

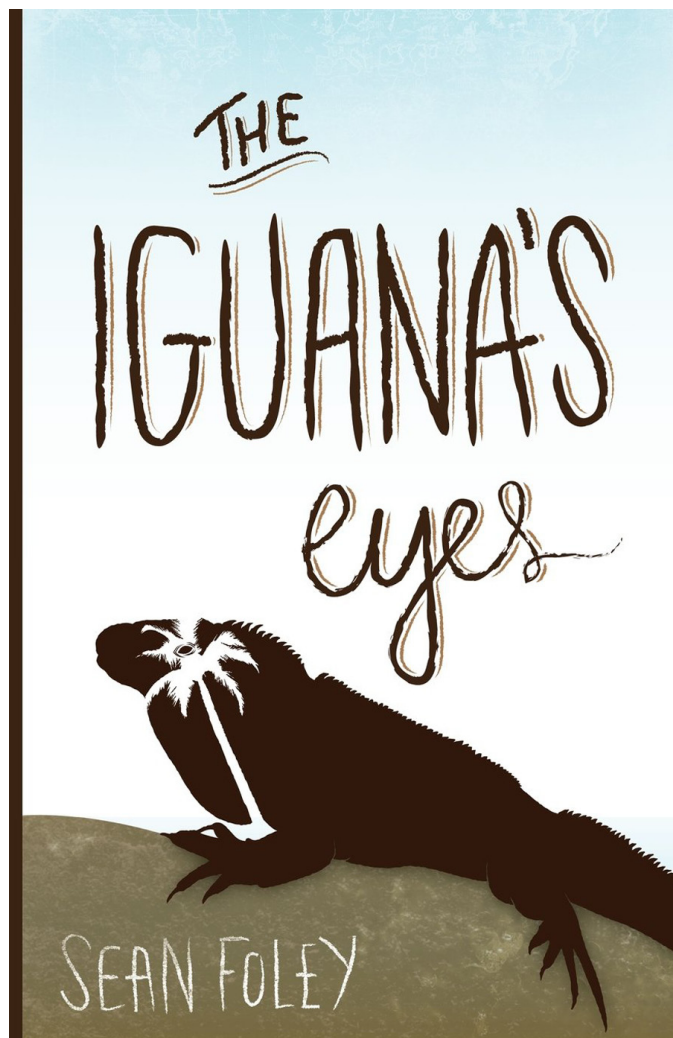


BOOK REVIEWS

Conservation for Young Readers

The Iguana's Eyes. 2013. Sean Foley. Columbia Vista Publishing, Columbia, South Carolina. 314 pp. Paperback — ISBN: 978-0-98996-180-6 (\$11.99). Kindle edition (\$5.99). Recommended for ages 9 and up.

Blue Iguana. 2013. Wendy Townsend. Namelos, South Hampton, New Hampshire. 177 pp. Hardcover — ISBN: 978-1-60898-157-1 (\$18.95). Paperback — ISBN: 978-1-60898-158-8 (\$9.95). Ebook — ISBN: 978-1-60898-159-5 (\$8.95). Recommended for ages 11 and up.



Sean Foley, a herpetologist for the Riverbanks Zoo and Garden in Columbia, South Carolina, tells the story of recently orphaned thirteen-year-old Madeline Bloomfield, who becomes embroiled in a treasure hunt with Bob, a Jamaican boy named after Bob Marley, and Brandon, a young pirate fanatic in possession of a mysterious journal. Their search for pirate treasure in the Hellshire Hills, home to the critically endangered Jamaican Iguana, leads to life-threatening encounters with an overzealous guard hired to defend developmental interests in conflict with efforts to protect the iguanas — reflecting the sad reality of such conflicts in Jamaica and throughout the developing world. Adults in the story comprise a diverse supporting cast. Maddy's odd aunt and an estranged uncle, the owner's of the hotel where Maddy and Brandon stay, Brandon's mother and a socially inept pirate fan, a wealthy socialite, Bob's extended family, and the aforementioned hired gun serve mainly as foils for the teens' adventures. The story's twists and turns keep the reader engaged and uncertain of the outcome until the very end. I won't spoil the ending, but will say that Maddy, Brandon, and Bob discover true friendship and the iguanas are still fighting for survival.

Wendy Townsend, who has a long history of writing for young adults and working with iguanas, tells the story of Clarice, a high-school student with an intense empathy for animals. This creates problems at school, where an adverse reaction to dissecting a frog results in a visit to the counselor's office. The counselor's suggestion that she should seek an opportunity to explore her interest in animals leads to a summer internship at the Blue Iguana Recovery Program (BIRP) on Grand Cayman. There, working with field biologists actively engaged in protecting a critically endangered species, she comes to terms with some harsh realities and awakens to the realization that she has a future in conservation biology. Unlike Foley's book, where the iguanas provide a backdrop for an engaging story, the Blue Iguanas at the BIRP facility are central characters. They and the dedicated staff and volunteers lead Clarice to an understanding of how she can make a difference, especially after a vicious attack that killed the seven iguanas to whom the book is dedicated. Although largely a story of a sensitive young woman coming of age, *Blue*



Iguana blends fiction with fact as it accurately portrays the people and the efforts that have made the Recovery Program a model of success. I easily recognized several individuals in

the fictionalized characters and the depiction of the program, the island, and especially the iguanas that clearly reflect the author's own experiences. Conservation can be a dirty job, especially in the inhospitable island scrub that few tourists see. Clarice's willingness to sacrifice comfort and convenience for the sake of another living creature is a powerful testament to everyone who values life and nature. I admittedly had a hard time empathizing with Clarice's vegan sensitivities, but could easily relate to the enthusiasm of the staff and volunteers, who treated both Clarice and the iguanas with respect. I also appreciated the awakening realization that life sometimes requires compromise, when Clarice accepted the reality that leather boots were a necessary price to pay in order to venture into the prickly vegetation and dog-tooth limestone of the harsh Salina.

Both of these books were intended for young readers, a demographic I long left behind. Nevertheless, I enjoyed them and recommend them highly (even for adults). Both provide insights into many of the problems inherent in conserving two of the most endangered species of lizards in the world, appropriately emphasizing the harsh landscapes where these iguanas live, the pressures imposed on those habitats by developmental interests, and, especially in Foley's book, the unfortunate realities of attempting to conserve nature in a developing nation. So, if you have an interest in conservation, iguanas, or island nations and like a good story, purchase copies for your favorite young readers and hope they'll let you read them when they're done.

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