



## **Iguana Care Demonstration**

### **How to Use This Document**

The following text is similar to what a presenter will say during a public demonstration. You may follow along, but please note that the exact wording and sequence will vary depending on staff and animal activity. Feel free to ask the presenter questions after the program. Thank you for joining us today!

## **Pre-Demonstration Announcement**

Hello! In a few minutes, Animal Care staff will be working with the Jamaican iguanas. If you're interested in learning more, please find a place a few feet away from the window. You may take a seat at the front or stand behind the people who are already seated. The demonstration will start shortly and will last five to ten minutes. If you have any questions before we begin, please let me know.

## **Introduction**

Welcome to Regenstein Small Mammal-Reptile House at Lincoln Park Zoo! My name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I'm with the Learning Team. During the training session today, a member of our Animal Care staff will enter the Jamaican iguana habitat. While they work, I'll describe how expert care helps reptiles thrive.

## **Training**

One of the ways we provide expert care is through training. Whether the animal is an iguana, a lion, or a

gorilla, training at Lincoln Park Zoo is always done with animal well-being in mind. Training is voluntary for animals, so they are never forced to participate. Everything is done through positive reinforcement, meaning if an animal responds the way we ask them to, they receive a reward.

One of the most basic behaviors in training is moving toward a target. Animal Care staff ask for that behavior using a pole specially designed



for training small animals. It might remind you of a lollipop. It isn't made of candy, but it's called a lollipop target because of the resemblance. When the iguanas follow the movement of the lollipop target, Animal Care staff reward them with a piece of fruit.

Sometimes, Animal Care staff notice the iguanas becoming very focused on their food rewards and getting a little too eager or excited. If that happens, Animal Care staff may leave the habitat and give the iguana a moment to rest before they resume the session.

Sometimes the Animal Care staff gently touch the iguanas with their fingers. They aren't just petting them. They're helping the iguanas get accustomed to being touched. That way, when we have to touch them for care purposes—such as during a veterinary exam—the iguanas are comfortable because the sensations are familiar.

Preparing iguanas for care is one of the benefits of training. Other benefits include being able to check on an iguana's mobility or being able to move them as needed without picking them up. Training also provides variety and mental exercise.

## **Enrichment**

Expert care also involves lots of enrichment. Enrichment is anything in an animal's environment purposefully included by caretakers to provide choice and encourage natural behavior. For Jamaican iguanas, our Animal Care staff often use food as enrichment. At the zoo, Jamaican iguanas eat salad greens, like kale, endive, and collard greens, along with carrots, beans, and fresh fruit. We round out their diet with specially made pellets that have a precise mix of nutrients. The placement of that food can be a source of enrichment.

Iguanas naturally spend a lot of time walking along tree branches to find leaves or fruit. Animal Care staff often place salad greens on branches to encourage natural foraging behavior. Animal Care staff can also place food inside puzzle feeders and other objects. These not only add variety to feeding, but also provide them ways to manipulate and investigate novel objects. This is known as mechanical enrichment.

Another way to provide food enrichment is with special, once-in-a-while food items. For iguanas, that can mean small invertebrates, like crickets or nightcrawlers.

Enrichment also comes from the way an animal's living space is structured. Jamaican iguanas are natural climbers, so there are several live plants and logs placed throughout the habitat at varying heights. They also dig holes to build nests, so the bottom of the habitat is covered with a layer of sand to encourage natural nesting behavior.

### **Saving a Species with Expert Care**

Our knowledge of how to care for Jamaican iguanas can help us care for their populations in the wild. Jamaican iguanas are one of the most endangered lizards in the world. They are native to Jamaica, an island nation in the Caribbean. They were once common across the island, but today they only live within a four-square-mile section of a

protected woodland right next to Kingston, the country's capital and largest city.

At one point, researchers thought Jamaican iguanas had already vanished. They were considered extinct by the 1940s due to non-native predators and reduction of their forest habitat. In 1970, a single Jamaican iguana was found by a hunter's dog, proving the species still survived. Another individual was found two decades later in 1990 and shown to staff at Hope Zoo in Kingston. After an extensive survey, researchers estimated the remaining population to be potentially as small as 50 individuals.

Lincoln Park Zoo is one of many partners working to save this critically endangered species from extinction. As a participant in the Jamaican Iguana Species Survival Plan, we work to better understand their needs and develop the techniques involved in caring for them.

Occasionally, wild hatchlings join the zoo population temporarily. They remain in human care for about two years, the most vulnerable time in an iguana's life. Then they are released back into the wild with a better chance of survival. This process, known as headstarting, has helped the Jamaican iguana population grow to be about ten times longer than it was in 1990.

## **Wildlife Trafficking**

Illegal trade in wildlife and wildlife products is driving the decline of many species. Because of their small and isolated population, Jamaican iguanas are not major targets of trafficking. But trafficking is a major threat to other Caribbean reptiles, including species closely related to Jamaican iguanas.

If you are considering purchasing a pet, be sure that you know its origin. Reptiles and other "exotic" pets may have been taken from the wild illegally. As a traveler, avoid buying products sourced from wild animals. If you are



uncertain, ask for the origin of the product to reduce your chance of supporting practices that harm wildlife.

## **Conclusion**

I hope you've enjoyed learning about the high quality of care that Lincoln Park Zoo provides animals. Once again, my name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I'm with the Learning team. Please let me know if you have any questions. Thanks for being here! Your support helps us conserve wildlife.