

Rally 'Round the Reptile Rescues

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Green iguanas are a common sight at reptile rescues. My last blog touched upon desert tortoise rescues, and after reading Eric's comment about how important rescues are, I thought this topic deserved a blog all its own.

If you've read my ramblings before, you know I often write about how important it is to avoid impulse buying when obtaining pet reptiles. Sometimes someone who buys on impulse remains forever glad he or she did so, and cherishes their pet herp for its entire life.

Others, however, come to regret their decision to buy a reptile on impulse. Can you guess who would fit into this category? My guess is it would most often be the person who buys a baby green iguana, not knowing that the lizard will eventually get big and occasionally testy, especially if it's a male.

In addition to the person who ends up with a too-hard-to-handle green iguana, there are also the people who find themselves with increasingly large pythons (such as Burmese) and tortoises (sulcatas). The pattern here is that people who see cute baby reptiles buy them without knowing that they will eventually turn into still-cute-but-possibly-huge reptiles. And if these impulse buyers can no longer provide the proper care for their growing pets they look for somewhere to "dump" them.

Zoos and stores are often the first stops in these cases. Usually, zoos have all the green iguanas, Burmese pythons and other reptiles that they need. Stores may sometimes take them, but the market for large adult animals is not typically as good as for smaller animals. Many people (me included) generally prefer to obtain an animal when it is young and watch it grow.

So people may get discouraged when they are trying to decide what to do with an unmanageable pet if they try these two options and fail. However, a third option may exist, and it may be the one they should have tried first: a reptile rescue.

Reptile rescues are typically operated by kind-hearted animal lovers who love nothing more than trying to help animals in need. Some take in many different types of animals, others specialize in one type. Reptile rescues abound, and they really came into prominence in the early to mid-1990s, during the pet reptile boom that took place back then. This is when a lot of impulse buying and, later, the need to find new homes for abandoned reptiles really took off. Of course, rescues still serve the same important function today.

Rescues are not only places to go if you need to find a new home for an unwanted pet. You should also check them out if you are considering getting a new one. After all, you may be able to pick up a lizard, snake or turtle you want at a much less expensive price than you might pay elsewhere, and you'd be giving a homeless reptile a new lease on life. That's two great reasons right there to patronize a reptile rescue if you have one nearby.

One thing I feel compelled to mention. There are some "rescues" out there that collect unwanted animals in order to sell them for profit. This is a controversial practice. Most rescues will charge you something in exchange for an animal, but you may want to determine whether or not the fees they collect from the transaction go toward personal profit or back into the rescue itself. This may or may not make any difference to you personally, as long as you get the reptile you want, but to some people it does make a difference. If you're one of them you may also want to find out if the rescue you are dealing with is a registered nonprofit enterprise. Also find out if they are willing to provide advice and help after you acquire a new pet.

If you're an animal lover, even if you aren't in the market for a new pet, consider making a donation to your local rescue. These people don't have the funding of larger animal assistance organizations, and every dollar helps them big time.

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