Venezuelan Red Listed animals are now in everyone's hands

Massive inflation has been one of the dominant characteristics of Latin American economies over the last few decades. As local currencies have lost value, governments have re-launched them with new names, higher values, and new designs. In 1987, for example, the Bolivian *boliviano* lost six zeroes to become the *boliviano nuevo*. Between 1986 and 1993, Brazilian currencies dropped nine zeroes, and in 1993, 1,000 Mexican *pesos* were replaced by one *peso nuevo*. Argentina may be the most dramatic example in the hemisphere: in 1970, the *peso ley* replaced the *peso moneda nacional*, at a rate of 100 to 1. In 1983, the *peso argentino*, worth 10,000 *pesos ley*, was introduced. Two years later, 1,000 *pesos argentinos* were replaced by one *austral*, and in 1992, the *peso convertible* replaced the *austral* at a rate of 10,000 to 1. During this span, the decrease by 13 orders of magnitude in currency values has had many implications in Argentina, with the conservation opportunities presented by so many new designs almost surely the least among them: the same familiar national symbols, events, heroes and monuments often reappeared.

However, this year Venezuela joined the regional trend of dropping zeroes without missing out on the unique public education opportunity it presented. On 1 January 2008 it substituted its *bolívar* for the *bolívar fuerte* at a rate of 1,000 to one. For anyone interested in biodiversity conservation the difficulties implied by the inflation that motivated the change had a silver lining: The Central Bank used illustrations taken directly from the *Red Book of Venezuelan Fauna* for the back of its new bills. This represents a considerable break with past symbols-and-events designs, although the front of each bill still maintains tradition with portraits of heroes from the Independence war against Spain in the 1800s.

The new family of Venezuelan currency has notes for 2, 5, 10, 20, 50 and 100 *bolívares fuertes*, each with its own threatened species. Respectively, these are the pink river dolphin *Inia geoffrensis* (Near Threatened in Venezuela, Vulnerable globally), the giant armadillo *Priodontes maximus* (Endangered in Venezuela, Vulnerable globally), the harpy eagle *Harpia harpyja* (Vulnerable in Venezuela, Near Threatened globally), the hawksbill turtle *Eretmochelys imbricata* (Critically Endangered in Venezuela and globally), the spectacled bear *Tremarctos ornatus* (Endangered in Venezuela, Vulnerable globally), and the red siskin *Carduelis cucullata* (Critically Endangered in Venezuela, Endangered globally).

Of course, it is too early to say if placing threatened species in all Venezuelans' hands, as it were, will have a positive impact on their conservation. Although hopes are high in Provita, the Venezuelan NGO that published the *Red Book*, there is caution as well. According to the current Director for Institutional Development, Franklin Rojas-Suárez, 'a much higher profile will be of great benefit for most of the species used. Twenty years ago, probably a few thousand people in Venezuela knew that spectacled bears existed, and public support for conservation activities grew greatly after we and many others began awareness campaigns. Putting a bear on the currency reaches many more people than NGOs alone can, and makes Venezuelans realize that we have outstanding fauna of which they should be proud, and which they should value. However, for the red siskin, greater prominence might fuel current illegal trade and collector demand. So we'll have to see.'

What is clear is that this is a unique opportunity for governmental institutions, conservation organizations, local citizens and other stakeholders to join efforts in assuring that the increased visibility of Venezuela's threatened species helps decrease their extinction risk. It is heartening that the scientific endeavour of classifying risk has had the non-scientific result of familiarizing a nation with its animal species.

Jon Paul Rodríguez and Kathryn M. Rodríguez-Clark*
Centro de Ecología, Instituto Venezolano de Investigaciones Científicas, Apdo. 20632, Caracas 1020-A, Venezuela
E-mail jonpaul@ivic.ve
**Also at: Provita, Apdo. 47552, Caracas 1041-A, Venezuela*

Evidence of another living 'giant' lizard from the Canary Islands

The lizard genus *Gallotia* are endemic to the volcanic Canary Islands, and are divided into four main evolutionary lineages. One of these includes the locally-named 'giant lizards', adults of which can reach body lengths of over 240 mm (not including the tail) and 1 kg in weight. Subfossil evidence of these lizards indicated their existence on the Canary Islands until relatively recently but it was generally thought that the last remaining species, *Gallotia simonyi* from El Hierro, had become extinct by the 1940s. Then, in 1975 the rediscovery of this species on a rather inaccessible adjacent cliff was announced by German biologists. Subsequent fieldwork by local researchers led to *Gallotia intermedia* being discovered on the island of Tenerife in 1995 (not giant in size but still from the same evolutionary lineage), followed by *Gallotia bravoana* in La Gomera, in 1999. All of these Critically Endangered species appear to exist in small, isolated, relictual populations. The local Canary Islands Government has set up recovery centres and put in place strict protection measures for these lizards.

© 2008 Fauna & Flora International, *Oryx*, 42(2), 171–175 doi:10.1017/S0030605308042221 Printed in the United Kingdom

In December 2007 the Spanish national newspaper *El Pais* published a picture of what is expected to prove the existence of the fourth and final member of the giant lizard lineage, from the island of La Palma. No specimens have yet been captured but the photographs, taken by a biologist, are convincing: it is a *Gallotia* but appears morphologically different and larger than the native species. This again demonstrates that relatively large vertebrates can escape notice despite their proximity to well-populated areas. Human population densities in La Palma (120 persons km^{-2}) are close to the EU average (114 persons km^{-2}). The situation with *Gallotia intermedia* on Tenerife is more surprising still: the population density on this island is more than 3 times the EU average, with one of the recently discovered populations even being found close to a major tourist area.

The presence of a large lizard on La Palma is known from subfossil evidence. It also fits the biogeographical pattern in the Canaries. La Palma is a recent island whose subaerial emergence has been dated at just over 1.7 million years ago. Since its appearance it has been colonized by other lizards found on the much older neighbouring island of Tenerife, i.e. the smaller congeneric *Gallotia galloti* and the gecko *Tarentola delalandii*. If the pattern is repeated for the new lizard it would be expected to be most closely related to *G. intermedia* from north-west Tenerife, rather than the larger *G. bravoana* (La Gomera) or *G. simonyi* (El Hierro). Tissue samples and mtDNA sequencing are needed before this can be examined.

What has led to the recent near-extinction of these lizards? Is it due to the arrival of humans (and associated introductions) that have had a negative impact on the giant lizards but not the smaller congenerics, or do human impacts influence the outcome of competition between the two *Gallotia* species on each of the western Canary Islands, with the smaller species driving the larger one to extinction? Unfortunately there are no control islands with just one giant species to examine this. A congeneric lizard as large as those from the giant clade, *G. stehlini*, is the only native *Gallotia* on Gran Canaria and relatively abundant, particularly close to human habitation, suggesting that large *Gallotia* can live with humans as long as a smaller competitor is absent. Even so, this is not conclusive proof of a competition effect: *G. stehlini* belongs to a different evolutionary lineage, which means that it may be able to cohabit with humans as a result of possessing particular characteristics absent in the other giant lizards. More research on the actual causes of the giant lizards' decline is required because the long-term natural survival of this group depends on identification of the exact causes, followed by appropriate remediation.

Richard P. Brown
School of Biological & Earth Sciences, Liverpool John Moores University, Liverpool, L3 3AF, UK
E-mail r.p.brown@ljmu.ac.uk

9th Conservation Workshop for the Fauna of Arabia: Protected Area Systems in the Arabian Peninsula

The 9th Annual Conservation Workshop for the Fauna of Arabia was held at the Breeding Centre for Endangered Arabian Wildlife in Sharjah, UAE, over 3-5 February 2008. This important regional forum is hosted by the Environment and Protected Areas Authority of the Government of Sharjah, under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Dr Sultan bin Mohammed al Qassimi. The workshop series has grown in both scope and size since its inception in 2000, with a total of 84 delegates attending from seven countries in 2008.

Earlier workshops assessed the conservation status of a range of regional taxonomic groups, from large mammalian carnivores through to freshwater fishes. Last year the 8th Workshop focused for the first time on protected areas (*Oryx*, 41, 132-133), following earlier workshop recommendations that the identification and protection of suitable habitats was of over-arching concern throughout the Arabian Peninsula. The interest generated by discussions in 2007 made it clear that protected area planning and management was an important unifying theme for species conservation in the region. The 2008 Workshop continued the focus on protected areas, and a series of parallel workshop sessions evaluated for the first time the status of the region's snakes.

The sessions on the evaluation and development of protected area networks had four core objectives, each one forming a sub-theme for the Workshop: (1) to review the current status of protected areas and protected area systems in the Arabian Peninsula; (2) to undertake a formal evaluation of protected area management effectiveness; (3) to identify priority sites for the development of Transfrontier Conservation Areas; and (4) to raise awareness of the implications of global climate change on species conservation and protected area creation and management in the region.

Protected areas networks are well advanced in some countries in the Peninsula, and others are in the process of planning for protected areas. A series of country reports were presented for Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, Kuwait, and for sites in UAE. Some common issues emerged, including the need for high-level political support and inter-agency involvements at all stages of protected area creation and management, the value of making explicit linkages with appropriate and sustainable commercial activities, the importance of law enforcement, and the critical need to engage meaningfully with local communities.

The evaluation of protected area management effectiveness sought to identify common limiting factors, obstacles and needs relating to protected areas in the region through the application of a formal tool to evaluate protected area