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FACT-SHEET ON:

**Anegada Rock Iguana *Cyclura pinguis***  
**UK Overseas Territory: British Virgin Islands (BVI)**

This species is Critically Endangered. Its range has declined from the entire Puerto Rico Bank. Fossils are known from Saint Thomas (US Virgin Islands) and Puerto Rico. Vulnerability to predation by humans and their dogs and cats is the probable cause of the contraction of its distribution to Anegada only, where it is therefore endemic.

Population density in 1968 was estimated at 2.03/ha. In 1991, this figure had dropped to 0.36/ha in comparable habitat. Extrapolation of density estimates, distribution, and relative habitat quality yields a population estimate for Anegada of 164 individuals. A small restored population exists also on Guana Island with eight founding adults, from which three juveniles have been translocated to Necker Island. The total population, including individuals on Anegada, Guana, and Necker has probably built up to about 250 individuals, as a result of the efforts outlined below, but more needs to be done.

Like all *Cyclura* species, Anegada Rock Iguanas are primarily herbivorous, consuming leaves, flowers and fruits from different plant species. However, due to direct competition with grazing livestock in its native habitat such as sheep, goats, burros, and cattle, they have been reduced to eating vegetation rejected by these domestic and feral animals. This has also caused them to become opportunistic carnivores preying upon centipedes, millipedes, roaches, insects, and other invertebrates as opposed to being strict herbivores.

This forced diet has affected the iguanas' ability to reproduce. As reproductive females are not being provided with enough nutrition to produce eggs and support their own metabolism, many do not survive after laying eggs, resulting in the present skewed sex ratio of 2 males to every female. Females usually lay one clutch of about 12-16 eggs per year in late spring or early summer.

Anegada Island is rare in the area that it is not a volcanic island, but formed from coral and limestone providing many caves and natural burrows for the iguanas. Animals typically inhabit a single burrow and it was once observed that they appeared to bond for life, dwelling in burrows in close proximity to their mate. As the drive to find more females and compete for food has increased their range, this does not appear to be occurring any longer.

The reasons for the decline are competitive grazing with domestic and feral livestock, being preyed upon by feral dogs and cats, and (as with other Rock Iguanas) habitat-loss due to built development.

These Iguanas have been bred in captivity at the San Diego Zoo and the Fort Worth Zoo. Both zoos have been working with the National Parks Trust of the [British] Virgin Islands (NPTVI) on a joint recovery programme started in 1997 on Anegada Island. Iguanas have been raised at the facility for release into the wild. Hatchlings are fed and protected so they can be "headstarted" for the wild and not fall prey to feral dogs and cats. This offsets



*Anegada Rock Iguana,*

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Below: left: Wire Wist; right: Poke-me-boy; © RBG Kew



the juvenile mortality rate and is accompanied by field research, nest-site protection, and monitoring of released animals. The first batch of releases showed a survival rate of over 85%. As of March 2020, over 300 Anegada Iguanas had been repatriated to the wild. Other organisations, including the International Iguana Foundation, the European Union and UKOTCF have also helped support this work at various times.

The small island of Anegada is also home to a number of endemic plant species. One of these unique species is *Metastelma anegadense*, a scrambling thin-stemmed plant belonging to the milkweed family, Apocynaceae. It is commonly known as Wire Wist, reflecting the use of the stems as a natural string. Another is a spiny tree in the bean family, *Vachellia anegadensis*, well named Poke-me-boy. It is Critically Endangered in the IUCN Red List, although quite common on Anegada where it forms part of the Iguanas' coastal habitat. Threats from built development and grazing livestock could lead to its extinction. For decades, NPTVI has partnered with the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, to identify and conserve threatened plants. Such is the importance of this habitat, that it forms part of the Tropical Important Plant Areas of the British Virgin Islands – a network of 18 sites across BVI created in 2018: the most important sites for plant diversity and of high conservation importance.