

Improving Species Recovery Planning: a review of four iguana plans

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The IUCN/SSC Iguana Specialist Group (ISG) is a volunteer member network of experts from various backgrounds and geographic areas around the world that are dedicated to the conservation of iguana species and their habitat. The ISG's mission is to prioritize and facilitate conservation, science, and awareness programs that help ensure the survival of wild iguanas and their habitats. To achieve this, we implement, advise, and fundraise for programs that include population surveys, protected areas management, invasive species control, field research, genetic studies, education, and captive breeding/headstarting initiatives. For more information about the ISG please visit us online at <http://www.iucn-isg.org/>

Summary: Planning plays a critical role in biological conservation. The ISG regularly assists with the creation of individual species conservation plans. Though these plans can have different names (Species Recovery Plan, Conservation Action Plan, or Conservation and Management Plan), they all have commonalities such as a 3-5 year time horizon, focus on a single species, and adherence to a framework of actions in areas of policy, management, research and education. We assessed the number of activities completed for four different species recovery plans: *Cyclura collei*, *Cyclura carinata carinata*, *Cyclura cyclura cyclura*, and *Cyclura pinguis*. The results of this assessment show that, on average, only about one-third of the activities were completed within the time horizon of the plan. While this result does not necessarily indicate failure, it does compel us to review the species recovery plan process to ensure the ISG is meeting its obligation for successful species recovery and management.

Methods: To analyze the SRP implementation, we classified each action in the plans into one of four categories: Policy, Research, Management, or Education. The majority of actions are easily classified into one of these categories. However, some actions could be categorized into two categories, especially policy-related actions. Consequently, some of the results are subject to our interpretation. For example, is an action that affects education policy a policy action or an education action? We also counted which actions were completed and which were not. So, although the category data might be subject to bias based on interpretation, the percentage of actions completed is not.

Results:

Andros Iguana Conservation Action Plan 2005-2011

6 Policy actions, 2 completed- 33%
10 Research actions, 3 completed- 30%
11 Management actions, 0 completed- 0%
18 Education actions, 8 completed- 44%
Total: 45 actions, 29% completed

Jamaican Iguana Species Recovery Plan 2009-2014

6 Policy actions, 1 completed- 17%

13 Research actions, 9 completed- 69%
50 Management actions, 20 completed- 40%
15 Education actions, 2 completed- 13%
Total: 84 actions, 38% completed

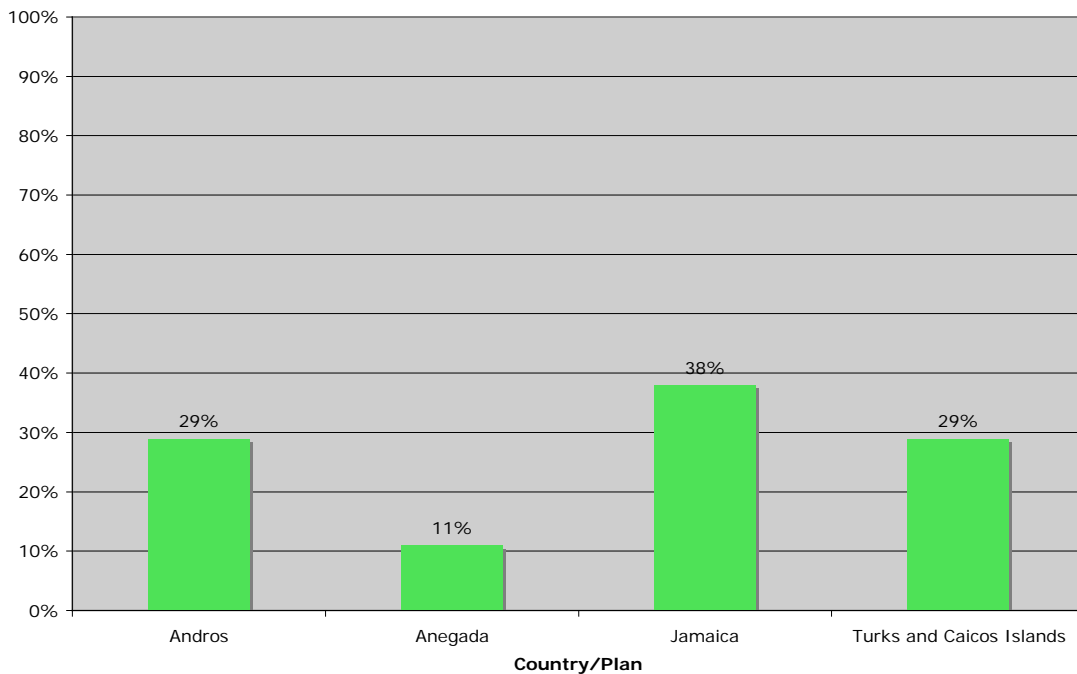
Anegada Iguana Species Recovery Plan 2006-2010

11 Policy actions, 0 completed- 0%
19 Research actions, 5 completed- 26%
30 Management actions, 1 completed- 3%
15 Education actions, 2 completed- 13%
Total: 76 actions, 11% completed

Turks and Caicos Iguana Conservation and Management Plan 2005-2009

14 Policy actions, 1 completed- 7%
15 Research actions, 5 completed- 33%
12 Management actions, 3 completed- 25%
35 Education actions, 13 completed- 37%
Total: 76 actions, 29% completed

Figure 1: Percentage of Species Recovery Plan actions completed by country



Discussion: An average completion rate of 27% after 3-5 years of plan implementation does not seem to illustrate a highly successful program. These numbers can be interpreted in a number of ways that are useful for improving species recovery. First, they point out that a goal of 100% completion of actions is highly unrealistic. Nevertheless, it seems obvious that changes need to be made to the plans so that they can be more successful. Some recommendations are given in the next section. Second, the data show that there are numerous challenges to implementing species recovery actions. Each species has its own challenges related to the cultural/political environment of their habitat. Still, there are many similarities to these challenges and solutions. Communication between conservation practitioners within and between taxa (i.e., within and among specialist groups) is an important part of improving species recovery.

Lessons Learned:

Below we offer some solutions for improving the species recovery plans for iguanids, some of which are likely useful to other taxa.

Lessons learned for recovery plan creation:

1. Prioritize Actions: Plans contain upwards of 80-100 actions. Without knowing which are the most important, scarce resources may be used on activities that are not as critical.
2. Less is More: It is very important that plans be specific about the actions and who is going to implement them. Also, without a person dedicated to implementing the plan, it seems that having fewer actions that are of higher priority would be more efficient and effective.
3. In-country partners should be more involved: Our sense is that these plans are underutilized. To help improve their usefulness for the in-country partners, it is advisable that they play a greater role in driving the process to create the plans.

Lessons learned for recovery plan implementation:

1. Coordinate SRP actions with budget cycles of implementing agencies: In-country agencies are responsible for the majority of the actions assigned in the SRPs. To be able to accomplish these actions, the agencies will need to plan accordingly. To make sure that SRP actions are implemented, it is important that someone work with these agencies to help them put specific actions into their annual work plan.
2. Create accountability/Improve communication: A report of the annual progress of each SRP should be sent out to each of the implementing partners so they can see their (and others') progress. This action complements the previous one so that actions that have not been completed can be promoted for the coming year.
3. Utilize current internet technology to document the collective knowledge base in a living document: Updating plans and tracking their progress is important. To make this process transparent, we recommend using a Wiki or similar technology that allows participants to collaborate on a document. This will allow recovery partners to 1) update their own progress, 2) see the most current progress without having to wait for a document to be updated, and 3) review the process of certain actions - for example, if an action was tried and unsuccessful a new member of the recovery team could see this.

Lessons learned for institutions supporting recovery programs:

1. Have grant applicants list what specific actions within the species recovery plan they are addressing.
2. Require that grant recipients send an update for all SRP actions they work on to be used with an annual progress update of the SRP.
3. Promote an annual update and reporting on the SRP progress.

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