

IGUANA REPORT FROM JAPAN

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From the end of 80's to early 90's, there was a little reptile boom in Japan. Many pet shops were constructed and other non reptile shops, including department store, tropical fish shops, and even some supermarkets, started to sell small cutie green iguanas. The number of imported juvenile iguanas had increased rapidly through 1992 to 1993. As compared with increasing number, the price of iguanas decreased in a short period. In approximately 1990, one juvenile was about 30,000 yen (about \$300) to 40,000 yen (\$400). By 1992, it dropped to 10,000 yen (\$100). Last year, it dropped to around 3,000 yen (\$30). It became 1/10 in 5 years. We don't think it is that iguanas are sold at a lower cost but there are some people who think they should not spend more money to create their environment than the animals' price. Of course it takes more than \$30 to make a good captive environment.

And \$30 is inexpensive enough for the elementary school children to buy iguanas as a

toy. We have seen many children buying them in the pet shops.

The problem was there was no information available for proper iguana care. There were no books, no magazines, no veterinarians specialized for exotic animals. Different explanations were heard if you asked different people. Most shops described the lizards as follows.

"Iguanas are easy to keep."

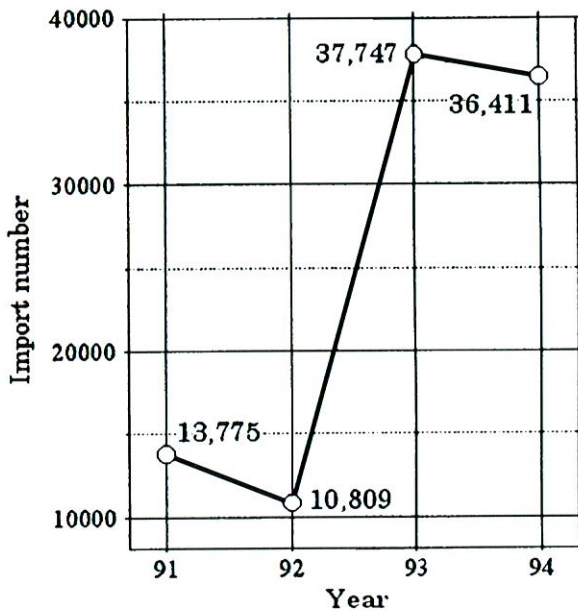
"Iguanas eats anything."

"They don't grow big."

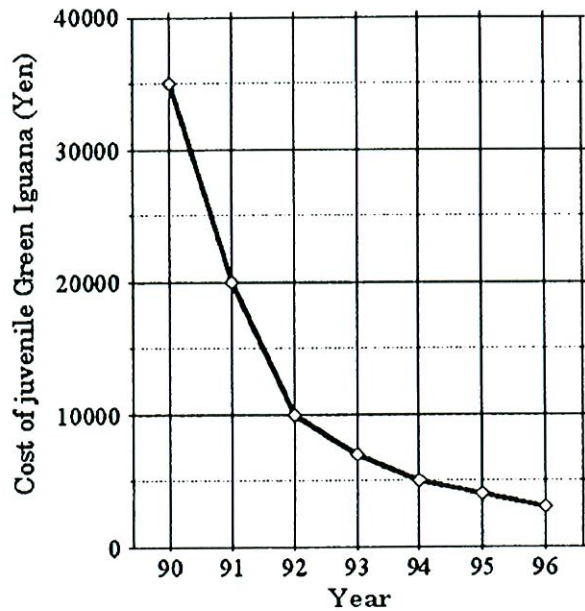
"Keep them in a 20° (Centigrade) environment."

"60 cm aquarium is enough."

All these non-academic expressions were heard from many pet shops. And since there was no other information, people began to believe this wrong information. We heard that less than 10% would survive over a year. Thirty thousand iguanas are imported now, but we have rarely seen iguanas that are over 1 m.



Import number of juvenile iguanas in Japan. From 1991 to 1994. There was a great boom in 1993.



Cost shift of one juvenile Green Iguana. It became less than 1/10 in five years. It is now 2,000 to 3,000 yen.



Rescued juvenile iguanas: they were all depressed and suffering from Metabolic Bone Disease (MBD). They were fed only lettuce and given no direct sunlight.

Every time we go to pet shops, we encounter poor-looking, suffering iguanas. Most of them have Metabolic Bone Disease. Many people didn't understand the necessity of sun-bathing and some didn't even know that they need a heater.

There were many respiratory infected, parasite infected, paralyzed limb, MBD juvenile iguanas all over. At one shop, with the worst conditions, we couldn't leave them and we bought them all. They all recovered and we are now keeping 14 iguanas in a small apartment. But there are more out there. We had to do something for these poor iguanas.



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6½ year-old male Grand Cayman
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Photograph: Robert W. Ehrig