

EAG TALK

THE ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS GROUP

World Snake Day: The Racer's Story



The critically endangered Antigua racer snake photographed on Green island, 2021.

By Nathan Wilson

Leisurely it slithered across my path as I walked along the beach, oblivious to me and seemingly without a care in the world. It was between 1.5 and 2 feet long—a small one, with a stubby tail that seemed as

though it had been gnawed on by something. I realised then that perhaps this snake, this Antigua racer, was not as carefree as I had initially thought. Not when it had lost its tail, where its reproductive organs could be found. Not when this injury had likely been caused by an encounter with a rat. Not when

an invasive species had invaded its home. (See photo)

This is the sad reality for our critically endangered Antigua racer snakes when the offshore islands are invaded by invasive species. The snakes on Green island—which is home to the largest population on the planet—are all too familiar now with

this plight. Why does this matter, then? Why should the sorrows and worries of these snakes matter to the people of Antigua & Barbuda, many of whom choose to visit the offshore islands for a sense of peace and privacy, rather than wildlife?

Here's why: without the Antigua racer, that un-

touched beauty many have come to love is jeopardised. These snakes are a vital link in the ecosystem balance on the offshore islands, controlling lizard and pest populations. Without them, that beauty we have all come to love takes a serious hit. Moreover, the Antiguan racer is a unique part of our identity as Antiguan and Barbudans; this snake is ours (for all arwe), and we *need* to protect before it's too late. If

we allow invasive species like rats to destroy this balance unfettered, it *will* be too late.

We have seen this happen already when rats caused the extinction of the Antiguan racer from mainland Antigua, so that the only snakes left were found on Great Bird Island. We almost saw it happen a second time in 1995 when Great Bird Island was invaded by rats and the population plum-

meted to a mere 50 individuals, dangerously close to eradicating an entire species, *our* species, from the face of the planet.

This World Snake Day, let's make a promise to protect what is ours. The EAG has promised to do this by keeping the offshore islands pristine through the work of the Offshore Islands Conservation Programme (OICP), which is currently executing an eradication on Green is-

land to rid it of rats, mongooses and other invasive species. We are playing our part to ensure that the survival of this already rare species is not further endangered, and you can play yours too!

Some simple ways that you can protect the Antiguan racer snake is by: (1) not killing them when you see them on the offshore islands (our snakes are not venomous!); (2) checking your bags, boats, luggage and attire for seeds, eggs and other potential sources of invasive species; and (3) calling the EAG at 462-6236 if you see any signs of rats on the offshore islands.



WE PAY FOR PIX

GOT AN EXCLUSIVE PHOTO OF A BREAKING NEWS STORY?

YOUR PIX COULD NOW EARN YOU CASH.
NEWSCO PAYS \$50
FOR ANY EXCLUSIVE PHOTO
 SUBMITTED THAT WE USE ONLINE
 & IN THE DAILY OBSERVER.

NOTICE TO LOCAL BUSINESSES
 Register Your Vacancies at the One Stop Employment Centre For FREE Recruitment Assistance!!! Employer services include but not limited to: Free Advertising of Vacancies; Access to a large pool of qualified job seekers; Applicants Pre-Employment Screening & Skills Assessment; Interview Services and Advanced Job Matching Tools. Expert services are available that will reduce the costs associated with recruitment! For more information please call 562-8533/4.

MARRIAGE LICENCE NOTICE
 People wishing to acquire a marriage licence should contact the Ministry of Legal Affairs on 462-0017/9 or legalaffairs@ab.gov.ag to schedule an appointment for an interview with the marriage coordinator. All couples are urged to make contact at least two days prior to the date of their intended nuptials.

URGENT NEED FOR DOG FOOD
 PAAWS animal shelter, which houses over 100 rescued dogs and cats, relies entirely on donations to survive. During Covid-19, the number of abandoned dogs has increased and PAAWS (along with other animal charities) is doing its best but often runs short of food. A sack of dog food of any size dropped at their door will be of immense help or it can be collected. Cash donations are equally welcome.

VOLUNTARY SERVICE FOR THE ELDERLY
 Community Home Health Care Services is a volunteer organisation which assists the vulnerable elderly in the comfort of their homes. We are a group of health care providers offering services on a case by case basis. Our services consist of vital signs checks, companionship, grocery shopping, bathing, feeding and collection of medication. Give us a call/WhatsApp: 268-781-0683. We operate on a strictly voluntary basis and donations of food items, clothing and toiletries are welcome.



Send your submissions to editor@antiguaobserver.com or email us for details.