



BLUE IGUANA TALES

Volume 3, Number 3 – 2005 Summer Edition – Quarterly update on the Blue Iguana Recovery Program



© AE Nash 2005

Last of the Wild Blues - Green-Red-Blue returns to the wild.

Team Blue Thank yous ...

The staff of the Blue Iguana Recovery Program would like to extend heartfelt thanks to our wonderful Team Blue 2005 volunteers. We miss you all!

We would also like to take this opportunity to thank Roger and Mary Bumgarner, who have allowed Team Blue the use of their guest cottages in Boddentown. The cottages were protected from the ferocity of the ocean during Hurricane Ivan by the main house, which was completely destroyed. The extent of their loss makes the Bumgarner's generosity even more extraordinary and appreciated. As the number of Team Blue members peaked through June, Nigel and Penny Clifford lent us their smart red truck, which was quickly promoted to favorite team vehicle due to its excellent AC capabilities! Logistically, the vehicle proved invaluable and it was much appreciated by all. Dan Gillman was also very generous, offering his vessel, Lost Horizons, under the helm of Captain Larry, to give our mosquito-bitten and weary iguana trackers a very welcome Sunday of respite on and under the blue Caribbean Sea.

Equally important is the funding that enabled us to run this summer's fieldwork, providing equipment, supplies, fuel and sustenance. Sincere thanks are due to the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust and the Dennis Curry Charitable Trust, the International Iguana Foundation, and the International Reptile Conservation Foundation. We have managed to make your financial support stretch a very long way.

Team Blue 2005 would not have been possible without the continuous support at all levels from the International Reptile Conservation Foundation and Directors John and Sandy Binns, AJ Gutman, and Joel Friesch. We can't thank you enough! The Blue Iguana Recovery Program wouldn't be what it is without the IRCF and we encourage all of our readers to become members and help to support conservation programs for other endangered reptile species: www.IRCF.org

Team Blue 2005

Team Blue 2005 - Group 1

Front Row (left): Fred Burton, Sam Addinal, Chris Carr, Nick Louis, Barbara Watkins.

Nick and Barbara formed the advance guard, kicking off the work at the home of the last wild blues.



© Robby Addinall 2005

Team Blue 2005 - Group 2

Front Row (left): Coralie Farren, Lorraine Scotson, AE Nash, Nick Louis, Emily Hohlfeldt.

Back Row (Left): Chris Carr, Sam Addinall, Fred Burton, Jude Bryja, Joel Kuhns. Not shown: Brian Carson.

The whole team was only ever all together in one place at one time, when socializing at the end of a long day's work.



© Desmond McConvey 2005

Team Blue 2005 - Group 3

Front Row (left): Desiree Wong, Amanda Stenman, Janie Coleman.

Back Row (Left): Nick Louis, Karin Nelson, Fred Burton, Coralie Farren

Desiree's passion for cooking gave the whole team a lift, mid way through the project when team numbers dipped for a while, the project work stayed as demanding as ever.



© Desiree Wong 2005

Team Blue 2005 - Group 4

Left to right in foreground: Nick Louis, Jeffrey Ackley, Sam Addinall.

Further behind in the truck bed: Coralie Farren, Tandora Grant, Matt Goetz.

Around the cab: Erika Delgado, Fred Burton, Gaby Besne, Janice Gerrits.

Team numbers peaked in June, overwhelming our transport options when the BIRP's blue truck broke down at a critical stage. But we didn't really travel with the entire team in the Clifford's red truck! We picked up a rental car instead, kindly paid for by San Diego Zoo.



© Robby Addinall 2005

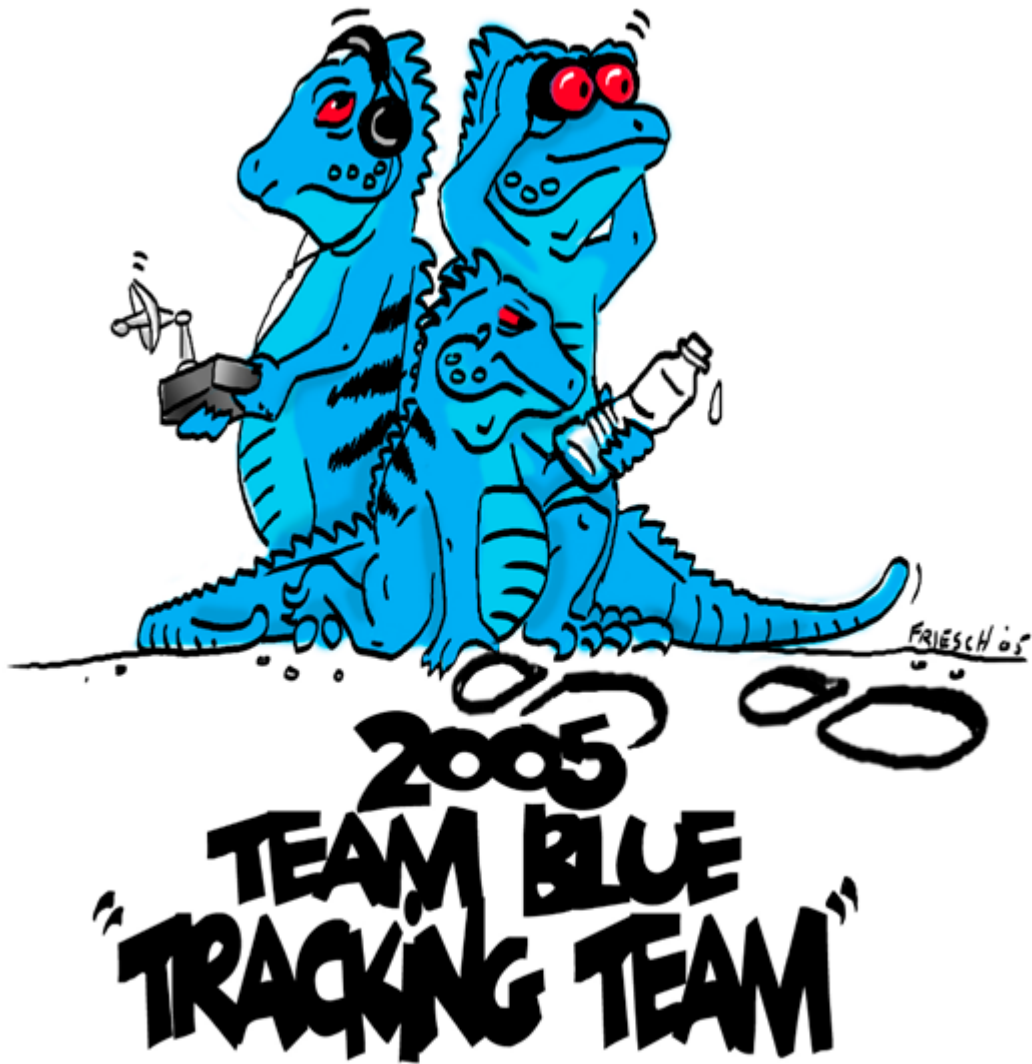
Team Blue 2005 - U.S.A.

Front Row (left): Sandy Binns, AJ Gutman, Joel Friesch, and John Binns.

The IRCF thanks our hatchling cage donors: Rob Ferber, AJ Gutman, Carole Saucier, Chris and Dana Belstler, Mrs. S.J. McCann, Allison Carey, Christopher Boote, Marc Taslimi, Tim Martyn, Tavia Smalley, Raymond Huerta, Ella Marie Poyner, Desiree Wong, LeAnn Monson, Kim Scott, Lorraine Baker, Kathryn Tosney, Pamela Tangredi, Renata Watson, Erik Carlseen, Tom Comfort, Sharron Lang, Patrick Kubeja, Patrick's Iguana and Herp Forum, Robert Allen, Rob Dorson Trust, Jamestown Community College - Earth Awareness Environmental Club.



© John Binns 2005



© Joel Friesch 2005

Team Blue in the Salina Reserve ...

Coralie Farren is doing an awesome job in the Salina Reserve. Linking Blue Iguana fieldwork to her Master's degree, she is leading the tracking of the 23 young Blue Iguanas we released in December 2004. Now approaching three years of age, these iguanas are starting to behave like adults, and have been giving Team Blue a frantic runaround in 90 + degree weather! Coralie has been tireless and persistent in adapting to the searing summer heat while managing field personnel as well as the daunting volume of data entry.

The condition of the young Blues in the Salina is superb – they have grown vigorously since release, becoming well established in their territories. And we see males courting females. The substantial growth rate has actually created an unexpected problem – the young Blues are shedding so regularly that they keep sloughing off the radio transmitters glued to their backsides! We know for sure that at least 21 of the 23 animals we released are still alive and well after their first six months in the wild. Two males are unaccounted for, but we have no particular reason to suppose they are doing anything other than heading further afield and doing what wild iguanas do.



© Fred Burton 2005

Left: AE Nash, Coralie Farren & Lorraine Scotson with an iguana in the Salina Reserve.

Two of the females, GYP and GRP, have turned out to be cross dressers; both are now unmistakably males! These boys have grown significantly, flushed to beautiful blues, and are now busy charging around checking out all the girls!

As in the winter season, the radio tracking data is flowing in fast, with hourly positions recorded for each iguana every day. Matt Goetz has arrived back from Jersey (after missing the release scheduled for September last year due to the storm) and is now making up for lost time! Tracking is scheduled to close at the end of June, by which time we should know if any of the young Salina females are going to nest this year. Check www.BlueIguana.ky for the very latest updates.

The Last of the Wild Blues?

This year we decided to try to crack the mystery of the last really wild Blues. Team Blue 2005 started with observations on a farm access road in the east interior of Grand Cayman, where small numbers of new hatchlings have been appearing year after year. After his second session gazing down a dirt track with a pair of binoculars and seeing nothing but mirages, BIRP Warden Chris declared it “like watching television with the power off!”

During the first two weeks, our vigilance paid off. We acquired enough information to set traps for unseen iguanas and managed to catch our first – only to find it was an old friend, Blue-Green. This animal has a serious case of wanderlust, having traveled east from the QE II Botanic Park where he was originally released. This was the third time we had recaptured him!

He is a very lucky animal; from the scars on his body, it appears that he was attacked by a dog and managed to survive to tell the tale. We tracked him for a while, but he didn't seem to be in contact with any other iguanas – just a lonesome traveler.

The excitement began to increase with the trapping of a young adult male. This one had not been tagged before, and therefore must have hatched in the wild. Green-Red-Blue or GRuB as he is now known, was fitted with his beads and a radio transmitter and tracked at a distance for many weeks. Gradually we built up a detailed map of his home range and habits.

Tracking GRuB led us to a focused centre of activity, and it was time to enter the shrubland and watch. But GRuB had also shown us how extremely shy these wild iguanas are: they flee at 150 yards from an observer! We needed observation blinds. Team Bluer Nick Louis put in a call to his Cabelas (hunting equipment)-addicted father, Clif in Colorado, and a set of blinds was on its way in no time. Many thanks to Clif for his generosity!

From behind the newly-acquired blinds, we quickly spotted our first female, and later a second male. Both were trapped and tagged – not an easy task - and we excitedly added the young male, Yellow-Orange-Blue (YOB), and the even younger female, Green-Green-Red (GGR), to our tracking routine.

Sadly, things have not developed any further. A theoretical second female, whose presence had been hinted at by the overlapping home ranges of YOB and GruB, has not turned up, nor have other males to compete for GGR. The tracking data seem to suggest that the three animals that have so far been spotted are a closed group, perhaps the only ones left. Strangely, they are all under 10 years old. Are these in fact just offspring of iguanas we released in the Botanic Park?

It is surprising, but consistent with these rather discouraging results, that no wild iguanas have turned up in the Salina Reserve, or the QE II Botanic Park, since we re-established wild populations there. If truly wild males remained anywhere near these areas, we would expect them to discover and try to move in on our released females. That just hasn't been happening, and leads us to the rather somber but not unexpected conclusion that GRuB, YOB, and GRR are what is left of the wild Grand Cayman Blue Iguana population.



Farmer Mr. Smith (centre) became a fast friend of the team in the home of the last wild Blues, here with Nick Louis and Barbara Watkins



Fred tries out a new blind.



© Samantha Addinall 2005

Windsor has his work cut out this year.

Hatches and Matches...

At the end of May, Elizabeth, a wild-born female originally seen in the home of the last wild Blues, successfully laid nine eggs in her pen in the captive facility. This was fantastic news and meant that the breeding strategy for 2005 was working. The Daniel/Elizabeth pairing was one of the most important and Elizabeth's first clutch of eggs in captivity – vital new genes! All nine look good and healthy at this point. Interestingly, since laying her eggs, Elizabeth is much less nervous and will sit and watch people pass by her pen rather than diving for the shelter of her retreat.

Elizabeth is the only captive mama to date. Some of the other girls are heavily gravid and languid in the extreme; Ruth is almost spherical and poor old Biter is lolling around looking thoroughly exhausted. We're keeping our fingers crossed to see some results from the Hal and Gloria and Billy and Deborah pairings. We saw them both mating - Chris and I have been big time voyeurs recently!

We found out just in time for the mating season that Arlington was a 'True Blue' (thanks to Scott Davis for working through those bloods in time) so dashed her into an empty pen in Windsor's row. Hopefully they will have had an opportunity to mate, although the females all seem to have a generally poor attitude towards old Windsor. All they seem to want to do is beat him up, which is not so funny if you're an undersized and hunchbacked Blue Iguana. He has a good reputation as a breeder but the only activity we've seen from him this year is frantic sprint laps around the various pens as he tries to avoid one or another of his allocated overly aggressive females.



© Samantha Addinall 2005

Egg dream - Biter in an advanced state of pregnancy.

Out free roaming in the Park, we now have 16 females and that means 16 nest sites to find and excavate for eggs.

As we move into peak nesting season and wind down work with GRuB et al., Team Blue members are helping to watch each individual female, checking their behavior to assess how close they are to nesting, and searching for clues as to their chosen nesting sites.

At this time, we have collected eggs from Sapphire and Red White. Sapphire surprised us all by nesting in the orchard, rather than the lakeside nesting spot that she has used for the last three years. Red White gave her trackers the most wonderful runaround, and they shifted at least a ton of earth in the process of seeking her five precious eggs. Purple also nested, but alas, as in every year to date, her six eggs were infertile. We are also waiting for Shy to select one of the five burrows she's dug so far in which to lay her eggs!



© Samantha Addinall 2005

Now We're Cruising!

Could you all hear the whoops for joy coming from the Caribbean last week? After months of planning, we had the enormous pleasure of receiving our first ever cruise ship tourists. The Royal Caribbean International ship, Empress of the Seas, delivered us the Tokuyama family from San Francisco, a charming group to initiate their somewhat nervous tour guides. The animals pulled out all the stops - we were lucky enough to see Slugger, Red Pale Blue, and Santa out in the Park, and all the little chaps in the captive facility behaved themselves beautifully. Biter lolled around cooperatively and Digger and Hal continued their on-going (head-bobbing) conversation through the bars of their communication grate, providing a wonderful display of manly aggression, grrrrr!



The Blue Iguana, Santa, gives these gentlemen a good eye (top) look at this while tour guides Chris Carr (left) and Samantha Adzral, second from right look on. Photo: Cynthia McGowan

Cruisers meet Blue Iguanas

By Cynthia McGowan
c0cfnr@ctny

The first official cruise passenger tour of the Blue Iguana Recovery Programme at the Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park was not even disrupted by a downpour of rain Tuesday morning.

Although the skies opened for the end of the tour, the eight visitors from the Royal Caribbean's Empress of the Seas ship had high praise for both the Botanic Park and their first ever encounter with Cayman's Blue Iguanas.

The eight visitors, who are native to Taiwan and China, living in San Francisco, were greatly enthused about the hour and a half long tour.

"It was really great to see all the iguanas. It is a great facility and we were introduced to all the different flowers also," said Ms. Fumika Tokuyama, who had previously seen Marine Iguanas in the Galapagos Islands.

Other members of the group said it was their first time seeing any sort of iguana and they were fascinated by them and were interested in the fact that the Blue Iguana is an endangered species, which they had not previously known.

The Blue Iguana Recovery Programme

Continued on page 7

© Caymanian Compass 2005

The tours mean so much to us and will help to furnish the iguanas with a financially secure future. The local response to the tours has been great too; there seems to be genuine excitement at the advent of such a different kind of tourist concept in Cayman – we even made the front page of the paper.

Called simply “Save the Blue Iguana”, our tour is being sold on board Royal Caribbean International vessels, and will also be taken up this winter by their sister line, Celebrity Cruises. Royal Caribbean has taken the very unusual step of opening this tour midway through the summer and is being very generous with their financial terms to ensure that there is a significant benefit to the conservation work. Net tour profit is paid by Royal Caribbean directly into the Blue Iguana Conservation Fund.

Meanwhile back at the park...

.... the facelift continues, with a beautiful new gate for the head-starting facility courtesy of Karoly at Artisan Ironworks. The fence-building around the facility will soon be complete; we just need to raise the money for a final stretch of about 20 meters.

We'd like everything to look its best for the 100 or so very important new residents turning up soon with the 2005 hatch. Here again we need to give thanks to all those who supported our baby cage appeal conducted by the IRCF. As this is written, we have raised over \$7,576.00 of the \$7000.00 needed to house the new arrivals. We are facing a backlog at the captive facility,

as the 2003 juveniles will not be released into the Salina until December this year. The next few months are going to be very busy for the BIRP wardens - how will we ever think of names for all the new iguanas?

Grand Style at the Grand Caymanian



© Desiree Wong 2005

Fred, Theresa Foster, Chris and Sam at the Grand Caymanian's Grand Re-opening.

One day we will have painted the whole world lewisi blue, but to get us there we need the help of individuals who are willing to believe in the Recovery Program and help market it, individuals like Theresa Foster who, with her husband Gary, runs a local time share and resort, the Grand Caymanian.

The Foster's resort was very seriously Ivanized and it was during the process of putting it back together that they decided to contact the National Trust's Chair Carla Reid, who in turn contacted Fred.

They proposed to provide support for the program in various ways, initially by branding their restaurant 'The Blue Iguana Grill', complete with a host in a Blue Iguana costume, and by selling our new tour and heavily promoting our work with adults and



© Desiree Wong 2005

children alike. As if this wasn't quite enough already, they offered to throw a very generous annual donation and free conference facilities into the bargain. Their proposal was not turned down!

Last Saturday, BIRP and Team Blue were all invited to the grand re-opening and were able to enjoy the stunning new resort and restaurant. The place has been beautifully rebuilt and restored and has a wonderful atmosphere. We are all delighted to see another of Cayman's great institutions rise again from the ruins of the hurricane.

Surely the high point of the evening was watching Fred being chased down by a lumbering six-foot Blue Iguana.

We are excited to see how BIRP's relationship with the Grand Caymanian develops and are thrilled that a local business is being so supportive of the Program. Next on the agenda is the Team Blue trip to test out and pick the best Blue Iguana cocktail! (Or does Fred just want another rendezvous with the six foot Blue?)



© Desiree Wong 2005



THE GRAND CAYMANIAN RESORT, GRAND CAYMAN, CAYMAN ISLANDS
Email: gayoper@candw.ky Rental: (345) 949-3100 Fax: (345) 949-3161

King Blue Bobble-Head



U.S. Orders Click Here

The King Blue Bobble-Head is available **Now** on www.BlueIguana.ky for U.S. sales and will go on sale in Grand Cayman soon!

King Blue is designed by Joel Friesch (Sculpture) and manufactured by the IRCF. Made of hand-cast plaster and hand painted, it is truly a work of art - with a twist of fun added mimicking the famous head bob of a "True Blue". The base displays Grand Cayman's endemic butterfly.



Support the Blues !

Blue Iguana Recovery Program Partners



A program of the National Trust for the Cayman Islands, in association with local and international partners.

Donations

Direct financial assistance to the Blue Iguana Recovery Program can be made to the "Blue Iguana Conservation Fund" at PO Box 10308 APO, Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands. This is an audited National Trust account restricted to the Blue Iguana Recovery Program.

In the US, tax-deductible contributions can be made through: www.BLUEIGUANA.KY

