

LETTER FROM THE VICE-PRESIDENT

Greetings, Friends! Our President normally handles this column, but he's currently in the field. Since I was given this opportunity (as Vice-President), I thought I would tell you a little about myself and about how I became involved with (iguana) conservation. Even as a youngster, I was interested in herpetology, especially lizards, and I have run the gamut of keeping all the various types of herps. As I got older, I started concentrating on specific lizard families: geckos, chameleons, and iguanids, with *Anolis* and true iguanas as favorites. I began traveling regularly to the Caribbean and, to a lesser extent, Central and South America in search of the 350+ species of anoles.

Although most hobbyists consider anoles to be a beginner's lizard or, even worse, snake food, they are usually not aware of the specialization and evolution of this varied group. Anoles as a group are the most intensely studied reptiles in the world, and they have served as models for a number of ecological and evolutionary studies.

In my travels in search of anoles, I inevitably encountered some of the species of *Cyclura*, *Iguana*, and *Ctenosaura*. My first encounter, and one of the most memorable, was on the Naval Base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. I was walking along the edge of a scrub thicket looking (of course) for anoles and Curlytail Lizards (*Leiocephalus*). At the time, I was a young man (19–20) and wasn't fully aware of the status or abundance of Cuban Iguanas on the base. I knew that they were protected and rare, so I didn't expect to see any in the limited time available to me. However, as I made my way along the path, out of the corner of my eye, I noticed movement, large movement. I turned to see a huge male *Cyclura nubila* three meters away bobbing his head at me. My emotions were a mix of excitement, veneration, amazement, and surprisingly, for just a moment, FEAR, as I observed this remarkable creature, who seemed larger than life. The experience was profoundly affecting. Needless to say, I was hooked.

Fifteen years later, seeing an iguana in its natural habitat still evokes the same emotions (except fear). After that encounter, I felt I needed to learn more about these magnificent lizards, and to find out what I personally could do to help reverse the rapid decline in their numbers. Since then, I have met many wonderful people dedicated to iguanas, and have been privileged to participate in several conservation projects, most recently a population survey of *Cyclura pinguis* on Anegada. This spring, I will assist in the Turks & Caicos Islands with *C. carinata* translocation and research. I hope that, in some small way, my work will help assure that these beautiful creatures will continue to inspire awe and reverence for many years to come.



Joe Burgess

Joe Burgess with an *Anolis luteogularis*. Photograph by Dorothy Burgess.

The IIS contingent in Seattle: Izzy, John Binns, Joe Wasilewski, and Joe Burgess (left to right).



Surveys on Anegada were hot work: Joe Burgess (left), Sallie Davie (center), and Roberto Maria (right) take a short break. Photograph by John Binns.