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ABQ zoo enlisted to help rare iguana species

By [Maggie Shepard / Journal Staff Writer](#)

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Cerulean, a 7-year-old male Grand Cayman blue iguana, is seen here in his enclosure Monday. He joined the ABQ BioPark as part of the species' population recovery program. The BioPark is one of only 15 facilities to house blue iguanas. (Roberto E. Rosales/Albuquerque Journal)

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — When Cerulean gets riled up, in anger or romance, his cool, scaly skin and the spikes along his thick neck turn blue.

The 7-year-old Grand Cayman blue iguana joined his mate at the ABQ BioPark zoo last week.

Conservationists and staffers at the BioPark hope Cerulean and his younger female blue iguana companion make babies during their time at the Reptile House at the zoo, because their species is considered “highly endangered,” said Richard Reams, curator of herpetology at the BioPark.

The BioPark was selected to help with the blue iguana recovery program and received the female and two other males at the end of the summer, said Reams, who sits on the international Species Survival Plan board, which decides which facilities should have which creatures to maximize a species' survival chances.

Reams said he is happy the BioPark was chosen as one of only 15 facilities to help maintain the blue iguana population.

“Not all zoos can hold them, and we had space here,” Reams said.

So the zoo took two males and a female blue iguana during the summer, and Cerulean arrived last month. He was introduced to the female last week, and they got along splendidly, Reams said.

The other two males are not on display.

Conservationists in the blue iguana homeland, Grand Cayman Island in the Cayman Islands, reported only 15 of the creatures alive in the wild in 2003 because of loss of habitat, attacks by dogs and cats, and hits by automobiles. That number, Reams said, is up to about 750 this year.

The zoo-based population program is intended to be a backup in case the natural population on Grand Cayman Island suffers again, Reams said.

Meanwhile, Reams and his team are treating the herbivorous animals to their favorite treats: grapes. “They chase after them,” Reams said.

And when they are resting in their cage on display with the zoo’s 500 or so other reptiles, Cerulean likes to perch on rocks high up in their room, while his mate hides behind the bushes.



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