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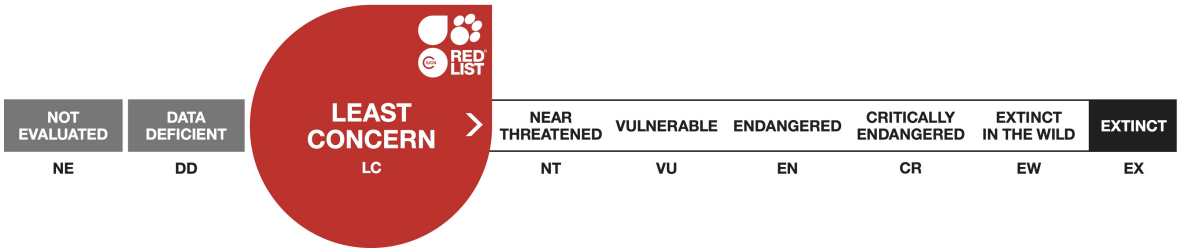
Iguana iguana, Common Green Iguana

Assessment by: Bock, B. *et al.*



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Taxonomy

Kingdom	Phylum	Class	Order	Family
Animalia	Chordata	Reptilia	Squamata	Iguanidae

Taxon Name: *Iguana iguana* (Linnaeus, 1758)

Synonym(s):

- *Lacerta iguana* Linnaeus, 1758

Common Name(s):

- English: Common Green Iguana
- Spanish: Iguana

Assessment Information

Red List Category & Criteria: Least Concern ver 3.1

Year Published: 2018

Date Assessed: November 24, 2014

Justification:

Listed as Least Concern in view of its widespread distribution, large population, and invasive range expansion. The species also has healthy populations found in several protected areas across multiple countries.

Geographic Range

Range Description:

The Common Green Iguana occurs from northern México in Sinaloa and Veracruz south through Central America and the northeast of South America to Paraguay and southeastern Brazil. It also occurs naturally on numerous islands, including Isla de Maíz Grande (Nicaragua) and Islas San Andrés and Providencia (Colombia), Cozumel (Mexico), Útila and Roatán (Honduras), Guanaja, Corn Islands (Nicaragua), Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, Saba, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Trinidad, and Tobago. It also has been introduced to Anguilla, Antigua, The Bahamas, Barbuda, British Virgin Islands, Canary Islands, Cayman Islands, Fiji, Guadeloupe, Japan, Marie-Galante, Martinique, Puerto Rico, Sint Maarten/Saint-Martin, U.S. Virgin Islands, and the United States of America (Florida and Hawaii). It is suspected that non-native Common Green Iguanas have been also introduced to St. Lucia, Curaçao and Saba where they are threatening the native populations with hybridization.

Maximum elevation records for the species include 800 m in Michoacán, México, and 1,000 m in Colombia (Etheridge 1982), although in Colombia it is common to find individuals occurring at higher elevations (presumably released pets). However, successful reproduction has not been reported for elevations exceeding 1,000 m, with the exception of events where females nested in a compost pile at the Santa Fe Zoo in Medellín (G. Valencia pers. comm. 2017).

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Country Occurrence:

Native: Aruba; Belize; Bolivia, Plurinational States of; Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba (Saba, Sint Eustatius - Introduced); Brazil (Bahia); Colombia (Colombia (mainland), Colombian Caribbean Is.); Costa Rica; Curaçao; El Salvador; French Guiana; Grenada; Guatemala; Guyana; Honduras (Honduran Caribbean Is.); Mexico (Campeche, Yucatán); Montserrat; Nicaragua (Nicaragua (mainland), Nicaraguan Caribbean Is.); Panama; Paraguay; Peru; Saint Lucia; Saint Vincent and the Grenadines; Suriname; Trinidad and Tobago; Venezuela, Bolivarian Republic of (Venezuela (mainland), Venezuelan Antilles)

Introduced: Anguilla; Antigua and Barbuda; Bahamas; Cayman Islands; Dominican Republic; Fiji; Guadeloupe; Japan; Martinique; Puerto Rico (Puerto Rico (main island)); Saint Barthélemy; Saint Martin (French part); Sint Maarten (Dutch part); Spain (Canary Is.); United States (Florida, Hawaiian Is.); Virgin Islands, British; Virgin Islands, U.S.

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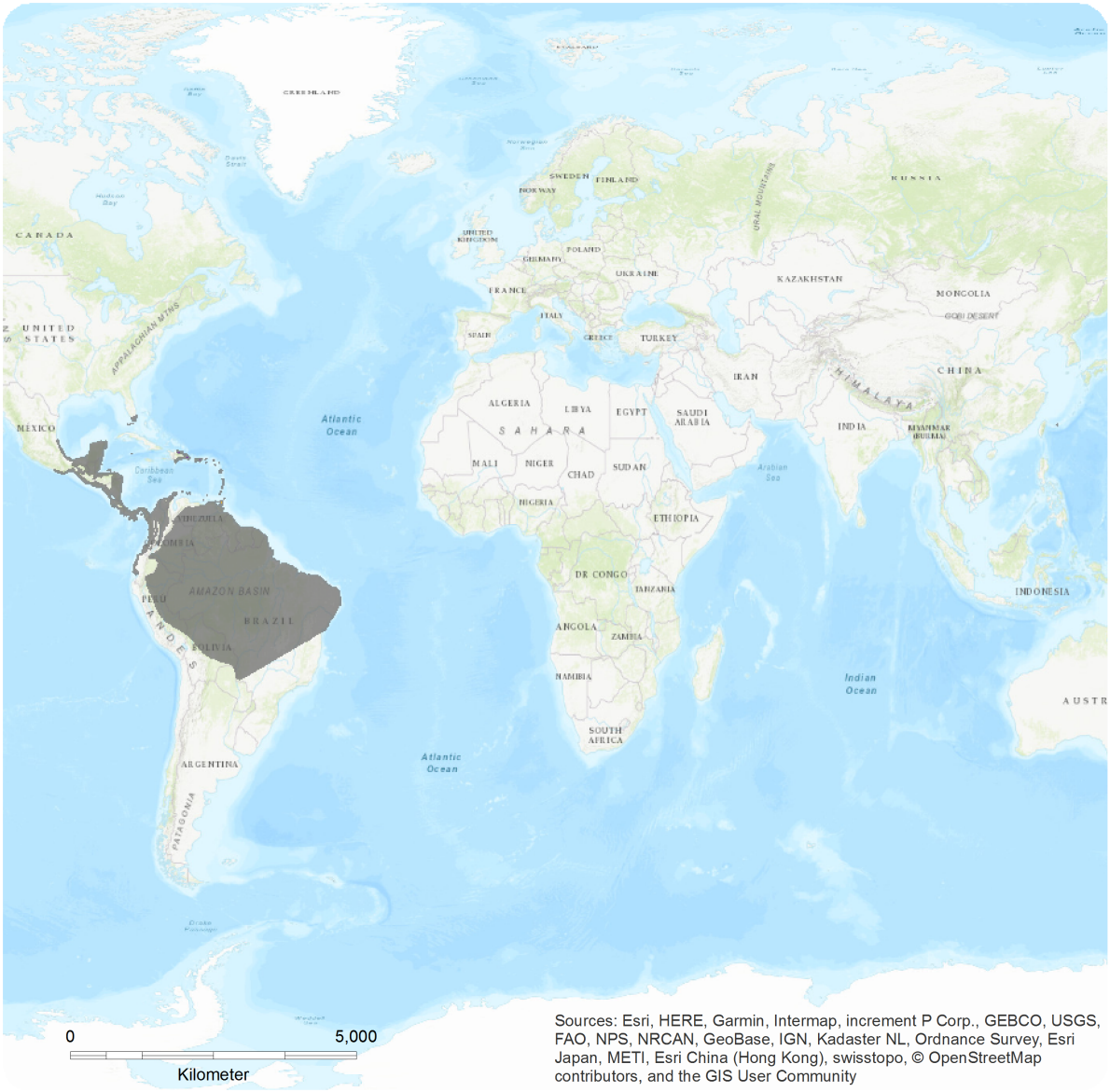
Distribution Map

Iguana iguana



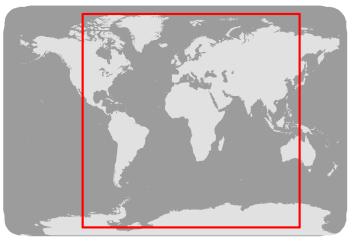
Sources: Esri, HERE, Garmin, Intermap, increment P Corp., GEBCO, USGS, FAO, NPS, NRCAN, GeoBase, IGN, Kadaster NL, Ordnance Survey, Esri Japan, METI, Esri China (Hong Kong), swisstopo, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community

Range

- Extant & Introduced (resident)
- Extant & Origin Uncertain (resident)
- Extant (resident)

Compiled by:

IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature)



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply any official endorsement, acceptance or opinion by IUCN.

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Population

This is a common species throughout most of its native range. Density estimates of natural populations are few and they range from a small number of individuals (1.2–3.7 iguanas/hectare, Muñoz *et al*. 2003) to several hundred per hectare (55–364 iguanas/hectare, Rodda 1992). Factors affecting iguana population density are habitat quality in terms of forage, predation pressure, and human exploitation pressure.

The Common Green Iguana has been introduced to over 20 countries globally. Invasive iguanas can exhibit rapid population growth and cause multimillion-dollar impacts on human infrastructure, agriculture, tourism, long-term food security, and biodiversity. In addition, cross-breeding with invasive Common Green Iguanas is now the main threat to the survival of Lesser Antillean Iguanas (*Iguana delicatissima*), has been documented with Rock Iguanas (*Cyclura* sp.), and may threaten other native Common Green Iguana populations. To date, no country has been able to eradicate this species once a breeding population has become established (IUCN SSC Iguana Specialist Group 2017).

Current Population Trend: Unknown

Habitat and Ecology **(see Appendix for additional information)**

The basic biology of Common Green Iguana has been studied in many portions of its wide range of distribution (México: Casas Andreu and Valenzuela López 1984, Alvarado *et al*. 1995; Honduras: Klein 1982; Costa Rica: Hirth 1963, Fitch and Henderson 1977, van Devender 1982; Panamá: Rand 1968a; Colombia: Müller 1968, 1972; Harris 1982; Muñoz *et al*. 2003; Venezuela: Rodda 1990, 1992; Rodda and Grajal 1990; Curaçao: Bakhuis 1982, van Marken Lichtenbelt and Albers 1993; Brazil: Ferreira *et al*. 2002, Campos and Desbiez 2013).

In contrast to the majority of iguana species, Common Green Iguanas have colonized humid tropical rainforests and can be exclusively arboreal, descending to the ground principally for nesting. This species also inhabits other types of habitat beyond tropical rainforest, including dry forest, gallery forest, savannahs with few trees, and even xeric islands with exclusively shrub vegetation.

Herbivory in Common Green Iguanas have been studied primarily from an ecophysiological point of view (Rand 1978; Iverson 1982; McBee and McBee 1982; van Devender 1982; Troyer 1984a, 1984b, 1984c; Govender *et al*. 2012), rather than from an ecological perspective (Benítez-Malvido *et al*. 2003). *Iguana iguana* is one of the few generalist herbivores of tropical forest canopies (Rand 1978), but even so, there is evidence they prefer to feed on certain plant species, not necessarily the most abundant (Rand *et al*. 1990, van Marken Lichtenbelt 1993, Lara-López and González-Romero 2002, Gómez-Carrasquillo *et al*. 2006, Campos *et al*. 2014). Consumption of snails and insects that occur on vegetation is probably incidental (Hirth 1963, Townsend *et al*. 2005). Consumption of dead animal flesh (Loftin and Tyson 1965, Arendt 1986, Anderson and Enge 2012) and faeces of conspecifics (Troyer 1984c) or other species (Campos *et al*. 2011) also has been documented. This behaviour may be related to maintaining an intestinal microbial fauna for fermentation of plant matter. Thermoregulation in juveniles and adults apparently also is tightly related to digestive processes (Wilhoft 1958; McGinnis and Brown 1966; Müller 1972; van Marken Lichtenbelt *et al*. 1993, 1997).

In areas where it has been documented, the phenology of this iguana's reproductive cycle is correlated

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tightly to the tropical wet and dry seasons. Males establish reproductive territories at the beginning of the dry season and females lay their eggs during a restricted period in the middle of this season, so that eggs begin hatching near the onset of the rainy season, a time when new leaves are abundant and easier for neonates to digest (Hirth 1963; Rand 1968a; Müller 1968, 1972; Fitch and Henderson 1977; Harris 1982; Klein 1982; van Devender 1982; Casas Andreu and Valenzuela López 1984; van Marken Lichtenbelt 1993; Muñoz *et al*. 2003). Because the climate varies seasonally between hemispheres, there is a clinal variation in the dates of mating, nesting, and hatching across the range of the species (Rand and Greene 1982).

There is wide variability in body sizes of females nesting for the first time (between 295–425 mm SVL) and these were estimated between two and eight years of age (Zug and Rand 1987). Clutch sizes vary directly with body size, ranging from nine to 71 eggs (Rand 1984, Alvarado *et al*. 1995) and, in the majority of populations that have been examined, mean clutch size is near 35 eggs (Hirth 1963, Müller 1972, Klein 1982, Casas Andreu and Valenzuela López 1984, Rand 1984, but see Bakuis 1982, Muñoz *et al*. 2003). To date, only one nest per female in only one annual nesting season has been documented, although Rand and Greene (1982) speculated that some populations near the equator, where there are two well-defined dry seasons each year, might exhibit two reproductive seasons each year with some females nesting in both. Although not well-studied, survival rates in Common Green Iguanas appear low for both juveniles and adults. One study found that up to 60% of all nesting females die each year (Bock *et al*. 1985) and another estimated hatchling survivorship at 65.2% for three weeks (Knapp and Abarca 2009).

Juvenile iguanas are preyed upon by crocodiles, caiman, and fish while swimming during their dispersal away from the nesting sites, and by other large lizards (for example, *Basiliscus* sp.), snakes, birds, and mammals when in their terrestrial habitat (van Devender 1982, Rivas *et al*. 1998, Knapp and Abarca 2009, Ribeiro Duarte 2010, Wehrle and Guzman 2012). Adults are vulnerable to attacks by snakes, raptors, owls, and a variety of mammals (Swanson 1950, Greene *et al*. 1978, Bessier *et al*. 2010). Adult females also are vulnerable to attack by crocodiles and caiman while swimming during migration to and from nesting sites and while they are excavating nest burrows (Dugan *et al*. 1981, Bock and Rand 1989, Platt *et al*. 2010).

Systems: Terrestrial

Use and Trade

Common Green Iguanas have been consumed by humans since pre-colonial times (Cooke *et al*. 2007), but the exploitation rates of wild populations in many areas are no longer sustainable (Fitch and Henderson 1977, Fitch *et al*. 1982). The meat and eggs of iguanas are protein sources for many human communities, and are also prized for their alleged medicinal or aphrodisiacal properties (Stephen *et al*. 2011). The use of iguana hides for producing leather is also common. Common Green iguanas are bred in captivity for export to the pet trade from several countries, with the highest numbers coming from El Salvador and Colombia. It is estimated that the legal international pet trade in juvenile iguanas from 2001 and 2008 was approximately 4.5 million individuals (Stephen *et al*. 2011).

Private citizens throughout the range of Common Green Iguanas often feed wild individuals in order to attract tourists and large tour groups to their businesses. Some people even keep small captive colonies for this purpose (Stephen *et al*. 2011).

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Threats (see Appendix for additional information)

The Common Green Iguana has been consumed by humans since pre-colonial times (Cooke *et al*. 2007), but the exploitation rates in many areas are no longer sustainable (Fitch and Henderson 1977, Fitch *et al*. 1982). The meat and eggs of iguanas are protein sources for many human communities, and are also prized for their alleged medicinal or aphrodisiacal properties (Stephen *et al*. 2011). The use of iguana hides for producing leather is also common. Iguanas are especially vulnerable to overharvest because adults are conspicuous during the mating season, females are easy to capture while nesting, and because in many areas these times of vulnerability coincide with the Catholic Lent period, stimulating consumption of iguanas because they are considered as "white meat". Müller (1972) mentioned a male-biased sex ratio skew among adult iguanas in northern Colombia, presumably because the harvest directed towards females at the nesting sites.

The international market in juvenile Common Green Iguanas as pets is enormous, and even though the majority of these individuals come from iguana farms, it is likely these businesses supplement their stocks with individuals from natural populations. It is estimated that the legal international pet trade in juvenile iguanas from 2001 and 2008 was approximately 4.5 million individuals (Stephen *et al*. 2011). The magnitude of the illegal iguana pet trade is more difficult to document.

Forest habitat for green iguanas is being lost throughout its native range through development and land conversion for grazing. Although they can inhabit disturbed areas, the reduction of forest to small, suitable patches or narrow strips results in severely lowered population numbers and leaves individuals highly vulnerable to poaching and predation. Farmers and hunters throughout Central America report sharp, local declines over the last several decades (C.L. Malone pers. comm. 2017).

Conservation Actions (see Appendix for additional information)

In addition to commercial iguana farms, there are multiple projects within the range of the Common Green Iguana where they are raised in captivity as part of a conservation strategy (headstarting). One of the most well-known of these projects is Fundación Pro Iguana Verde, initially under the administration of the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute in Panamá (Werner 1987, 1991). The idea was to develop economic strategies to make land use more sustainable (Werner and Miller 1984, Miller 1987) by permitting rural peoples to raise iguanas for food and wild release. Several communities participated in trial releases as part of this project, where juveniles were reared until attaining harvestable sizes, offering an additional source of protein to participating families without requiring the removal of individuals from natural populations (Cohn 1989). Similar projects were functioning in Costa Rica, where they also operate an ecotourism attraction, conduct environmental education, and continue releasing headstarted iguanas in natural habitats (Escobar *et al*. 2010).

In addition, there are dozens of other projects that raise iguanas for conservation strategies in Central America, almost all supported by local governments and NGOs (Stephen *et al*. 2011). However, recent analyses have concluded that these projects are not economically viable and their impact on the natural populations has been minimal (Eilers *et al*. 2002, Stephen *et al*. 2011). These projects may play an important environmental education role, but apparently the repopulation efforts have not been very effective, and there is no evidence that they are helping to reduce the harvest levels in natural populations where they operate.

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This species is listed in Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and found in several protected areas.

Credits

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External Resources

For Images and External Links to Additional Information, please see the Red List website.

Appendix

Habitats

(http://www.iucnredlist.org/technical-documents/classification-schemes)

Habitat	Season	Suitability	Major Importance?
1. Forest -> 1.5. Forest - Subtropical/Tropical Dry	-	Suitable	-
1. Forest -> 1.6. Forest - Subtropical/Tropical Moist Lowland	-	Suitable	-
1. Forest -> 1.7. Forest - Subtropical/Tropical Mangrove Vegetation Above High Tide Level	-	Suitable	-
14. Artificial/Terrestrial -> 14.4. Artificial/Terrestrial - Rural Gardens	-	Suitable	-
14. Artificial/Terrestrial -> 14.5. Artificial/Terrestrial - Urban Areas	-	Suitable	-
14. Artificial/Terrestrial -> 14.6. Artificial/Terrestrial - Subtropical/Tropical Heavily Degraded Former Forest	-	Suitable	-

Threats

(http://www.iucnredlist.org/technical-documents/classification-schemes)

Threat	Timing	Scope	Severity	Impact Score
1. Residential & commercial development -> 1.1. Housing & urban areas	Ongoing	Majority (50-90%)	Unknown	Unknown
	Stresses:	1. Ecosystem stresses -> 1.1. Ecosystem conversion 1. Ecosystem stresses -> 1.2. Ecosystem degradation		
1. Residential & commercial development -> 1.2. Commercial & industrial areas	Ongoing	Majority (50-90%)	Unknown	Unknown
	Stresses:	1. Ecosystem stresses -> 1.1. Ecosystem conversion 1. Ecosystem stresses -> 1.2. Ecosystem degradation		
1. Residential & commercial development -> 1.3. Tourism & recreation areas	Ongoing	Majority (50-90%)	Unknown	Unknown
	Stresses:	1. Ecosystem stresses -> 1.1. Ecosystem conversion 1. Ecosystem stresses -> 1.2. Ecosystem degradation		
2. Agriculture & aquaculture -> 2.3. Livestock farming & ranching -> 2.3.4. Scale Unknown/Unrecorded	Ongoing	Majority (50-90%)	Unknown	Unknown
	Stresses:	1. Ecosystem stresses -> 1.1. Ecosystem conversion 1. Ecosystem stresses -> 1.2. Ecosystem degradation		
5. Biological resource use -> 5.1. Hunting & trapping terrestrial animals -> 5.1.1. Intentional use (species is the target)	Ongoing	Majority (50-90%)	Unknown	Unknown
	Stresses:	2. Species Stresses -> 2.1. Species mortality		

Conservation Actions in Place

(http://www.iucnredlist.org/technical-documents/classification-schemes)

http://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2018-1.RLTS.T174481A1414646.en

Conservation Actions in Place
In-Place Land/Water Protection and Management
Occur in at least one PA: Yes

Conservation Actions Needed

(http://www.iucnredlist.org/technical-documents/classification-schemes)

Conservation Actions Needed
3. Species management -> 3.1. Species management -> 3.1.1. Harvest management
4. Education & awareness -> 4.3. Awareness & communications

Additional Data Fields

Distribution
Lower elevation limit (m): 0
Upper elevation limit (m): 1000
Habitats and Ecology
Continuing decline in area, extent and/or quality of habitat: Yes
Movement patterns: Not a Migrant

The IUCN Red List Partnership

The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™ is produced and managed by the IUCN Global Species Programme, the IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) and The IUCN Red List Partnership.

The IUCN Red List Partners are: Arizona State University; BirdLife International; Botanic Gardens Conservation International; Conservation International; NatureServe; Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew; Sapienza University of Rome; Texas A&M University; and Zoological Society of London.