

Rapid response to the discovery of an invasive Green Iguana on St. Eustatius

On February 16, this year, an invasive Green Iguana (*Iguana iguana*) was discovered in a residential area on the island of St Eustatius by STENAPA, the National Parks Foundation. It is not known whether the animal was brought to the island as a pet and escaped or was released, or whether it arrived via cargo ship or other means. However, the discovery of this adult female individual forms a great potential threat to the endangered Lesser Antillean Iguana (*Iguana delicatissima*), which is native to the island and endemic to the Lesser Antilles. The invasive Green iguana, is causing ecological havoc on other islands in the region as it hybridizes readily with the Lesser Antillean Iguana and is also a powerful competitor for the more docile Lesser Antillean species.

The Green Iguana is already responsible for the extirpation of the Lesser Antillean Iguana on St. Maarten and many other Caribbean islands. It can easily be distinguished from the Lesser Antillean Iguana by its black bands on the tail, longer spines along the back, markings on the body, and large scale below the ear (see photo). In contrast, the Lesser Antillean Iguana which may either be green (female) or grey (male), lacks bands on the tail.

While it is very difficult to eradicate invasive reptiles once they become established on islands, if the species is caught early enough it should be possible to prevent its spread and establishment on St. Eustatius. Thanks to decisive action by the Ministry of Economic Affairs of The Netherlands, local authorities and several collaborating parties have been able to develop and implement a rapid response plan. Most importantly this plan includes three week-long “search and destroy” missions, one of which has just been completed.

A newspaper article and radio and TV presentations were used to involve the public at an early stage. The first search mission targeted an area of 200 radius around the exact location where the Green Iguana specimen was found, as well as the harbor area. Fortunately, and notwithstanding broad support and several helpful tips by the island residents, no more Green Iguanas have yet been found. Two more missions are planned for later this year. All material collected will be sent to international experts for various supporting analyses.

For further information or questions or suggestions please contact: Dr. Adolphe Debrot, project leader, IMARES Wageningen University and Research, The Netherlands (dolphi.debrot@wur.nl)

Invasive Green Iguana



Lesser-Antillean Iguana



Large round scale on chin.



Dark Bands!

How to distinguish the invasive Green Iguana from the endangered Lesser-Antillean Iguana