

Invasive

Green Iguanas in the Cayman Islands

Overpopulation Issues

An **invasive** species is defined as a species which is alien to the ecosystem in question and the proliferation of the species causes negative changes in the new environment. This is different to a **native** species which normally live and thrive in a particular ecosystem having evolved there over many millennia.

When a species is introduced into an ecosystem outside of its normal range, the natural arrangements of the recipient ecosystem may be disrupted due to the introduced species outcompeting and providing a role which is not accommodated in that ecosystem. This results in negative effects to the normal functions of that ecosystem and the species reaches invasive status.

Green Iguanas are native to Central and South America. After being introduced to the Cayman Islands and other Caribbean Islands, the negative impacts of their proliferation are being felt:

Vegetation Degradation

Iguanas are voracious herbivores, eating shoots and buds before the tree or plant has an opportunity to flower, causing the vegetation to die.

On a large scale, this can deplete Cayman's forests, mangroves and cause huge economic losses to farmers.



Public Health & Safety

The iguanas are well known to undermine roads by digging beneath when nesting, defecating in recreational pools causing a health hazard to swimmers and are a hazard on airport runways causing delays.



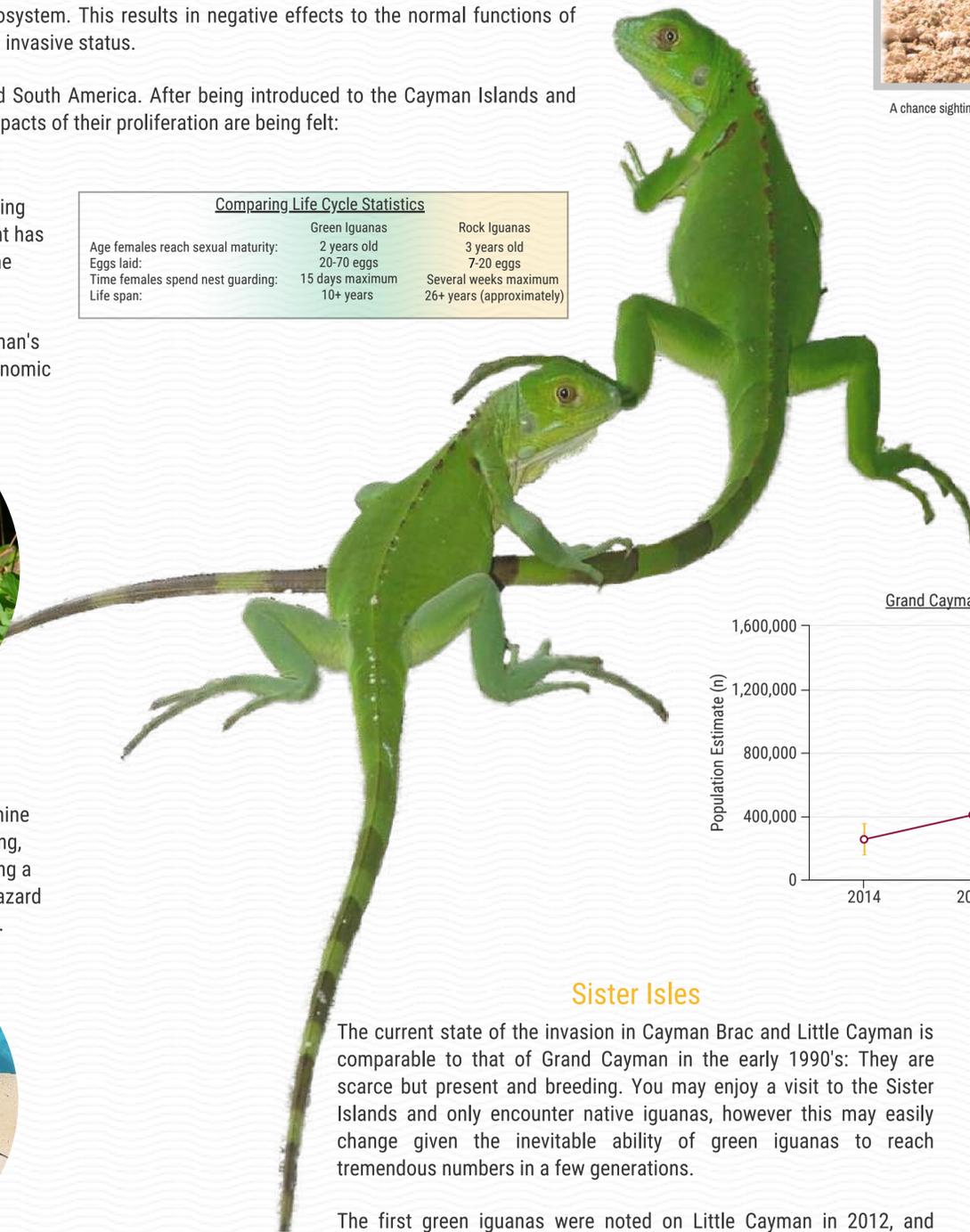
Hybridisation

In 2016, a clutch of Green Iguana and Sister Island Rock Iguana hybrids were found.

This directly threatens the already endangered Rock Iguanas as we know them. Pictured (below) is a Hybrid with a regular Green Iguana hatchling.



Comparing Life Cycle Statistics		
	Green Iguanas	Rock Iguanas
Age females reach sexual maturity:	2 years old	3 years old
Eggs laid:	20-70 eggs	7-20 eggs
Time females spend nest guarding:	15 days maximum	Several weeks maximum
Life span:	10+ years	26+ years (approximately)



A chance sighting of a Green Iguana in West Bay, taken 29 October 2004, shortly after hurricane Ivan hit Grand Cayman.

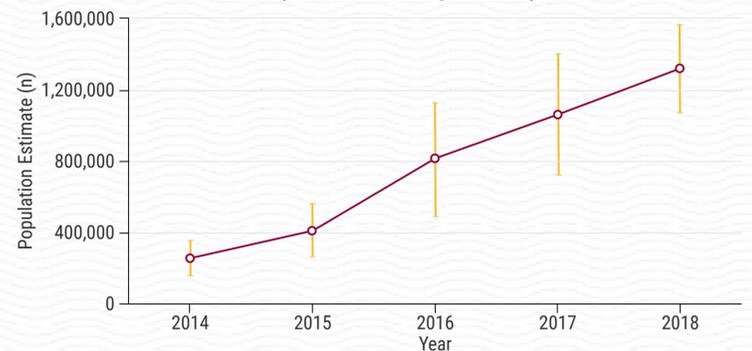
Invasion History

Grand Cayman

Green Iguanas have been present on Grand Cayman for more than 25 years, with only occasional sightings reported in 1994. It is thought there were multiple introductions as the original iguanas were brought over for both pet trade and as a food source.

With growing concerns from overpopulation, the Department of Environment started conducting annual population surveys every August:

Grand Cayman Annual Green Iguana Survey



The Green Iguanas have shown exponential growth year-on-year. To address the growing problem, two pilot culls were carried out in 2016 and 2017 to investigate effort, biology and community incentives. Meanwhile, resources necessary to curb the growth were increasing every breeding season.

In October 2018, a large scale cull was implemented, the first of its kind. Registered individuals have a set quota and are paid \$5 per iguana brought in. From October to December, just under 300,000 iguanas were delivered to the counting station.

The cull is currently continuing through 2019 with the ultimate aim of 1.3 million iguanas deposited by the end of the year.

Sister Isles

The current state of the invasion in Cayman Brac and Little Cayman is comparable to that of Grand Cayman in the early 1990's: They are scarce but present and breeding. You may enjoy a visit to the Sister Islands and only encounter native iguanas, however this may easily change given the inevitable ability of green iguanas to reach tremendous numbers in a few generations.

The first green iguanas were noted on Little Cayman in 2012, and shortly after 'Green Iguana B'Gonna' was set up as a volunteer response group, followed by the foundation of 'Team Go Green' in Cayman Brac. On both islands, sightings from the public are reported to the Hotlines so that volunteers can respond quickly and hopefully capture the animal. Both residents and visitors are needed to call the below numbers if there is a possible sighting:

Cayman Brac: +1 (345) 917-7744 Little Cayman: +1 (345) 925-7625

The Iguanas of Cayman

Green Iguana (*Iguana iguana*)

- Highly invasive.
- Widespread in Grand Cayman, scarce in Sister Isles.
- Identified by large scale on the cheek.
- Juveniles bright green.
- Adults have a banded tail and appear green, grey orange or a mixture.

invasive



Sister Island Rock Iguana (*Cyclura nubila caymanensis*)

- Classified as endangered and protected by law.
- Endemic to Little Cayman and Cayman Brac.
- Subspecies of the Cuban Iguana (*Cyclura nubila nubila*).
- Red eyes.
- Adults can appear brown or grey.
- Juveniles similar in appearance to adults.



protected

Blue Iguana (*Cyclura lewisi*)

- Classified as endangered and protected by law.
- Endemic to Grand Cayman.
- Confined to eastern districts of Grand Cayman.
- Red eyes.
- Adults can appear blue or grey.
- Juveniles similar in appearance to adults.



protected