

# A Highly Anecdotal Account of a Most Remarkable Anole

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Photographs by the author.

“You’ve gotta see this!” my fiancé Mark called to me one morning. He was outside, which could mean only one thing: A wildlife encounter was underway. Living in a semi-rural neighborhood in Florida, you never knew what you would see, from a mated pair of Sandhill Cranes walking down the street with their young, to Gopher Tortoises excavating burrows in the front yard.

I walked downstairs to the concrete area under our elevated house where Mark was staring at something on the ground. I looked down to see a Cuban Treefrog (*Osteopilus septentrionalis*) with the tail of a Green Anole (*Anolis carolinensis*) protruding from its gullet.

“I knew that lizard,” Mark said forlornly.

“What do you mean, you recognize the lizard just by its tail?”



Should we intervene on behalf of a favorite lizard or let nature take its course?



When it seemed like we were rooting for the losing side, we walked away.

“Yeah, he was the biggest male around here. I think he was the one who watched me nail the lumber together for the floor. I swear he would follow me around.”

We watched as the frog remained in a state of suspended animation for several minutes, not making much progress with its digestive activities. Finally, it started to open its mouth as though having difficulty with its prey.

“Maybe we should try to make the frog regurgitate the lizard,” I said. Neither the frog nor the lizard (I could safely surmise) seemed to be having a fun time of things. Plus, as a steward of the land, I felt a responsibility to intercede in such matters.

“No, we need to let nature take its course. Besides, it might prolong the lizard’s agony if he were regurgitated in a mangled state,” Mark replied.

“Hmm, well, maybe you’re right.”

A couple minutes later the frog regurgitated the lizard on its own. The lizard turned out to be the large male after all, and its heaving sides attested to its continued survival. I ran to get my camera, and when I returned, the frog had swallowed the lizard again, tail first. This time, the lizard was fighting back by biting the frog’s forelimb. As the frog tried to swallow the lizard, it simultaneously began to swallow its own forelimb. Still, the lizard’s snout was gradually descending down the frog’s gullet. At this point, I realized I was late for work and left soon afterwards. Mark stopped watching too. We wrote the lizard off as a goner.

The next morning, a Saturday, I was reading outside on a lounge chair when I saw a lizard in the same area as the event from the previous morning. It was a male *A. carolinensis* courting a female. I had almost returned to reading my book when I realized the lizard was missing its tail. Could it possibly be the same individual? Upon closer inspection, the lizard looked like it had been through hell. Its skin was blackened in several areas, and it had bits of what could have been digestive enzymes or half-digested prey on its dorsum. It had to be the same lizard after all! Yet despite the lizard’s ordeal, it was still courting energetically ... what a trooper!



Could “our” anole have survived his close encounter with the Cuban Treefrog?



Gordon became so acclimated to our presence that he would accept insects from our hands.

Over the next several weeks, the lizard, whom we named Gordon, made a complete recovery. His tail regenerated, and he became the fury of the 'hood, fighting both conspecific males and Cuban Brown Anoles (*A. sagrei*) to almost certain defeat. Perhaps unwisely, we also started feeding him insects to the point that he would jump on our legs when he was hungry. None of the other lizards in our yard tolerated humans to this extent.

He eventually mated, and I observed the pair settling down on our landscaping plant, a Staghorn Fern, one evening, with what may have been their offspring on a lower leaf.

Gordon lived for several years until he went missing last year. Perhaps a crow that had started spending time close to the house brought about his demise, or possibly a kid from the neighborhood walking up the stairs around this time may have stepped on him, since Gordon would rarely run very far out of the way. Regardless, it was an unhappy event.

It might sound corny to say that a lizard can be inspirational, but Gordon was a testimony to the importance of tenacity — and bite force!



Gordon and his mate lounge in a Staghorn Fern with what might have been their offspring lurking beneath a lower leaf.