

PRESS RELEASE

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Plan to save Grand Cayman's Blue Iguana now hinges on new protected area

In a four-day meeting, the third version of an evolving strategic plan to save Grand Cayman's Blue Iguana, has just been formulated. The long-term vision of the Blue Iguana Recovery Programme is now almost within reach.

The updated plan now hinges on promised action by the Cayman Islands Government. To enable full recovery of this unique symbol of Caymanian wildlife, an area of Crown land in the east interior of Grand Cayman must become protected.

"We're at a pivotal stage of the programme, now" says the Blue Iguana Recovery Programme's director, Fred Burton. "We are poised to quickly restore a viable population of Blues in the wild, but will be totally stuck unless we can secure some more protected shrubland habitat. We have over 100 hatchings this year that will be ready for release by 2010, and we must be ready for that or else they will have nowhere to go."

The renewed Species Recovery Plan ranges from education and awareness through captive breeding and iguana releases, to establishment and management of protected areas. Many aspects depend on the new protected area proposal, including an EU-funded project to build a visitor centre and shrubland education centre there, forming a major new nature tourism attraction in the East End.

Roger Corbin, the newly elected Chairman of the National Trust, says *" This project, which now enjoys the support of the Department of Environment and internationally recognized scientific bodies, has been a programme of the National Trust of the Cayman Islands from its beginning. It is important not only for saving the Blue Iguana but also because the endangered habitat in which the Blue Iguana lives must be protected and is about to become an important tourist attraction. The National Trust is in discussion with the Cayman Islands Government in an effort to acquire vitally important additional land for the expansion of the area into which the iguanas can be reintroduced."*

Director of Environment, Gina Petrie, adds *"Having been involved in this Programme from its beginning, it is very clear to me now that we are at a watershed – either the Blue Iguana and its extraordinary and unique habitat will be saved for future generations, or we all lose in the long run. I am optimistic that public attitudes can be reflected in national policy, and that our proposals to secure an area in the East Interior for conservation, are wise, realistic, and strongly in the public interest."*

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