Puerto Rican Ameiva Impacts from Invasive Iguanas

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Major: Environmental Science

Introduction:

While in Puerto Rico, I noticed many types of lizards and wanted to understand more about the native species impacted by invasives. The species I decided to focus on, *Ameiva exsul*, is part of the whiptail family. A male can grow up to 32in and females are smaller, both with a life span in the wild of about 5 years. Their preferred habitat includes canopied and sandy areas with partly cloudy weather. This is because temperature plays a significant role in activity for these lizards (Blair, 2009). Ameivas are diurnal with isopods being the majority of their diet along with vertebrates.

P.C: The BioFiles

How are Green Iguanas Impacting Ameivas?

The Green Iguana is outcompeting the native species of lizard, *Ameiva exsul*, in many ways. They are larger in size, live longer, and are able to adapt to urban and disturbed areas better. Green iguanas have a negative impact on environments with overpopulation (Krysko, 2007). And, with Puerto Rico not having any predators able to control the population, humans have taken up this role as "iguana hunters".

The Green Iguana:

The green iguana is an invasive species in Puerto Rico that may live up to 20 years in the wild and can grow up to 70in. They are located in regions such as Central America, Caribbeans, and Southern Brazil. Their preferred habitats are tropical rainforests and disturbed/ urban areas. The green iguana's diet mostly consists of leafy vegetation, some fruit, and eggs. They have also sometimes been found to consume other lizards and crabs too (Govender, 2012).

P.C: Jamon Jordane

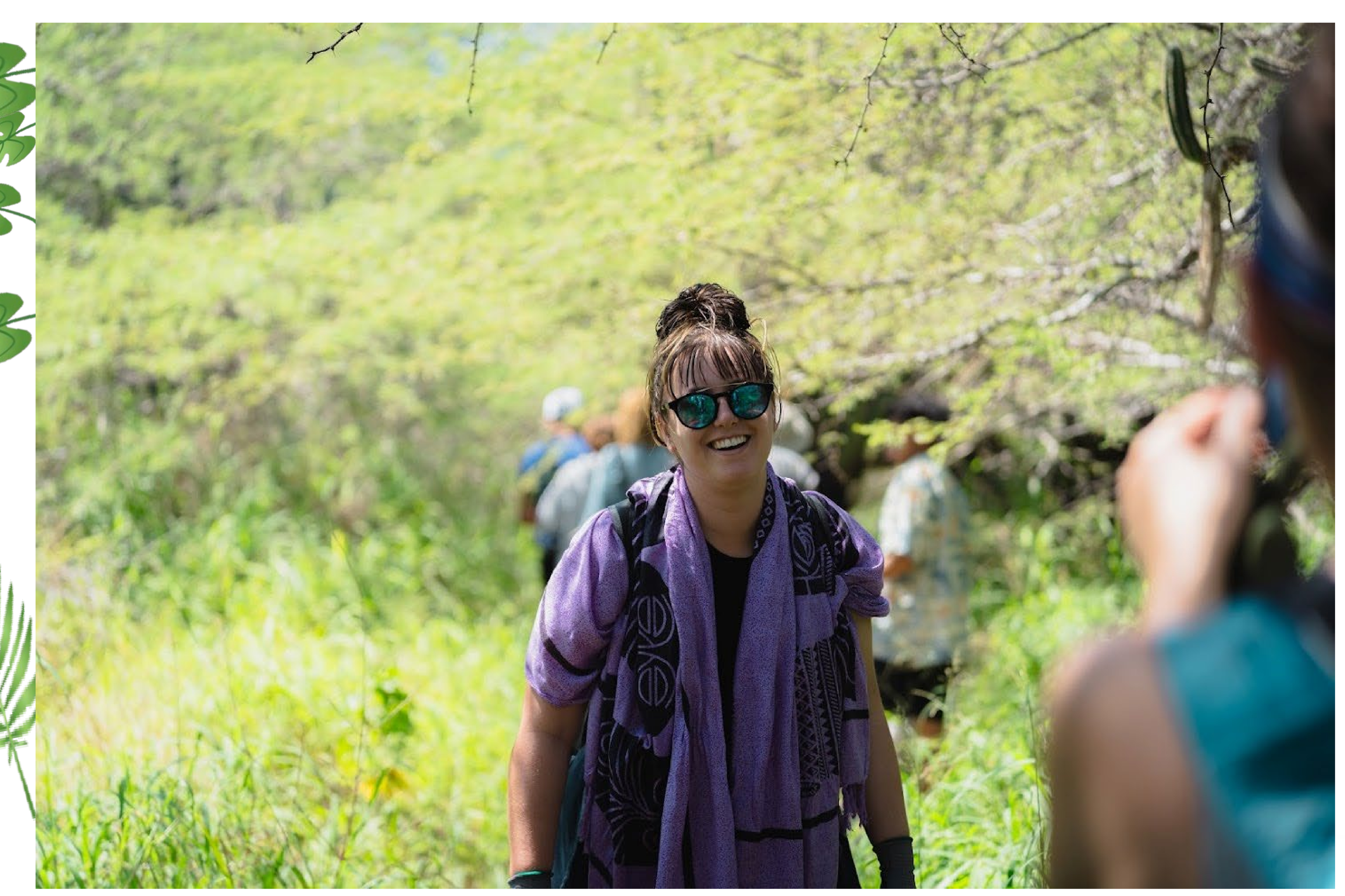
Interview Quotes:

"Twenty-five years ago they appeared to my memory. I hate them and it's true that most Puerto Ricans do too. They multiply fast, eat harvests, and are a plague."- Alexis Morales

"The native iguanas are more populated on the outskirt islands like Mona island. The invasives are all over except for the higher elevations. They eat eggs, fruit, and vegetation."-

Projects:

We spent our time on the island doing all sorts of community projects. When we went to Llanos Costa to pick up trash, we saw an invasive green iguana on the cliff enjoying the view and another eating vegetation. Then, we went to Quebradillas and saw the aquaculture lettuce farming, it made me realize that this system keeps invasive iguanas out and allows crops to thrive. They gave us a tour of their current facility (shown) as well as a tour of their still under construction building which was much bigger. This gave me hope that the people of Puerto Rico will have more sources of fresh vegetation that will not be negatively impacted by Green Iguanas. They also said they donate their leftover vegetation scraps to a manatee rescue which was so cool!



P.C: Jamon Jordan

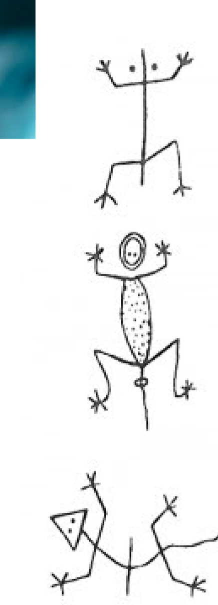
P.C: Hunter Grove

P.C: Hunter Grove

Iguanaboina:

These cave drawings show a mix of iguana, saurian, and Boina (dark spirit). The back of an iguana represents sunny weather while Boina's son, Boinayel, represents the water within clouds.

In Central and South America iguanas have been eaten for over 7,000 years and are often referred to as "chicken of the trees". Below is a recipe for iguana tacos!



P.C: Taino Cave Paintings

SCAN ME

Acknowledgements:

Much appreciation to all those who contributed to making this trip happen! To those who I knew before the trip and I bonded with more and to those I bonded with for the first time I thank you. I know I will forever remember this experience and tell stories about my memories there. I hope to go back to Puerto Rico someday and give back to communities as well as reignite bonds ☺

Sources:

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Taino cave paintings. TainoGallerycom Reproduction Ethnic Taino Indian Ceramic Jewelry and Art RSS. (n.d.). http://www.tainogallery.com/symbology/paintings/