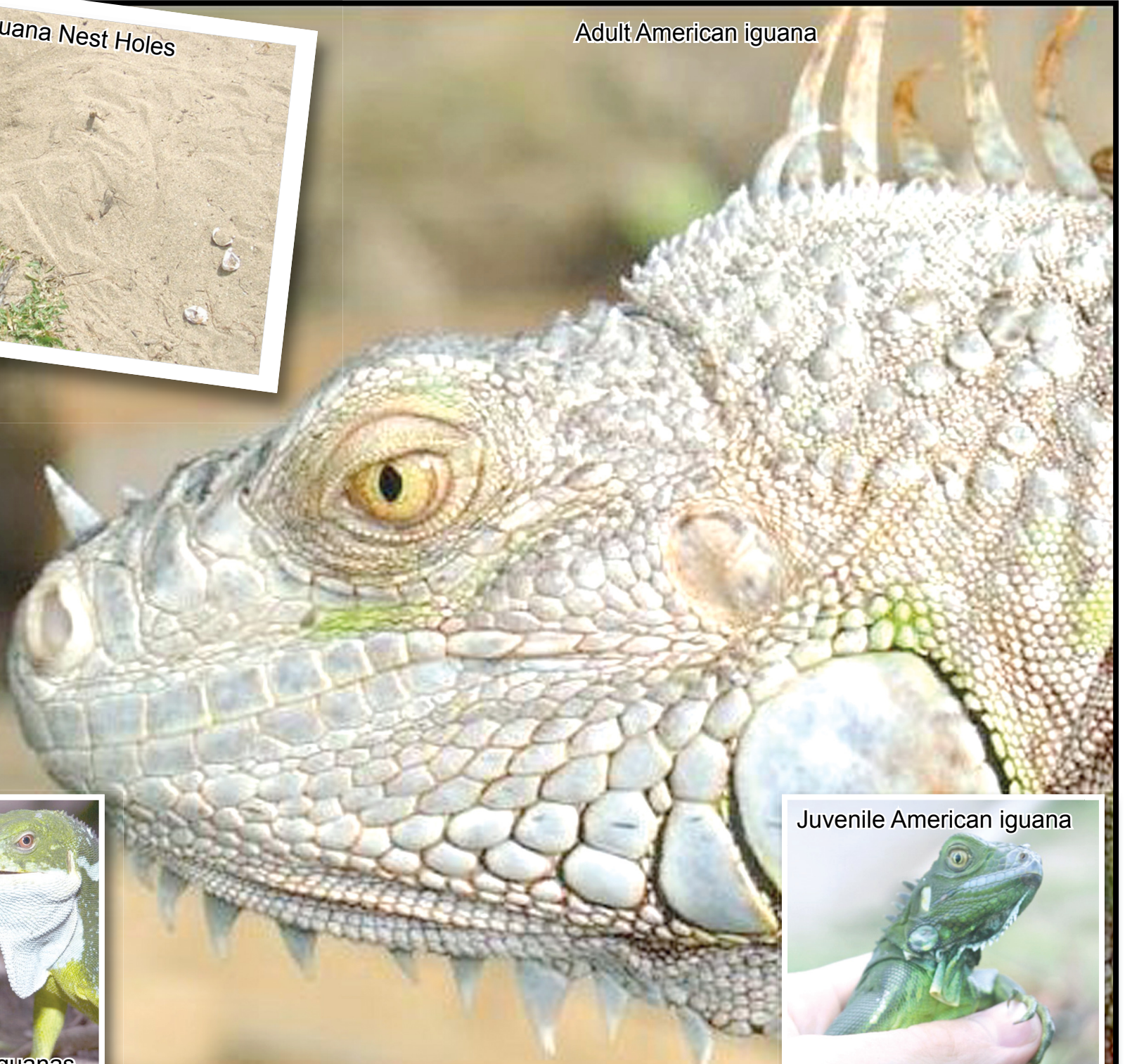


American Iguana Nest Holes



Adult American iguana



Juvenile American iguana



Adult Fiji Banded iguanas

BEWARE OF THE AMERICAN IGUANAS

Source: BIOSECURITY AUTHORITY FIJI

The American Iguana (Iguana iguana) is a declared pest in Fiji. It is thought to have been brought illegally into the country and released on Qamea Island. Now almost 10 years later, it has spread to Laucala and Matagi Island as well. These three islands being in close proximity of Taveuni, Rabi and Vanua Levu, there is a strong possibility of the American iguana incursion into Taveuni, Rabi and Vanua Levu as well.

Why American iguanas are a threat in Fiji

In absence of natural predators and competitors, the American iguana population could increase rapidly in a very short period of time. These iguanas pose an immediate threat to food security in villages and islands where they are present as they eat plants such as dalo and cassava leaves, bele, tomatoes, pawpaws and cabbage, beans and yam vines.

If American iguanas are left unchecked, food sustainability in Fijian villages will be at great risk in the near future. Large numbers

of American iguanas would devastate the environment around the villages and cause economic hardship.

They could also affect Fiji's biodiversity having a serious impact on endemic plants and bird eggs and nestlings. American iguanas also pose a threat to the endemic Fijian banded and crested iguanas through a possible transmission of iguana specific diseases, parasites and pathogens from the American iguanas to the endemic Fijian iguanas.

American Iguana mating and breeding season

The months from May to October are the mating and breeding period of the American Iguanas in Fiji. During mating and breeding period, American iguanas become most visible and vulnerable.

This is because the female American iguanas migrate from their island forest habitat to coastal areas to lay their eggs in sandy and well drained soil. They could look for sandy areas with some trees or around a fallen tree or the root of a large tree. Some may also be seen swimming in search for nesting site.

The American Iguana breeding and mating

period is a crucial time for iguana eradication and as such the Biosecurity Authority of Fiji (BAF) is stepping up its eradication efforts during this period.

A team from the NatureFiji-MereqetiViti and BAF were in Taveuni this week to conduct training on surveillance and monitoring of nesting areas with village heads in Taveuni. The villages have been trained on basic observation skills, differentiating on American Iguana and endemic iguanas, handling and euthanasia and learning to fill monitoring data sheets. The villages are to assist BAF in surveillance and monitoring during the nesting season and also in the eradication process.

BAF is appealing to the public to be on the lookout for the American iguanas over the next six months during its mating and breeding season. The message also extends to seafarers and boat operators who service the northern division to monitor their vessels and ensure that there are no American iguanas on board either accidentally or deliberately. Boat operators and seafarers play a very important role in containment of the American iguana and the prevention of its spread to other parts of Fiji. The MOU between BAF and the Maritime Safety

Authority of Fiji (MSAF) would also see the maritime officers helping BAF in monitoring the movement of American iguana and other domestic pests in the outer islands of Fiji.

How does American Iguana look like

The American iguana generally grows from 1.5m to 2m from head to tail and usually weighs from 4 to 9 kilograms. They are green but may also appear bluish with black markings. Adult American iguanas have long dangerous spines along their head, neck, back and tail and long sharp claws, which they use in defense.

They also have long flaps of saggy skin hanging from their chins to the base of their necks, which is called a dewlap. On both sides of their cheeks they have a large scale underneath their tympanums (a slightly sunken leathery covering of their eardrums). This large scale is a key identification feature for the American iguanas. The large scale and dewlap are also ways to differentiate between American and endemic Fijian iguanas.

● Help stop this pest from spreading. Contact BAF on 3312512 or info@biosecurityfiji.com.