

IGUANA NEWS BRIEFS

COLD RELATED IGUANA DEATHS

Many southern Florida IIS members have reported cases of iguana mortality due to cold weather. We have had reports from Miami, Boca Raton, and Ft. Lauderdale of adult green iguanas found dead on the ground, after severe cold, at least by south Florida standards. Although temperatures did not reach freezing, strong cold winds produced wind chills that were fatal to iguanas that stayed in treetops during the cold spells. Colder extremes were recorded in December 1989 in south Florida. The winter of 95/96 had more cold spells and broke many daily cold records throughout the southern peninsula.

IGUANA SUSPECTED AS SOURCE OF ILLNESS THAT KILLED INFANT

SOUTH BEND, Ind. — A 3-week-old boy died of salmonella poisoning that probably was contracted from the family's pet iguana, and health officials warned Thursday that other reptile owners could be at risk.

"I do not know why [pet stores] sell these things," said Diane Jones, Fulton County health nurse. "The least they could do is inform people about this."

Health officials are not even sure how Gaige Becker got salmonella, but Jones said it could have been as easy as someone's handling the iguana and then touching the boy.

While Gaige's story sounds unusual, health officials have seen an increase in unusual strains of salmonella as the popularity of pet reptiles—especially iguanas—grows. The number of imported iguanas rose from 27,806 in 1986 to 798,405 in 1993, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

At least 90 percent of reptiles carry some strain of the intestinal bacteria, according to the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention. The reptiles include snakes, turtles and other types of lizards besides iguanas.

In 1994 and 1995, health departments in 13 states reported unusual strains of salmonella bacteria that were traced back to reptiles.

Gaige died in October in Rochester, Ind., about 40 miles south of South Bend, but the cause of death was not disclosed until a Fulton County Board of Health meeting last month. Gaige died of the Poona strain of salmonella, the same bacteria carried by the family's iguana, which has been destroyed.

The boy's parents, Jamie and Teresa Becker, did not realize the danger that the iguana posed to their son, health officials said.

Salmonella causes diarrhea, abdominal cramps and a fever, and many people who get it do not even realize it. But for people with immature or weakened immune systems—babies, the elderly or those with AIDS—the bacteria can cause severe sickness and, if

not treated right away, death.

Last year, the Atlanta-based CDC began a campaign to encourage veterinarians and pet store owners to make owners of reptiles aware of the risk.

"We're not by any means telling people not to own reptiles," CDC spokesman Tom Skinner said Thursday.

"It's just that we've identified a threat to public health. It's the obligation of our agency to inform people of that threat and inform them of the necessary precautions."

The CDC's recommendations on preventing salmonella:

- Wash your hands after handling a reptile and make sure children do not put their hands in their mouths after touching a reptile.
- Keep reptiles away from areas where food is prepared and do not wash cages, food dishes and aquariums in the kitchen sink
- Do not keep reptiles in child-care centers. And anyone with a weakened immune system, including pregnant women, should avoid them.

THE HERALD, FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 1996.
NATIONAL NEWS
By NANCY ARMOUR
Associated Press

IGUANAS ON THE INTERNET

One recent Wednesday at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, half a dozen network analysts milled around an office stuffed with computer terminals,

network cables—and a three-foot iguana named Iggy. Iggy happily devoured a kiwifruit under the hot spotlights of a video camera. He then crawled up a stack, under a sign reading "The Iguana Channel," and relieved himself. The camera captured the moment and fed its frames to one of the workstations. The video was digitized, compressed and then broadcast to some 20 viewers in seven countries.

The Iguana Channel was not a pay-per-view event. It was aired free on the Internet, the information highway on which tens of millions of users swap more than 15 trillion bytes of data monthly.

W. Wayt Gibbs
Scientific American
November 1994

DEALER RAIDED

On 1 February, 1996, Strictly Reptiles, a South Broward County, Florida reptile dealer, was raided under a federal warrant by special agents from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Law Enforcement in cooperation with agent from the I.R.S.. Many animals and records were seized including about a dozen smuggled Rhino iguanas. The iguanas were in various stages of starvation, suffering from severe dehydration. Many had badly bruised snouts.