



# BLUE IGUANA TALES

Volume 3, Number 2 – 2005 Spring Edition – Quarterly update on the Blue Iguana Recovery Program



© John Binns 2005

## Out in the Wilds

In the last issue of Blue Iguana Tales we reported on the release of 23 two-year-old Blue Iguanas into the National Trust's Salina Reserve ("Not just a walk in the Park," BITs 3:1). Radio tracking of these animals continued up to the end of January, after which the radio transmitters were removed and the iguanas left to their new lives in the wild until the coming breeding season. In an article prepared for the program's web site in mid- January, Program Director Fred Burton mused on the final stages of this fieldwork:

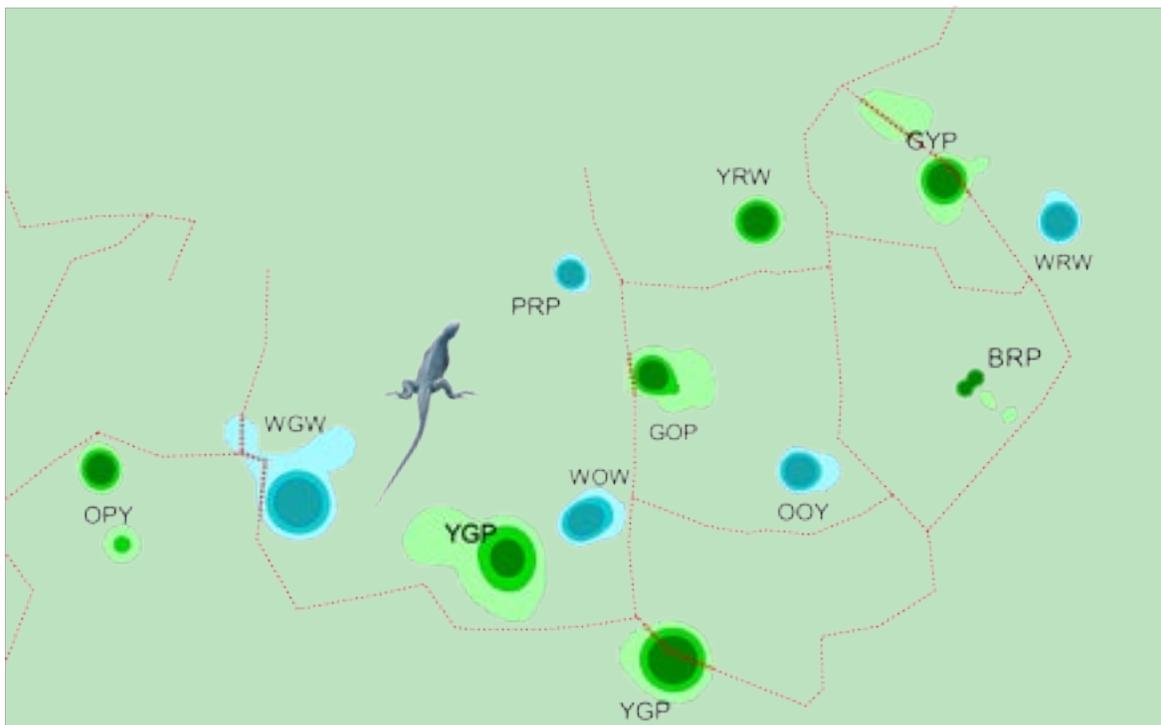
*"Yesterday in the Salina Reserve I held a young female Blue Iguana, and peeled off a radio transmitter that she'd been carrying for the last two months and more. It was Gypsy, one of the thirteen two-year-old female Blues that walked into the wild for the first time on 7 December last year. It's been reassuring, measuring and weighing these plump, wriggling young iguanas, to see how well they've done since we let them go. All are alive and well, and some have even gained weight though food resources are getting scarce as we enter the dry season.*

*In another two weeks we'll weigh and measure the males, then all that remains for this phase of the inaugural Salina Release project is weeks of data entry and analysis to tease out key conclusions from the months of meticulous monitoring.*

*It's tempting to speak of success, but it's far too soon for that. By May some of these released iguanas should be big enough to mate, and that brings a whole new raft of questions and uncertainties. Only if the released Blues nest successfully within the soil patches of the Salina Reserve, will we feel confident we're on the right track.*

*There are other possibilities. Food resources may run low through the dry season, and the iguanas could migrate out of the Reserve in search of edible foliage. Perhaps some ancient instinct will draw them to the coast when nesting season approaches, bringing the females into harm's way on a busy coastal highway. Maybe the uncertain dry summer rains will fail and the females will scatter looking for moist nesting soil. In May and June we'll have to radio track these females again; it's the only way we'll know what happens.*

*For now I'll close with my heartfelt thanks to those tireless and dedicated souls who worked with me and BIRP Wardens, Chris Carr and Samantha Addinall, all through December and January, to help Gypsy and her 22 peers start their lives in the wild. Those thanks belong equally with the institutions who made this promising start possible, financially and in many other ways."*



© Fred Burton 2005

*The Salina Reserve central release zone, showing half the animals released last December. After six and three weeks in the wild respectively, the females (green contours) and males (blue contours) were spending 95% of their waking hours in small, discrete territories centred on their retreats.*

THE BLUE IGUANA RECOVERY PROGRAM  
**TEAM BLUE** SPRING & SUMMER  
**2005**  
GRAND CAYMAN, CAYMAN ISLANDS, BRITISH WEST INDIES

## Team Blue 2005

The Blue Iguana Recovery Program has always been deeply reliant on voluntary support. The skills and services that stalwart local and international volunteers bring to us are critical in tackling all manner of tasks both great and small.

In 2002, a small but hardy international team assembled to assess the remaining wild population of Blue Iguanas. Their shocking findings reverberated worldwide. In 2004, a much larger group assembled to build 102 cages, doubling the capacity of the captive facility in an intense two weeks. This group, dubbed “Team Blue”, was so well organized and made such a significant contribution that we decided to do it again! As in 2004, the sizable task of recruiting and coordinating Team Blue 2005 has been energetically taken up by John Binns, who, with his wife Sandy and the International Reptile Conservation Foundation, has become an invaluable networking and support centre for the Blue Iguana Recovery Program in the USA.



© Fred Burton 2005

*Matt Goetz, Durrell Wildlife, transporting iguana food collected from other areas of the island during the aftermath of Hurricane Ivan.*

Salina release, also Nick Louis and Durrell Wildlife’s Matt Goetz, who were both here for the planned September release and got to experience Hurricane Ivan instead. Matt stayed on after the storm and was a key member of our recovery team; he and Nick need to come back if only to experience Cayman in times when cold beer, running water and an electricity supply can be found!

This year’s Team Blue is concentrating on fieldwork. We will be sending teams back into the Salina Reserve to monitor our 23 released three-year-olds, through their first breeding season in the wild. Released last December, these animals are just approaching breeding age and Team Blue will

Team Blue 2005 is starting at the beginning of April and runs through to the end of June. We have twenty ‘Team Bluers’ in the offing, originating from the UK, representing at least six of the United States and also coming to us from Mexico. Many are going to be familiar faces, we will be welcoming back Houston Zoo’s Jude Bryja and IRCF’s Desiree Wong who were here to help with the December



© Fred Burton 2005

be tracking their behaviour, recording who, if any, is mating, and then following the females to their nesting sites. Any eggs will then be recovered and whisked off to the safety of 31 Moonbeam Drive (Fred's house) where they will be incubated, hatched, relocated to the head-start facility at the Botanic Park and, when they are big enough to be safe from snakes, sent back to join their parents in the Salina. It's an exhaustive two-year process that ensures maximum survival statistics in an uncertain world.

At the same time, we will have a team in the deep east interior of the island, catching up with the last known wild Blue Iguanas. This fearless band of field researchers will be setting up lookout posts in one of Grand Cayman's most hostile environments. From their observations they hope to build an accurate picture of the numbers of surviving animals (heretofore estimated at 10-25), where they are living and, above all, where their nesting sites are. Again, the ultimate bounty will be the retrieval of eggs, which, produced by wild parents, will contain animals with precious new genes. The results of the survey may shock or delight us, but solid information about these animals is increasingly vital to future conservation planning.

The third arm of Team Blue 2005 will be active in the Botanic Park, where a securely established released population of Blues will also be breeding. Animals released in early 2004 should all be breeding this year, in addition to the older animals whose territories and habits are now quite well known. Locating every female in the Park and spotting where they nest is a larger task than ever before.

Team Blue will rotate "rest days" at the captive facility, giving bruises and scratches a chance to heal while helping with day-to-day essentials such as feeding, cleaning and food collection, and also providing essential extra bodies for updating enclosures and dealing with extra tasks that just don't get done without voluntary help.



© John Binns 2005

*One of Grand Cayman's most hostile environments.*

This ambitious and exciting summer work plan would be completely impossible without the commitment of so many volunteers, and the institutions which support many of them. Cumulatively over the three months, 20 overseas volunteers will be joining the BIRP's core local team, spending anything from ten days to the whole three months "on the job" with Team Blue 2005.

With 3 potential nesting areas (we only had one last year), and the sustained field presence that only Team Blue can provide, we may be looking at a record number of eggs going into incubators. So, ladies and gentlemen, it is time to lay your bids. Team Blue will undoubtedly be making wagers on how many new hatchlings we will see this year. Watch this space!

### Preparing for Blue Iguana Tours

Way back in 2001, when the Species Recovery Plan for the Grand Cayman Blue Iguana was first formulated, it was becoming clear that somehow the Blue Iguana Recovery Program needed to build sustainable revenue-generating activities in order to support a small permanent staff. That need has become ever more critical as two years of spectacular breeding success have brought the Cayman captive population of Blues well over the 200 mark. Our first professional Warden was hired with grant funds from the International Iguana Foundation and Maples Finance (Cayman) Ltd., and our current Wardens, Chris Carr and Sam (Samantha) Addinall, have progressed from dedicated volunteers to paid staff thanks largely to additional funds raised by the International Reptile Conservation Foundation. But staff cannot be maintained forever on short-term grants, so the program has been focusing much attention on ways the Blue Iguanas can help fund their own survival.



© Fred Burton 2005

Local telecom company **CaymanOne** volunteers Mark and Alexia Cheley, Cassandra Kenney, Morali Namburi, Dirk Schaeffner, Herb Peintner, Alexander Peintner and friend Natasha pose with BIRP Warden Chris Carr (on right) after spreading gravel on the main tour area.

Quietly over the last year, the Blue Iguana captive breeding and head-starting facility has been changing its face, with fresh paint and new infrastructure ranging from trails and fences to a new shade tent. With a combination of support from the Disney Wildlife Conservation Fund, locally donated and discounted supplies and materials, funds through the International Reptile Conservation Foundation and, most recently, a small start-up grant from KPMG (Cayman) Ltd, the program's staff and many volunteers now have the facility ready to accept the first paying guided tours.



© Fred Burton 2005

*The small iguana food garden at the Blue Iguana captive facility receives a face lift.*

Although the QE II Botanic Park itself is not scheduled to open until late April, conservation benefit tours of the Blue Iguana facility for passengers on Royal Caribbean and Celebrity Cruise lines are expected to commence in the next few weeks. If all goes well, these tours will soon be expanded to accept local and stay-over visitors groups, and the tour income should soon underwrite the current staffing costs of the BIRP.



© Fred Burton 2005

*The hospitality tent for visitors touring the Blue Iguana facilities.*

This will be a major landmark for the program. Program volunteer Robby Addinall has played, and continues to play a key role in making this vision a reality.

## Spring at the Park

*Blue Iguana Warden Sam Addinall reports from the captive facility on Grand Cayman.*

Preparations are complete for this year's Blue Iguana mating season; we are watching with eager anticipation as the new pairs start to interact. Although actual matings are unlikely to occur until May, the animals' behaviour already hints at the fast approaching breeding season.

Our captive facility animals are displaying behaviour similar to their free roaming peers, which is an encouraging sign. Conditions for our iguanas, insofar as is possible, should closely mimic the state of affairs in the wild. Our two small but very 'manly' males, Daniel and Windsor, mating with four and three females this year respectively, are shepherded through

each of their mates' pens during the course of a day. This is what would be happening in the wild – Slugger is clearly demonstrating this behavior, patrolling and determinedly policing all the females around the facility.

Each season, with the help of the Blues' Studbook Keeper, Tandora Grant, we have to prioritize the mating of our founder animals to ensure that we have their genes as fully represented as possible. So all the animals in the breeding pens are being shuffled, those previously on their own are now (hopefully) happily coupled and those that were already living as a pair have been put with other animals. The iguanas' reaction to change always makes for interesting observations. One of the most obvious reactions is an immediate 'blueing up' - they have all displayed the most wonderful colours. Zasa, who is normally our bluest animal anyway, is now simply exquisite in his turquoises and royal blues.

Some animals that have been moved into the larger pens are obviously enjoying the space and especially enjoying the food growing in the enclosures, seeming to graze much more enthusiastically than the animals that have just vacated.

Not all the iguanas enjoy their increased space; it appears that it is quite overwhelming for some of them. Our two youngest breeding females, sisters Juanita and AJ used to be the type to charge down their freshly filled food bowls (and the warden at the end of them). Now they are shrinking violets and will no doubt be relieved when they can go back into their smaller enclosures in the old facility. Conversely, Meteor, who has been put into a slightly smaller enclosure, is now less likely to dive into her retreat when she sees us coming, and the once shy Carley, hardly ever seen in her large pen, now basks boldly on a large rock in the middle of her smaller new home.

There is, however, an exception to every rule. Timmy (named for being Timid) has been given twice the space she had. She is a young female like AJ and Juanita, but instead of becoming even shyer, we are rather regretting her choice of name; now she relaxes openly sunning herself on this shelf and that, and never bats an eyelid when we pass.



© Samantha Addinall 2005

*One of the youngest breeding females at the Blue Iguana facilities, Juanita.*

Plenty of changes elsewhere as well, with animals getting reacquainted with old flames or meeting each other for the first time. It was with much apprehension that Chris and I put little Deborah in with big bad Billy. We purposely left this move to the very end of our relocation schedule and then sat and watched on the wall of the pen, like anxious parents to see how these two would react to one another. Billy is the program's oldest male and will turn

fifteen this year. He is also our largest animal and has developed a reputation for being a bit aggressive. He charges his wardens, positively foams at the mouth when John Binns heaves into sight and, has in the past injured females with whom he has mated. Chris and I were understandably relieved to see Deborah standing up for herself, refusing to be backed into a corner and, with a couple of weeks of living with Billy under her belt, much amused to see her make this great angry beast back away from his own food bowl so that she could eat all his best bits of fruit. Talk about paper tigers!



© Robby Addinall 2005

*“Say hello, Billy”.*

## Texan Connection

With so many endangered species having to be relocated for vital captive breeding, we shouldn't forget how lucky we are to be working with the Blue Iguanas on their home turf.

On March 4, Mike Fouraker, Tarren Wagener and Anne Ward arrived from Fort Worth Zoo, Texas. They were here to study the conditions in which our captive Blues are successfully breeding, especially the weather, the diet of our iguanas, and their physical environment. The knowledge that they will gather over the next 12 months will hopefully help any Blues existing outside the Caribbean, where breeding success to date has been patchy.

Of course, nothing is simple about the research that is going on. Tarren and Mike assembled and set up two really serious looking automatic weather stations. These are now recording relative humidity, temperature, total light and photosynthetically active radiation in two typical breeding enclosures. Tarren also took notes on sight lines and structures within the enclosures.



© Fred Burton 2005

*Automatic weather Station.*

Anne, who is Director of Nutritional Services at Fort Worth, shadowed the Blue Iguana feeding routine and will be returning in April to begin analyzing food samples, and measuring ultra-violet light intensities. Funded by a grant to Fort Worth Zoo by the Morris Animal Fund, the study is running simultaneously in Cayman, Indianapolis and Brownsville. Comparison of results from these disparate locations should give partnering US zoos ideas to help improve their iguana breeding success, which is meant to provide an important backup to conservation efforts here in Cayman.



© Fred Burron 2005

*Fort Worth Zoo's CEO, Mike Fouraker, and Director of Conservation & Science, Tarren Wagener, install a weather monitor in a young adult breeding cage.*



© John Binns 2005

## King Blue Bobble-Head



[U.S. Orders Click Here](#)

The King Blue Bobble-Head is available **Now** on [www.BlueIguana.ky](http://www.BlueIguana.ky) for U.S. sales and will go on sale in Grand Cayman in April !

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](http://WWW.BLUEIGUANA.KY)

