IUCN SSC Iguana Specialist Group

Conservation Success Stories

Increased protection for the Critically Endangered Jamaican Rock Iguana (*Cyclura collie*)

IUCN SSC
Species Survival Commission

Increased protection for the Critically Endangered Jamaican Rock Iguana (*Cyclura collie*)

IMPLEMENTED BY

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Over 800 Jamaican Iguanas have been reintroduced to the wild

THREAT ADDRESSED

The main threat to this species is invasive alien species, primarily cats and mongoose, which has been addressed through increased control measures within the core protected area.

TARGET

Execute actions outlined in the action plans. (T-011)

SUCCESS LEVEL

Highly successful

Success category:

Habitat expansion and habitat quality improvement

Success subcategory:

New policies implemented

Success story:

Caribbean Rock Iguanas are the most imperilled group of lizards in the world, yet they play a vital role in the ecosystems in which they live, by maintaining plant diversity. Rock Iguanas help disperse seeds as they are the largest native vertebrates in their island ecosystems, helping to maintain the forest and aid in the resilience of the areas in which they thrive. The endemic Jamaican Rock Iguana is arguably the most endangered iguana in the world, listed as Critically Endangered (CR) on the IUCN Red List. Considered extinct by the 1940s due to habitat loss and invasive species (IAS), the Jamaican Rock Iguana was rediscovered in 1990 in the dry forest of Hellshire Hills. This event galvanised conservationists to launch a recovery effort that ensured the iguana's survival and benefited other native species in the area.

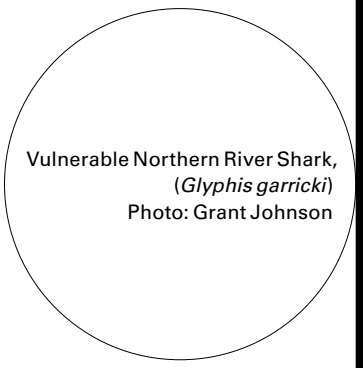
Early surveys identified two communal nesting areas used by the relictual iguana population. Intensive monitoring during 1991–92 confirmed only six adult females using these soil-filled depressions. In 1993, a Population and Habitat Viability Assessment provided the blueprint for interventions, including nest protection, habitat and iguana monitoring, and a head-start program at Hope Zoo, Kingston. By 1997, IAS control began in the core iguana zone, expanding to about 0.5 km^2 by 2013. Continued IAS incursions led to an in-depth evaluation in 2016 to refine control strategies. Evaluations were conducted using a thorough camera traps grid and by tracking of both invasive species and iguanas to better understand movement and range. In 2021, a buffer zone was added, doubling the protected area and reducing IAS entry into the core iguana zone. Improved control protocols have increased natural recruitment and hatchling survival, and caused an increase in the populations of native species like the Jamaican Hutia and Boa.

While improving protection of the wild population, the head-start facility, where hatchling iguanas are brought from the wild to grow until they can better defend themselves against IAS was expanded to promote greater turnover and increased reintroductions. The facility can now house 150% more hatchlings, and time in captivity has been cut in half. Vital to these improvements are regular assessments to ensure the captive population is healthy and determine which individuals are ready for release back to the wild. Over 800 Jamaican Iguanas have been reintroduced, and the programme is on track to reach the goal of releasing the 1000th iguana by 2026. ■ **STESHA A. PASACHNIK**

REASONS FOR SUCCESS

This programme's success stems from over 30 years of collaboration among dedicated individuals and organisations, ensuring the Jamaican Rock Iguana thrives. Evaluating conservation actions supports adaptive management. Field rangers implement protection while scientific studies guide realistic growth. Expanding the head-start facility and studying released iguanas ensures safe progress. Outreach and education strengthen local support and capacity.

ISG
iguana specialist group



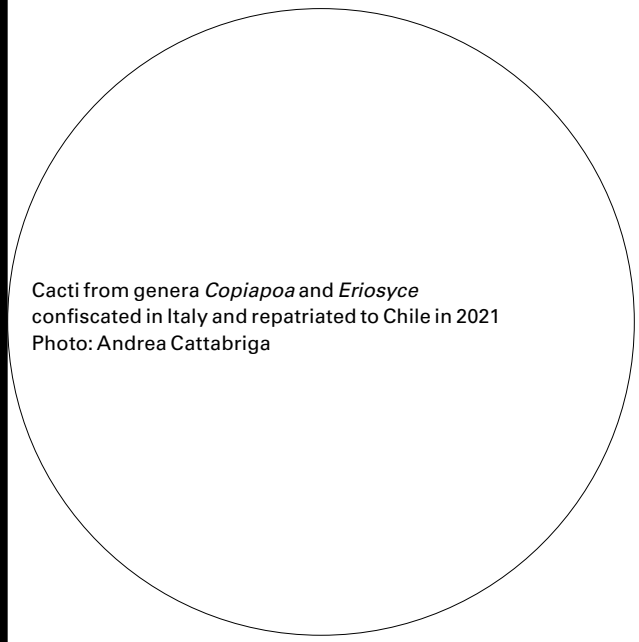
Vulnerable Northern River Shark, (*Glyphis garricki*)
Photo: Grant Johnson

Interviews about human wildlife interactions with local inhabitants
Photo: Kiran Thapa Magar

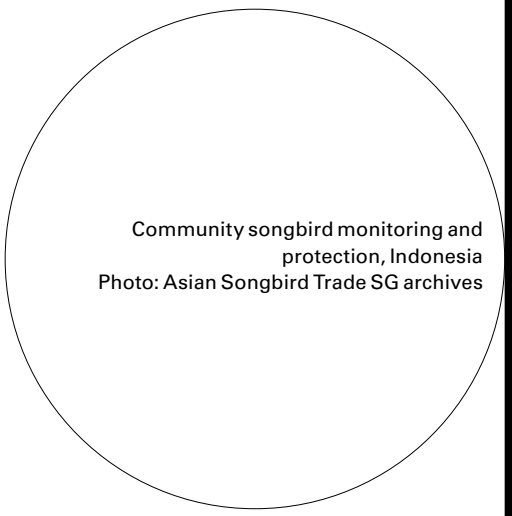
Vicuña management by Cooperativa Agroganadera de Santa Catalina and Comunidad Aborigen Atu Shapi de Morritos. Santa Catalina, Jujuy Province, Argentina
Photo: Yanina Arzamendia

Story photo credits

A hatchling Jamaican Iguana (*Cyclura collie*) surviving in the wild
Photo: Stesha A. Pasachnik



Cacti from genera *Copiapoa* and *Eriosyce* confiscated in Italy and repatriated to Chile in 2021
Photo: Andrea Cattabriga



Community songbird monitoring and protection, Indonesia
Photo: Asian Songbird Trade SG archives

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