



BLUE IGUANA TALES

Volume 2, Number 1 – 2004 Spring Edition – Quarterly update on the Blue Iguana Recovery Program

FREEDOM !



February saw the start of this year's big reward for 2001's hard work – the release of the first of a dozen two-and-a-half year old iguanas into the Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park in Grand Cayman.

In previous years at least half of the iguanas released into the Park have migrated elsewhere, and many have been lost to road kills, cat predation and other threats in the surrounding unprotected land. This year we're continuing to experiment with new release techniques, and now it looks as though we may have made a breakthrough!

The latest strategy involves providing the iguanas with an ideal home, which they can't bear to leave. For young females at least, a dry, tightly fitting "retreat" made of wood or rock, is evidently a resource to be cherished. It provides a safe place to hide and sleep, with protection from the elements, from predators, and above all from marauding males and competing females.

The first young female to be released this year was placed in her custom retreat late one February evening, and was free to leave when she woke the next morning. As it happened, she didn't want to leave! She spent all her first day of freedom inside her retreat, and all the next day she never went more than 3ft away from its entrance. Gradually she grew bolder and roamed further afield, but now more than a month on, she has remained totally faithful to the site where we released her.



Two weeks after the first release, a second female was released using the same strategy. Again, this iguana is behaving as though her artificial home is the most important thing in her life. Two out of two releases have chosen to stay in the exact location where they were first let go.

It may sound unremarkable, unadventurous even, but this behavior has far-reaching implications. If all our released females behave this way, then we can expect the males (that are to be released later) to stay where the females are. It's too soon to be sure, but just possibly, we may have solved the difficult question of how to persuade our released iguanas to remain in the safety of the Botanic Park, without necessarily having to put a fence around it.

This year's release is probably the last major release into the Park. When all the 2001 hatched youngsters are free, the Park will be almost at its limit for supporting Blue Iguanas. The iguanas hatched in 2002 will need a new site.

Pink Pigeons and Blue Iguanas

Pink Pigeon photograph by J. Hartley - Durrell Wildlife



In 1963 Gerald Durrell founded what is now known as the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, on the island of Jersey in the UK's Channel Islands. A world famous author and broadcaster on wildlife conservation, Durrell wrote 37 books, which have been translated into 31 languages. His most popular book, "My Family and Other Animals", was turned into a successful television series that was broadcast around the world. He died in 1995.

Durrell Wildlife is a highly respected and acclaimed force for conservation, with a remarkable track record in saving endangered species in many corners of the globe. Its logo is the Dodo, the giant land bird of Mauritius, which became extinct in about 1690. Another Mauritian bird, the Mauritius Pink Pigeon, was on the same track, with only 10 birds left in the wild by 1991. Thanks in no small measure to Durrell Wildlife's involvement, wild Pink Pigeons are recovering in Mauritius, now numbering 350.

Moving from pink to blue, Durrell Wildlife last year signed an agreement with the National Trust for the Cayman Islands, to help our Blue Iguana Recovery Program! The agreement has now swung into high gear with a commitment of professional help late this summer, when we hope to release captive-reared iguanas into the Cayman Islands Government's Wilderness Farm. A grant from the Dennis Curry Charitable Trust, through Durrell Wildlife, will support this exciting development.



So if you've been wondering why the Dodo has recently appeared on our web site, www.BlueIguana.ky, now it should be clear – we have a new and powerful ally in our quest to save the Blue Iguana! To learn about Durrell Wildlife, visit www.durrellwildlife.org. There, among many other things, you will find some memorable quotes from Gerald Durrell's writings.

“Remember that the animals and plants have no Member of Parliament they can write to; they can't perform sit-down strikes...they have nobody to speak for them except us, the human beings who share the world with them, but do not own it.” - Gerald Durrell, from “Catch Me a Colobus”

Deutsche Bank and Disney

Avid readers of Blue Iguana Tales will recall that in October 2003 we received a grant from the [Disney Wildlife Conservation Fund](#), to introduce Blue Iguana related resources to the Cayman Islands National Curriculum for schools. The work is already well underway, but as part of our bid to Disney we committed to trying to raise the balance of the funds needed to realize this project's full potential.

Our vision was to write and print high quality curriculum modules for Pre-school, through Key Stages 1 and 2, covering many aspects of science and language arts. With these printed modules would be “[Blue Dragon Treasure Chests](#)” filled with teaching and learning tools, and a DVD all about the Cayman Blue Iguana. Additional resources would be developed for key stages 3 and 4. Throughout all, the Blue Iguana, its habitats, related animals and plants, and the conservation program would be used to illustrate and teach knowledge and skills specifically called for in the National Curriculum.





Deutsche Bank (Cayman) Ltd. obviously liked this idea; when the National Trust for the Cayman Islands' Dr. Mat Cottam put the idea to their Board, they were instantly enthusiastic! The result? Disney Wildlife's funding has indeed been matched, and we now have the resources to complete the whole project!

“Deutsche Bank is proud to be a part of this worthy program”, states Marketing Manager Sophie Ebanks-Hendrie. “We are committed to the future of the Cayman Islands, and what better way to do this than through the Blue Iguana Recovery Program. The program is dedicated to the restoration of our indigenous wildlife – the Blue Iguana – through education targeted to our young Caymanians. Education will always be the key for the future of Cayman and our wildlife. The Gerald Durrell Wildlife Trust in Jersey, Channel Islands has been actively involved in this and other projects to preserve endangered species, and our Jersey head office has had a long association with them. So it is nice that after 20 years here, we can do our bit to help Cayman’s Blue Iguana.”

After the “Year of the Blue Dragon” has helped raise awareness of the plight of the Cayman Blue Iguana everywhere, we are now building a framework to ensure the message is never forgotten. At the same time we are helping provide the kind of locally relevant material that teachers are keen to use, in teaching the skills, knowledge and values Cayman’s youth will continue to need, generation after generation.

Kansas Connection



Many years before a formal conservation program began for Grand Cayman’s Blue Iguanas, concern for their survival in the wild led to a few Blues being placed in zoos in the USA. In more recent times such exchanges are much more carefully planned and are subject to extremely strict local and international laws, but the original travelers survived and their offspring are now being cared for at several institutions. There they serve as ambassadors for their kind, attracting interest and support for our Blue Iguanas in the wild. Tuco, a 10-year-old male Blue Iguana living at [Sedgwick County Zoo](#), Wichita, Kansas, is a shining example.

Last year SCZ zookeeper Yukie Asano-Vong led volunteers and fellow reptile staff in a merchandising campaign, which raised \$3,404.29 for the Blue Iguana Recovery Program. On busy weekends and holidays through the spring and summer, the group set up in the hallway of their reptile and amphibian building offering hand-made Blue Iguana items, Iguana Specialist Group T-shirts, Blue Iguana posters, anything that would sell whether for 20 cents or 20 dollars plus.



Luis Bello Zarallo, zoo volunteer and Yukie Asano-Vong selling a wide selection of Blue iguana merchandise



(L – R) Veronica Laflin (Sr. Keeper), Steve Larson, Yukie Asano-Vong and Mike Taylor (Zookeepers)

Thanks to Sedgwick County Zoo's tremendous creativity and commitment, backed by purchasing management from Sandy Binns at the International Reptile Conservation Foundation, we have been able to acquire a range of urgently needed equipment, ranging from electronic injectable ID tags to radio tracking gear for the next major Blue Iguana release to the wild.

When you consider that Wichita is 1,591 miles from Grand Cayman, you may wonder, what is the connection? But of course the connection is right there in Wichita, and he's called Tuco.

Meet the Blue Crew!

"Never doubt that a few dedicated people can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has" goes the oft-quoted adage from Margaret Mead. Fortunately for the Blue Iguana's world, there are more and more dedicated people determined to steer Grand Cayman's unique giant blue lizard away from extinction.

Here we plan to highlight one person in each successive issue of Blue Iguana Tales, in no particular order or priority, selected from those who give of their time, energy and passion, again and again and again. This spring, we want to introduce Joel G. Jefferson.

A year ago Joel, who comes from West Bay in Grand Cayman and currently works at the Bank of Butterfield (Cayman) Ltd., was looking for information about the Blue Iguana on the internet. He found both Cyclura.com and BlueIguana.ky, followed up, and shortly after was wielding a paint roller, helping put the finishing touches to a set of new Blue Iguana breeding pens. Since then he has become one of the project's most frequent weekend volunteers, helping excavate iguana nests to gather the eggs for incubation, monitoring wild iguana movements, building iguana "retreats" from rocks and cement... in short, lending a practical hand wherever is needed.

Joel Jefferson and "Slugger"

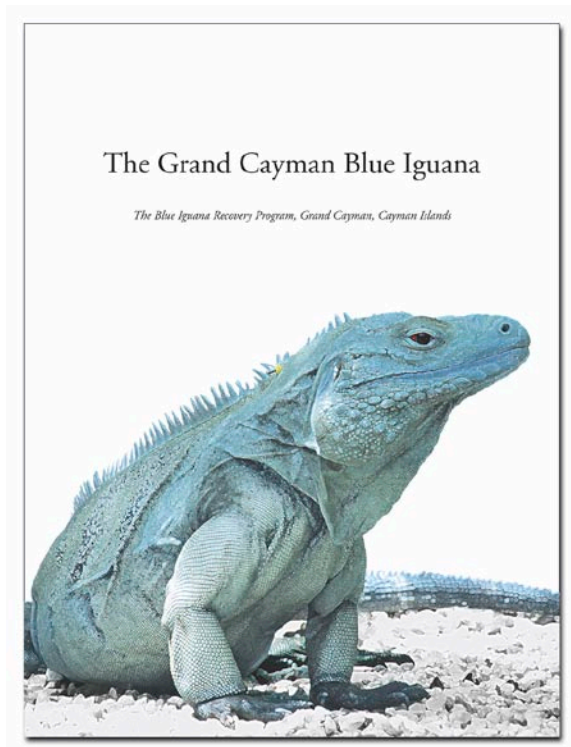


Photograph by Divya Visvanath

When asked what motivates him to give up his weekend time to this kind of work, this is what he has to say:

"Knowing that our largest indigenous animal is on the verge of extinction motivates me, but what really gets me going is the fact that we can do something about it. It's not like having to teach a bird to fly or a lion to hunt; these animals naturally do what they do purely from instinct, which is what makes them special. All we really have to do is raise them up to a particular size where they are no longer in danger of predators and they are fine. That in itself is also motivation because it's just that easy. All we need is some extra helping hands to go around and some financial support and the program will succeed. These animals are found nowhere else on earth, not even on the sister islands. To lose something so special would truly be a national tragedy and that keeps me going."

Blue Booklet

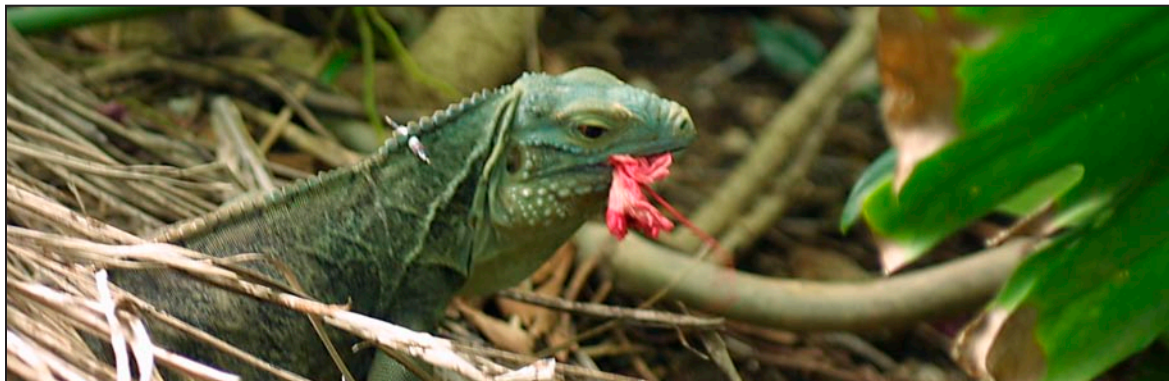


Sample pages



Thanks to another mammoth contribution of time and effort by John Binns, a very smart, short booklet on the Blue Iguana is now available in extremely limited numbers. Written by the Program's director Fred Burton, and designed mainly as support material for several major grant applications, this booklet simply presents the Blue Iguana and the Blue Iguana Recovery Program on 16 full color pages, with an onion-skin fly and an embossed color cover. Twelve inches by nine, and fit to grace any corporate desk, this may also be of some interest to individuals. No more than 35 copies are available for sale, at a cost of \$40 per copy (all proceeds to benefit the Blue Iguana Recovery Program). If you want one please contact John at Jbinns@cyclura.com, who will tell you that for some extra, you can even get one signed by the author and photographers!

The printing cost was covered by a grant from the International Iguana Society (WWW.IGUANASOCIETY.ORG) combined with pooled grants for the Blue Iguanas held by the International Reptile Conservation Foundation. Thanks to all!



Blue Mouse-pads



In the last Blue Iguana Tales we highlighted our Blue Iguana Mouse Pads, which are still available, though stocks are dwindling. In Cayman, look for them in the gift shops at the Botanic Park, Pedro St. James, Pure Art, the National Gallery, Hobbies & Books, Tortuga Rum Company outlets, the Blue Iguana Souvenir Outlet, Kirk Office and of course, at the National Trust house on Courts Road.

Interested in buying or selling Blue Iguana products? Outside the Cayman Islands, check one of these web sites:

www.BLUEIGUANA.KY

www.CYCLURA.COM

In Cayman, contact the National Trust for the Cayman Islands, 949-0121 - Or - contact the Blue Iguana Recovery Program at the address below.

Donations

Direct financial assistance to the Blue Iguana Recovery Program can be made to the “Blue Iguana Conservation Fund” at PO Box 10308 APO, Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands. This is an audited National Trust account restricted to the Blue Iguana Recovery Program.

In the US, tax-deductible contributions can be made through either of two 501(c)(3) foundations:



International Iguana Foundation
Rick Hudson, Program Officer
1989 Colonial Parkway
Fort Worth, Texas 76110

International Reptile Conservation Foundation
John Binns, President
3010 Magnum Drive
San Jose, California 95135



In either case, be sure to indicate clearly that you wish your contribution to assist the Blue Iguana Recovery Program.



“Quincy” - March 2004



A program of the National Trust for the Cayman Islands, in association with local and international partners.

www.NationalTrust.org.ky

