



Archie a few days before I left; although his health was much better, he was still disoriented and moved about his pen cautiously.

# The Seven Blues of May<sup>1</sup>

John Binns

International Reptile Conservation Foundation

Photographs by the author except where indicated.



Sunday is a day of the week that typically provides peace and quiet, time to catch up on the work accumulated during the previous week. Sunday, 4 May 2008, started off no differently. The day would be dedicated to editing material for the June issue of *Iguana*, and replying to an assortment of emails, particularly one regarding the new signs that had just arrived at the docks in Grand Cayman for the Blue Iguana facility.

Downstairs, Sandy was taking advantage of the day to evaluate new web design templates for the Blue Iguana website, conferring with her developers on enhancements, functionality, and ease of maintenance. The decision to give the Blue website a new face had been made months before, but very recent activity with the European Union (EU) Grant, discussion of a new protected area, and facility signage enhancements were making the web-site upgrade a priority.

Some 2,733 miles away, Fred Burton, Director of the Blue Iguana Recovery Program, was enjoying the weekend break, the warm, tranquil early morning only occasionally interrupted by

the crowing of a rooster intent on being a nuisance. Sipping on a mug of coffee, Fred was immersed in polishing the details of a EU Grant that would consume the better part of his attention during the coming week.

Sam Hicks, personal assistant to Fred, and her partner, Giles Shaxted, had been out the night before celebrating their anniversary. They'd gotten in late and planned to sleep in.

In George Town, John Marotta, Head Warden at the facility, was leisurely enjoying his first day off in a month. John had his A-Team of regular local volunteers, Stu Petch, Gary Redfern, and Sheilagh Rickard, set to manage the day's work at the facility.

All that peaceful orderliness was about to change.

Stu, Gary, and Sheilagh converged at the QE II Botanic Park at 0900 h when the park entrance gate was to be unlocked.

<sup>1</sup> This story will serve as an account of these events in the archives of the Blue Iguana Recovery Program.



FRED BURTON

This photograph was taken as Fred Burton and John Marotta entered the main facility pen area. Eldemire (lower left) is lying on his side, his left leg missing; Jessica (upper right) lies motionless although still alive.

They drove down the road leading to the facility, parked, and, once the gate to the old wire-fenced cages and the gate leading into the large pen area were unlocked as customary, they began a walk-around to check on the iguanas.

At 0910 h, John's cell phone rang; caller ID indicated it was Gary. The call could only be one of a few things, John thought to himself, either Gary couldn't join the team today, a key to the facility gates was lost, or the iguana food he had collected the day before couldn't be found. What John wasn't prepared for was the tone of Gary's question and what followed: "*Does Eldemire have bead tags?*" A pause, then: "*Eldemire is out of his pen and dead.*" Before the words could be fully fathomed, John instinctively asked if any other iguanas had been injured. In the background, he could not quite make out what Stu was telling Gary, but he realized then that something insanely wrong had occurred. After a slight delay, Gary said: "*Jessica is out of her pen and injured, and Sara is dead.*" It was enough for John; he blasted out the door heading to the facility. John was aware that Fred's car was in for repairs and knew he'd have to detour to pick him up.

Gary then called Fred. Fred struggled to hear the soft-spoken clipped South African accent, but what got Fred's attention were the words: "*We've got a problem.*" Gary continued his update in a state of shock as he, Stu, and Sheilagh walked the facility, uncovering the enormity of the situation.

Fred knew he had to get to the facility quickly but he was without a car. The phone rang almost immediately; it was John saying he'd be there momentarily. As they drove toward the park, Fred called Mat Cottam of the Department of Environment to inform him of the horror and to discuss who needed to be alerted immediately. Unable to concentrate as they made their way through traffic, Fred left that for Mat to decide.

By the time they arrived, Carl Edwards from the Department of Environment Enforcement Office was already there. Fred and John made their way into the facility, already engulfed in emotion and working hard to get their heads around the scene. As they neared the main area, John recalled looking between the slats of the facility fence and seeing a large male Blue lying on its side with his left rear leg missing. Not far away was Jessica. John quickly recognized the large male as Eldemire. Over the past three years, John had taken a special liking to this iguana with his gnarly old-man looks and missing spines. Something special about his appearance and demeanor had captured John's heart.

By the time Fred, John, and Carl arrived, Gary and Stu had completed their inspection of the grounds and had a tally of fatalities, injured, and missing. Fred transcribed the list into his notebook. Sheilagh had taken it upon herself earlier to break away to feed and water the iguanas. Despite the mayhem surrounding her, she worked silently in background taking care of what needed to be done.

Fred, John, and the others walked the grounds taking in the unimaginable horror as well as anyone could. Eldemire, Sara, Yellow, and Digger were dead. Pedro's entrails were found just outside the entrance to his pen; his body was missing. Jessica was clearly injured, although she was alert and able to walk. She was carefully moved back into her pen. Billy, appearing disoriented, had sustained a huge gash on his right front leg and had a large hematoma over his right rib cage. Deborah, Billy's mate was first thought to be missing, but an intensive search revealed that she was underground nesting. Archie was beaten and almost unconscious. All but Eldemire, Jessica, and Pedro were found in their pens.



FRED BURTON

Billy stationary in his pen with a large gash on his right front leg.

The slaughter of the captive Blues immediately raised fears that the free-ranging Blues in the Park may have been hit as well. The search began. Biter, whose retreat is located next to the fence outside of Sara's pen, was okay. Mad Max Too was okay. One by one, each animal was found and all were healthy.

While John continued his inspection, Fred took the opportunity to text-message me with the news and to update Mat, who had been working feverishly contacting others on the island. Shortly, Dr. Colin Wakelin, Department of Agriculture Veterinarian, Gina Ebanks, Director of Environment, Mat Cottam, Senior Research Officer for the Department of Environment, Carla Reid, Chair of the National Trust for the Cayman Islands, and a forensic team from the Royal Cayman Islands Police arrived at the scene.

Dr. Wakelin immediately began suturing the gash in Billy's leg. He then examined Jessica, who at that moment appeared hurt but not seriously injured. Dr. Wakelin advised Fred to keep a close watch on her condition and notify him immediately should her condition change. Next he examined Archie, advising that he also be monitored closely. Aside from Eldemire and Billy, the rest had no obvious external signs of injury. The speculation was that all of the affected animals had suffered internal injuries either from being stepped on or beaten. This raised the question of how many other captive iguanas had been brutalized and had yet to display any symptoms.

I was deeply entrenched in photo editing when the phone chimed to alert me of a text message. The screen read: Fred Burton: *"The dead list... Eldemire. Sara. Digger. Yellow. Pedro. What can I say..."* Confused, I messaged back to Fred: *"What dead list???"* Knowing my reply would take time to reach him, I returned to editing, but the oddness of Fred's message made me review it again. At that point, I realized that I had received three messages and had only read the last. The first message sent at 0913 h PST read: *"Juan, we have a catastrophe at the facility. Four igs are dead. Police are on the case. Looks clearly like human agency. We are all in shock and still s..."* The message was cut off and followed by a second garbled message: *"??? 7??G=."* In alarm, I messaged back: *"Oh Crap I just read the previous messages."* Then I immediately dialed his cell. In a matter of seconds, I was

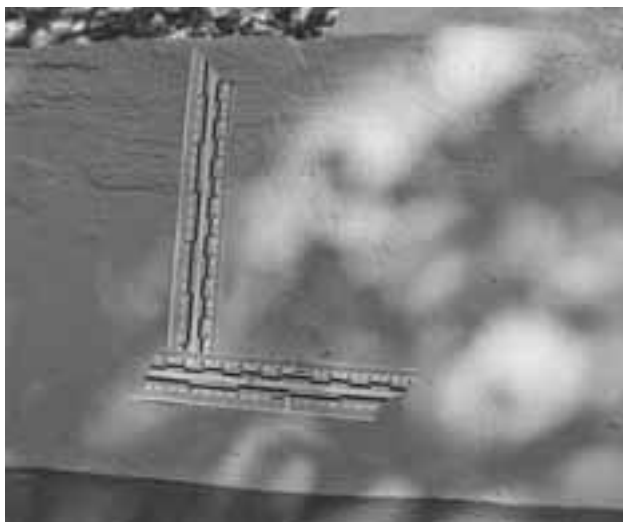
getting a complete rundown on what had happened. Fred was having a difficult time as he spoke and was noticeably shaken, as was I listening to the account of the carnage. As with all things Blue, I let Fred know that whatever support he needed, the IRCF was standing by. He requested that we get the news out as well as we could. Distressed, I sent out the broadcast messages. Sandy and I then began to prepare and organize for the firestorm that was sure to follow.

As the police and Department of Environment enforcement people took control of the crime scene, Fred and the others gathered under the visitors' tent in the main compound. Talk centered around how best to handle the media. Fred had been taking photographs for potential use in the investigation since he'd arrived on the scene; some of those and others he was yet to take would meet the media requirements.

John and Fred struggled to decide which of them should call Sam; it had to be done and both knew it would hit her hard. In the end, John made the call. Sam's downstairs phone rang some time after 1100 h. Sensing that the call might be important, she made her way down the stairs in a race with the answering machine. She didn't make it. The caller ID indicated it was John. Not unusual for him to call given the small size of the team. She hit redial.

John answered and came right to the point: *"I'm at the Park. Someone hit the captive facility and some of the animals are dead."* Sam flashed on Digger and she prayed his name wouldn't be mentioned. John continued: *"Yellow, Sara, and Eldemire are dead. Pedro is dead,"* a pause... *"Digger is dead."* The news pierced her heart.

As she drove toward the park, she recalls her mood being fatalistic. Concerned that she'd have an accident in her haste to get to Digger, she was hoping all the time that this was some



Crime scene evidence markers.



Samantha Hicks in a cherished moment with Digger.

huge mistake. She arrived before noon. As she made her way to Digger, Stu and Gary followed. By this time both of them were mentally fatigued and emotionally drained, but their concern for Sam took precedence. Coming to terms with the fact that the iguanas were gone was hard, and Sam needed proof — which came all too quickly.

For a time, Sam crouched next to the pen wall devastated, weeping uncontrollably — but she needed to be closer. Asking the attending policeman for permission and without waiting for an answer, she jumped the wall. She recalls Digger being hot, not looking broken but not right, not a mess but certainly the lifeless body was not Digger anymore. She recalls: *"If I ever needed affirmation that such a thing as a soul exists, there it was. I crouched over this animal that I had spent so many hours with and I knew that were it not for the location and the unassailable circumstances, I would have never known him to be Digger. The particular cheeky slant to his eyes was hidden because he had squeezed them tightly shut, he looked too big and his body too long, so I suppose in life he had carried himself tall, but there is no great surprise there."* She stayed with him clutched gently in her arms.

Once the police had finished gathering the forensics, the bodies were moved to the tent for a more thorough examination. When Dr. Wakelin completed his work, he handed the four bodies over to a policewoman for transport; they would be X-rayed and then placed in cold storage. Dr. Wakelin left the park shortly thereafter.

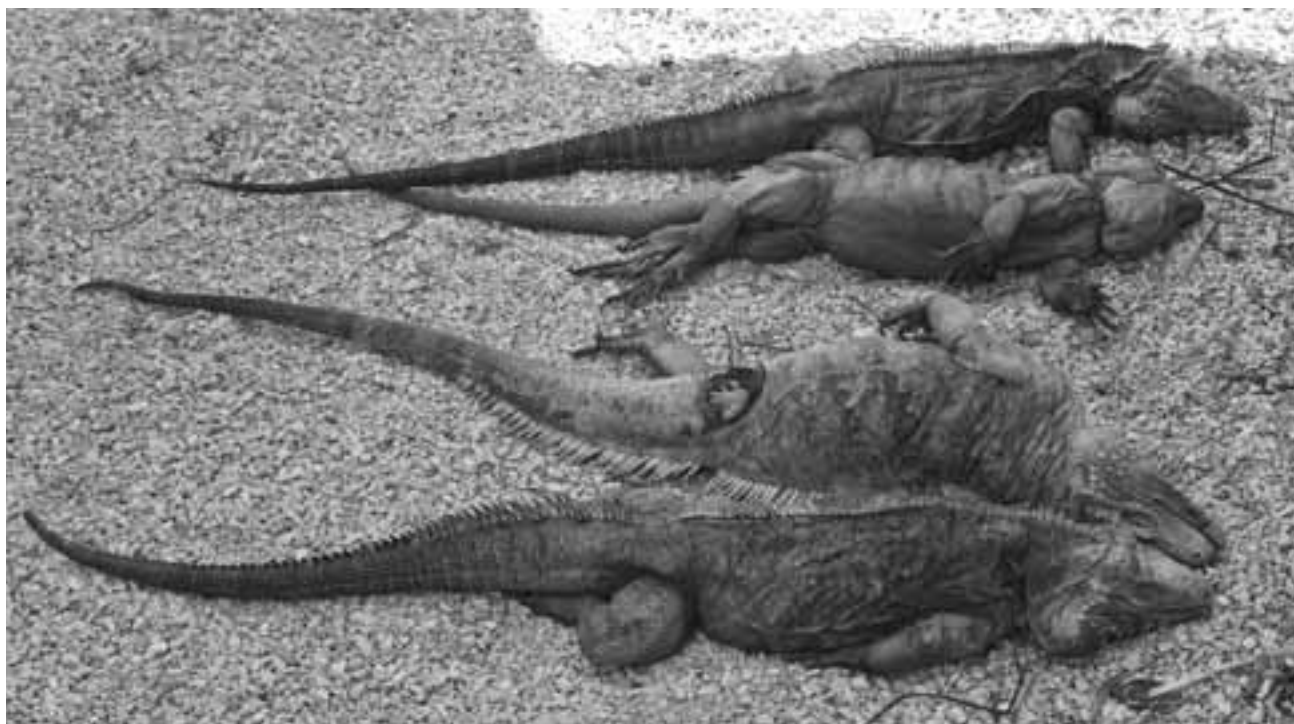
By this time John had resumed caring for the Blues; less burdened thanks to Sheilagh's earlier efforts, he had more time to monitor health status and look for signs that any of the others had been injured. John noted that Matthias was acting mildly sluggish, possibly due to the weather, but since he was up in his tree he couldn't have been seriously injured.

Fred called Carol Winker of the *Caymanian Compass* to break the news. He then made his way back to check on Jessica. She had stopped responding to touch, and her breathing was shallow. Fred then realized she was mortally wounded. Carol arrived about the same time. Fred was on the phone with Dr. Wakelin preparing to transport Jessica to his office; Carol snapped the shot. Carol's front-page story and photograph of Fred on the phone with his hand on Jessica was the beginning of the weeklong media frenzy of front-page news and radio broadcasts as the Associated Press distributed the news to the worldwide media.

Jessica was lying on the clinic table as Dr. Wakelin did everything he could to bring her back, but it was hopeless. How she survived for as long as she did was anyone's guess. The decision was made to let her live her last hours away from the clinic, and no place was more appropriate than Fred's home. I received a message from him shortly thereafter: *"Jessica is now fading. The vet has done all he can with Bonnie's<sup>2</sup> advice. She is on my lap with minimal life signs only."* Jessica's final moments were witnessed by a small group of people who stopped by Fred's house. Present were Luigi Moxam, One-345 clothing line, Selita Ebanks, a Caymanian supermodel, Orneil Galbraith, a former BIRP warden, and Team Blue volunteer Clara Lawrence. By day's end, the death toll had risen to six.

By Monday morning (5 May), news of the murders was spreading like wildfire. After a sleepless night, Fred was up early. The phone was ringing, and incoming email already numbered in the hundreds, just as it did for us in California. Sam arrived

<sup>2</sup> Bonnie Raphael, DVM, Dipl. ACZM, Senior Veterinarian, Global Health Programs, Wildlife Conservation Society, Bronx, New York.



After the initial crime scene investigation was completed, the bodies of the four Blues were moved under the tour tent prior to being transported for radiographs. From the top, Yellow, Sara, Eldemire, and Digger.

to relieve Fred so he could address official matters from law enforcement and government officials.

Sam established her workspace in the corner of Fred's office that came equipped with an outdated and temperamental PC, which I replaced when I arrived with one of Fred's upgraded computers that I had serviced. Another makeshift table was assembled in the middle of the room to act as central depository for printouts and other documents that would be needed. With a phone in place, her workstation neatly organized and com-

puter humming, she began what would be a weeklong nightmarish test of every administrative skill imaginable under conditions for which none of us were prepared. Throughout the crisis, Sam did as Sam does; she entrenched herself, focused unemotionally, and met the challenges that under normal circumstances would have taken an office full of people to manage.

Park security, at a level no one had ever imagined necessary, was an immediate concern to ensure that the perpetrators would not hit again. The Blue program operates meagerly on funds derived from local and international contributions, and relies heavily on a volunteer base. No funds existed for any level of security. So, John, Fred, and volunteers from BIRP and the National Trust for the Cayman Islands took it upon themselves to guard the facility until a solution could be found.

John was up early and slept no better than the rest of us. With emotions high and a growing anger, he still had to manage the facility's daily operation. The work was complicated by having to monitor all the iguanas for possible signs of injury, as well as by the almost constant barrage of interruptions from police inspectors, Department of Environment personnel, and the press — but, like all others committed to the program, he reached deep and found the inner strength to expertly manage the task.

In California, we too were deluged with incoming email and phone calls. Of paramount importance was the creation of a new section on the Blue Iguana website to centralize and disseminate information on the unfolding story. Offers of assistance and donations, as well as letters of condolence for the fallen, started pouring in from around the world. Ironically, this outpouring provided



COURTESY OF THE CAYMAN FREE PRESS

Fred Burton on the phone with Dr. Colin Wakelin discussing Jessica's declining health.



DR. MAT DACOSTA COTTAM

Dr. Colin Wakelin, Department of Agriculture Veterinarian, gives artificial respiration to Jessica as Fred Burton looks on. At this time, Jessica was fading and not responding to care.



confirmation that our years of effort to bring attention to the plight of the Blues had been successful. People obviously cared, but what a horrible price to pay for such attention.

Sarah Agnolin and a group of her friends were exploring some of Grand Cayman's caves near the Park when she received a call from one of her coworkers at the Ritz-Carlton tearfully informing her of the murders. Sarah works for the Ritz-Carlton's Ambassadors of the Environment program taking children and adults to visit the Blue facility as a part of their program. In her free time, she and other naturalists from the Ritz, like Kirsten Werner and Taya Maki, regularly volunteer at the facility. She called John to get more details on what had happened and to offer assistance. Over the days to follow, the girls from the Ritz dedicated every available hour to assisting John. However, their largest contribution to the crisis was a parallel fundraising effort. Sarah and her colleague Kurt Christian conceived, negotiated, and set up donation tables outside Grand Cayman's busiest stores with the goal of collecting \$3,000. With 50 volunteers and tables with nothing more than 5-gallon plastic water jugs with taped-on labels, they reached their goal the first day and, after three days, had amassed over \$16,000 in walk-by donations. The news had deeply touched and outraged everyone on the island from top government officials to the old folks on the East End, and everyone wanted to help.

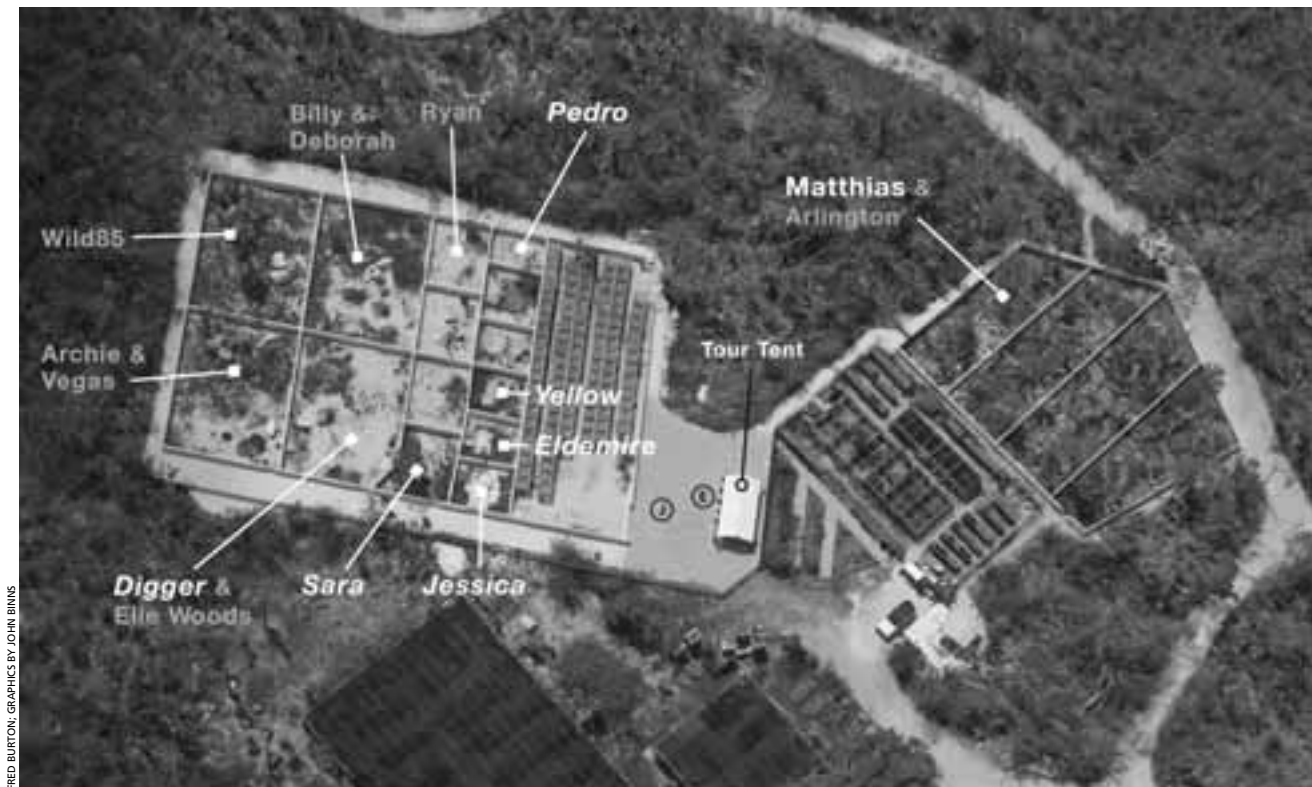
Behind the scenes, the police and other enforcement officials were working feverishly to put together the pieces of the crime. To facilitate identification of the perpetrators, talk of creating a reward quickly gained support. By the end of Monday, enough funds had been secured to target the reward at CI \$10,000. Crime Stoppers would handle the promotion, and

local security companies were offering to install security systems at the facility and in the Park.

On Tuesday (6 May), the Blue Team hit the ground running, operating at full efficiency. John had the security watch at the facility the night before, but was nevertheless up at first light. At the top of John's priority list was checking on Billy, Archie, and Matthias. He and Fred were closely monitoring any new symptoms or signs of health issues. Female Blues were laying their eggs about a month early, which also would have an impact on his schedule.

Fred was tireless. He was interviewed for four different morning shows prior to attending the autopsies conducted by Dr. Wakelin at the St. Matthew's Veterinary School's facility at Lower Valley. At days end, Fred's final email to me read: *"Nuts here too, Juan, I am so exhausted I am about to drop. Four different shows in the morning, the autopsy, on Radio Cayman after that, back to the Park, and on the phone since I got home. I am humbled by the effort that others are putting in at the same time, yourselves included, Sam, John, the National Trust, Department of Environment, and the community at large. I'm going to have to close down, shower, go out for some food, and a quiet drink to plan the burial ceremony. I simply can't keep focused without something a little restful and a decent night's sleep, perhaps. Thanks SO much Juan. Fred."*

On Wednesday (7 May), John arrived early at the Park. To save time, he decided to take the shortest route and check on Matthias before checking the others. He found Matthias dead in his retreat; he had died sometime during the night. John had reached his breaking point. His eyes welled with tears of rage, angered that anyone could conceive and carry out such a hideous crime on such magnificent and unique creatures. The



FRED BURTON; GRAPHICS BY JOHN BINNS

Aerial photograph identifying pen locations for the dead and those that survived. The circle "E" marks the location where Eldemire was found, and circle "J" where Jessica lay when the murders were discovered.

death toll was now at seven. He composed himself before calling Fred.

With the news of Matthias, and fearing that Archie and Billy's condition might decline, Fred called Dr. Bonnie Raphael, Senior Veterinarian, Global Health Programs at the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) in Bronx, New York to ask for emergency veterinary assistance. That afternoon, Fred gathered with others at the Department of Environment to attend a debriefing on the autopsies. Results indicated that besides humans, canines were involved, adding to the horror to which these poor creatures had been subjected. The decision was made to keep information specific to the investigation from the media and the public at large.

News of the murders reached Dr. Stephanie James, Senior Veterinarian, Global Health Programs, WCS, who recalls staring at the message for five minutes wondering how something so awful could happen. Over the next few days, treating gorillas, frogs, deer, and pheasants, she monitored what was unfolding in Grand Cayman. The news of Matthias' death reached Dr. James in the midst of packing for a trip to Anegada, British Virgin Islands, to perform health assessments on pre-release captive Anegada Iguanas at the headstarting facility. Dr. Raphael asked her if she would be willing to travel to Grand Cayman to assist with Billy and Archie. She agreed without a moment's hesitation and immediately began working on necessary paperwork. To practice veterinary medicine in the Cayman Islands, she needed to be licensed, requiring approval from the Department of Agriculture and the Cayman Islands Veterinary Board. In Grand Cayman, the senior government officers present took exceptional steps to facilitate the request so that she could start work on Billy and Archie as soon as she arrived. Within six hours of the initial call, she had her license, a process that normally takes weeks. She packed for the unknown (antibiotics, fluids, analgesics, vitamins, syringes, a blood gas analyzer, and other potentially useful supplies), and she was scheduled on the first flight out of JFK the next morning.

Later that same afternoon, Fred went to the Park, and, with the help of John and Cameron Richardson, a regular volunteer, carefully captured Billy and Archie so they could be taken to St. Matthew's Veterinary School for radiographs. Knowing Dr. James was due to arrive the next day, he subsequently took Billy and Archie home, which would better facilitate and expedite Dr. James' examination and minimize the stress imposed on the iguanas.

Fred called that evening to ask if Sandy and I would travel to Grand Cayman to attend the burial tentatively scheduled for 11 May, and to assist with the crisis. We agreed. Giles Shaxted, Sam's partner, worked miracles organizing flight arrangements, and securing free lodging for us at Compass Point Dive Resort and Ocean Frontiers Diving, East End, Grand Cayman. The next day and a half was a blur as we made arrangements to leave.

By Thursday (8 May), news of the murders had gained international attention and it dominated the news in Grand Cayman. The influx of condolences, offers of assistance, Blue sponsorships, and contributions were reaching epic proportions. The team was completely inundated trying to respond. Things were no different for John at the Park. The Department of Environment enforcement and police inspectors again were



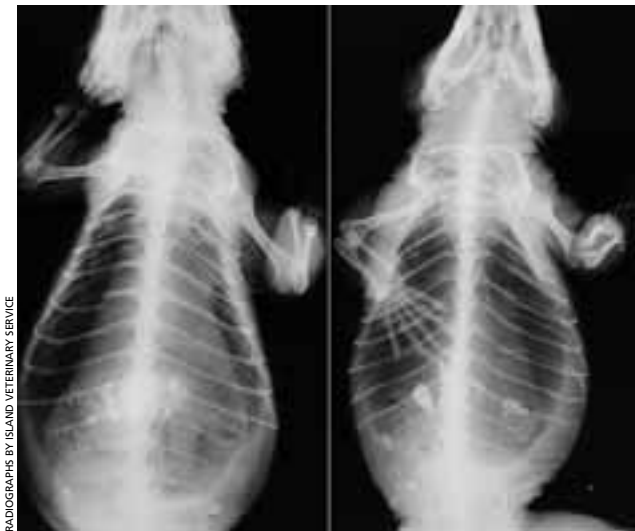
The circle marks the area in which Pedro's remains were found.

looking for any evidence they may have missed. At about 1130 h, they left and Stu arrived to catch up on any developing news and to give John a hand.

At noon, John received a call from Carl Edwards, Department of Environment Enforcement; "*I think we have found Pedro, and I need you to come take a look.*" John and Stu followed Carl's directions. Along the Botanic Park road leading to the Park's entrance is a rather obscure side road that leads to a group of three homes. As they arrived, they saw Carl, police, and other investigators standing near what appeared to be a dead Blue Iguana in the apron of the driveway. What was odd about the location was that a police officer had been there the day before asking questions, and he could not have missed seeing a dead iguana. They had returned only to ensure that no details had been overlooked in the investigation. The body was decomposing. John recalls that the body appeared to have been skinned rather than torn by a dog or other animal. He scanned the remains with a PIT-tag reader even though the tissue where the tag is routinely placed was missing — no ID response was obtained. Then John noticed the right eye had burst. Pedro suffered from a thinning cornea in the right eye, leading to the tentative assumption that this was Pedro. At that point, Carl took the remains to the Department of Agriculture for examination and identification. Later, Fred confirmed that the remains were those of Pedro by using photographs to identify Pedro's unique scale pattern.

Dr. James arrived at noon and was escorted quickly through Customs with the help of an employee from the Department of Agriculture. She and Fred immediately headed to the house to evaluate Billy and Archie. The radiographs taken by Dr. Elisabeth Broussard, veterinarian, Island Veterinary Service, the day before demonstrated that Billy had fractured ribs and Archie had fluid in his lungs. The physical exam and blood work indicated that both iguanas had some internal bleeding, but whether the bleeding was into the lungs or the coelomic cavity was unclear. Dr. James considered the factors needed to develop a treatment plan. Both iguanas were large breeding males unaccustomed to being handled; both had internal bleeding and muscle trauma, so handling would have to be minimized. Such severe injuries required heat to help the iguanas metabolize some of the





RADIOGRAPHS BY ISLAND VETERINARY SERVICE

Radiographs of Billy (left) and Archie that Dr. Stephanie James reviewed at Fred's house after her arrival.



Dr. Stephanie James, Senior Veterinarian at WCS Wildlife Health Services (right) and Dr. Elisabeth Broussard discuss treatment procedures for Billy and Archie.



Dr. Stephanie James injects fluids into the posterior flank of Billy, while Dr. Elisabeth Broussard injects other meds into his left front leg.

toxic by-products of the trauma, minimize their stress levels, and allow their immune systems to function optimally. Dr. James and Fred discussed the cases and decided Billy and Archie should be placed back in their pens. Being in their established territories would reduce stress and allow them to thermoregulate, which would facilitate immune functions.

Once husbandry was decided, a treatment regimen was determined. Pain medications, antibiotics, and vitamins could be administered orally, but oral medication could disturb their normal gastrointestinal flora and curb eating habits. If the iguanas stopped eating, determining if anorexia was attributable to worsening conditions or because they didn't like the taste of medication in the food would be difficult. Also, because iguanas don't like to soak and rarely drink, increasing their fluid intake would be problematic. The decision was made to manually restrain them every three days and administer the treatments. Billy and Archie received their initial treatment and were moved back to their pens.

Later that afternoon, Fred and Dr. James went to St. Matthew's Veterinary facility to examine and review details of the autopsies. Some of the post-mortem samples would have to be sent to the U.S. for further forensic evaluation. *Cyclura lewisi* are protected under CITES Appendix I, which meant Dr. James had a mountain of paperwork ahead of her to obtain the necessary permits, all of which needed to be completed before she departed in



Dr. Stephanie James working on obtaining CITES permits for export/import of forensic materials.



Vials containing samples of the remains that were exported for further examination.

less than a week. Fred was on the phone contacting the Cayman Island officials, and Dr. James contacted WCS so they could start filing paperwork for exporting/importing the samples. Within 48 hours, the CITES export permit was delivered to Fred's door as was a document from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service allowing the samples to be brought into the U.S.

By Friday (9 May), responding to the aftermath of the crisis had become routine. Sandy and I were airborne when Fred



Dr. Caroline McKinney, St. Matthew's Veterinary School (left), Fred Burton, Dr. Stephanie James, and Shana Chin, Scientific Assistant, Cayman Islands Department of Agriculture preparing samples for export and crosschecking the Chain of Custody forms for each of the samples.



The crisis center in Fred Burton's home office. Samantha Hicks (far left) and John and Sandy Binns work to respond to the barrage of incoming correspondence and website updates.

learned that the remains of the seven could not be buried and would have to remain in cold storage as potential evidence for any legal proceeding. John Marotta continued his vigilant monitoring of Billy and Archie, both of whom appeared to be responding to the treatment, and began to focus his efforts on the females who were already or about to begin nesting. Fred remained preoccupied with the criminal investigation, media, and incoming contributions. Dr. James visited the facility to monitor treatment, and worked on obtaining the CITES permits. Sam, and now Sandy and I, worked to keep the website updated and to respond to contributions both in the Cayman Islands and in the U.S. Enforcement continued their investigation.

From Friday until I left the island on 20 May, the daily routine remained constant. Sandy left for home on the 13<sup>th</sup> after reaching a point where remaining didn't make sense, and my efforts became divided between assisting Fred, Sam, or John and working on photographic assignments for the Program. Dr. James continued treating Billy and Archie until she left on 14 May, handing the responsibility to Dr. Elisabeth Broussard, who continued the treatment every three days until completion. Billy and Archie have largely recovered and continue to improve. As the days passed, our focus shifted to the nesting females. Nests had to be excavated and eggs gathered.



John Marotta (back), Sarah Agnolin (left), Rachel Hamilton (center), and Kirstyn Werner (right); the latter three naturalists, who work as Ambassadors of the Environment at the Ritz Carlton (by Jean-Michel Cousteau), worked for days looking for Deborah's nest chamber. This was Billy's first successful mating.



John Marotta loading freshly collected eggs into a box for incubation.



While Fred Burton searches for Vegas's nest, Archie looks on inquisitively. Archie had already been receiving treatment for over a week when this photograph was taken, and he was clearly regaining mobility in his severely injured rear left leg.

One act of insanity killed 17.5% of our captive adults. The Program is extremely fortunate that the seven lost iguanas had produced large numbers of offspring and are well represented genetically. One heartbreaking note is that we had already been discussing the release of these individuals. They had served the program well, and were largely responsible for helping to replen-



The name signs for Pedro, Digger, and Sara that once adorned their pens, later moved to the facility shed.

ish the population. It only seemed right, the royalty that they were, that they should live their remaining years free in the kingdom we are working so hard to protect.

This heinous crime and the loss of these animals have scarred the fiber of our souls. None will be forgotten, and each will be cherished and remembered for the special creatures they were. Rest in Peace.

### Acknowledgements

Thanks to my wife, Sandy Binns, for her constant support and encouragement. I am grateful and thank those who contributed information for this story: Fred Burton, John Marotta, Samantha Hicks, Dr. Stephanie James, and Sarah Agnolin. Thanks also to Giles Shaxted for his assistance in providing our accommodations, and to the Compass Point Dive Resort and Ocean Frontiers Diving East End, Grand Cayman, which supplied wonderful accommodations during our 11-day stay. I commend and thank Team Blue volunteers: Stu Petch, Gary Redfern, Sheilagh Rickford, Kirstyn Werner, Rachel Hamilton, and all Team Blue volunteers who make this Program possible. Thanks to the doctors who gave their full support during this crisis: Dr. Colin Wakelin, Dr. Elisabeth Broussard, Dr. Caroline McKinney, and Dr. Stephanie James; Shana Chin for her efforts and assistance with the export samples; Island Veterinary Service for radiographs; the organizations that continue to support the efforts of the Blue Iguana Recovery Program: National Trust for the Cayman Islands, The Department of the Environment, The Department of Agriculture for the Cayman Islands, and St. Matthew's Veterinary School, and the Wildlife Conservation Society. Thanks also to AJ Gutman and Bob Powell for their review and comments.

## In Memory of the Seven Blues

Samantha Hicks

Blue Iguana Recovery Program



JOHN BINNS

**Sara's** service to the Program began in 1992. She had been caught in the East End as a youngster several years before and we estimate that she was born in 1985. Sara was the first founder female in the Program and had bred successfully with many males, producing 49 young. She was the Grand Dame of the captive facility. Dignified and self-contained, she was never aggressive yet never overtly friendly, just warily tolerant of our presence. Sara's contribution to the Program and the survival of her species was invaluable. She was digging a nest when she was set upon and beaten to death.



JOHN BINNS

**Jessica**, born in 1993, was the daughter of Sara and Zadok. Like her brother Pedro, she developed minor eye problems that rendered her a little slower than most iguanas. This factor added to the impression that she was the gentlest and sweetest of creatures. She bred successfully with Daniel and Digger and produced 23 young. She was always ready for attention and very responsive to voices, making her an easy target for her attackers. Jessica somehow managed to survive the initial attack and fought for her life for over 24 hours before she succumbed.



SAMANTHA HICKS

**Eldemire** was born to Mr. Blue and QE in 1990. He was a big beast, but gentle, easily identifiable by the underbite that showed off his sharp upper teeth, ironic for such a meek soul. With his long dorsal spines and gargoyle-like features, Eldemire looked like a scraggly old man and never failed to attract attention from touring visitors. Although not filled with machismo like his younger brother Digger, Eldemire did sire five young with Sara in 1995. He was dignified despite his peculiarities, and had warmed to humans in recent years, unfortunately making him all the easier to target. Eldemire's remains were mutilated and discarded.



CRAIG FELKE

**Digger** touched thousands of people's lives. He was naturally friendly and was our greatest ambassador. He was born in 1994, the offspring of Mr. Blue and QE. His first keepers named him Digger because he used to dig into a plant pot in his cage and hide from them. Digger was the most loving and inquisitive iguana; he would do almost anything for anybody, especially if there was a flower or a Noni fruit involved in the bargain. His great love for people likely contributed to his death. Rather than being afraid of strangers with evil intent, he probably welcomed their company.



SAMANTHA HICKS

**Pedro** was the son of Sara and brother to Jessica and was born in 1993. Pedro was a crowd pleaser. He was capable of flushing up to the most vivid and beautiful shades of blue, so that one of the most common comments made about him was that he didn't look real. Like Jessica, he had minor eye issues. He adored being stroked. He was totally unable to defend himself and completely unprepared for violence from trusted human beings. Pedro was very proudly sponsored by Kenrick Webster and was such a gentle role model for his species that he was chosen to meet The Earl of Wessex on his last visit.



SAMANTHA HICKS

**Matthias** didn't succumb to his terrible injuries for several days, behavior typical of this proud little Blue. Matthias was larger than life and we would have been interested in seeing if he would have achieved great physical size; born in 2001, at seven years he was a mere youngster and should have had at least 60 more years to grow. Son of Nathaniel and Ruth, Matthias was very handsome, a perfectly formed animal with a row of very neat spines and a bright blue flush. He appeared to know his own worth and cockily taunted much larger iguanas from inside his earlier wire enclosure. He spent many happy hours dangling his legs from his favorite perch on a Smokewood branch.



FRED BURTON

**Yellow** was our movie star and cover boy. He was born to Dempster and a wild male in 1995. His eager and sometimes rather aggressive style earned him the Botanic Park's southern kingdom, where he dominated 35 acres, intersecting with the territories of six females, until he was deposed by Forrest in 2004–5. His favorite mate, Sapphire, used to walk far from her territory to visit him, but he fell on hard times as a King-in-Exile, and was eventually returned to the captive facility for a chance to recuperate. He was just beginning to look like his former self when his life was violently ended. We like to think that he has joined Sapphire, who was taken from us by dogs in 2006.