



IGUANA RELOCATION NETWORK

A LOCAL NON-PROFIT'S FIGHT TO DISPEL MYTHS AND MISCONCEPTIONS, AND FIND THESE MINIATURE DINOSAURS PERMANENT, LOVING HOMES AT LAST...

Kathy Clagherty of the Iguana Relocation Network was gracious enough to step in as a last-minute speaker to talk about the IRN, a local non-profit whose goal is to help surrendered iguanas find permanent homes with proper husbandry. Kathy is currently the Director of Community Outreach as well as the Team Leader of Home Visits. Formerly, she was IRN's vice-president and did foster care.

As part of her talk during the meeting, Kathy answered questions regarding iguana care, the geographic range of the green iguana, and other queries about the species. She showed her own large male iguana, Pumpkin, whom she adopted via the Iguana Relocation Network. Pumpkin, she noted, had been quite amorous toward her during breeding season until she gave him "Lady Greenfingers" (a green rubber glove) and then another green fabric toy for him to direct his advances.

Kathy also discussed IRN's iguana adoption request form, adoption contract (a legally-binding document borrowed with permission from iguana guru Melissa Kaplan), and the home visits she makes to make sure that a potential adopter's iguana enclosure is in "move-in condition" before an iguana goes home.

The Adoption Process

In an earlier interview, Kathy described the adoption process: "First, you have to fill out an adoption request. You can do this online. Or we can snail mail it. It's rather thorough, asks about past experience with iguanas or other reptiles. The goal is to find out what misinformation, if any, you have about iguana husbandry. And if there is, to correct it!

"When your application has been approved, I will arrange for a home visit. Yes, I come to your home to see your set-up, and counsel you in whatever needs improvement. Habitats must be



Kathy Clagherty shows off Pumpkin at the June meeting.



in “Move-in” condition before the iguana is released into custody. I discuss the adoption fee of \$25, which is non-refundable. At this time, or even before, you go to IRN and pick out an iguana that is approved for your situation. We strive to match the right iguana with the right adopter. If you pick out an ig then decide not to adopt after paying the fee, it is not refundable. It is a serious decision, and an adoption contract is signed.

This is a legal document, so we need to make sure that the adopter is committed to the welfare of the iguana, and fully understands what they are getting into. If you pay the fee, decide on an ig, but change your mind, and want a different ig, (one that is still appropriate to your situation), you can apply that fee to the other iguana. When all the t’s are crossed and the i’s dotted, I will deliver your beautiful iguana to you, or you can pick it up at IRN.

“There are always people who think they can have a reptile and treat it like a mammal. We try to make our adoption process as rigorous as possible. As Director of Community Outreach, I see part of my job as making myself available to adopters to help answer questions and especially after the adoption with follow-up. The whole process can take up to a month.”

At the meeting, one member questioned why she and Jaime Pajak (IRN’s founder) chose green iguanas as their cause, and not herps in general, or even sulcatas. She responded with, “You have to pick your battles, pick your cause.... Because we love iguanas, we chose iguanas.”

Sarah Richard, MHS Adoption Chair, added to Kathy’s statement by telling MHS members that many more iguanas would be euthanized if it weren’t for IRN. “It’s the one area we can’t keep up with in animal placement,” she noted, as often times it’s too difficult to place them within the society.

Not all iguanas come to IRN through MHS, however. Some come through IRN’s website or referrals. Kathy states, “The number of fostered igs hovers around ten. I can think of nine that have been adopted, but there might be more.”

How It All Began

Sarah Richard had talked with Jaime Pajak about iguanas and MHS’s adoption program before IRN existed. Pajak was aghast that it had come down to euthanasia for many iguanas brought to the society. Sarah responded with, “Well, do something about it”, and so she did.

Kathy had this to say about IRN’s beginnings: “In Dec of ‘02 I became acquainted with Jaime. She was fostering my Pumpkin and she brought him to the Herp meeting. After adopting him, we talked at great length and kept in touch. I had been toying with the idea of starting a non-profit ig rescue group of some kind. I brought this up to Jaime, and she said she had already started a website and was networking with other rescue groups online. I believe it was in June that we started the process of going non-profit. We met regularly over the summer to work out the

SOME OF IRN’S CURRENT RESIDENTS UP FOR ADOPTION.





details, such as the by-laws etc. We, well, Jaime mostly, recruited friends to become board members. MHS's own Marilyn Brooks Blasus held the position of treasurer for a while.

"After a couple of false starts, we began having regular board meetings at my house. Of course, after I resigned, the meetings have been at [Jaime Pajak's] house, as they continue to be. There is a committed core, but I see that some members don't show up much, and there are new ones that I don't know well. I believe that the people involved care very much about IRN. We communicate between meetings via a Yahoo Group for Board Members."

Gaining the recognized 501(c)(3) status was not difficult for the fledgling organization, but there were many hoops to jump through. It took about a year to accomplish. "IRN from the beginning, has been run the way a 501(c)(3) is supposed to. That is to say, as we learned rules and regulations, we adapted to them."

Jaime Pajak has said that she patterned the structure of IRN after the MAARS organization (an avian rescue organization in the Twin Cities where she regularly volunteered). However, one important difference between the two organizations is that there is no IRN building at this point. IRN relies on several board members and volunteers to foster the iguanas waiting for homes. "We would love to have central housing for the fosters. This is our dream—to get a building for the igs. However, [Jaime Pajak's] house is IRN. That address is the legal address of IRN; all correspondence goes there. The most difficult thing is housing all of those iguanas." Also, feeding them ends up being inexpensive compared to the medical costs and electricity.

Outreach

As part of her status as Director of Community Outreach, Kathy speaks at many different func-

tions, including church groups, classrooms, Boy Scouts/Girl Scouts, vet clinics, pet stores, and others. She did some iguana information sessions at a Petsmart in Woodbury for about three months. Every Saturday from 2-6 p.m. she would pack up a foster ig, wire cage, lights, and food, and station herself at the cat adoption center, answering questions and promoting IRN. She is also exploring the possibility of running some community classes on ig care.

All in all, Kathy and the rest of the IRN members keep busy and work hard to change misconceptions and misunderstandings about the green beasts that they hold so dear. Jaime Pajak has recently graduated from the U of MN Veterinary School, and has completed an externship with Dr. Douglas Mader (author of *Reptile Medicine and Surgery*, the big black book for herp vets). So iguanas who find themselves at the door of the Iguana Relocation Network can breathe a sigh of relief, knowing that they will receive excellent care from some extremely dedicated volunteers. §

For more information, check out IRN's website: <http://www.iguanarelocationnetwork.org>

