

THE CAPTIVE HUSBANDRY AND PROPAGATION OF THE CUBAN ROCK IGUANA, *CYCLURA NUBILA* PART 3. DIET AND FEEDING

BY ROBERT W. EHRIG

Cuba, the largest island of the West Indies, has an extremely large and diverse flora. The Cuban Rock Iguana, *Cyclura nubila* would be expected to have a natural diet utilizing many of these plant species. Feeding the Cuban Iguana, in most respects, is identical to feeding the Green Iguana, *Iguana iguana*, in captivity. The Cuban Iguana, coming from a drier habitat, appears to have lower water requirements than *Iguana iguana*. Cuban Iguanas extract sufficient moisture for their needs from their diet. Our animals rarely drink, except for females preparing for egg laying. This is when all iguana species are most vulnerable to dehydration.

No other aspect of iguana husbandry is more controversial than diet. We have attempted to simulate a natural diet by providing a large variety of food items. Most iguanas will readily accept food items that are familiar to them. Many will shun unfamiliar ones. So it is advantageous to introduce new items to their diet with familiar ones. A hungry iguana will eat favorite foods readily and is stimulated to try new foods.

Most published diets contain greater protein quantities than I am comfortable using. Iguanas have thrived for us on a diet consisting of 94 - 98% vegetable and fruit and 2 - 6% prepared animal food or animal protein. This was based on years of personal observations of iguanas feeding in the wild. Large quantities of low-calorie fibrous plant materials are consumed. When seasonal fruit supplies become available, iguanas travel to the sources and consume large quantities while they last. Animal protein (carrion) is consumed readily, but it is only rarely available.

Allan's Cay Iguanas, *Cyclura cyclura inornata*, are frequently fed scraps of conch (a

marine snail) by boaters cleaning their catch. Most accept a few morsels and quickly lose interest. But a yachtsman with a loaf of white bread will have an entourage of iguanas as long as the supply lasts.

In the wild, an iguana emerges from its retreat after sunrise. It basks in the sun long enough to raise its body temperature to begin daily activities. Basking spots are usually prominent areas, centrally located in the iguana's territory that receive early, full sunlight. Not only does the ultraviolet light stimulate the iguana to eat, it facilitates the absorption of nutrients from the food.

In captivity, these situations are simulated by artificial habitats described earlier (Iguana Times, Volume One, Nos. 3 & 4). Lighting systems optimally commence at 730 — 800 hours with food introduced at 930 hours. We feed iguanas daily, but do not feed on rainy days. Volume of food varies seasonally. Substantially more food is consumed in summer than winter months.

Feeding portions are based on the amount of food each iguana will readily eat. If the animals are still hungry, more food is offered. In groups, two feeding dishes are sometimes necessary to insure subordinate animals receive their fill. Some animals will eat heavier on alternate days. This is especially true of hatchlings. The diet of hatchlings is essentially the same as adults, except that it is chopped or shredded to a finer consistency.

We also feed animals *coccothrinax* palm fruits, carambolas, sugar apples, sapadillas, papaya leaves, guanabanas, and other tropical fruit. We don't mention them in the table as these are not available in most temperate regions, we utilize *plumeria* and *hibiscus* flow-

ers and leaves as foods. In temperate areas, honeysuckle or dandelions would be good substitutes. Any local fruit or flower might prove

to be a valuable addition to the iguana diet. All foods should be acquired from sources known to be pesticide free.

Basic Iguana Diet

Greens (30-40% of volume)

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| Romaine Spinach | Kale Escarole | Leaf Lettuce Mustard Greens | Collards Parsley, etc. |
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Handling: All greens thoroughly rinsed and chopped or diced. Hatchling or juveniles need finely chopped food to aid digestion. Gut fauna in young iguanas can be overwhelmed by large pieces of food.

Bulk Vegetables (30-40% of volume)

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|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------|
| Frozen mixed vegetables (carrots, corn, peas, green beans, limas) | Green beans Peas Broccoli | Zucchini Yellow squash Yams | Cabbage Avocado |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------|

Handling: All vegetables should be fresh or frozen, frozen: thawed and served room temperature or slightly warm, chopped.

Fruit (10-30% of volume)

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| Banana Grapes | Melon (Honey dew, Cantaloupe, etc.) Papaya Strawberries, cherries, blueberries, peaches | Kiwi Mango |
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Handling: All fruit washed and chopped into small pieces designed to be bite-sized for various size iguanas. Bananas served with skin.

Protein (2-7% of volume)

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|-------------|--------------------------|
| Raw chicken | Dog, cat, or monkey chow |
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Handling: Chicken meat chopped. Process food soaked.

Continued in next issue...



Cuban Rock Iguana, *Cyclura nubila*.
Photography: Ron Harrod