

'Babies' in the wild

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Thursday, March 16, 2017

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Pardeep Kumar of Kula Wild Adventure Park releases an iguana back into the wild. Picture: SUPPLIED

PARDEEP Kumar watched in silence as representatives from civil society and government organizations take turns to release iguanas bred in captivity back on Monuriki Island. Soon it would be his turn.



As he waited patiently he could not help but feel a little sad about letting go of something that was a big part of his life for almost a decade.

For seven years Mr Kumar raised crested iguanas from Monuriki Island at Kula Wild Adventure Park. Last week he witnessed their reintroduction into the wild.

Watching them grow, ensuring they were healthy and seeing to it that they were fed on a daily basis was part of his routine.

While many visitors to the park would consider it just another job, Mr Kumar played a far more important role. The iguanas from Monuriki Island were on the verge of extinction. His role was to prevent that happening.

In 2010, he was introduced to 20 iguanas from Monuriki Island which he was to help breed.

With a little learning from park director Ramesh Chand, Mr Kumar took on the role wholeheartedly referring to the iguanas as "my babies".

"I looked after iguanas before but this time around things were different because they were a dying race," he said.

"The first rule about looking after the iguanas is never put two of the same gender in the one cage. They tend to fight a lot.

"I put two iguanas, male and female in a cage and once I know they were getting along I put in box filled with mud. For several days we have to ensure the mud was moist. This is where the female iguana will lay eggs — so the mud has to be soft.

He said once the iguanas delivered the eggs he would then take the eggs, weigh them and place them on dishes, cover the eggs with plastic and wait for the eggs to hatch.

Once the eggs hatched, he would then prepare the cages and continue to feed them until they could support themselves.

"For the babies, I used to give them little servings of ripe pawpaw and some leaves. If I find that they are a bit ill and are not eating I would make some pawpaw juice, put it in a syringe and give it to them.

"From time to time I would put them in the sun, they need the sun every now and again."

Mr Kumar has been an employee for Kula Wild Adventure Park for 14 years. He said his wife and 10-year-old

daughter understood his passion for animals.

"They understand that they are also my family."

On Monuriki Island Mr Kumar said he was happy the iguanas were reintroduced into the wild. He was also happy he was part of one of the Pacific's successful projects where creatures bred in captivity were reintroduced into the wild.

"My house is empty now but my babies will be happy."

- [Back to top](#)