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# FLICKER



MONTHLY BULLETIN of the CAYMAN ISLANDS  
DEPARTMENT of ENVIRONMENT TERRESTRIAL ECOLOGY UNIT

## Alien Invaders Outstay Welcome...

Demands for action to address the issue of Grand Cayman's exploding Green Iguana *Iguana iguana* population reached new levels this month, with the DoE receiving calls from frustrated members of the public on a daily basis.

Observations of the animals defecating in swimming pools, feeding on fruits and vegetables, garden flowers, and preying on native bird's eggs, have raised concerns from homeowners and scientists alike.

Underpinning the problem is the Animals Law. Written in 1976, Section 80 states that "Iguanas... are protected animals". This well-intentioned measure was aimed at protecting Cayman's critically endangered Blue Iguanas and Sister Islands Iguanas, but much has changed in the Cayman Islands since 1976 – not least the arrival of the Green Iguana. Paradoxically, this antiquated legislation protects the pest to this day.



Juvenile Green iguana



Adult Green iguana

The National Conservation Law, is designed to bring Cayman's conservation legislation into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The new Law distinguishes between the Green Iguana and local species, removing the protective status of the former - facilitating private action and the potential for government control. The Conservation Law also, however, brings with it a broad range of measures, from E.I.A. for major developments, to dedicated spending of the Environment Fund on genuine environmental projects. These measures have meant that the Law has not been universally popular with special interest groups, and to-date, has languished with successive governments for over eight years.



Ching ching

## Ching Chings Gather...

DoE has received calls about Ching chings (Greater Antillean Grackle) *Quiscalus niger caymanensis* forming large roosts towards sunset. This is no cause for concern. These roosting aggregations are typical of many species belonging to the New World Blackbirds (Icteridae). During the 1980s and 1990s, roosts of 700-1000 birds were reported in West Bay, George Town and Bodden Town (Bradley 2000).

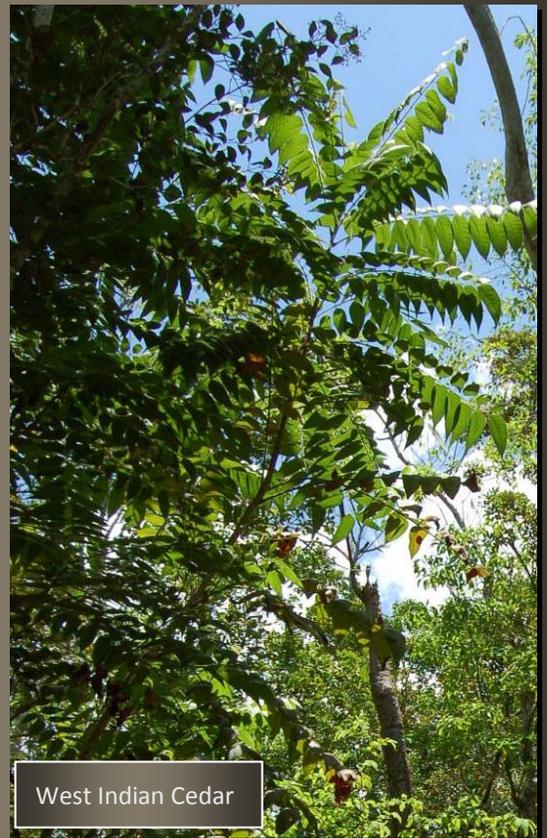
Ching chings are highly protective of their young and will defend their nests and fledglings vigorously against human and animal intruders. Despite their diminutive size, they can deliver a painful peck. If you are attacked, holding your hand above your head will attract the birds up and away from your head, allowing you to retreat to a safe distance. Though common locally, Ching chings are an endemic sub-species unique to the Cayman Islands, and they are protected by Law.

Reference: Bradley, P. E. (2000). *The Birds of the Cayman Islands*. British Ornithologists' Union, BOU Checklist Series 19. ISBN 0907446 23 X

## Cedar Family Tree...

Over the next few weeks, staff of the DoE Terrestrial Unit will be assisting ecologist Dr. Alan Gray, from the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (Midlothian, UK) in the collection of samples from Cayman Islands' Cedar trees *Cedrela odorata*. These will be used for genetic analysis, to determine phylogenetic relationships between local Cedars and those on islands across the Caribbean.

It is important that we generate academic interest in our Cedar trees. Cedar is the primary nesting choice of the Brac Parrot *Amazona leucocephala hesternia*, and in recent years, a decline has been noted due to infestation by an insect pest, the Mahogany shoot borer *Hypsipyla grandella*.



West Indian Cedar

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