

VIDEO REVIEWS

🦎🦎🦎🦎 = Highly Recommended 🦎🦎🦎 = Worth Purchasing 🦎🦎 = Questionable Value 🦎 = NOT Recommended

Reviewers:

Shawn K. Fry, G. Scott DeLay and William K. Hayes
Department of Natural Sciences
Loma Linda University
Loma Linda, CA 92350, USA



Captive Care of the Green Iguana

*Scimitar Film Productions, North Somerset, UK. 1996.
Written by Dr. Adam Britton and Melissa Kaplan.
Presented by David Woodland. 70 minutes (color).*

From the opening scenes of iguanas that appear to be in their natural habitat in the tropics, the viewer is immediately impressed that this video is a piece of art. Indeed, the quality of the video is apparent throughout. The photography is superb, the writing excellent, and the graphics and special effects well done. Experts are interviewed throughout the video, with careful attention given to every detail. Although somewhat lengthy at 70 minutes, the production is a pleasure to watch. Most important of all, the authors who wrote most of the text are exceptionally well-informed and provide an abundance of interesting and accurate information.

In the introduction, the viewer is warned about the difficulties of keeping iguanas and reminded that they will grow to become large animals. Only those who are serious about keeping an iguana in good health should consider keeping one as a pet. Information is then presented in six sections, each lasting roughly ten minutes.

In "Obtaining an Iguana," criteria are given for selection of a young, healthy animal. Captive-bred animals, though scarce and more expensive, are considered preferable to those from the wild. Advice is offered on transportation of the pet, handling, taking the pet to a vet, and on early acclimation and taming. In the section on "Accommodations," the owner is urged to plan ahead to allow for rapid growth of the iguana. Detailed information is provided on cage dimensions, heating, lighting, cleaning and use of plants in the cage. The examples of cages shown were highly attractive and appealing, which hopefully will inspire owners to provide the best home possible for their pet.

The "Feeding and Diet" section is particularly detailed, with excellent advice on giving a balanced diet. The importance of herbivory and diversity in the diet are stressed, and a recipe for a balanced diet is offered. Vitamin and calcium supplementation is recommended, though with appropriate cautions.

The basics of intestinal fermentation (via bacteria and nematodes) are explained and the hazards of excess animal protein in the diet are discussed. "General Care" is just that; misting, cleaning and claw-clipping are described, as well as giving the iguana a daily bath.

The segment on "Breeding" was amusing because Roger Lamb says it's so easy and simple. He then goes on to show the construction of an elaborate egg laying chamber and a sophisticated incubator. It all seemed pretty high tech and a lot of work. In reality, the process could be greatly simplified. We were also amused to learn that male iguanas often express interest in female humans during stages of their menstrual cycle. Although skeptical at first, our correspondence with colleagues suggests there is compelling evidence for this during both ovulation and menstruation. Controlling the photoperiod was emphasized by Lamb. As with birds and mammals, which respond to increasing daylength during spring, changes in temperature are also important for stimulating breeding in reptiles, though rainfall or humidity may exert an influence. Lastly, the eggs that were shown shortly after being laid appeared to be somewhat dehydrated.

The final topic, "Health Care," offers useful advice from Stephen Divers, D.V.M., on metabolic bone disease (from inadequate nutrition or uv lighting), chronic renal disease (from excessive animal protein in the diet), egg retention and both external and internal parasites. Surprising to us, there was no mention of salmonellosis here or elsewhere in the video. Some of the visual aids, such as before and after x-rays of an egg-bound female iguana that underwent surgery, were particularly interesting.

Because the video was made in Britain, the pronunciation of some words, particularly "vitamin" and "iguana," may come across as amusing to Americans and Canadians. Further evidences of the British way of life include prices expressed in pounds and a steering wheel on the right side of a car. Nevertheless, keeping iguanas in any country offers similar challenges, and it is refreshing to be reminded that cultures elsewhere have much in common with our own.

The most disturbing aspect of the video, however, reflects the powerful influence of commercialism in our own country. To market the video in the U.S., a large distributor (Ocean Nutrition) insisted that a statement be added to the feeding and diet section that condones commercial iguana foods as an appropriate substitute for the fresh foods diet recommended (this statement was not present in the UK version we viewed that was kindly loaned to us by Melissa

Kaplan). The producer added the comment with neither the permission nor knowledge of the authors, who disagree with the statement.

Regardless, the video is extremely well done and offers a wealth of information and advice. Novices and experts alike will be sure to want this video, not just for the benefit of their pets, but for pure watching pleasure as well. A pleasant surprise will also greet members of IIS at the very end: the address of the International Iguana Society is provided, much to our appreciation.



Green Iguanas: The Video Guide to Care and Breeding

*Hardin Productions, Dallas, Texas, USA. 1994.
Written by Brian J. Hardin. 60 minutes (color).*

This video is of high quality and it is obvious that a lot of work and planning went into its production. Its goal is to present the viewer with facts to assist with the captive care and breeding of the “pet of the trendy set” (as quoted from the Los Angeles Times). Unfortunately this video contains serious errors that cause it to fall short of its goal and could lead to inappropriate care by new iguana owners.

After a brief introduction during which the viewer is told that nine out of ten pet iguanas die in their first year, the commentator describes how to get started by purchasing a good book on iguana care, acquiring a satisfactory cage, and choosing a knowledgeable veterinarian. The next section describes how to build an ample-sized cage. Advice is offered on cage substrates, cleaning, misting, heating, lighting and the housing of two or more iguanas together. Next, the attributes of a healthy iguana are discussed to help one select the best pet available, preferably a young one. This is followed by details on maintaining your pet’s health, with an emphasis on avoiding metabolic bone disease, the “number one killer” of pet iguanas. During a lengthy discourse on providing a nutritious diet, emphasis is given to preparing a fresh, diverse salad of vegetables. In the section on handling, safety guidelines are appropriately mentioned as is the need for good hygiene to avoid salmonella infection. Tips on breeding are offered next, along with some interesting shots of iguanas doing what any animal instinctively knows to do well—except for the one that attempts to mate a toy iguana! With the concluding remarks, some charming scenes are shown, such as an iguana pulling aside the covers of a bed to sleep beneath them.

Despite the well-organized and highly informative presentation, the video has its detractions. From the very first scene of a harness-restrained iguana on a stroll outdoors, it quickly becomes apparent that much of the footage was taken from the homes and

yards of highly devoted iguana lovers. This, unfortunately, lends a “home video” quality to the production, and one quickly gets the impression that if you truly love your iguana, you will offer it not just an attractive cage but the full room as well—if not the entire home. Many of the graphics also are crudely drawn and seem unnecessary to illustrate a point.

Throughout the video a number of individuals are interviewed, including a wildlife biologist, a vet, an animal trainer and a handful of owners. Their often unpolished performance and distracting background visuals suggest that the video could have benefitted from better planning.

Of more concern are some of the misleading statements sprinkled throughout the video. For example, the viewer is told that the diet should contain animal protein (20% for juveniles; 5% for adults) and suggests that this be provided by monkey chow, dog food or certified pesticide-free insects. Scientists, however, have aptly demonstrated that green iguanas in their natural home are near-exclusive herbivores throughout their life (reviewed by W. Hayes, 1996, *Iguana Times* 4(3):48-49). The video even shows an iguana swallowing a neonatal mouse, which may have difficulty passing through the valves of the anterior colon that apparently facilitate digestion of plant material. The video also states that if there is insufficient time to research the nutritional balance of the diet you prepare, your pet should be weaned onto a commercial iguana diet that is “more likely” to be nutritionally complete. In reality, most commercial diets are probably inadequate in both nutrition and fiber. If one does not have time to prepare an appropriate vegetable diet, then they should not own an iguana.

Furthermore, short shrift is given to full-spectrum light bulbs, which can be important especially in northern climates for providing uv radiation, necessary for vitamin D synthesis. The video claims that full-spectrum lighting may bring out the animal’s colors but is unlikely to emit sufficient uv wavelengths to be of any benefit to the animal. Vitamin D supplementation is offered as the best alternative to natural sunlight. However, a properly designed lighting system, with bulbs less than 12 inches from the lizard’s basking spot for 10-14 hours a day, can indeed provide sufficient UV for those who cannot offer access to sunlight for their iguanas. As the video admits, over supplementation of vitamins and minerals can, in fact, be detrimental.

Despite these concerns, the video does offer considerable information that is accurate as well as entertaining. Nevertheless, we’d be more enthusiastic about recommending it if the producers would release an updated version without the misleading statements.