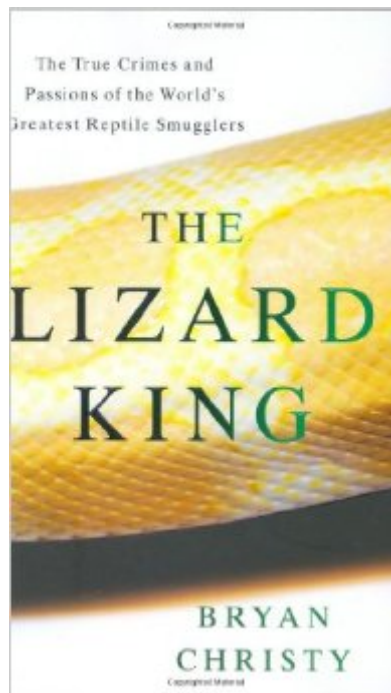


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# The Lizard King: The True Crimes And Passions Of The World's Greatest Reptile Smugglers



## Synopsis

Imagine The Sopranos, with snakes! The Lizard King is a fascinating account of a father and son family business suspected of smuggling reptiles, and the federal agent who tried to take them down. When Bryan Christy began to investigate the world of reptile smuggling, he had no idea what he would be in for. In the course of his research, he was bitten between the eyes by a blood python, chased by a mother alligator, and sprayed by a bird-eating tarantula. But perhaps more dangerous was coming face to face with Michael J. Van Nostrand, owner of Strictly Reptiles, a thriving family business in Hollywood, Florida. Van Nostrand imports as many as 300,000 iguanas each year (over half the total of America's most popular imported reptile), as well as hundreds of thousands of snakes, lizards, frogs, spiders, and scorpions. Van Nostrand was suspected of being a reptile smuggler by Special Agent Chip Bepler of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, who devoted years of his life in an obsessive quest to expose The Lizard King's cold-blooded crimes. How this cat-and-mouse game ended is engrossing and surprising.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The author did his homework on this one! As someone who's been around the business and many of its key players from the 1970s through the present, I marveled at the accuracy of most statements in this account. The numbers regarding quantities of animals and amounts of money seemed well-researched, realistic and largely believable, unlike the trumped-up crap that groups like the HSUS and PETA push to increase sympathy donations. The author's whole approach seemed out to record the real personalities, not mass media baloney exaggerated to make news and sell

books. I particularly liked his 'as it was' style and non-demonization of the principles. This book will be enjoyed by those involved in the herp trade in any way. Devout conservationists will probably applaud it as an exposé, but its strength lies in its honesty and facts. I hope everyone notes the sentence credited to U.S. Fish & Wildlife agent Chip Bepler on page 79: "He (Bepler) could not do much against habitat destruction, pollution, or any of the other amorphous problems facing wildlife, but he could do something about commercial profiteers." ----- That statement summarizes the major mentality in the U.S. on dealing with the issue of helping / protecting wildlife. The prevailing attitude is to do what makes headlines, ensures budgets and justifies your job, even if it's a drop in the bucket toward solving the real problem. With government money wasted by the millions on such a sham, it's no wonder that a few people will be disgusted and continue smuggling while feeling that they too deserve to profit from wildlife. The funny thing is, most of the species discussed in this book were smuggled in low numbers -- sometimes just a few pairs -- that did nothing to hurt wild populations.

"The Lizard King" is a gripping tale that takes readers into the subterranean world of reptile smuggling. The book features a fascinating cast of characters, ranging from bold, brash smuggling kingpins to the honorable men and women of the law who pursue them against great odds. Lay readers will learn a wealth of information about the world of legitimate reptile collecting and the seamy underworld of reptile smuggling. The scale of both is eye-opening. Thanks to gaping holes in the laws governing reptile importation and the high level of demand among legitimate and illegitimate collectors for exotic species, smuggling of protected and endangered animals has been relatively easy and tremendously lucrative. The odds are stacked against government agents who have made it their life's work to protect these beautiful and rare species. Author Bryan Christy is to be commended for his voluminous research. It is always a pleasure to discover a book that opens up a world previously unknown to a reader. He also deserves credit for the courage it took to gain access to some of the smuggling world's most powerful players so that he could authenticate facts for his story. I found the subject matter deeply engaging throughout. Christy also shows skill in assuming a neutral tone in describing the exploits of both the smugglers and the lawmen who are trying to bring them to justice. He tells the story from both points of view so the reader understands the thinking of both sides. Although some readers may feel that his narrative stance should be one of moral outrage toward the smugglers, I found his objectivity to be a more effective tone. It drew from me a feeling of revulsion toward the smugglers and elicited my admiration for the government agents pursuing them.

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