



## Protection in Cuba

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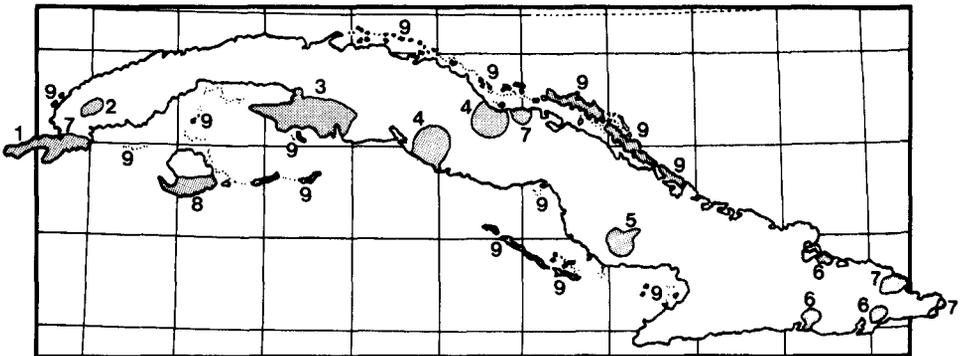
One of Cuba's hutias, the conga hutia *Capromys pilorides*

Cuba is making a big effort to protect endangered vertebrate species. By Resolution No. 21-79, the Government has forbidden all hunting throughout the year in certain areas that are important for wildlife; outside these areas hunting of the commonest species is permitted from July to February. Time will show whether the law can be enforced.

### Introduced Species

Introduced species that have become established and are now part of the Cuban fauna should be protected so long as they neither harm nor compete with the native species, although this is not recognised in the new Resolution, but some introduced animals have to be destroyed on sight, including mongoose *Herpestes auro-punctatus*; rodents of the genera *Rattus* and *Mus*, and the babilla *Caiman crocodilus fiscus*, a crocodilian established in the south-west of Isla de Pinos, in Lanier Swamp, which kills the juvenile *Crocodylus rhombifer* in the same habitat. Feral dogs and cats, which occur in the six old provinces, also have to be eliminated. The dogs, whose history can be traced back to the first years of Spanish colonisation, are very fierce, hunt in packs, attack anything edible, and are a serious menace to both the native fauna and domestic stock. There are even authentic records of attacks on man, particularly a single man at night. Groups of hunters have been organised officially to hunt the packs, and a bounty is paid for every head.

Protection areas: 1. Guachanacabibes; 2. Mil Cumbres; 3. Zapata Swamp; 4. Yaraguabo and Jobo Rosado; 5. Najasa, El Chorrillo, Guaicanamar; 6. La Gran Piedra, Niceto Pérez, Cayo Saetia; 7. Reserves of the Academy of Sciences; 8. Lanier Swamp and southern part of Isla de Pinos; 9. All islets and cays.



Cuban  
solenodon



Feral cats particularly threaten our native endemic insectivore *Solenodon cubanus*. Indeed, they may be its only enemy apart from man, for there are no dogs in the dense, humid, dark forests inhabited by this small 'living fossil', and this is not mongoose habitat; but cat footprints are commonly seen.

### The Hutias

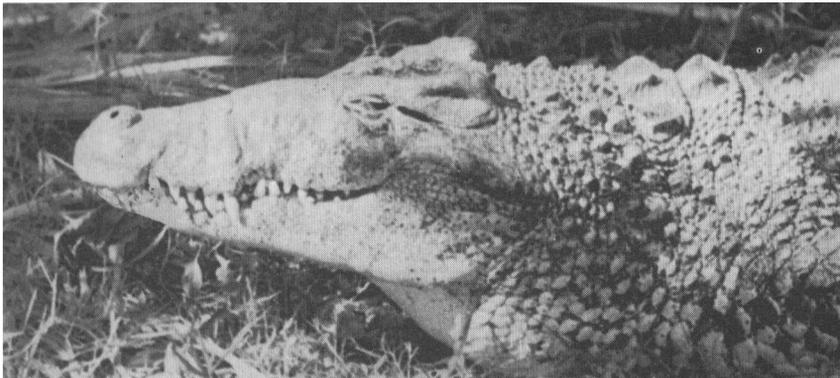
The most endangered of the endemic Cuban hutias are those recently discovered by the author, which are confined to islets and tiny cays. Fishermen used to land and take many hutias in a single raid. Now the 'rat-hutia' *Capromys auritus* can be found only in the central channels of Fragoso Cay off the north coast; the little ground hutia *C. sanfilipensis* in the Juan García Cay north-west of Isla de Pinos, or Treasure Island; the tiny Cabrera's hutia lives only in the Ana Maria Cays, to the south of Camaguey; and Garrido's hutia in Cayo Largo and some smaller cays to the east of Isla de Pinos and south of Zapata Swamp. Man is their only enemy. It is to be hoped that the new Resolution will be enforced and put a stop to the fishermen's raids. Now the dwarf hutia *C. nanus*, living in the protected area of Zapata Swamp but not seen since 1937, may be able to survive.

### The Birds

Cuba's native birds have been depleted by over-hunting, and ground-nesting birds especially by the feral introduced species. For some it is now too late. Some are extinct, and others, including the ivory-billed woodpecker *Campephilus principalis*, face extinction. Only a few individual ivory-bills have been seen in recent years in reserves belonging to the Cuban Academy of Sciences in eastern Cuba; the population may be no more than fifteen. The catey or Cuban parakeet *Aratinga euops* no longer occurs in Isla de Pinos, where it used to be plentiful, and is scarce everywhere.

### Crocodiles

Both our crocodiles are in danger: the endemic *Crocodylus rhombifer* faces



Cuba's endemic  
crocodile,  
*Crocodylus  
rhombifer*

extinction and the native *C. acutus* extermination. Some twenty years ago, when they were threatened by agricultural developments, the populations of *C. rhombifer* in Zapata and Lanier Swamps in Isla de Pinos, were taken to enclosures or 'corrals' built in the Laguna del Tesoro, a big freshwater pool in Zapata Swamp. Unfortunately the same was done with *C. acutus*, and the two species were put together without any consideration of their individual needs. The result was many hybrids, called 'mixturados', mainly *C. acutus* x *C. rhombifer*; mortality was very great, as was the number of mutilated individuals, and the big crocodiles were slaughtered for their hides. Presumably these 'mixturados' had been known to the professional hunters in the wild only in the places where the ranges of the two species overlapped.

All this was done with the best intentions, but without adequate scientific advice. In 1962 I tried to stop this work, but without success. Later, as a crocodilian consultant of IUCN/SSC, I continued my efforts to save the crocodilians. Not long ago the number of 'pure' adult male *C. rhombifer* cropped was about 100, and the situation was (should I say 'is?') desperate. However, recently a new centre for captive pure *C. rhombifer*, called Tasajera, was created in the south-west of Zapata, in Habana Province, and animals were transferred to it from the corrals in Laguna del Testoro. Again the new 'reserve' has no scientific advice, but it is better than nothing, and the new official Resolution protects the future not only of crocodilians but of all the most endangered Cuban vertebrates.

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## Protection for Florida Manatees

'Nearly every living Florida manatee bears cuts and deformities caused by boat propellers', according to the US Fish and Wildlife Service, which is planning to establish manatee refuges and sanctuaries where activities harmful to manatees can be restricted or prohibited at certain times. In 1978 about 80 of the estimated 1000 manatees in Florida waters died, mainly by injuries from power boats or other human activities. Winter is the critical time when the manatees congregate in warm water near natural springs or power plant discharges in search of the 68-70-degree F minimum temperatures that they need. Manatees were almost exterminated in the US in the hunt for their meat and leather, and the Florida animals are the only sizeable US population surviving.

## Snail Darter Loses in the End

The tiny endangered snail darter fish which held up the \$116m. Tellico Dam in Tennessee (see *Oryx*, June 1979, p5) has lost the final battle. By a special amendment to an appropriations bill, Congress ordered the dam to be closed (despite the fact that it had been ruled uneconomic to complete it). The snail darters will be transferred from the Little Tennessee to the Holston River, where they may or may not survive.

## Captive Breeding in the Galapagos

By March 1979, 751 Galapagos giant tortoises, all of endangered subspecies, had been hatched at the Charles Darwin Research Station, and 549 had been released on their island of origin: 79 on Española (Hood), 182 on Pinzon (Duncan), 109 on Santiago (James), 101 on San Cristobal (Chatham), and 78 of two subspecies on Isabela (Albemarle).