

Ahura Resorts Fiji Leads Rare Iguana Rescue & Research Program

Ahura Resorts are delighted to announce the arrival of a research specialist to Malolo Island to undertake an analytical survey of the island's rare and endangered iguana population.

Adam Clause from The University of Georgia (USA) is undertaking this exciting three month research project based at Likuliku Lagoon Resort that will include surveying, DNA testing and the electronic tagging and releasing of iguanas. His work will also include a detailed analysis of the tropical dry forest areas that are classified as one of the most endangered ecosystems on the planet.

This incredible journey of discovery would not be where it is today without the support and enthusiasm of Steve Anstey, Group General Manager, Ahura Resorts.

"As a resort company operating in a pristine, sensitive environment such as ours, with ocean and coral reefs on one side and land flora and fauna on the other, we fully recognize the importance of sustainable tourism and believe that development in such areas carries both a legal and moral responsibility to ensure our environment is not degraded through irresponsible activities and practices" comments Steve.

"Our aim is to not only minimize our impact on the extraordinary nature that surrounds us but also, through a range of activities, programs and initiatives, to improve and enhance the environment for challenged species and future generations. The significant work we have done to date with the iguanas and now the launch of Adam's research project demonstrates our serious commitment"

Adam's scope of work will include training of Ahura staff as their support, understanding and engagement is vital to the future of this program. He will also develop a tropical dry forest restoration plan for Ahura Resorts, as well as undertake Fijian crested iguana surveys to estimate their population size and distribution across the Ahura resort leases and surrounds.

"This project is a fantastic example of integrative conservation and I'm thrilled to be a contributor. The warm and productive collaboration between the US Geological Survey, San Diego Zoo Global, Mamanuca Environment Society, Taronga Zoo and of course Ahura Resorts has brought a stimulating diversity of expertise and a new focus on Fijian crested iguana conservation on Malolo Levu. This is exactly the sort of work I've wanted to do all my life!" comments researcher Adam Clause.

The Journey – A Disappearing Species – The Discovery – The Sanctuary

The Malolo Island Iguanas are of the crested variety *Brachylophus vitiensis* and were considered extinct until 2010 when an injured one was discovered at Likuliku Lagoon Resort.

It was sent to Kula Park on the main island for care but unfortunately died shortly after arrival. The curator of Kula Park advised visiting researchers Robert Fisher of the US Geological Survey and Peter Harlow of Taronga Zoo of the find and they took the iguana to Suva where it is now a part of the University of South Pacific vertebrate collection. A tissue sample was taken and sent to San Diego Zoo for DNA analysis. There was bittersweet excitement when six weeks later the results indicated it was a species thought to be extinct.

Fortunately, three months later another junior iguana was found at Malolo Island Resort and then a second at Likuliku Lagoon Resort. Others have since been found and seven are now held in captivity at Likuliku Lagoon Resort for research and breeding purposes.

Despite these rare, ad-hoc finds that clearly indicate a small iguana presence in the area, the early surveys undertaken to find more failed to produce sightings in their natural habitat.

Working closely with researchers from the US Geological Survey, Taronga Zoo and San Diego Zoo Global, immediate steps were taken by Ahura Resorts to identify the major threats that may be affecting the iguana population. The first item on the agenda was to control the feral cat and rat populations and secondly to introduce an ongoing tropical dry forest reforestation program on the resort leases.

In June 2015, three years after these programs were implemented, a survey of the tropical dry forest areas revealed six new iguanas. Much to everyone's excitement, it appears that the programs have made a positive impact. Two of the six iguanas were captured, DNA samples taken and then tagged and released back into their natural habitat. It is hoped that the next survey will show continued success of the programs and a further increase in the iguana population.

The preservation of the iguanas and the tropical dry forest vegetation on Likuliku Lagoon Resort and Malolo Resort leases is an ongoing environmental initiative of Ahura Resorts in partnership with US Geological Survey, Taronga Zoo, San Diego Zoo Global and the Mamanuca Environmental Society.

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Ahura was an ancient god of creations who symbolised life, kindness, equality, care of the environment, charity, loyalty and faithfulness to settlement, tribe and county. The omnipresent sun was an enduring symbol of radiance, purity and life sustenance. Today, Ahura Resorts embodies these same values. As a 100% Fijian-owned company, with over 30 years experience in tourism and hospitality throughout the Pacific, Ahura is dedicated to providing quality holiday and lifestyle experiences while preserving cultural values and the surrounding environment. Ahura is the management company operating one of Fiji's most popular and well-known resorts - Malolo Island Fiji, and the luxury escape for couples which features Fiji's first and only over-water bures - Likuliku Lagoon Resort. Experience the Warm Heart of Fiji with Ahura Resorts. www.ahuraresorts.com

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More shots are available upon request.

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