


 The logo for 'EAG TALK' features the letters 'EAG' in a stylized font with a blue and green wave-like graphic underneath. To the right of 'EAG' is a colorful leaf graphic. The word 'TALK' is in large, bold, blue capital letters. Below the 'EAG' graphic, the text 'THE ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS GROUP' is written in a smaller, grey font.

EAG TALK

THE ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS GROUP

To protect our endangered species



The Barbuda Warbler. (Photo credits go to Jeff Gerbrach)



The unique and culturally significant Antigua Racer. (Photo credits go to Nick Hollands)

By Nathan Wilson

Have you ever considered that what we have in Antigua and Barbuda, besides 365 white sand beaches, can be found nowhere else in the world? And not only are they unique to our islands, but their population is so small that they are considered endangered? This means that these unique plants or animals are at risk of becoming extinct, meaning that should they die there will be none anywhere on Earth.

Antigua, Barbuda and Redonda is home to several species that are considered to be at great risk of becoming extinct. Rated as Critically Endangered are the Redonda Anole, Redonda Ameiva, and the Antigua Racer. The Redonda Anole and Redonda Ameiva can only be found on Redonda, as their names suggest, and the Antigua Racer once

widespread across the country, can now be found only on four offshore islands in the Northeast Marine Management Area (NEMMA). The Barbuda Warbler, which can be found only in Barbuda, is rated as Vulnerable. All these species are restricted to a very small area; they are endemic or special to Antigua, Barbuda and Redonda, being found **nowhere else** in the world. Unfortunately, they are exposed to threats that can easily push them to extinction.

The world celebrates Endangered Species Day on 21st May in acknowledgment of the plight of these species and to teach ways we can all take action to protect threatened and endangered species.

One potential cause of extinction is the introduction of **invasive alien species (IAS)** to the habitats of these endemic creatures. IAS are

plants and animals that are introduced to an area they are not native to, and compete with the native plants and animals for food and other resources, often causing the native species to die off. IAS have also been shown to harm the economies of areas they have managed to colonize, often by destroying resources that locals rely on for their livelihoods.

Many of them also are health hazards. Rats – a well-known pest - and mongooses have been major threats on the offshore islands in the NEMMA, bringing the unique and culturally important Antigua Racer to the brink of extinction, with only 50 being found on Great Bird Island **alone** in 1995. It was only thanks to the eradication of the rats off Great Bird Island that the Antigua Racer was able to recover to a population of approximately 1200 on four islands.

The Redonda Anole and Redonda Ameiva also faced similar threats with the presence of rats and goats on Redonda that turned the island into a wasteland. They have been given a chance to recover after the removal of the rats and goats in 2016. These invasive species also had serious impacts on the presence of migrating birds, many of them rare, that would normally visit the offshore islands to nest and breed.

One other potential cause of extinction is extreme weather phenomena like hurricanes. There was widespread concern as to whether the entire Barbuda Warbler population had been killed after the devastation caused by Hurricane Irma in 2017. Fortunately, a survey on the island confirmed that this beautiful bird weathered the fierceness of Hurricane Irma, to remain the undefeated, sole



The Redonda Anole. (Photo credits go to Geoffrey Giller)

endemic bird of our country.

We cannot easily control all threats to our endangered species, but there are some we can definitely prevent. We want to keep our offshore islands free of invasive alien species to protect our Important Bird & Biodiversity Areas; these islands are key to their survival as they are more often undisturbed, and undeveloped and are therefore even considered the last refuge for some globally significant plants and animals. **You can assist** in protecting our offshore islands by following a biosecurity checklist to ensure that no invasive species are accidentally introduced:

Bag: Make sure there are no holes in your bags where small animals can sneak in. Thoroughly check the insides and pockets for any signs of potential invasives (seeds, dirt, eggs, etc.). Ensure packed bags are tightly secured.

Footwear: While on the



The Redonda Ameiva or Redonda Ground Lizard. (Photo credits go to Britney Hay)

mainland, scrub footwear with soapy water to remove any dirt or mud that may harbour seeds or animals.

Also check the soles, laces, and tongues of shoes for seeds.

Clothing: Check cloth-

ing zips, socks, and Velcro fasteners for seeds.

Food: Pack any food into sealed containers to keep out pests.

Bedding: Check bedding, such as sleeping bags, for signs of invasives before packing them inside closed bags that can be sealed.

Tents: Shake out camping gear while checking thoroughly for signs of invasive species. Once complete, pack the equipment into tightly sealed bags.

Boat/helicopter: Check the boat/helicopter for signs of invasive species who may stow away in small spaces.

The EAG works to increase understanding of the value of protecting the biodiversity of our natural environments, especially in local Important Bird & Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) like the NEMMA and Redonda. Our work is possible through support provided by the Global Environment Facility and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.