

WASAH



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

NEWSLETTER

15 March, 1998
(14)

Letter to Politicians

The response to our letter of 21 January to WA's elected members of parliament was quite good. Although most were standard replies acknowledging ours, at least we got a response. Several offered their support and a couple were so positive that they offered advise on how to go about achieving our primary objective.

As editor I received a letter from Dave Mell, CALM's Chief Wildlife Officer commenting on the preamble in the appendix to *WASAH Newsletter* 13. This and my reply as the author of that piece can be found later in this newsletter.

If anyone is interested in staying in Perenjori, we now

have available accommodation there. WASAH member, Dave (Beerbottle) Robinson has been transferred to the Wheatbelt and can be contacted on -
(08) 99731515

December '97 MEETING REPORT

Another great WASAH meeting with 29 members and 6 guests present. The venue was pleasant enough with some taking advantage of the free bar-b-q and others going bush-walking at meeting's end.

Bruce George lost his wallet on the way to Bickley, while Don Howe headed home to Cottesloe without his large beach umbrella. Surprisingly, Bruce got his wallet back and, after the long-distance return, the umbrella was still where Don had left it.

We didn't have a guest speaker but we still amused ourselves and had some Christmas cheer.

At the upcoming March meeting at the zoo education centre we are fortunate to have Dean Burford speaking to us on his work with the Western swamp turtle (*Pseudemys umbrina*).

Make sure you attend!

HAPPY EASTER TO ALL

IMPORTANT NOTICE!

The views expressed by contributors to the WASAH Newsletter are not necessarily those of the Executive, the Society or its members. As editor I tend towards minimal censorship as I believe everyone's opinions should be heard, but I will exercise this if I believe an article's content reflects poorly on WASAH.

Brian Bush

What is HERPETOLOGY & WASAH (My opinion)

by Brad Maryan

What is herpetology? To most people it is the study of amphibians and reptiles. This may encompass a more specific aspect of this such as taxonomy, ecology, physiology, morphology, etc. It is a term to describe a person involved with these animals in such a way as to contribute to our knowledge of them. Personally, I feel that it is more than this, especially for the non-professional, private

hobbyists. The main difference between the professional and amateur herpetologists is the former has usually demonstrated an intellectual ability and tenacity in completing a tertiary academic discipline and is remunerated for his/her contribution while the latter does it all for love. In the end they are both equally important. Many professionals may disagree with me on this, but whose to say which contribution is of greatest importance? All that matters is I believe my contribution to be important. We should all be entitled to our say, irrespective of whether this be verbal or written.

Sadly, in this complicated materialistic society we live in we tend to forget the fundamental requirements of a quality life. Those that just wish to pursue an interest in private herpetology are excluded from doing so by over regulation - regulation enacted by those with little compassion or appreciation of the satisfaction one can glean from this interest. Those having worked with or in government departments will know what I am saying.

To me, herpetology is a fundamental component of my improved quality of life. When I was conceived something happened to predetermine that I would have this interest. I would go so far as to say my life would be inane without it. This interest was evident in me, as it is in many others, at an early age. The telltale signs vary from an insatiable need to peruse books and

magazines on reptiles to visiting the local patch of bush to see what could be found. I reckon anyone with an interest in natural history should give themselves a pat on the back, and anyway, it is wonderful and damn good fun. At the next WASAH meeting cast your eyes over the younger members and consider what the future holds for them and their continuing interest. If we do not get some sensibility into the system in Western Australia then they are cursed with an ongoing discrimination based on some mistaken bureaucratic philosophy that legislative prohibition is a primary conservation mechanism. Have a look at the list of threatening processes that Bush has included here in his response to a letter from CALM's Chief Wildlife Officer later in this issue.

Given the opportunity some of the youngsters will take their interest further and work in this field either after obtaining a degree or, as Brian Bush (Snakes Harmful & Harmless) and Klaas Gaikhorst (Armadale Reptile Centre) have done, combining the best of both worlds: being paid to pursue their passion. One of their greatest contributions is sharing their knowledge and experiences with other people.

I know having an interest in herpetology is simply the best. It hurts no one and allows individuals to contribute positively to society generally and the herpetological community specifically. Unfortunately, in

this country and especially WA, the problem relates to being able to pursue your interest. We are all different with differing pursuits. Some may just wish to photograph while others may wish to keep. I know you may think I am dragging over old ground and you expect me at any moment to raise CALM again. There is no need. I know that my philosophy is different from theirs and I do not expect them to appreciate my point of view because they are not herpetologists.

My opinions on keeping are simple too. We are only here for a short time and it is normal to want to enjoy life. If that enjoyment involves keeping then so be it. It does not matter if you keep a single herptile or hundreds, as long as you do the right thing by the animals. This is where WASAH comes in. Did you know that the society was informally initiated by four blokes in a Kalgoorlie pub back in 1990. One of us, a good mate to the other three, had just won a court case against CALM. It felt as though we all had won, but more importantly it illustrated how little they cared about people back then. The defendant's honourable commitment to herpetology would have been obvious during the preliminary investigation. So obvious, in fact, that the whole thing should never have been taken to court. Even more sad, as a reflection of the bureaucracy we must work with in today's society, was the comment by the two wildlife officers involved after the case,

"Oh well, you win some, you lose some."

I suppose we should be thankful to them because they also told us that the only way we would change the system was to form a lobby group - hence WASAH! We have gone from strength to strength while maintaining a simple philosophy:

For WA to come into line with all other Australian states and territories and allow reptile and amphibian keeping by hobbyists.

In the June newsletter we will be including an example letter requesting the above. All that is required of you is your signature and then forward it to the environment minister.

During a similar situation in NSW, 11,000 letters were received supporting keeping and only 1,000 from animal rights groups opposing keeping.

The Kit is yours

The ***WASAH Reptile Keeping Kit*** is available to all members for \$5. If interested in obtaining one you can contact me on 9444 6412 or order one at the next meeting. The kit contains the following:

A) The necessary criteria & guidelines to obtain (hopefully) a keeping licence in this state plus a standard Regulation 16 licence application form.

B) Basic care sheets that can be used as a guide for keeping anything from a small gecko to a large python. Most of the information is from John Weigel's *Care of Australian Reptiles In Captivity* with an emphasis on WA species.

C) Herp shop catalogue that is operated in Victoria by Brian and Lani Barnett. This contains a wide assortment of herpetological items such as books, heating equipment, thermostats, etc.

D) A price list on heat pads and various other equipment used in keeping reptiles. This company is based in Victoria also, but orders can be filled directly through Perth importers, Artex Enterprises.

E) Basic captive care data recording sheets to allow you to record information on the animals you are holding.

F) A recommended list of herpetological books and references. Most books on amphibians and reptiles are available through Andrew Isles Book Shop in Victoria. Write to them and ask for a catalogue

That's it, basic and simple but very beneficial for any person wishing to keep a critter or two.

What about frogs? We have not ignored them. Keeping frogs is great fun and should be encouraged. You may recall a book review in a previous WASAH newsletter entitled, *A Guide to Keeping the Australian Green Tree Frog*. This book is a must for anyone interested in keeping

frogs. It is available for \$13.95 from Graphic Print Group, Graphic House, 10-14 Kingston Avenue, Richmond, SA 5033.

ADDITION TO THE HERPETOFAUNA of ELLENBROOK BUSHLAND

In *WASAH newsletter* No. 7 (April 1996) Robert Browne-Cooper presented a list of 42 herp species recorded in this beautiful area of bushland. RBC visited this area on 9 March 1997 and was sampling the banksia woodland and was fortunate in collecting an adult narrow-banded burrowing snake (*Simoselaps fasciolatus*). Herping is great fun as there is always a surprise around the corner. BM.

Lady Snakebuster's Experiences

by Linda Gwinnett

I will start with the "sad" tale, then finish with the "glad" tale.

On Friday, 20 February, around lunchtime, I received a call from a lady asking me if I was 'the Ranger' .

"No," I said , "May I ask what it is about?"

To which she angrily retorted, "I have a snake in my kitchen!"

So far so good - I then ask her for her address, which she gives me frantically, I ask her to repeat it to make sure I had it down correctly. She then gets even more agitated and angry. Well, all I ever learned about "interpersonal skills" went flying out the window, and I commented to her that she really shouldn't be screaming at me as I was just a volunteer not a paid ranger, to which she slammed the phone down on me (I sometimes have that effect on people). Concerned that some poor snake was having to put up with this person I set out to her 'friendly' abode. Low and behold! When I get there - who has she called?? NO, not Ghostbusters! but THE FIRE BRIGADE!

Anyway, much to my surprise, I get invited in and on entering the kitchen I find two LARGE firemen in full regalia and long-handled spade at their feet, heaving and struggling with the dishwasher. The firemen and the husband believed the snake to have gone into the dishwasher as he disappeared around the back of it. I asked the husband to describe the snake to me.

"It was a Dugite!" he said.

"Well, can you give me a description of it?"

From his description I guessed that it was a Fraser's Legless Lizard (having rescued around 6 of these little guys in the past couple of weeks) and told him that this is what it could be. Well, he was not impressed, telling me he was a landscape gardener and had seen legless

lizards before and this was not one, it was a DUGITE, then proceeded to ignore me.

Anyway, these two macho firemen decided they had to take the dishwasher apart (more banging and clanking). I leaned back against the work surface and watched, arms folded, legs crossed.

"Would anyone be interested in my opinion?" I ask solicitously. (Oh, alright, so it might have had a tinge of sarcasm in it!). Dismantling work stopped for a second while I told them that they were really making too much noise and if they would just stop what they were doing and quietly move away, the so-called snake might re-appear, hoping to make his escape out of this mad-house. Well, needless to say my suggestion went down like a lead balloon, and the dismantling work recommenced. I had noticed that the hole in the bottom side of the cupboards for the dishwasher pipes was also large enough for our roving reptile, and guessed he was in there. The "men" then discussed taking the dishwasher outside, so that the snake could get out and it would no longer be in the house.

"What if he isn't in the dishwasher?" I ask. "You'll never know if you take the dishwasher outside." (They really didn't want to hear that).

Then the hole in the bottom of the Cupboard was noticed. Husband almost goes into hysterics, and he's ready to

get the can of Mortein out and spray the hole.

“What if he isn’t in that hole?” I ask. “You’ll never know if you spray in there and he doesn’t come out.” (This was getting repetitive).

Luckily for our little friend, one of the firemen shone his torch in the hole and proclaimed loudly,

“There he is, sitting just inside the hole, on the pipe!”

All three of them dived in to have a look.

“Would any of you like me to take a look so I can identify it and hopefully get it out?????” I ask.

Grudgingly they agree, hand me the torch and in I go.

“Oh!” I exclaim, grabbing the little green body of a Fraser’s legless lizard, “Lord, it’s a legless lizard.”

Husband says, “That can’t be a lizard it hasn’t got any legs.” (Gee, he’s quick isn’t he?).

“That’s why it’s called LEGLESS!” I say patiently .

After trying fruitlessly to get these people to listen to anything I had to say, and having given my name and phone number to the firemen, as they had requested, I took the lizard and I left, leaving the firemen to re-assemble the dishwasher and re-connect all the pipes.

What really makes me sad, though, is that this couple continually dismissed what I had to say, simply because I

was a volunteer (female, at that!), and I left there knowing that their hysteria regarding snakes would be passed down to their children.

Okay, now for my happy story. It happened a couple of weeks before Christmas:-

Every morning I check our pool and skimmer box for any little creatures that have trouble breathing underwater, but this particular morning I was a couple of hours later than usual. I was horrified to find a bobtail lizard nose down in the skimmer box, limp and looking very much as though he were dead. I walked up to the house, berating myself for not having looked earlier, and riddled with guilt at my carelessness.

I suddenly realised that if this had been a human being I would have immediately tried to resuscitate them, using mouth-to-mouth and CPR (not that I ever finished the First Aid Course I started several years ago). Well, I looked at the little limp body in my hand and thought what did I have to lose? I turned him over on to his back, opened his mouth and blew gently into it, covering his nostrils with my fingers. I then gently massaged the area I hoped his heart would be in! I continued this for several minutes and was astounded when the little guy stirred. I continued massaging and gently blowing air into his mouth and finally was rewarded with him opening his eyes. He took a shuddering breath and from then on I was determined he was going to be alright, even

if it took me all day. I sat on the grass with him for about an hour, rousing him when he closed his eyes and massaging his sides. My daughter came out with some tomato of which he ate a slice, but he had very little energy. I decided at this point, knowing he was now breathing on his own, to leave him in a quiet corner so he could recover on his own. I put him in a shady spot and covered him with a sheet to protect him from potential predators. I checked on him throughout the day and about mid-afternoon he was ready to face the world, so off he went into the sunset, so to speak. I hope he’s doing okay out there, he certainly deserves a long life, having almost come to an early and untimely end! I bet the Red Cross never envisaged their First Aid Course could or would benefit a young bobtail lizard!

Worm Lizard Hunting in the Goldfields

by Brad Maryan

If you came up to me and said, “Hey Brad, let’s take a run out into the Goldfields and look for *Aprasia* species”, I would have responded with a “not likely!” But then again, this is Australia - big and vast and full of reptiles that still remain undescribed. There are hundreds of places out there that have not been looked at yet. By the way, members of the genus *Aprasia* belong to the legless

lizard family Pygopodidae and are commonly known as worm lizards. It includes about a dozen known species restricted to the southern half of Australia. They are thin and quite small (up to 15cm) spending most of their life underground. Some species can be quite abundant, such as *Aprasia repens* in the Perth suburbs, while others are a real challenge to find.

WASAH members Greg Harold, Mark True and I had such a challenge in September 1997 - looking for an undescribed *Aprasia* near Leonora. How did we know it was out there? During October 1996 Ken Youngson and Jan Henry of Ninnox Wildlife Consulting, while conducting a survey for Anaconda Nickel, pit-trapped on a greenstone ridge a brown worm lizard with black head. It looks similar to *A. smithi*, a black-headed species which also has a black tail and white lips and was named after Laurie Smith of the WA Museum. The Leonora animal is definitely a new one and will be formally described soon.

We drove as close to where we believed the type locality was and thought how can there possibly be an *Aprasia* living here? Hard ground and rocks everywhere! It would need a diamond-tipped nose to penetrate the surface. Anyway, we thought we were close so we started looking. We noticed a low rocky ridge with a few scattered acacia and eremophila shrubs and little sandy patches spread along it. "Looks good!" After five minutes of rock turning we had one in the bag. "You

beauty, how easy is this!" It was too easy, after another 5 hours raking, digging and cursing, not another one could be found. We recommenced our search next morning for a few more hours and still nothing. That was when we started thinking that one was enough and how lucky we were to find it. I am only guessing here, but I suspect this *Aprasia* is probably widespread but sparse on the ground. That is herpetology for you - all luck and [if you are with Busho] a considerable amount of bull faeces. We photographed the beast and headed for the derelict outstations to turn over some corrugated iron and rubbish - the easy herping and the good life!

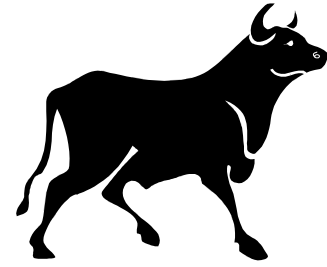
Footnote: It takes great skill to turn over a piece of iron and find a reptile. At least there may be someone out there thinking this is the case. I just wish I had the gift too, however when it comes to worm lizards I can only find them under rocks. Never mind!

EXERCISE
free thought

Always
QUESTION
the written and spoken word

Many a myth has been perpetuated because as individuals we lack the above attributes

HERPTALES



KING BROWN or big WORM?

Who are these blokes who keep telling us about a mysterious limbless creature found at Mount Dale? They persist in telling us it was a king brown, but we wonder. Come on you guys, we would like to hear about it as there are some big worms up there. Ha! Ha!Anon

BARNACLE BRUCE

Hey people, don't take Bruce George anywhere. Your time is taken up saving his life rather than herping. RBC, Bruce and I chartered a boat recently to check out the herp on an island near Augusta on the south coast. Before we headed off, Bruce was continually telling us off his vast boating experience and how he knew the waters off the Pilbara coast like the back of his snake hook. His hook does not get much use either! He even referred to Rob and I as his boys (more like deck hands) when we were negotiating charter prices. Busho tends to do this while asking for permission to check out derelict houses on private property: he refers to us as his apprentices.

As we thought Bruce was more than capable of looking after himself. We left him to fish on this granite rock. What a mistake that was - you can't take your eyes off this bloke for one second. All of a sudden Rob and I were responding to cries for help and, "Get the rake, get the rake." Rakes are used for Barnacle Bruce had seen a

sea snake among the rocks. No such luck. Instead, there was Bruce hanging from a barnacle on the side of this rock - he had slipped! His cries were really ringing in our ears by now, a very similar sound is made by a baby seal when crying for its mother. Rob and I did not know whether to grab our cameras or the rake. As our time on the island was

precious we decided to rescue him from the depths of the ocean and the great white sharks. Good on Ya Bruce, next time we will use reins. You must have really been embarrassed when you learned that the depth of the water was only a few centimetres! NOT!!!



REPTILES OF SULLIVAN ROCK, MT VINCENT AND MOUNT CUTHBERT

Species list compiled by Tony Pattison

CLAWLESS GECKO (*Crenadactylus ocellatus*)
SPECKLED STONE GECKO (*Diplodactylus polyophthalmus*)
WESTERN-SADDLED GROUND GECKO (*Diplodactylus pulcher*)
VARIEGATED GECKO (*Gehyra variegata*)
MARBLED GECKO (*Phyllodactylus marmoratus*)
BARKING GECKO (*Underwoodisaurus milii*)

WESTERN GRANITE WORM LIZARD (*Aprasia pulchella*)
SOUTH-WESTERN SANDPLAIN WORM LIZARD (*Aprasia repens*)
FRASER'S DELMA (*Delma fraseri*)
GRAY'S DELMA (*Delma grayii*)
BURTON'S LEGLESS LIZARD (*Lialis burtonis*)

ORNATE CREVICE DRAGON (*Ctenophorus ornatus*)
WESTERN BEARDED DRAGON (*Pogona minor*)

BLACK-HEADED MONITOR (*Varanus tristis*)

SOUTH-WESTERN COOL SKINK (*Bassiana trilineata*)
GARDEN SKINK (*Cryptoblepharus plagiocephalus*)
DARLING RANGE HEATH CTENOTUS (*Ctenotus delli*)
WEST COAST CTENOTUS (*Ctenotus fallens*)
RED-LEGGED CTENOTUS (*Ctenotus labillardieri*)
KING'S SKINK (*Egernia kingii*)
SOUTH-WESTERN CREVICE EGERNIA (*Egernia napoleonis*)
SOUTHERN FIVE-TOED EARLESS SKINK (*Hemiergis initialis*)
SOUTH-WESTERN FOUR-TOED LERISTA (*Lerista distinguenda*)
COMMON DWARF SKINK (*Menetia greyii*)
SOUTHERN PALE-FLECKED MORETHIA (*Morethia obscura*)
BOBTAIL (*Tiliqua rugosa*)

SOUTHERN BLIND SNAKE (*Ramphotyphlops australis*)
FAT BLIND SNAKE (*Ramphotyphlops pinguis*)

SOUTHERN CARPET PYTHON (*Morelia spilota imbricata*)
DUGITE (*Pseudonaja affinis*)

REPTILES AND FROGS OF SULTANA ROAD WEST

Compiled by Tony Pattison and Steven Howe

Sultana Road West, High Wycombe is home to 20 reptile species and 4 frog species identified to date. No doubt with further surveying the following list will be enlarged on. The vegetation is almost devoid of native species apart from a banksia woodland over human-made grassland of exotics. The area is considerably degraded and traversed by several sandy tracks. We have been visiting this area for about 11 months.

The herpetofauna identified to date:

YELLOW FLANKED BURROWING FROG (*Heleioporus barycragus*)
MOANING FROG (*Heleioporus eyrei*)
MARBLED BURROWING FROG (*Heleioporus psammophilus*)
WESTERN BANJO FROG (*Limnodynastes dorsalis*)

MARBLED GECKO (*Phyllodactylus marmoratus*)
SOUTH-WESTERN SPINY- TAILED GECKO (*Strophurus spinigerus*)

SOUTH-WESTERN SANDPLAIN WORM LIZARD (*Aprasia repens*)
GRAY'S LEGLESS LIZARD (*Delma grayii*)
BURTON'S LEGLESS LIZARD (*Lialis burtonis*)
WESTERN BEARDED DRAGON (*Pogona minor*)

GOULD'S MONITOR (*Varanus gouldii*)

SOUTH-WESTERN COOL SKINK (*Bassiana trilineata*)
FENCE SKINK (*Cryptoblepharus plagiocephalus*)
WEST COAST CTENOTUS (*Ctenotus fallens*)
SOUTHERN FIVE-TOE EARLESS SKINK (*Hemiergus initialis*)
TWO-TOED EARLESS SKINK (*Hemiergus quadrilineata*)
WEST COAST FOUR-TOED LERISTA (*Lerista elegans*)
COMMON DWARF SKINK (*Menetia greyii*)
SOUTHERN PALE-FLECKED MORETHIA (*Morethia obscura*)
BOBTAIL (*Tiliqua rugosa*)

SOUTHERN BLIND SNAKE (*Ramphotyphlops australis*)
FAT BLIND SNAKE (*Ramphotyphlops pinguis*)

DUGITE (*Pseudonaja affinis*)
SOUTHERN HALF-GIRDLED SNAKE (*Simoselaps semifasciatus*)

WASAH GENERAL MEETING

Friday 20 March, 7.00pm

Perth Zoo Education Centre

Guest Speaker:

Dean Burford

On The Western swamp turtle

GENERAL MEETING
21 December 1997
MINUTES

1. **Convene Meeting** - 10.35am
2. **Attendance** - 29 members and 6 visitors.
3. **Apologies** - Jamie Stuart, Trevor Howe, Robert Browne-Cooper, Bean Burford, Shane Heriot and Peter Anyon.
4. **Correspondence Tabled** - Letter from Friends of Trigg Bushland thanking WASAH members Robert Browne-Cooper and Tom Fronck for assistance relocating reptiles.
5. **President's Report** - • Wished everyone present a happy Christmas and New Year. Advised members that under WASAH's Constitution elections must be held no more than five years after incorporation. This will occur in 1999 and we plan to hold elections in the near future.
6. **Vice-President's Report** - • *Herpetofauna* is delayed although it will be posted out shortly.
 - 1998 membership fees are due. As usual you will receive a reminder in the next newsletter. Those unfinancial after March will no longer be members.
 - New book on Australian pythons by North American, Brian Kend. Asks for expressions of interest in purchasing copies at AUS\$40-50.
 - Reptile Keeping Kit is always available at \$5. Contact Brad if you are interested.
7. **Treasurer's Report** - Nil
8. **General Business** - • Don Howe mentions the possible need for oblong turtle relocation from Mason's Swamp, Nedlands. Don suggested he would look into this and get back to us.
 - BB mentions turtle relocation at Maylands.
 - Simon Ball, WASAH/CALM Liaison Subcommittee, updated members regarding progress with obtaining our primary objective: a) the subcommittee met Dr Paul Biggs from the Environment Minister's Office - Gordon Wyre was unable to attend this meeting; b) Suggested that the wildlife act and regs will be redrafted early 1998 and it is particularly the regs that concern us; c) a letter from Cheryl Edwardes, Environment Minister, was received in the interim advising WASAH to continue discussions with CALM; d) emphasised that there is a mood within CALM that change regarding herptile keeping is inevitable in Western Australia the only question is when.
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 - BB mentions the problems with Reg 4 and 15 licences regarding contradictory conditions, open season and Part 4: 28(2) of regulations. He suggests this is an area that requires an overhaul.
9. **Editor's Report** - • Calls for more articles to be submitted by members other than the usual ones.
10. **Call for further business** - Nil
11. **Meeting Adjourned** - • Formally at 11.15am followed by an insight into the elapid snake genus, *Pseudechis* by BB.

The Editor
WASAH Newsletter
9 Birch Place
Stoneville WA 6081

APPENDIX TO NEWSLETTER 13

I refer to an article on snake removal and the open season notice for certain venomous snakes in the appendix of newsletter No 13 and wish to correct some apparent misconceptions.

The open season notice for snakes (Government Gazette (No 41) of 22 June 1984) copy attached, authorises the destruction of the snakes listed under specific circumstances. Any activity other than destroying snakes which constitute an immediate danger, such as capture, may not be undertaken lawfully unless the person is the holder of a licence issued under the Wildlife Conservation Act. Licensing, therefore, is a requirement for the capture and removal of potentially dangerous snakes.

Being licensed should not in itself create exposure to prosecution provided the person abides by the requirements. To put this in perspective, during the last financial year CALM issued 8874 wildlife related licences. In that same period 18 offences involving breach of licence conditions were reported. That represents 0.2% of all licences issued. Five of those resulted in a warning or no further action.

Offences in Western Australia are classified as either crimes misdemeanours or simple offences. Wildlife Conservation Act offences are classified as simple offences, not crimes.

Your author's observations of the book, Wildlife Crime Policy and the Law deserve some comment. In his attempt to mock the efficacy of wildlife conservation legislation, the author conveniently overlooks the history of hunting and collecting pressure on fauna. The mentality that if you maintain the habitat you automatically conserve the species is somewhat naive. The effects of whaling and the impact of long lining on seabirds are testament to that. The introduction of pathogens, predators, competitors and the risk of hybridisation from related species released outside their normal range can also compromise species conservation. Legislation is part of the solution, along with education, species management and habitat preservation. The huge global demand of the live fauna trade represents a serious threat to the conservation status of many species around the world. Consequently, it is surprising that your author does not appear to support anti-smuggling legislation.

Unlawful collecting on top of the sort of ecosystem modifications mentioned above may be unsustainable and contributes to population losses. The deterrent effect of wildlife conservation legislation is one of the means available to manage the interaction between people and wildlife and minimise the loss of protected fauna from the wild.

If your society was fair dinkum about conservation, it would support those legislative measures which are aimed at preventing losses to populations of fauna in the wild.

D.J. Mell
CHIEF WILDLIFE OFFICER
6 FEBRUARY

(Extract from Government Gazette (No 41)
of 22 June, 1984)

WILDLIFE CONSERVATION ACT 1950.

F. W. 678/67.

PURSUANT to the powers conferred by section 14 of the Wildlife Conservation Act 1950, I hereby declare an open season throughout Western Australia, except on Nature Reserves, to allow a person to kill individual animals of the species of fauna described in the Schedule hereto, subject to the restriction that no person shall kill the described reptile unless that person considers that it constitutes an immediate danger to human life, farm stock or domestic animals and birds.

Schedule. Reptiles.

1. The undermentioned venomous front fanged land snakes:-

Southern Death-adder-*Acanthopis antarcticus* (sic)
Northern Death adder-*Acanthopis praelongus* (sic)
Desert Death adder-*Acanthopis pyrrhus* (sic)
Lesser Black Whipsnake-*Demansia atra*
Greater Black Whipsnake-*Demansia papuensis*
Bardick-*Notechis curtus*
Tiger Snake-*Notechis scutatus*
Taipan-*Oxyuranus scutellatus*
Mulga (or King Brown) Snake-*Pseudechis australis*
Yellow bellied Black Snake-*Pseudechis butleri*
Dugite-*Pseudonaja affinis*
Ingram's Brown Snake-*Pseudonaja ingrami*
Five-ringed Snake-*Pseudonaja modesta*
Gwardar-*Pseudonaja nuchalis*
Eastern Brown Snake-*Pseudonaja textilis*

2. All Sea Snakes of the family Hydrophiidae

That part of the notice relating to the above species of fauna published in the *Government Gazette* No. 78 on 16 October 1981 is cancelled.

H. D. EVANS,
Minister for Fisheries and Wildlife.

By Authority WILLIAM C. BROWN Government Printer
34O89/6/84-250-GG479



10 February 1998

Dave J. Mell
Chief Wildlife Officer
Department of Conservation & Land Management
Locked Bag 104
Bentley Delivery Centre WA 6983

Dear Dave,

Thank you for your letter of 6 February regarding an article I authored in *WASAH Newsletter* No. 13. It is ironic how things have eventuated since the publication of the above. I feel largely responsible because I encouraged many WASAH members and other "snakebusters" to obtain a licence. I was somewhat naive. I did not consider CALM acting in the first instance with the immediate confiscation of animals and a recommendation to the Crown Solicitor's Office to prosecute. This type of action does little for conservation and also alienates those people that are undertaking a public service that assists the department. Surely, as a token demonstration of good faith and appreciation, a little discretion would benefit all. A written reprimand to a licensee found to be breaching the conditions attached to his/her Regulation 4 and 15 licences would be a better first option.

Although the *open season* notice includes the phrase 'to kill', this is in the broader definition under the Wildlife Conservation Act of 'to take'. On Page 1, Paragraph 2 of CALM's Policy Statement 22 of November 1992 when referring to the *open season* it reads,

*It is an offence to take (defined to include to kill, capture, disturb, molest, hunt or attempt to do so) or possess reptiles except in accordance with a licence. **The only exceptions are the taking of certain venomous land snakes and sea snakes when they constitute an immediate danger to human life, farm stock or domestic animals;***

Although non-venomous reptiles can not be taken under the *open season*, the very act of a property occupant or owner contacting a snakebuster demonstrates their concern for life or livestock. A combination of a widespread community fear of snakes and a difficulty in identification further contributes to a confusing situation and begs the question, "Does assisting a concerned member of the public by removing a non-venomous reptile from their property without a licence constitute an offence?" Technically maybe, but then again, if my interpretation of the Act is correct, it is also impossible to exist as a human in Western Australia without breaching the Act unless licensed to take fauna.

Thank you for defining offences in Western Australia. I admit I erred in referring to the Act as a criminal act. Recently I had some difficulty tracking down the information you provided. The Crown Law Department could not divulge any information to a non-government organisation and the Citizens' Advice Bureau did not consider the nature of my request to "come within their work description". I eventually got an answer from the Conservation Council. Although the Wildlife Conservation Act may not be a criminal act the repercussions that may befall a person prosecuted under it could be quite substantial. Apart from the fines these may range from a refusal by CALM to issue further licences to the perception in the minds of family and friends that he/she is a criminal.

From my humble philosophical point of view I define conservation as, "*Halting humans unnecessary alteration of the planet's ecosystems while minimising all necessary modification caused as we compete as a life form.*" Therefore I do mock the efficacy of wildlife conservation legislation based on blanket protection of all animals and consequently would like the opportunity to contribute to the formulation of good legislation. An improvement would be the retention of the statutory protection of the high priority threatened taxa, including increased penalties for offences

involving these, and a reduction in the blanket protection of all other taxa currently afforded by the Wildlife Conservation Act.

I do not support the illegal export of fauna. This is not because of any short-term conservation negative but because of the loss of income to the Australian people - an income that may benefit us all through financing realistic conservation programs, especially with regards to sustainable use. I also mock those that promote through misinformation the falsehood that the illegal export of Australian animals of common species threatens the conservation status of these in this country. It is more likely that uncontrolled export may impact negatively on overseas organisms and/or ecosystems. I concede though that the few animals located by customs and wildlife agencies listed by McDowell is a direct result of the vigilance of the state and federal authorities and a world awareness of our stringent wildlife export laws. I do support the controlled export of Australia's fauna no more or less than I do the current export of our flora, woodchips, seafood, minerals, etc. They are all export resources, some of which CALM is already involved in the control of.

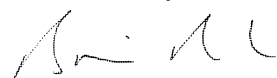
The small number of life-forms that have become extinct or threatened through over-harvesting that you allude to is minuscule compared to those gone or going this way through habitat clearing, over grazing by stock, cropping, urban development and, especially in Australia, predation by introduced mammals (Cogger *et al.*, 1993 in ANCA's Endangered Species Program Project No. 24: *The Action Plan for Australian Reptiles*). I refer you to the dinosaur dynasty - a massive variety of life gone, but the earth continues. It just isn't as it was. Keep in mind also that a fundamental component of evolution is change. The current prohibition on keeping will contribute nothing to sustaining the earth's biodiversity.

I am disappointed that you question my commitment to conservation. I am, as I trust all of WASAH's members are, far more conservation-minded than the person who is anti timber harvesting while living in a house, anti mining while riding a bike, or "saves" whales while crushing numerous other organisms under foot. I am fair dinkum about conservation but not the facade promoted by some with a vested interest in deceiving the public into believing it is conservation.

Yes, it is a sad day when our legislators forget that *Homo sapiens* are also an integral component of the planet's biomass. The drafting of any legislation requires careful consideration of a broad range of normal human activities resulting in the inclusion within the final legislation of a provision for these to continue. We especially dislike the discrimination we experience because our interest is herpetoculture. A discrimination not experienced by those into aquaculture or aviculture, or residents of all other Australian states and territories.

Saying all of the above, I do appreciate that your beliefs have developed through your association with an enforcement agency. I am fortunate in having the benefit of being able to peruse the problems from a much broader outlook. Therefore I trust our differing opinions do not detract from any mutual respect we may have for each other in the future.

Yours faithfully,



Brian Bush

Note: in the following list of threatening processes the non-commercial harvesting and keeping of reptiles is not listed.

Threat to Reptiles Species

(Number of species whose endangered status is the result of the listed threatening process)

(From Cogger *et al.*, 1993 in ANCA's Endangered Species Program Project No. 24: *The Action Plan for Australian Reptiles*)

Habitat clearance - 30
Overgrazing by stock - 21
Cropping - 21
Predation (by exotics) - 14
Urban development - 14
Pasture improvement - 12
Fire regime - 10
Soil degradation - 9
Visitor disturbance - 8
Soil & water pollution - 7
Mining - 6
Native forest logging - 6
Rabbit grazing - 6
Climate variation - 5
Habitat fragmentation - 5
Weed invasion - 5
Habitat drainage - 4
Rock removal - 4

ROBINSON'S BACK!

When I read this in the *West Australian* I got all excited. I thought our own David Robinson (although nobody knows him by this name) had rediscovered his herpetological roots. Yes! Imagine it! The great Beerbottle actually out there herping and getting among our reptilian mates. In a previous *WASAH Newsletter* it was reported that Beerbottle had taken up jogging while living in the Pilbara. Well, he has moved to Perenjori, in the WA Wheatbelt and things are still the same. Surrounded by heaps of herp and Beerbottle can't find any of it - not even a tree dtella (gecko). WASAH members are hoping he can locate a population of the Southwestern woma. You never know - he may trip over one while jogging. Good on Ya Dave.....Anon

Handler hurt in snake rescue

(Reprinted [with some editing] from the *Broome Advertiser* Wednesday, November 5, 1997)

AN AGGRESSIVE olive python, which was almost four metres long, caused havoc in a Broome garden when it bit a snake handler attempting to rescue it.

Broome police officer Mick Prosser discovered the non-venomous snake in his Hamersley Street garden when he went outside on the evening of October 14.

"It looked like a garden hose on the driveway," Sen. Const. Prosser said.

"I realised it wasn't a hose so I grabbed the dog and took him inside. I got a torch and shone it on the snake."

"It was massive, about 13 foot."

"I certainly didn't expect one that large to be living in my yard in Broome."

Sen. Const. Prosser went to the Broome police station to see if another officer could identify the snake, but while he was gone the python slithered up a coconut palm and hid in the leaves.

He then contacted amateur snake handler and venerable WASAH member Gary Davies who climbed a ladder to reach the snake.

But during the rescue, the snake bit Mr Davies on the hand and leapt onto him, constricting around his head and shoulders. Mr Davies remarked later that this behaviour in snakes was most unusual,

"They normally have more respect than this towards WASAH members!"

"That wild-looking bloke was hanging on for dear life as the snake wrapped around his head and neck," Sen. Const. Prosser said.

"He was having trouble breathing and trying to climb down the tree."

"At this point I'm sure I heard him yell for a beer!"

"It could have easily killed him."

Mr Davies fell from the ladder with the snake trapped around him.

When he was on the ground, two friends helping Mr Davies with the rescue pried the snake off the tough, semi-conscious WASAH member suffering severely from his injuries.

An incoherent Mr Davies placed the snake in a hessian bag to be liberated 100 kilometres north of Broome.

Although briefly losing consciousness during the episode, the experience has not tempered Mr Davies' passion for snakes.

Since moving to Broome three years ago he has moved 'countless' snakes from backyards, and rescued numerous maidens from watering holes, and hoped to open a professional rescue service in the future.

The large crowd of awed onlookers were heard to remark as one,

"Those WASAH members sure are great people!"

SURVEYS Up & GOING BY WASAH MEMBERS

WASAH has two separate herpetofauna surveys happening at the moment in the Perth suburbs. These enable members to gain experience in this area and acquire some hands on with identifying and bagging beasts. The end result being heaps of fun while the learning curve keeps going upwards. These surveys involved installing a series of pit-fall traps with drift lines and having them checked daily. The information is recorded on data sheets and at the completion of the respective survey a report is written up for CALM, the museum, etc. Everybody benefits from these activities.

Have you heard of Modong Nature Reserve? This 155 hectare A class reserve has definitely felt the presence of WASAH over the past twelve months. It is located at the end of Kwinana Freeway on Thomas Road in the suburb of Oakford. WASAH has 6 traplines in representative vegetation communities and have recorded 26 species so far. An added bonus is that there appears to be a healthy population of honey possums in the reserve. We are planning to run the traps on and off until winter to record seasonal information. It is a beautiful reserve in reasonably good condition just starting to rejuvenate itself after a bushfire several years ago. Well worth a visit members.

The other survey is at Samson Park, a little 8.5 hectare parkland with remnant bushland areas in the suburb Samson. Due to its size we were a little worried that our traplines would go walkabout as the park receives a fair amount of pedestrian traffic. So far we have had no problems and everything is running smoothly.

A funny thing occurred when we were setting up the traps. We were paid a visit by the local policeman. A concerned resident must of wondered what this bunch of feral-looking people with shovels were up to. "We are WASAH," we said to the approaching police. "What is WASAH?" they asked. From the look on their faces we knew they wished they hadn't. After explaining everything to them and showing our collecting permit they got out of there quick smart!

Both surveys have been a great success due to the efforts of members David Algaba, Roger Renolds, Glen Gaikhorst, Kylie Oliver, Ross Daghish, Robert Browne-Cooper, Thomas Rasmussen. Dean Burford, Bruce George, Colin Hannan and Russell Brown. Way to go guys!

We must thank those two old blokes (they are almost as old as the Perentie) at the WA Museum, Ric How and John Dell, for their continued support with WASAH projects. We also thank CALM for issuing the permits.

Keep wrigglingBM

WASAH EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

President/Editor: Brian Bush

(08) 9295 3007

Vice-President: Brad Maryan

(08) 9444 6412

Secretary: Robert Browne-Cooper

(08) 9445 2409

Treasurer: Russell Brown

(08) 9390 2680

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.

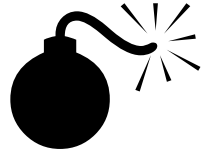
WASAH/CALM LIAISON SUBCOMMITTEE

Simon Ball: (08) 9448 2168

Mick Lynch: (08) 9300 2496

Jamie Stuart: (08) 95711832

Address all correspondence related to this newsletter to: **The Editor, 9 Birch Place, STONEVILLE 6081**



Final call for members in
this our inaugural election year of 1998

Membership Form

1998

(Western Australian Society of Amateur Herpetologists Inc)
Address to: The Secretary, WASAH, 169 Egina Street, Mount Hawthorn 6016

I wish to become a member of WASAH and in so doing agree to abide by the rules and constitution of the Society. Membership entitles me to an annual subscription to the journal of the Australasian Affiliation of Herpetological Societies, *Herpetofauna* and the Society's newsletter.

Surname (Ms Miss Mrs Mr).....

Given names.....

Postal address.....

Post Code.....

Telephone number (H)..... (W).....

Remittance enclosed (\$15/year to a maximum of 5 years).....

Constitution & rules will be forwarded to you upon joining

Date.....

Signature.....

Nomination Form for WASAH Executive Positions and Newsletter Editor

Address completed forms to **The Executive, 169 Egina Street, Mount Hawthorn 6016**

Be sure to include the nominee's signed letter of consent.

13.0 VOTING RIGHTS OF MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY

13.1 Each member present in person at a general meeting is entitled to vote when called upon during general business.

13.2 Each member is entitled to vote, nominate or be nominated for during an election to fill a vacancy in the Committee.

14.0 ELECTIONS

14.1 The Committee shall be elected by members of the Society.

14.2 Elections to be held annually if required.

14.3 Nominations for election shall be sent in writing to the Secretary no later than 1 month prior to annual general

meeting. All nominations will include---

(a) the name of the nominator;

(b) the name of the seconder; and

(c) a signed letter of consent from the nominee.

14.4 Elected members of the Committee shall not remain in office for more than 5 consecutive years, however, at the completion of 5 consecutive years in office they may resign and be nominated for re-election.

Position

.....
(President, Vice-president, Treasurer, Secretary or Executive Assistant)

Nominee

.....
(full name)

Nominator

.....
(full name)

Seconder

.....
(full name)

Note - Only financial members' names can appear above - are you financial for 1998? If there is an **asterisk** next to your name on the envelope then you are non-financial

Remember to include a signed letter of consent from nominee & return before June 1 '98