



WESTERN AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY of AMATEUR HERPETOLOGISTS (Inc)
(Member of the Australasian Affiliation of Herpetological Societies)

NEWSLETTER

20 March, 1995
(3)



WASA Logo

Robert Browne-Cooper, our Secretary, put the above logos together. They look pretty good and may one day be worn on tee-shirts. Hopefully they will stimulate input from members. Anyone

out there with some artistic ability can have a go. If you believe you can do better or have some other ideas, notify the Editor.

HERP amongst the GROCERIE S

A Lesmurdie woman arrived home from Kalamunda after a day's shopping. She commenced packing it away and was removing the loose leaves from a lettuce prior to storing it in the crisper. To her

amazement, beneath the outer leaves was a short, thick snake about 35cm long.

It was a Bardick (*Echiopsis curtus*). This small elapid snake is unrecorded from the Darling Range in this area, extending no further inland than Caversham. Although the shopkeeper at the store believed the lettuce was grown locally, it is more probable that it came from a market garden north of Wanneroo.

On Christmas eve I received a call from the manager of Woolworths, La Plaza Shopping Centre, Bentley. He was having trouble finding an employee to bring the pumpkins in from out back. When he went to investigate the problem there was a snake curled up asleep on the top-most pumpkin on the pallet.

I responded to the call and bagged an adult, female Stimson's Python (*Antaresia stimsoni*).

The back pattern and colouration suggests this individual came from somewhere other than Perth. The pumpkins were grown at Gin Gin, but did the snake get transported with them?

I have applied to keep this beast as it can not be safely liberated for fear of a negative impact on the gene-pool of the resident population.

BB

The following two articles were submitted by Les Harris of Exmouth. Both serve to illustrate how little we know about WA herpetofauna. They include, respectively, new data on the reproductive biology of a seasnake and a range extension of the Bobtail (T. rugosa). Thanks Les.

Ed.

Notes on the OLIVE SEASNAKE

(*Aipysurus laevis*)

By Les Harris (Member)

At 3.30pm on Thursday 24 October 1994, I was called to Town Beach, Exmouth with a report of a seasnake having

been washed ashore. On my arrival I found that a local beachfront store owner, Dutchy Holland, had tethered a huge dead seasnake with fishing line. This was to both stop it dehydrating and to delay decomposition.

The snake had quite a bulge in its body (see facsimile). As everyone on the beach was curious to know what it was the snake had swallowed, I brought out the "surgical tool", one blunt fishing knife. As it turned out, not only was I cutting it open to reveal the meal, I was also performing a premature caesarean section that day.

To our surprise we found a completely intact White-blotched Rock Cod (*Epinephelus multinotatus*) which measured 36cm in length and weighed 0.9kg.

The snake measured 1.7 metres total length and 22cm circumference at midbody and weighed 3kg after the fish was removed.

I mentioned "caesarean" above as the snake was a gravid female with seven "eggs". Cogger, Ehmann and Gow, in their respective books, list the maximum number of young as five.

The vital statistics for this snake are as follows:-

Midbody scales 23
Ventrals 154
Anal scale divided
Subcaudals single
SVL 1480mm
Tail 220mm.

*

BOBTAILS in Exmouth!

By Les Harris (Member)

On the 26 October 1994 there was a small bushfire at the corner of Nimitz and Reid Streets, Exmouth.

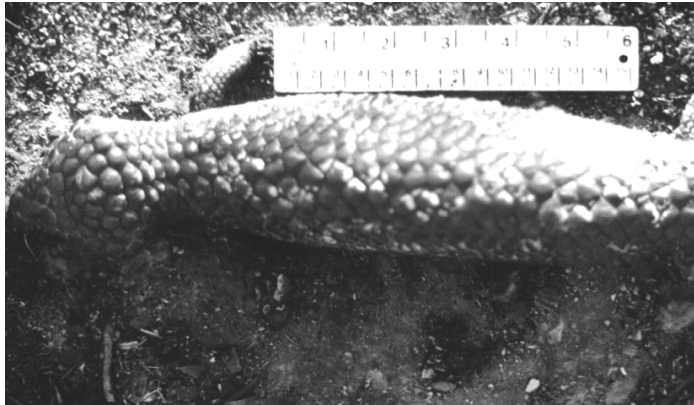
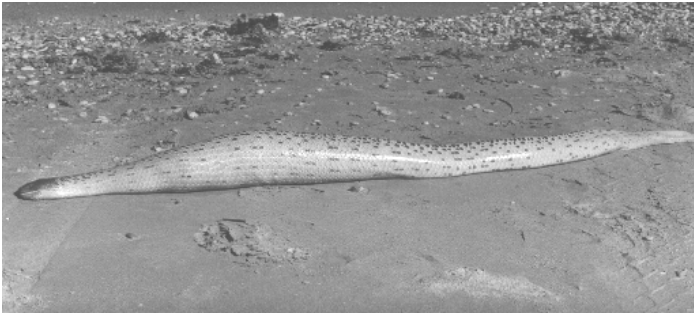
At about 4pm a shire worker, Richard Tinney, was driving along Nimitz Street when he observed a few young boys attempting to chase something off the road and back into a small section of bush that was still smouldering.

By the time Richard was close enough and able to pull up, the boys had scattered and the "bobtail" had entered the hot coals. It was too late to save this totally harmless and inoffensive creature.

I was notified a short time later and immediately taken to the site where I was shown the charred body which I photographed (see facsimile).

I have lived in Exmouth for just over seven years. I spend a considerable amount of time in the bush but this is the first Bobtail I have seen on the NW Cape. However, over the next few days, several locals who have lived here much longer than I told me of seeing the occasional Bobtail. I have no reason to disbelieve these people.

Ed here! I have also had reports of Bobtails in and around Newman. However, to date have not been fortunate enough to verify this.



About our PRESIDENT

Brian Gordon Bush
A LIVELY
HERPETOLOGIST

An opportunity for WASAH members to gain a little insight into the man in the top job. *May the force be with us.*

Anyone having the chance to see Brian on the ABC television program, the 7 30 Report recently chasing tiger snakes on Carnac island must have noticed the impact he makes. Indeed, lively is probably an understatement Read on and have a good laugh.

Born in the Sydney suburb of Rockdale on 16 June 1947 he developed a fascination for reptiles as a young boy. This fascination was somewhat encouraged by his stonemason father who often brought home lizards from the bush during sandstone cutting excursions.

After completing an electrical trades Course at St George Technical College, Kogarah and serving two years National Service he returned to the electrical trade. It was too late though, the army service had instilled

in him the urge for change and he moved to Western Australia in 1976 so that his wife Judy could be closer to her family in Perth.

For 10 years he worked at Lort River on the Esperance sandplain, 700km south east of Perth, as a fencer and windmill mechanic. This brought him into regular contact with the reptiles of the area. The countless observations and information he gathered on the area, coupled with his frequent visits to the Goldfields region to the north, enabled him to produce a guide to the *Reptiles of the Kalgoorlie-Esperance Region*. A book which sold out so quick that he had to make photocopies to supply the demand. His energy and devotion to sharing knowledge with others is inexhaustible.

Therefore, after those rewarding ten years on the land, he convinced the wildlife authorities to allow him to do reptile education fulltime. He moved to the Perth and has been opening both youngsters' and adults' eyes and minds on the reptile world since.

He is fully supportive of genuine amateurs being allowed to legally maintain reptiles, his attitude being "if I'm allowed to keep you should be too".

Most of us refer to him as the "old man perentie" because of his fatherly stature. This also refers to his age and obvious wrinkles. Although he is often heard to remark that he is only 27 years of age. "If you spent as much

time on top of windmills close to the sun as I have, you would be wrinkled too".

His snake collection is large by W A standards. He has done numerous articles and has a small elapid snake named after him, *Rhinoplocephalus spectabilis bushi*. Although this is only a subspecies he continually elevates it to full species while we persist in synonymising it with *R. gouldii*. All in good fun!

Western Australian herps have got to be good-natured and thick-skinned to survive in an unfriendly environment Good-natured is Brian!

I remember getting lost a few years ago while headtorching for geckos. After spending all night in the bush I eventually found my way back to camp midmorning the following day. There was Brian with a big grin on his face as he says to me, "Brad, we were not worried about you but I did sort out who would get your snake boxes and books etc if you never came back". Always good for a laugh!

He reckons his skin is turning to scales and he should have hatched out of an egg. He has been hospitalised three times in over 35 years from snakebite and says, "any keeper or collector of snakes who has not been bitten must be too rough on the animals".

He is also often heard to remark that the greatest fallacy concerning Australia's snakes is that they are the deadliest in the world. He points out that people who should know better

perpetuate fear of snakes by not qualifying this statement. More correctly it should be, "Australia has the deadliest snakes in the world if you are a mouse!"

BM

In this section we propose to include all the information about particular people and goings on that most of us would prefer no one knew. Also, if you wish to submit anything to be included here go ahead. It's "tongue in cheek" and all in good fun.

Dave Barker's book on

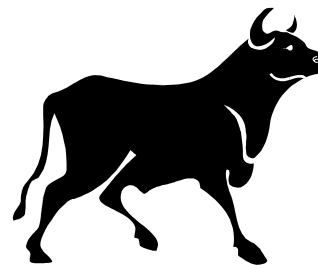
AUSTRALIAN PYTHONS

is
now
available

(see enclosed flyer)

WASAH will be bulk buying copies of this book. If you would like to buy a copy please notify the Editor within the next week.

HERPTALES



NEWSFLASH!

Our illustrious WASAH Treasurer David Robinson, also known as "Beerbottle", developed a new and exciting technique for collecting roadkilled herp specimens for the WA Museum. This method was refined during his stay in the Port Hedland area from 1989-1993. As Dave is always willing to share his knowledge he thought WASAH members might be interested in learning his new technique.

All herps know that spotlighting along bitumen roads on warm nights is a great way to collect reptiles. Most of us though tend to direct our attention towards the live wrigglers etc. Well, our own "Beerbottle" became a specialised collector of roadkills in the Pilbara by following 18-wheelers in his

own vehicle and reaping the rewards as the monster trucks squashed, splattered, flattened and bludgeoned every frog and reptile in their path.

Dave reckons, "Don't get too close to the semi as you might miss a specimen". and

“Always take along a hammer and chisel so you can separate the animal from the bitumen”.

You might think that identifying a beast after it has been run over may prove difficult. Not so! Dave has informed me that after years of practice, even though the animals are a bloody mess with guts hanging out everywhere, you can still make a positive identification.

Good news for members interested in Dave’s new technique, he is considering working on a *Key to Roadkilled Herps* detailing all the juicy aspects you need to know about their identification.

So there you have it, get out there and follow those Goliaths on our highways and GOOD LUCK!

We suspect that Ken Aplin of the WA Museum was getting a bit sick and tired of receiving pancakes as specimens from some guy in the Pilbara.

HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA

BM

The brief story following was submitted to the English teacher by a Year 9 student as an English assignment on irony.

An Outback EMERGENCY

Fred Long dropped into his local club for a drink. Many of the patrons there that afternoon he knew by sight, but rarely did he get involved in conversation with any of them. Bill the publican asked him how his divorce and settlement were progressing.

“Finalised at last” Fred replied. “I didn’t come out of it too badly financially as I had expected I might” he continued.

Taking up his glass, Fred moved to the corner table to consider his future as a single man. His boss, at the petroleum company he has been with for twenty two years, suggested he take a month off work and see a bit of the county. He planned to do just that. Next week he was heading north. His vehicle had been serviced and was ready to go. On the back seat was the new swag roll he had purchased from the disposal store yesterday. The smell of the new canvas was not unpleasant. It brought back memories of his youth and of the camping trips he had been on with the boy scouts. Sitting there thinking it suddenly dawned on him how very excited he was with the coming trip. An adventure!

He was dragged back to the club room by a word he overheard spoken by a new arrival: **Snake!**

The new arrival was talking, “Did you see that bloke on TV last night catching Tiger

Snakes on some island. He has to be crazy”

Fred interjected, “Bloody oath! The only good snake is a dead one!”.

Stowing his gear back into his vehicle, Fred checked to make sure the car fridge was full of cans. It was going to be a hot day!

Since Paynes Find, three days ago, the temperature had gradually increased each day as he headed north. He checked the map and decided he could make Wittenoom by nightfall.

Rolling a smoke and grabbing a can he started the engine and pulled out of the gravel pit onto the highway. The first kilometre sign he sighted said NEWMAN 190. The wide open spaces and feeling of freedom were exhilarating

The heat of the day was waning as the snake slithered out from the rock pile adjacent to the still pool of water. It was the thickness of a man’s arm and three times as long. Its skin glistened as if wet with oil. It was in its prime and close to depositing a clutch of eggs. Hunting was good near this waterhole and it showed in this female’s appearance. When the eggs were laid she would incubate them for their full term. The baby snakes would have a good chance to attain adulthood in this place. Rarely is this the case. Australia’s harsh environment meant few baby snakes survived their first twelve months. She coiled to sleep

on an overhang of rock still warm from the day's sun.

It was at that time of day when the sun is gone but it is not yet dark. Fred slowed his vehicle to a stop to stretch his legs. He knew he would not make Wittenoom this day. On his left was a sign portraying a tent with an arrow pointing up a dirt track. He jumped back into his vehicle and turned onto the track. Less than two kilometres along, it opened into a treed oval with numerous fireplaces, each with an old bridge section adjacent to it. Fred selected one, lit the fire and rolled out his swag. After a feed and a couple of cups of coffee he laid down and rolled a smoke.

He does not remember finishing his smoke but it is just on daylight when he opens his eyes. He must have been tired, he had slept with his boots on. This country sure is great. It can truly relax a man. He went for a wander to the edge of a cutting and sighted the waterhole. Climbing down for a closer look he spotted the snake on a ledge below him. A large brown-coloured snake. Quivering with fear and hate for the revolutive creature he stooped to pick up a large slab of rock. Leaning forward slightly, holding the rock out in front of him, he was able to bring it into line with the snake. He let go. The rock hit the snake with a plop and stayed where it had landed as if it had hit soft tar. Fred, feeling good with himself, climbed down onto the ledge. Gripping the slab of rock he lifted, then it happened! Something hit his

leg. There was sharp pain. Looking down he could see the snake's head with teeth firmly embedded in his flesh. He pulled it off and smashed the rock down on it time and again until it was pulp. Then headed back to his camp.

"Are you alright?" the stranger asks. "No! I have been bitten by a snake." Fred screams. "I have a CB radio in my truck, I will radio the Flying doctor." says the stranger rushing off.

Pains in the chest, problems breathing, hard to swallow, vision fading, head racing! Fred felt crook.

Being lifted off the ground, feeling of motion, blacking out, strange voices from afar: "How's the drip, let's go with the antivenom, polyvalent, allergic reaction, adrenalin, oh no!"

A day later the mangled body of a snake is examined for identification. An expert, after close examination, determined it to be an Olive Python in an advance state of pregnancy. A inoffensive, totally harmless species.

Fred was close to death on several occasions during the next five weeks. He had suffered a severe allergic reaction to the antivenom. Antivenom he did not need for a snakebite he should never have received.

The regional office of the Royal Flying Doctor Service estimate the cost of the return trip departing Port Hedland to be \$3,000.

Fred's fear of snakes was totally unreasonable. His physiological reaction to the bite was anxiety related, triggered by his fear .

MEMBERSHIP!

We are now taking memberships. \$15 each year. \$20 if you wish to have a copy of the Constitution and Rules posted to you. The \$15 membership includes annual subscription to *Herpetofauna* each year plus the *WASAH Newsletter*. Please complete the attached membership form and forward to the Secretary, 169 Egina Street, Mount Hawthorn WA 6016

The NEWSLETTER

We will include a letters section (if we ever get a letter) and ask you to send in anything you would like included. Anything that is sent in must be readable. That is in a reasonable hand or typewritten. Your suggestions would also be appreciated

Journals & Bulletins

HERPETOFAUNA

For those on the mailing list who do not wish to join WASAH

A worthwhile publication recommended by us for all the readers of this Newsletter. Send a cheque for \$15/one year or \$40/three years to:

The Editor
PO Box R307
Royal Exchange
SYDNEY 2000

MONITOR

The journal/newsletter and bulletin of the Victorian Herpetological Society. The VHS is the largest herp society in Australia and *Monitor* reflects that. Send \$20 for two issues/year to:

The Secretary
VHS Inc
16 Suspension St
ARDEER, VIC 3022

Hawkesbury Herpetological Society

The Secretary
PO Box 2
WHALAN, NSW 2770

Cape York Herpetological Society

The Secretary
PO Box 114
PALMCOVE, QLD 4879

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WASAH is an informal group of people with similar interests - all wishing to keep for private study and "love", frogs, turtles, lizards or snakes!

WASAH joined the Affiliation of Australasian Herpetological Societies in 1994.

REPTILES of MOUNT DALE & BOULDER ROCK

Over the years people have visited the Mount Dale/Boulder Rock area in the Darling Range to survey the herpetofauna. The main attraction at both localities is the amount of granite. Brookton Highway also provides a productive bitumen road for spotlighting during the warmer months. Check out these places in your street directory or regional map. Take note that over time the more accessible granite outcrops near main roads have been degraded. The exfoliated rock has been removed for gardens or needlessly smashed. A result of this is reptiles have become much more difficult to find in these areas.

An annotated checklist of reptiles recorded to date follows:

Geckos

Diplodactylus polyophthalmus **Rusty Stone Gecko**

Found under rocks, logs and active on road at night.

Diplodactylus pulcher **Beautiful Gecko**

One found beneath granite rock on grey soil at Mount Dale by Brian Bush. Scarce in this region.

Gehyra variegata **Dtella Gecko**

Common beneath granite slabs. This very abundant gecko becomes scarce on granite outcrops that are disturbed on a regular basis

Phyllodactylus marmoratus **Marbled Gecko**

Found active on road at night

Underwoodisaurus milii **Barking or Thick-tailed Gecko**

As for *D. polyophthalmus*.

Legless Lizards

Aprasia pulchella **Granite Worm Lizard**

Found under rocks and logs.

Delma fraseri **Fraser's Snake Lizard**

Found under granite rocks and inside abandoned stick-ant nests at Mount Dale.

Lialis burtonis **Burtens Legless Lizard**

Mainly found active on road at night.

Pygopus lepidopodus **Southern Scaly-Foot**

Only recorded road killed on Brookton Highway near Boulder Rock by Russell Brown. It is interesting to note that the Western Australian Museum list this species as being absent from the Darling Range. Keep an eye out for its members.

Dragon Lizards

Ctenophorus ornatus **Ornate Crevice Dragon**

On granite outcrops and beneath slabs.

Pogona minor **Western Bearded Dragon**

Seen active during daytime at Mount Dale.

Skinks

Bassiana trilineatum **Brown Swamp Skink**

Seen active among vegetation and found beneath rocks near creeks.

Cryptoblepharus plagiocephalus **Fence or Shinning Skink**

On living and dead trees as well as blackboys.

Ctenotus delli **Darling Range Heath Ctenotus**

Found on granite, laterite rocks and logs.

Ctenotus fallens **West-Coast Ctenotus**

Found under granite.

Ctenotus labillardieri **Red Legged Ctenotus**

Found Under granite, laterite rocks and logs.

Egernia napoleonis **South-Western Crevice Egernia**

Seen active on granite and large logs.

Hemiernis initialis **South-Western Earless Skink**

Found under rocks on soil and logs.

Lerista distinguenda **Darling Range Burrowing Skink**

As above.

Menetia greyii **Common Dwarf Skink**

Seen active in leaf litter and found under logs.

Morethia obscura **Southern Pale-flecked Morethia**

As above.

Tiliqua rugosa **Bobtail**

Seen active on road and tracks.

Snakes

Ramphotyphlops australis **Southern Blind Snake**

Found under rocks, logs and active at night on road.

Ramphotyphlops pinguis **Fat Blind Snake**

One found active on road at night near Boulder Rock by Brian Bush.

Morelia spilota imbricata **Southern Carpet Python**

One found active on road at night near Boulder Rock. A slough of this species has been found under a granite slab at Mount Dale.

Acanthophis antarcticus **Southern Death Adder**

Several males and females found active on road at night near Boulder Rock. Appears to be more prevalent where creeks/gullies bisect road.

Notechis scutatus occidentalis **Western Tiger Snake**

One found active on bridge at night near Boulder Rock.

Pseudonaja affinis affinis **Dugite**

Seen active during day and night on granite, road and tracks. Sometimes found under large granite slabs.

Rhinoplocephalus gouldii **Gould's Hooded Snake**

Found under granite, laterite rocks, logs and inside dead blackboys. Also seen active on road at night

Rhinoplocephalus nigriceps **Black-backed Snake**

As above.

Vermicella semifasciata **Southern Shovel-nosed Snake**

One found beneath rock on soil at Mount Dale.

If anyone can add species they have recorded in these areas to this list please let me know. How about sending your own list to the editor of the species you have recorded in any area you have visited for some time. It's all good fun and allows you to share your knowledge.

It would not surprise me if *Vermicella calonotos*, the **Black-Striped Snake** inhabited the areas of Banksia/Eucalyptus on white sand along the Brookton Highway. We should get some pit-traps up there to find out.

Compiled by B M