

LIVING WITH TEE BEAU:

Sharing Your Life and Home with a 26-year-old Male Rhinoceros Iguana

WRITTEN BY: MICHELLE HAMILTON

AS RELATED BY MONTY KRIZAN, OWNER/OPERATOR OF MONTY'S TRAVELING REPTILE SHOW, INC.

1106-A PHILIPS ROAD

ARROYO GRANDE, CA 93420

Early in the 1970's, Monty Krizan was a relative newcomer to the field of herpetology. His interest in all creatures was inspired at an early age growing up on a farm in Wisconsin. A specific interest in reptiles came as Monty entered his twenties and managed a bar/rec center in Burnsville, Minnesota. Business and participation was sluggish, so Monty bought a Burmese python and built an exhibit cage to display the python. From this experience, Monty learned that human beings will stand and look at things they claim not to like.

Since 1974, Monty has made his living exclusively by exhibiting, lecturing, breeding, caring, maintaining, and loving his collection of approximately 100 reptiles. Monty himself is deserving of an entirely separate story, but the focus of this article is Tee Beau, the male rhinoceros iguana that has been Monty's companion for most of its 26-year-old life.

Tee Beau was imported into the U.S., via Florida, as a 6 in. hatchling sometime in late 1969. To this day, there is some question as to whether Tee Beau came from Mona Island or Hispaniola (Haiti and the Dominican Republic). Early in 1970, Terry Odegaard, an avid herpetologist, took custody of this young iguana that had received rude treatment from larger lizards during its

travel. Odegaard returned to his home in Minnesota and began rehabilitating this young lizard with the help of a veterinary student at the University of Minnesota.

Tee Beau came to live with Monty in 1973. Their lives have become intertwined since that time as they travel extensively throughout North America to deliver a message that reptiles are survivors from the past. In the early stages of Tee



Monty and Tee Beau

Beau's association with Monty's Traveling Reptile Show, he displayed a 'cool' behavior, almost statue-like when he was introduced to the public. Sometime in the late 1970's, however, Tee Beau began to display the dominant behavior typical of most male rhino iguanas. Subtle behavioral changes exhibited by Tee Beau increased Monty's awareness that this little 20 lb. creature feared nothing under certain circumstances—from repelling dogs and cats to even charging an

80,000 lb. semi-truck that parked too near his perceived territory in a truck stop. But despite all these displays of dominant behavior, Tee Beau appeared to know when to turn it on and when to turn it off around the general public.

What makes Tee Beau a unique individual is that he has continuously been exposed to many other reptiles including large pythons and boas, assorted lizards, a 170 lb. alligator snapping turtle, and an 18-year-old, 8 ft. alligator named Albert. Tee Beau is oblivious to all except Albert; the mere sight of the alligator results in Tee Beau yielding territory and dominance instantly. R-E-S-P-E-C-T! But the ability to discriminate between Monty and *all* other human beings is cer-



Tee Beau and ice cream—not a good food item for a cold-blooded, herbivorous lizard.

tainly one of Tee Beau's most amazing and endearing talents.

During exhibition at the Calgary Stampede, for example, Tee Beau spent his allotted time on the front table as a gaff to draw people to the reptile exhibit. Typically, Tee Beau was content to sit under his basking lamp or natural sunlight for his daily tour of duty; but on occasion, the mere sight of Monty sent this lizard into an all out 'bull rush' with the intent of evicting Krizan from the premises. The amazing thing about this is that

Monty can be in the exhibit or mingling with a crowd 100 ft away, and instantly Tee Beau can spot him.

In order to satisfy this combative urge, Monty has adapted several approaches that allow Tee Beau to benignly assert his dominance. For example, the favorite enemy in Tee Beau's eyes is a 20-year-old institutional-sized rubber plunger, which has been beaten and pummeled into submission so many times by Tee Beau that it is now unrecognizable. This has not harmed Tee Beau, but rather served to dissipate his excessive energy and achieve a feeling of Mission Accomplished—without having to chase off Monty.

At other times, Tee Beau can display gentle

behaviors and a charming curiosity. When on exhibit at a shopping mall in San Jose, California, Tee Beau was lying on a terrazzo floor enjoying the flood of sunlight through a skylight. An unsuspecting 2-year-old with an ice cream cone squatted near Tee Beau for a closer inspection. Tee Beau sauntered towards the youngster—and carefully helped himself to the dollop on the top of the cone. Generally, Tee Beau receives a high quality herbivore

diet supplemented with

vitamins and minerals, but an easy ice cream treat certainly could not go unsampled.

Monty attributes Tee Beau's longevity while living in a most unusual environment to a number of things: freedom of movement, quality of diet, plenty of natural sunshine, exposure to other iguanas and reptiles, and stimulating interaction with Krizan and the general public on a daily basis. Tee Beau has more than just a simple routine—he always has something to do, something to keep him occupied.

The creation of Monty's Traveling Reptile Show was the result of a personal fascination with reptiles that manifested quickly into a desire to share these unique creatures with other people. Monty's first endeavors began with classroom situations, where he performed "show and tell" activities for former college mates who had become teachers at local schools. As Monty gathered more information about where the reptiles came from, their long history and their impact on the ecosystems in which they naturally live, he became a self-taught naturalist/environmentalist. He used reptiles as a magnet to draw the audience to the conclusion that many of these critters eat insects and rodents—and should therefore be considered our natural allies.

Initially, Monty transported the reptiles in portable containers designed to control temperature and offer secure environments. As Monty's business increased it became apparent that he would need a method to transport and display the reptiles that could be not only environmentally controlled for the animals but provide living quarters for himself as well.

In 1979, Monty found a company that manufactured large draft horse trailers. Together, the company and Monty worked and reworked designs, and finally decided upon a 40 ft. fifth-wheel trailer with six spacious display windows on the sides. On July 9, 1979, the new trailer shell was delivered to Monty's driveway. For some reason, still unknown to Monty, he had booked an exhibition in Illinois for September 20, 1979—and now the race was on. For the next 69 days and nights, Monty, with the help of a carpenter, a window glazer and a close friend, built the deluxe edi-

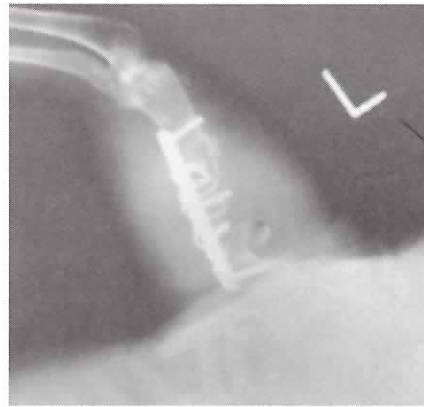
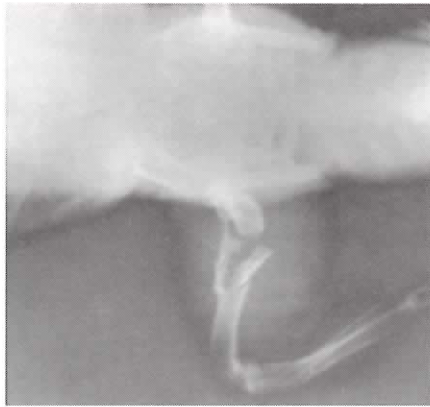


Monty's Traveling Reptile Show—ready to roll.



tion of Monty's Traveling Reptile Show—which continues to serve him well. This trailer is well-insulated and powered with a 12-volt electrical system. It also has an oversized generator that can be put into use with the flick of a switch to provide additional power when traveling under extreme conditions. When the trailer is parked or exhibiting, the environment of each cage can be finely tuned to deliver all occupants their desired requirements. In order to accommodate Tee Beau's freedom of movement, he was given the main hallway in the trailer. Early on he displayed a liking to the shower, which provided a clean, secure place. To this day, Tee Beau continues to occupy the shower in the trailer—or in Monty's own home—to do at the end of the day what he does best—SLEEP!

Beginning in 1981, Monty and Tee Beau were contracted to create a weekly television program in Alberta, Canada. The program centered around reptiles and the environment, and offered a meaningful alternative to young viewers on Saturday mornings. Over the course of the next eight years, Monty and Tee Beau starred in approximately 70 episodes of Monty's Traveling Reptile Show. Tee Beau quickly gained the respect of the film crew,



Tee Beau's shattered left rear leg—before and after surgery.

who never failed to ask “where is he?” when Monty entered the studio. Although Monty had a certain talent for capturing the media spotlight, Tee Beau also demonstrated an ability for claiming center stage. Each 30-minute program began with Monty and co-host Tee Beau welcoming the viewers and studio audience to the show. Regardless of the content of the show, Tee Beau frequently found a way to make unsolicited cameo appearances in front of the camera.

Time and time again, Tee Beau demonstrated a desire not to be left out of anything going on at the Monty's Traveling Reptile Show exhibit. In 1985, two days prior to the opening of the Minnesota State Fair, Tee Beau fell and severely shattered his left rear leg. Doctors at the University of Minnesota Hospital of Veterinary Medicine recommended removal of the leg or putting Tee Beau down. At the insistence of Monty, the veterinarians instead performed a six-hour surgery during which they used a 3-inch steel plate, four screws and wire to secure the bone fragments. Leg reconstruction was completed by wrapping the leg in a huge blue cast which served to immobilize the limb until healing was complete. Tee Beau was discharged to Monty with instructions to keep him cool and immobile. That lasted overnight. The following day it was business as usual for Tee Beau, who demanded to resume his position at the table, in the glorious sunlight, right in front of the exhibit. Tee Beau's threshold for pain, obviously, is different than a human's. He appeared to demonstrate heart and pride as he opened the Minnesota State Fair seemingly obliv-

ious to the events of the preceding 72 hours.

The metal and screws in Tee Beau's leg held fast and allowed the limb to repair, but his tissues eventually rejected the metal. This progression was followed for 3-1/2 years by Fredrick L. Frye, D.V.M., M.S., of Davis, California. Dr.

Frye removed the rejected metal during a surgical procedure in March of 1989. The injury has had no lasting effects on Tee Beau's excellent health—and certainly has not affected his ability to execute his famous 'bull rushes.'

Monty describes 22 years of traveling 750,000 miles throughout the U.S. and Canada as anything but a typical day at the office. “I could have stayed home under one roof and enjoyed my collection of reptiles, but I chose not to. I don't believe that I could have accomplished what I have without the companionship of a half-hateful iguana named Tee Beau. He has been described to me by many experts in the field of animal behavior as one of a kind.”

Having a lifestyle that resembles Monty's, George Lewis spent his entire life handling elephants. During the depression years he hauled “Tusco”, a 7 ton Asian elephant, throughout the U.S. on a flatbed truck. Upon meeting Tee Beau in the late 1970's, George advised, “Don't ever let anything happen to this guy—you can never replace him.” Presently, Tee Beau appears to be mellowing in his old age, spending many of his days basking in the sun on the deck of Monty's home in California. However, Monty admits that often he must still yield to the whims of his stubborn iguana. “Sometimes I can't even go into the house through the door I want to use, as Tee Beau will be patrolling that area.” Mere eye contact with Tee Beau will alert Monty to choose another house entrance if he wishes to avoid a confrontation. To sum up Tee Beau, no words seem to fit better than those of Dr. Fred Frye: “WHAT A BEAST!”