

FOCUS ON CONSERVATION

Guatemalan Beaded Lizard (*Heloderma horridum charlesbogerti*)

Project Heloderma

Extinction Imminent. The Guatemalan Beaded Lizard (*Heloderma horridum charlesbogerti*), endemic to the arid, desert region of southeastern Guatemala's Motagua Valley, is one of the most endangered reptiles in the world. First seen by scientists in 1984 and formally described in 1988, only a decade later the species was thought to be extinct in the wild. In 2002, a few individuals were found and limited studies obtained the first, sparse data on their lives in the wild, but most of this creature's life history remains a mystery.

The Motagua Valley is a small sliver of desert habitat, isolated on all sides by massive cloud-forested mountains and rainforested valleys. These Guatemalan lizards have evidently existed in total isolation for many thousands of years. Deforestation for cantaloupe, tobacco, and milpa (feed corn) farming has reduced the already tiny amount of suitable habitat for this species to about 16,200 ha and estimates suggest that this is sufficient to sustain at most 150–200 individuals. Negative myths and attitudes have long led local people to kill these venomous lizards on sight. Also, the rarity of this subspecies in particular and the rising popularity of Beaded Lizards and Gila Monsters (*H. suspectum*) as captives have led to exploitation for the pet trade. Estimates suggest that approximately 35 individuals were captured and sold abroad during the 1990s.

With the recent rediscovery of the species and two natural history studies performed with support of Zootropic, an interested NGO, the government of Guatemala has shown interest in protecting these animals and their habitat. In addition, Zootropic has launched an educational campaign targeting villagers in areas surrounding Beaded Lizard habitat. Since 2004, no reports exist of lizards being killed or sold. Studies are needed and planned to answer basic questions concerning critical habitat needs. Resultant data will be used to guide land preservation decisions. A proposed breeding facility in the Motagua Valley is needed, and any young animals produced would be slated for attempted reintroduction into protected habitat.

How You Can Help: With fewer than 200 individual Guatemalan Beaded Lizards remaining, your help is desperately needed to save these unique creatures. Wayne Hill and the National Reptile Breeder's Expo will be donating all proceeds from this year's annual auction to "Project Heloderma." To make this auction the greatest success possible, we need auction items. Monies collected for this fund will go only to efforts to save the Guatemalan Beaded Lizard, specifically to fund conservation research projects, raise awareness within its home range about its plight, and build an in-country breeding facility. For more information, to volunteer, or to donate auction items, please log on to:



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