



*Joey and Tammy Casey

Rhinoceros/Rock Iguanas *(Cyclura cornuta)*

Even More Prehistoric-Looking Iguanas

Rhinoceros iguanas are a large species of iguana that belong to the genus of iguanas commonly known as rock iguanas. This is a large, heavy bodied iguana species that ranges from grayish, brown, to olive brown sometimes with paler lateral bands or stripes. A low ridge of dorsal spines is also present. The most diagnostic feature of this species are is one or more bony knobs or tubercles on their snout, giving them their common name. Horns are less prominent in females and in juveniles than in males. Like some other lizards, in addition to having keen vision allowing them to detect predators, these iguanas also have a vestigial third eye atop their heads that detect changes in overhead light, and which act as photosensory organs. These iguanas are a semi-arboreal species, where they will often bask, thermoregulate, and forage for food both in trees and vegetation, as well as on the ground often near water. As with many other lizards, iguanas also utilize a variety of behavioral traits as defensive mechanisms to avoid predation or being eaten, as well as to signal territory, dominance, disposition, and in sexual displays, and these behaviors can include head bobbing, extending their throat dewlaps, gaping and hissing, and other such forms of posturing.

Many of the rock iguana species in the *Cyclura* genus are listed as Vulnerable to critically endangered, and display a high degree of endemism (where a species is restricted in range to a very small or specific region). Several species of *Cyclura* are being successfully maintained in public and private husbandry however. ***As with other iguanas, rhinoceros iguanas must require research into their potential adult size, husbandry, and housing needs beforehand. This species can be quite long lived, and given proper care, these iguanas can live for anywhere from 15 to 25 years or more. Iguana husbandry is not simple by any means, and this care sheet should not be considered complete or exhaustive, but rather a starting guide to the essentials and the basics. Please see the additional resources and information for far more detailed aspects of rock iguana husbandry.***

Taxonomy

Life: All living, physical, and animate entities

Domain: Eukaryota

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum/Sub Phylum: Chordata/Vertebrata

Class: Reptilia

Order: Squamata

Suborder: Lacertilia

Infraorder: Iguania

Family: Iguanidae

Genus: *Cyclura*

Species: *Cyclura cornuta**

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

Given proper care and husbandry, the rhinoceros and other rock iguanas can reach longevity for 15 to 25 years or more in captivity.

Distribution and Habitat

The rhinoceros and other related rock iguana species are medium sized to large, heavily built iguanas which are generally indigenous to the West Indies. While more precise ranges can be given, and are of course dependent upon the exact species and subspecies of these iguanas, species in this genus occupy the Turks and Caicos Islands, the Bahamas, Hispaniola, including Haiti and the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Cuba and other Caribbean Islands, Jamaica, and Grand Cayman Island. Many rock iguana species exhibit a high degree of endemism in that many occur only within one or a very few defined islands, geographic locations and/or even habitat types and requirements within the West Indies. Many rock iguana species, however, inhabit the tropical to sub-tropical dry forest, scrub woodland, coastal terraces, and other xeric biomes of the West Indies, characterized by sparsely vegetated and eroded limestone bedrock and outcroppings, and adjacent offshore islands, cays, and natural caves which provide these iguanas with important basking and thermoregulatory, foraging, and sheltering opportunities.

Origin/History

Cyclura cornuta (Bonnaterre, 1789).

The rhinoceros iguana is well established in captivity, both in public and private collections, having likely been in captivity since at least the 1960's and 1970's. As of 2007, rhinoceros iguanas were present in captivity throughout the United States at 20 zoological institutions, with an additional 533 animals of unassigned subspecies, reported by seven American Zoological and Aquarium Association Institutions (Pasachnik, S.A.; Carreras De León, R. (2019). This number of animals is believed to be much higher when specimens kept in European and Asian zoos, and in private collections are considered.

Wild populations of rhinoceros iguanas have plummeted due to development, logging, over-grazing, limestone mining and predation by introduced rats, cats, pigs, mongooses and dogs. Over half of their habitat in the Dominican Republic had been destroyed, and the remainder is became severely degraded. Their plight appeared to be far worse in Haiti. The Dominican Republic has protected Rhinoceros Iguanas for over 20 years, but hunting for their meats and skins continued in Haiti. Rhino iguanas are listed on CITES Appendix I and classified as "Vulnerable" by the IUCN. A number of zoos and hobbyists are breeding this species in captivity now, and predator-removal and reintroduction programs were put in place in the Dominican Republic. (Indiviglio, Frank 2010).

Experience Level Required

Intermediate/Moderate to Advanced.

Size

Hatchling rhinoceros and rock iguanas begin at approximately 7.9 to 12.0 inches or smaller in total snout to length, or about 4.1 inches snout-to-vent length (SVL). As adults, rhinoceros iguanas have the potential to reach 2 to 4 ½ feet, or 24.0 to 54.0 inches on average in total snout-

to-tail length. Adult males are larger than females, up to 25.1 to 29.3 inches snout-to-vent length (SVL). Adult female's snout-to-vent length of up to about 24.4 inches (SVL).

Housing and Enclosure

Enclosure System: Primarily Terrestrial to Semi-Arboreal. Housing must be sealed and escape proof. Younger or smaller iguanas 18" or less can be maintained in a minimum of a three foot by two foot by two foot enclosure, but will outgrow these accommodations and require accordingly larger housing. Larger iguanas should be housed in a minimum of a six foot enclosure by at least three feet by about six feet. Custom designed enclosures are available as well, and are perhaps the best choices for maintaining most large iguana species in. Acceptable substrates for rock iguanas can include coconut fibers, orchid bark, or chemical and pesticide free topsoil or potting soil. Rock iguanas are semi-arboreal lizards, and will climb when provided the opportunity. They require sufficient enclosure height with ample basking, and climbing spaces including sturdy branches, shelves, and other perches. Humidity levels should also be kept at relatively lower levels with this species at around 40 to 60%. Younger iguanas may require additional retreats such as hide boxes, log or rock hides, or artificial foliage to feel secure. A sturdy, easily cleaned and disinfected food, water, and litter dish should all also be provided as well. Many iguanas can even become litter trained with some time and patience. Although adult rock iguanas derive most of their hydration from their foods, also be sure to provide a supplemental water periodically as well in the form of a large water dish or pan. For added hydration and humidity, these iguanas can also be misted and/or soaked in lukewarm water for at least 15 to 20 minutes weekly as well.

Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity

For basking, create a thermal gradient (or a warm side) in the cage/enclosure. Ideal ambient temperatures would be 85 to 90 degrees F, with a basking temperature of about 95 to 105 degrees F. Nighttime temperatures can drop to 70 to 75 degrees F. Providing the correct amounts of UVA/UVB overhead incandescent and florescent lighting, and calcium-to-phosphorus ratios is essential for ensuring the health and overall well-being of rhinoceros and rock iguanas in captivity. Without UVA/UVB, or adequate amounts of it, they can be susceptible to the abnormal bone growth and development known as Metabolic Bone Disease (MBD), and other health and development maladies. Also be sure to spot clean the enclosure for urates, feces, or uneaten food at least twice per week. Be sure to periodically replace the substrate, clean, and disinfect the enclosure and its furnishings at minimum every 2 to 3 months. Do not allow your iguana to come into contact with any heating element. More specific lighting, heating, and humidity product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well. ***More detailed housing and enclosure recommendations for rhinoceros/rock iguanas and other large lizards that are beyond the scope of this care sheet can and should be researched further by any prospective pet owner.***

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Primarily Herbivorous to Omnivorous; In the wild, rhinoceros iguanas are primarily herbivorous species, feeding on a variety of plant materials including leafy greens, flowers, fruits, vegetable matter, and occasionally insects or other invertebrates and even other smaller vertebrates on occasion. As with other iguanas, rock iguanas have a large variety of dietary requirements that should be met if kept in captivity. Many commercialized iguana diets are available, and can be used. Chopped, store bought fruits and vegetables are also typically relished by these iguanas, and can include mustard greens, collard and turnip greens, hibiscus, green beans, kale, squash, sweet potatoes, carrots, as well as many other choices and mixed greens and vegetables. Pesticide, or chemical free dandelions and other select weeds can also be given. These iguanas will also accept small amounts of other food items such as small frozen-thawed rodents, but these should be given sparingly and should consist of less than 5% of their total diet. Absolutely avoid diets high in protein, as such diets can and do lead to gout, renal

disease, and other disorders seen in iguanas. Calcium and vitamin D3 supplements are also essential as part of a healthy rhinoceros and rock iguana diet. Feeding frequency depends on age, size, and overall health of the animal, but typically should be at minimum three to four times per week. Without the proper diet and amounts of nutrients and supplementation, all iguana species can be very susceptible to Metabolic Bone Disease (or MBD), a debilitating bone and growth disorder, other health and nutritional maladies, or even death in extremely severe cases. More specific dietary and supplementary product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well.

Handling

Rock iguanas can display variable temperaments and dispositions depending on the individual and how often they are interacted with. Captive bred and born, or otherwise well-established animals can become much more traceable and handleable. These iguanas are animals that require gentle, deliberate, and regular handling in order to become accustomed to being handled and are not a beginner's species. As hatchlings, these iguanas are typically not aggressive, but can be somewhat delicate and skittish initially, and should be handled carefully to prevent injury. Larger and older iguanas can be safely handled using a variety of techniques that adequately support the animal's weight distribution and/or that restrain movements if needed or depending on the disposition of the animal to be handled. A captive born and raised rhinoceros/rock iguana can become a very tame, docile and personable adult animal to maintain. However, other specimens, such as male iguanas can become aggressive and territorial and require much more careful and experienced handling. ***More detailed handling techniques for these iguanas and other large lizards that are beyond the scope of this care sheet can and should be researched further.***

*****Also be sure to practice basic cleanliness and hygiene associated with proper husbandry after touching or handling any animals or animal enclosures to prevent the possibility of contracting salmonellosis or any other zoonotic pathogens*****

Contact

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Disclaimer: Note that the information provided in these, or any care sheets, are not intended to be all-exhaustive, and further research and care should always be sought and provided when it comes to any species one may prospectively be interested in. These care sheets are also not intended to serve as substitutes for professional veterinary medical care and husbandry should any animal require it. Always seek proper and professional veterinary care for any animal should the need arise, and be prepared ahead of time for any and all husbandry costs and expenses that may occur with any animal beyond the initial purchase. Any animal owned is ultimately a matter of personal/individual care and responsibility. We cannot make any claims or guarantees regarding any information in this care sheet therein. This care sheet may be reprinted or redistributed only in its entirety.

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