



Green or Common Iguana

Taxonomy

Order: Squamata

Family: Iguanidae

Species: *Iguana iguana* (Linnaeus, 1758)

Synonyms: *Lacerta iguana* Linnaeus, 1758

Summary

Native to northern Mexico, south through Central America, tropical South America and on some Caribbean islands; it has gradually expanded its range, reaching Anguilla in 1995 when a raft of vegetation carrying 15 iguanas landed in the aftermath of two hurricanes. Iguanas can be a nuisance, but also pose an ecological threat where they are invasive.



Green Iguana in Cayman Islands © C. Malumphy

Biology

Green iguanas are primarily herbivorous, feeding on leaves, flowers and fruits of various broad-leaved herbs, shrubs and trees. They are opportunistic and may also eat small animal prey, like insects and snails. They are diurnal, arboreal, and often found near water. Iguanas may become abundant in areas with suitable cover and where food is readily available. Females can reproduce from 2 years of age and lay an average of 35 eggs per clutch. They offer no parental protection. Nesting typically occurs in March and April, with eggs hatching by August. Hatchlings are bright green, but adults tend to be greyish green to black in colour and males may develop orange coloration during the peak of breeding. In captivity they can live for over 15 years.

Distribution in Caribbean

Native to Grenada, Aruba, Curaçao, Trinidad and Tobago, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, and Útila. Introduced to Anguilla, Grand Cayman, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. TCI: not considered established although a few individuals have been observed on Providenciales.

Pathway of Entry

Natural dispersal: rafting between islands on vegetation/uprooted trees during extreme weather. Intentional/accidental dispersal: escaped or deliberately released pets.

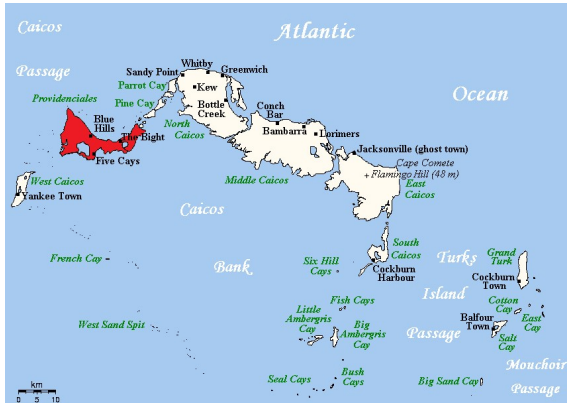
Impact

Iguanas damage residential and commercial landscape vegetation and their burrows erode and collapse foundations, seawalls, and other structures. In Florida the invasive iguanas eat the shoots and leaves of the grey nickerbean, *Caesalpinia bonduc*, an important host plant for the critically endangered Miami blue butterfly, *Cyclargus thomasi bethunbakeri*. On Guadeloupe they have almost totally replaced the native *Iguana delicatissima* through inbreeding and competition for food. As is the case with other reptiles, green iguanas can also transmit the infectious bacterium *Salmonella* to humans through contact with water or surfaces contaminated by their faeces.

Further Information:

https://animaldiversity.org/accounts/Iguana_iguana/

[Booklet: How to Tell the Difference Between Native Rock Iguanas and Invasive Green Iguanas](#)



Distribution of Green Iguana in TCI



Young Green Iguana with banded tail, Caymans © C. Malumphy



Side profile of Green Iguana head showing the distinctive subtympnic shield below the ear, Caymans © C. Malumphy



Rock Iguana, Turks and Caicos © C. Malumphy

Description

Green iguanas are large lizards, 17-25 cm upon hatching but can grow to over 2 m. Although called ‘green iguanas’, they are variable in colour, appearing blotchy or banded often with brown or black colouration. Hatchling and young green iguanas usually have bright green coloration. Colour may also vary based upon an iguana’s mood, temperature, health, or social status. Males exhibit the most variable colouration, sometimes turning orange or pink.

They have a distinctive pendulous dewlap under the throat, a dorsal crest made up of dermal spines that run from the mid neck to the tail base, and a long tapering tail. The dewlap and dorsal spines are more developed in adult males than females. Extensions of the hyoid bones stiffen and support the leading edge of this structure, which is used in territorial defence or when the animal is frightened.

This fleshy structure also serves in heat absorption and dissipation when it is extended.

Similar Species

The Turks and Caicos Rock Iguana (*Cyclura carinata*) is endemic to Turks and Caicos Islands. This critically endangered species is much smaller than the green iguana, males can grow to 80 cm in length and females 65 cm. The dorsal crest spines are significantly shorter than those of and back spines only exceeding 5 mm length in males.

The rock iguana tails are ribbed with rows of scales, whereas green iguanas have smooth tails with dark banding. Adult and juvenile green iguana’s have a distinctive large round scale below the ear called the ‘subtympnic shield’, rock iguanas lack this character.