

## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT AND SECRETARY

Just when you thought that an ordinary iguanophile had few options for helping with conservation work ...

We've been working for Blue Iguanas for years and can recite all the details of their plight in our sleep — world's most endangered reptile, only 20–30 left in the wild, captive breeding program, etc. — but the opportunity for some hands-on involvement came only this summer.

Although it remains one of the most endangered reptiles on earth, the Blue Iguana of Grand Cayman can be saved from extinction. The success of the captive breeding program headed by Fred Burton was apparent as the incubators started filling up with this year's eggs. With the facility in QEII Botanic Park already stretched to capacity with last year's record 84 hatchlings, clearly some help was needed — and help arrived from many quarters. Enter John Binns of the International Reptile Conservation Foundation and his quickly assembled crew of volunteers from Team Blue! The team brought together the talents and enthusiasm of zoo professionals and iguana enthusiasts from around the world. Financial help came from the International Iguana Society (in part from the Rob Dorson Trust Fund), the International Reptile Conservation Foundation (IRCF), the International Iguana Foundation (whose director, Rick Hudson, encouraged the participation of representative from several zoos, including Indianapolis, Tulsa, Knoxville, and Phoenix), and from several very generous local Caymanian individuals and businesses.

From 30 July to 13 August, Team Blue, with the assistance of a variety of local volunteers, swung hammers, wielded shovels, rakes, and assorted power tools, and managed to construct 102 new cages for Blue Iguanas. All of the existing cages got a thorough cleaning and refurbishing, plus repairs where needed. Some of the two-year-old animals slated for September release were already moved into larger quarters and (with the assistance of the local football team!) massive quantities of rock, soil, and vegetation were moved around within the freshly poured cement of the new breeding enclosures in preparation for their future inhabitants.

Volunteers also had a chance to learn about the natural plant components of the Blue Iguana diet, which have led to much-improved breeding success. Some Team members also participated in a rather grueling hike into the rocky and forbidding Salina Reserve to view the site slated for the September releases.

Our final task (or so we thought!) was to give the power tools a thorough workout clearing an area for a new work and storage shed. About half the concrete floor was poured for the shed, just as the rains accompanying Hurricane Charley started pouring ...

All the excitement of working with the Blue Iguanas plus a close encounter with a hurricane (!) was almost too much. With quick instructions from Fred Burton, everyone pitched in



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*Illustration by Joel Friesch.*

to prepare the facility to best withstand the high winds and torrential rains. Fortunately for the animals (and the island), little damage was done and, with a few cancelled outgoing flights, extra hands were available to set all the cages back up again.

The work was tough, the heat and the sun grueling, but we made a difference! And we're all already encouraging John to let us know about the next construction and repair field trip...

Joe Wasilewski

AJ Gutman