



The Virgin Islands

# DAILY NEWS



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Care Guide

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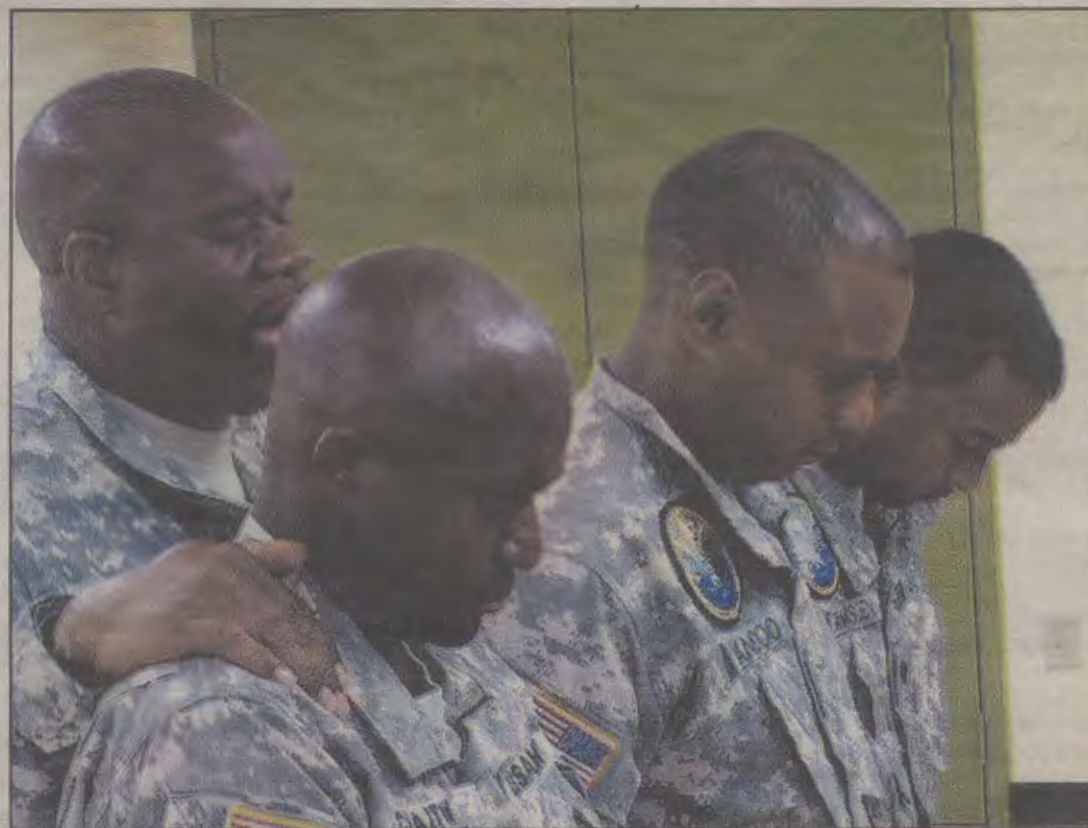
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Daily News Photo by FIONA STOKES  
V.I. National Guard chaplain Capt. Dion Christopher prays for Chief Warrant Officer Fabian Claxton, Staff Sgt. Peter Badoo and Spc. Adrian Ramsden before the three leave for a deployment to Egypt. **Page 2**



Beverly Nicholson-Doty.

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# Endangered lizard thriving in new Buck Island home

By JOY BLACKBURN

Daily News Staff

ST. CROIX — It is a project that the National Park Service has deemed a success.

The reintroduction of the St. Croix Ground Lizard to Buck Island in 2008 has resulted in a successful breeding population there — and that will be the topic as the Park Service lecture series continues on Thursday.

“We have basically repopulated Buck Island. We’ve got a new world out there — and that’s great,” said David Goldstein, chief of interpretation and education at the National Park Service sites on St. Croix.

Nicole Frances Angeli of Texas A & M University will present the lecture on the status of the Ameiva poplops population — the St. Croix ground lizard — that was reintroduced on Buck Island when Gov. John deJongh Jr. released the first one back in 2008, according to a statement the National Park Service issued about the lecture.

The lecture is scheduled for 5 p.m. to 6 p.m. Thursday in the Danish Guinea West India Company Warehouse/Slave Market Building and is free to the public.

The lizards — with a distinctive azure stripe — were unique to St. Croix but were virtually wiped out after Europeans arrived.

“This organism used to be found on St. Croix before Europeans got here,” Goldstein said. “Rats and mongoose basically eradicated it from mainland St. Croix. Maybe 10 years ago, the only place you could find it was on Green Cay.”

The National Park Service had conducted a massive rodent eradication on Buck Island in the early 2000s, which set the stage for reintroducing the lizard, Goldstein said. The eradication was done to protect native plant and animal species that were already on Buck Island and were being threatened by rats.

However, with the rodents gone, the possibility of reintroducing the ground lizard into its natural environment on Buck Island became an interesting



St. Croix Ground Lizard.

“

**If we are able at the turn of the 21st century to begin to shelter and encourage a breeding population of a lizard that exists nowhere else on earth, it means we have a chance at having a hand in maintaining healthy ecosystems on our planet.**

— David Goldstein, National Park Service

prospect, according to Goldstein.

“Because we had gotten rid of the mammalian predators, we were able to do that,” he said.

The move to reintroduce the endangered species involved a good deal of work under the supervision of a variety of federal agencies, he said.

Finally, in 2008, the lizards were released about halfway up a hiking trail on the northwest side of Buck Island. They now have spread to populate about two-thirds of the island, he said.

The V.I. Department of Planning and Natural Resources also reintroduced the ground lizard to Protestant Cay, he said.

Angeli’s doctoral work in Applied Biodiversity Science requires her to return periodically to Buck Island to check on the status of the breeding population of St. Croix ground lizards. She evaluates the environmental threats to population recovery and tracks the

lizard as it moves into new territory.

Her work is sponsored by the National Science Foundation and Texas A & M University, with support from the Park Service, according to the release.

Goldstein said that saving the St. Croix ground lizard is important for a variety of reasons — not the least of which is maintaining biodiversity.

“If we are able at the turn of the 21st century to begin to shelter and encourage a breeding population of a lizard that exists nowhere else on earth, it means we have a chance at having a hand in maintaining healthy ecosystems on our planet,” he said.

The Christiansted National Historic Site parking lot will be free and open for the lecture from 4:45 p.m. to 7 p.m. Thursday.

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