

# Green Green Iguana Iguana

Iguana verde  
(Spanish)

*Iguana*

Class: Reptilia  
Order: Squamata  
Family: Iguanidae  
Genus: Iguana

## **Distribution**

Throughout Central and South America and parts of Mexico

## **Habitat**

Iguanas live in tropical rainforest areas. They are arboreal.

## **Food**

Primarily herbivorous, they feed on leaves, flowers, shoots and fruit.

## **Reproduction**

Iguanas breed annually, usually during the dry season. The females migrate to the same nesting site for several years in a row. They are polygynandrous, with multiple matings amongst males and females. Average reproductive age of the female is 3.5 years; the male is 3-5 years. Gestation is between 59-84 days.



The green iguana is found over a large geographic area from Mexico to southern Brazil and Paraguay. It also inhabits many islands throughout the Caribbean region and the coastal eastern Pacific. It has been introduced to Florida, Texas and Hawaii.

Generally are found at lower altitudes in areas near water sources, such as rivers or streams. They spend most of their time high in the forest canopy, about 12 to 15 m above ground. Older, mature iguanas reside high up, whereas juveniles establish areas lower in the canopy. They can adjust well to more open areas provided water is nearby.

They feed on a wide variety of plant material, upwards of 100 different species of plants. Occasional insects may be ingested while consuming vegetation.

During the breeding season males become territorial and display head bobbing, dewlap extension and colour changes. Dominant males may also mark rocks, branches and females with a waxy pheromone-containing substance secreted from their femoral pores. These highly developed pores are on the underside of the thighs. Females have them as well, but less developed. Courtship occurs within a defined territory. During mating he grips her shoulder with his teeth. He pairs his cloacal vent with hers and inserts one of his hemipenes into her cloaca. Copulation can last for several minutes. Female iguanas can store sperm for several years allowing them to fertilize eggs at a much later date. On average, 65 days after mating, she is ready to lay her eggs. Number of eggs laid varies depending on her size and maturity.

### Development

Eggs measure 15.4 mm in diameter and 35-40 mm in length. Clutch size average is 20 but can be larger. Incubation lasts 90 to 120 days. Hatchlings pip the egg open using a special egg tooth called a caruncle. They measure 17 to 25 cm and weigh 12 grams. Young iguanas lack dorsal spines and resemble adult females in colour and shape.

### Characteristics

Within three years they can become a 1 kg adult. Mature iguanas weigh between 4 and 8 kg. Large ones can reach head to tail lengths of around 2 m. The tail is long and tapering. Colour varies. They have a pendulous dewlap under the throat. A dorsal crest runs from the neck along the back to the tail.

### Adaptations

Visual signals are used for communication. They are agile climbers and excellent swimmers. They are able to autotomatize. They can change colour which helps regulate body temperature. Cryptic colouration also provides camouflage. Being arboreal they can bask in the sun to thermo regulate. They have excellent vision and a parietal eye.

### Status/Threats

CITES Appendix II., not endangered but trade must be controlled.

### Sightings at Cano Palma

#### References

Gingell, F. Iguana iguana. Retrieved June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2008 from [http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/site/accounts/information/Iguana\\_iguana.html](http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/site/accounts/information/Iguana_iguana.html)  
Green Iguana. Retrieved June 29<sup>th</sup>, 2008 from <http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/reptiles/green-iguana.html>

Nesting sites are carefully chosen by the females. Occasionally they are shared with other females. Nests are located 45 cm to more than a metre deep. After laying the eggs, females may return to the nest several times but do not stay to guard it. Parental investment includes the risk of mating and laying eggs only, young hatchlings are on their own. Eggs are provisioned with nutrients by the mother. Absorbed yolk provides most of the nourishment for the first week or two of an iguana's life. Young are independent from birth; however they stay in familial groups for the first year of their lives. Iguanas require a high amount of dietary protein in their first two to three years for adequately fast growth.

Adults are usually between 1.2 and 1.8 metres long, half of which can be tail. Although called green iguanas, they are variable in colour. They come in many different shades, ranging from bright green, to a dull, grayish-green. Colour of an individual may vary based upon its mood, health, temperature and social status. Most colour variation is exhibited by males. Prior to, and during courtship, males may acquire a bright orange or gold hue. Mature females, for the most part, retain their green colouring. Colour also varies from region to region, and can include shades of pink, blue, lavender, red and black. The dewlap is more developed in adult males than females and is used in courtship and display. The scales on the head are larger and more irregular than the rest of the body. The dorsal crest is made up of dermal spines, long and pointed. They have long fingers and claws. Probable life span in the wild is 8 years.

Green iguanas use head bobs, dewlaps and colour changes to communicate various messages and emotions such as courtship, fear, and dominance. When threatened it extends the dewlap, stiffens and puffs its body to appear larger, and head bobs. It will lash out with its tail, using it like a whip. If caught it can detach part of its tail and later re-grow it. To escape it will leap from branch to branch using its claws and fingers to grasp and climb up trees. They are able to survive falls from heights of over 12 m on to solid ground. They use their claws to hook leaves and branches to break their fall. They will dive from trees into water to avoid predators. The parietal eye is a photosensory organ on the top of the head; sensitive to light and dark as well as movement, allowing them to detect predators from above.

The pet trade has placed a great demand on these. They are preyed upon by hawks and humans. In many areas they are hunted as food, referred to as "bamboo chicken". Programs are being developed to farm these animals instead of hunting them.

These are sighted easily and frequently around the station area

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