

LIZARD LETTERS

Iguanas, Salmonella, and Herpetoculture

Obviously, your intentions in writing the article *Iguanas, Salmonella and Herpetoculture: A Conflict of Interest...and Conscience?* (IT, Vol. 5, No. 2) were in the right place: a concern for the welfare of iguanas in captivity. My main complaint to your article, however, is that it emphasized criticism but did not address what I see as the bigger ethnoherpetological picture or present solutions in terms of the bigger picture. Although you may know me best in the context of having authored the Green Iguana Manual, I am also the founder and president of the American Federation of Herpetologists (AFH) and key decision maker in the publishing of the Vivarium magazine. Advanced Vivarium Systems Inc. is also my company and its focus is publishing.

As president of the AFH I have been involved with the legislative aspects of herpetoculture, primarily in trying to establish models for sound legislation and self-regulation. The pet trade and pet keeping are more complex in their ramifications than most people realize. Although initially my interest in herpetoculture was animal focused, it is becoming increasingly focused on the ethnoherpetological aspects. What are the cultural, social and psychological ramifications of herpetoculture? What human needs are fulfilled through herpetoculture? Are the long term effects of herpetoculture more beneficial than bad? As a result my interest has been in encouraging dialog and understanding between the various parties involved with amphibians and reptiles.

Although it is true that green iguanas are still mismanaged and abused in the pet trade, the fact is that more and more green iguanas are surviving, a percentage which I suspect at least equals the survival rate in nature and probably exceeds it. In general the pet trade has made considerable efforts in the last decade to try to improve the herpetoculture of green iguanas. The greatest problem with green iguanas today is that too many are surviving to become large. They are about to become an animal control problem. The economics of the green iguana trade have wide-ranging effects both in the countries of origin and in the importing countries. If you have followed the trends in herpetoculture, in the latter part of 1996 green iguana imports have gone down and are expected to continue to do so as the Australian Inland Bearded Dragon is being promoted as a better candidate for a reptile pet. More than a quarter million bearded dragons will hatch in the U.S. in 1997. The green iguana market will decline and find its level of equilibrium. Although it may seem I am pro pet trade, I am above all pro rights of individuals to keep and breed amphibians and reptiles, even in Oregon.

In the February/March issue of Vivarium I have a lengthy article titled the Spectrum of Ethnoherpetology which attempts to present a broad view of the relationship of herpetology, including herpetoculture, to human needs. It is my hope that this will lead to an understanding that could resolve the supposed chasm between herpetologists and herpetoculturists.

Philippe de Vosjoli
Advanced Vivarium Systems, Inc.
Santee, California

Impulse Buying

I am a sixth-grade elementary school student writing to you about iguana importing to the U.S., and mainly about impulse buying of the common iguana. I am a proud owner of a green iguana and I plan to hold that statement. From their native lands mainly in South [and Central] America, the common iguana is rapidly being captured and imported to the U.S. In time, maybe not too long, iguanas will be a threatened creature due to increasing wants in America. What many of those careless impulse buyers don't know is how large captive iguanas grow, and many stores don't [offer] adequate information to begin with. What I would like to know about this concern follows: What have we been doing to prevent this lack of knowledge many former and present owners have? Or is it still a concern that is undecided?

Geoff Todt
Bexley, Ohio

You have probably put your finger on a significant source of iguana abuse—impulse buyers who are poorly informed. In addition to the books and other sources on iguana care that are already out there (some of which IIS sells through the IIS Bookstore), Iguana Times does occasionally publish articles on iguana care (e.g., September 1995 issue). Perhaps the most critical means of getting knowledge to the buyers is to see to it that pet stores in your own area are providing adequate information to buyers. We appreciate your enthusiasm and concern for the green iguana.

Compassion

I am fortunate enough to have two green iguanas as pets. I feel love and fascination towards them and all members of their species. I am saddened but now very well informed thanks to your fine, compassionate article that I read in the June 1996 edition of Iguana Times [*Iguanas, Salmonella and Herpetoculture: A Conflict of Interest...and Conscience?*]. I too am appalled at the cheapness of the lives of these beautiful animals. Do you feel there's any chance that leg-

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isolation which prevents exploitation of these animals is a possibility? Would perhaps the ASPCA and other animal rights organizations give the green iguana their attention? Or are [iguana] unworthy because they are reptiles? Having a green iguana brings nature and its many wonders into my home. But I would rather never have another green iguana than to have one die at the hands of the misguided people without a conscience. I would appreciate any input as to how I may go about forming a successful support group in favor of the green iguana's lives over the greed of humans. *Iguana Times* is truly the most passionate, informative reptile publication in the U.S.

Donna J. Reid
San Diego, California

Legislation may well be enacted to regulate or ban the trade in green iguanas, but this would likely come about only as a response to public concern over the risk (though quite small) of salmonellosis infection from pet iguanas. It is difficult to predict whether such legislation might ever be passed, as was done a number of years ago to ban the sale of baby turtles. Regardless of the salmonella issue, some degree of regulation certainly could benefit the plight of iguanas bound for the pet trade. For example, by dramatically reducing the number of iguanas imported to the states, their value in dollars would increase. When a pet costs more to procure, it is generally given much better care and is purchased less often by those who don't take a serious interest in their pets welfare. Unfortunately, there will always be some abuse of pets regardless of whether they are reptiles, fishes, birds or mammals. Rather than seek to ban the sale of all iguanas (and other pets), the best way to ensure better care is to communicate your concerns with all involved in the pet trade—but especially the pet owners. The letter by de Vosjoli suggests that an Australian reptile has already begun to reduce sales of green iguanas.

— Editors

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