

# FIRST INSULAR RECORD OF THE BLACK SPINY-TAILED IGUANA (*CTENOSAURA SIMILIS*) IN THE CAYS OF SIAN KA'AN, IN THE MEXICAN CARIBBEAN

## PRIMER REGISTRO INSULAR DE LA IGUANA RAYADA NEGRA (*CTENOSAURA SIMILIS*) EN LOS CAYOS DE SIAN KAAN, EN EL CARIBE MEXICANO

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*Ctenosaura similis*, the Black Spiny-tailed Iguana, is a medium sized iguana (SVL = 275-350 mm) who is a very common inhabitant in the coastal regions of Middle America, ranging

from the region of Isthmus of Tehuantepec, until Panama. Its distribution area goes around the Yucatan Peninsula but,



**Figura 1.** Ubicación de los cayos pequeños (rombo rojo) donde se observó la población de Iguana Negra de Cola Espinosa (*Ctenosaura similis*) en Bahía de Espíritu Santo, dentro de la Reserva de la Biosfera de Sian Ka'an, Quintana Roo, México.

**Figure 1.** Location of the small cays (red diamond) where the population of Black spiny-tailed iguana (*Ctenosaura similis*) was observed at Bahía de Espíritu Santo, within Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve, Quintana Roo, Mexico.

<p><b>Macrolocalización</b></p>	<p><b>LEYENDA</b></p> <p>◆ Sitio de observación</p>	<p>Fuentes de Información Geográfica INEGI, CONABIO</p>
	<p>Kilómetros</p> <p>0 2.5 5 10</p>	<p><b>Especificaciones cartográficas</b></p> <p>Proyección: UTM Zona: 13 Norte Cuadrícula: 40,000 m Elipsoide: GRS80 Datum: ITRF08 Escala: 250,000</p>





**Figura 2.** Hembra de *Ctenosaura similis* tomando el sol sobre un tocón de palmera. Archivo de fotografía: SDSNH\_HerpPC\_05455. Foto: Sarah Landeo-Yauri  
**Figure 2.** A *Ctenosaura similis* female basking on a palm tree stump. Photo voucher: SDSNH\_HerpPC\_05455. Photo: Sarah Landeo-Yauri.



**Figura 3.** Macho de *Ctenosaura similis* forrajeando entre la vegetación. Archivo de fotografía: SDSNH\_HerpPC\_05456. Foto: Sarah Landeo-Yauri.  
**Figure 3.** An adult male of *Ctenosaura similis* foraging among the vegetation. Photo voucher: SDSNH\_HerpPC\_05456. Photo: Sarah Landeo-Yauri.

apparently, shows a gap between the northern and southern populations within the peninsula (Díaz-Gamboa et al., 2020).

On August 23rd, 2019. We spotted nearly a dozen individuals of *C. similis* basking in sandy beaches of a series of cays located within the Bahía de la Ascension, inside the Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve, 26 km SSW of Punta Allen (municipality of Tulum, Quintana Roo), the most conspicuous of those islets is Cayo Iguanas (Fig. 1), a small cay around 0.42 km<sup>2</sup> (19.56333° N, 87.57449° W; WGS84). The individuals were active, sunning and foraging. According to local fishermen, the spiny tailed iguana is abundant in that cay (hence the toponym) and nearby islets. The photographic evidence (Figs. 2 and 3) is vouchered in the San Diego Natural History Museum as follows: Landeo-Yauri, S. and V. H. González-Sánchez. Verified by Bradford Hollingsworth San Diego Society of Natural History, San Diego Natural History Museum (Photo vouchers: SDSNH\_HerpPC\_05455 and SDSNH\_HerpPC\_05456).

This lizard exhibits a wide distribution across the Yucatán Peninsula (Lee, 1996; Díaz-Gamboa et al., 2020) and is commonly found inhabiting various Mexican Caribbean islands such as Cozumel, Mujeres, Banco Chinchorro, and Contoy (González-Sánchez et al., 2017). Additionally, it can readily be spotted in the mainland of the Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve (Calderón-Mandujano et al., 2006). However, until this recent discovery, its presence on any island of the central coast of Quintana Roo remained unknown. This constitutes the second recorded instance of a reptile species inhabiting this specific region of the Mexican Caribbean, with only a single record of the Cuban anole (*Norops sagrei*) existing for Cayo Culebras (González-Sánchez et al., 2023). This finding helps bridge the gap in the known distribution records between the northern and southern coastal populations within the Mexican Caribbean.

The Black Spiny-tailed iguana is recognized for its adaptability and plasticity in adapting to new habitats (Díaz-Gamboa et al., 2020). Consequently, it is highly likely that this lizard may also be present on or potentially colonize other Sian Ka'an islands, such as Cayo Culebras in the Ascension Bay, or Isla Techal within the nearby Espiritu Santo Bay.

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