to maintaining biological diversity and important elements in providing sustainable livelihoods in rural communities in the islands they live on in The Bahamas.

“The Bahamas is extremely pleased that in this particular case, it was a combination of happenstance and a coordinated effort between all countries involved, including the country from which the animal is taken from the wild, the countries through which they are taken and the destination countries where they are sold, is essential to address the problem using all tools including international wildlife conservation agreements such as CITES and enforcement agencies, such as Interpol.

We thank the government of the UK for their excellent cooperation as they have gone to extraordinary lengths to ensure the successful repatriation of these animals and we look forward to working with other countries as well as local, regional and international NGOs to address the challenge,” said Minister Dorsett.

Head of the Border Force CITES team Grant Miller stated that Border Force takes its role in preventing illegal wildlife trafficking very seriously. Mr. Miller explained that the rarity of this particular species made this an incredibly significant seizure as the Iguanas are critically endangered and in effect priceless.

“We were in contact with the Bahamas High Commission in London from an early stage and straight away it became clear that getting them back to their natural habitat was going to be really important. Arranging the repatriation of such rare animals is complex and sensitive, but I’m delighted that through our close work with the Bahamian authorities, British Airways, the City of London Corporation and other partners we have succeeded.

Not only has Border Force made sure that the criminals responsible for smuggling these animals are behind bars, we’re also proud to have been able to play a part in safeguarding the future of this iconic species,” stated Mr. Miller.

Partners at British Airways came on board in this success story by transporting Iguanas to The Bahamas in an effort to return them to their habitat. The British Airways flight BA253 to Nassau was flown by Captain Al Matthews who said, “Naturally, all of our customers are special, but despite having flown Prime Ministers and members of the Royal Family, these iguanas are by far the most unusual. You don't expect to share your cabin with incredibly rare reptiles. However, I can confirm all the iguanas were securely stored throughout the flight and had the most comfortable journey possible.”

On the British Airways BA253 flight, the Iguanas were accompanied by two UK Border Force officers from London Heathrow Airport to Nassau. At The Lynden Pindling International Airport, the Iguanas were received by The Bahamas Environmental Science and Technology Commission along with environmental stakeholders including The Bahamas National Trust and The Nature Conservancy. The BBC accompanied the Iguanas and will be completing a documentary on the journey of the Iguanas and why these Bahamian animals are so special to the ecosystem of The Bahamas.