



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

NEWSLETTER

1 June, 1998
(15)

NEARLY!

OK, so I'm an optimist, but after almost eight years since WASAH's inception, things are positively percolating at an ever-increasing rate towards our primary objective.

Politicians that have assisted or supported us so far, and deserve mention here, are MLA's Bernie Masters, The Hon. Phil Pental, Dr Judy Edwards, The Hon. Cheryl Edwardes, Jan van de Klashorst and MLC's The Hon. Greg Smith and The Hon. Norm Kelly.

Elsewhere in this newsletter (page 11) are replies in parliament by the Minister for the Environment to relevant questions by Phil Pental and Dr Judy Edwards. The greatest disappointment here

is the Minister's reply regarding reptiles as pets.

WASAH has never argued for the unrestricted keeping of all species, however, I do believe that many require no regulating or statutory protection per se.

Consider also, there is no available data to suggest that any *Australian reptile or frog has had its conservation status adversely impacted on by the actions of private keepers.*

In fact, it could be argued that the reverse is the case. Imagine if the South-western woma (*Aspidites* sp.) was already in captivity! Its taxonomic status would be resolved and, if it was determined to be distinct, it would be safe!

MARCH MEETING

What a beauty! As all our meetings are. WASAH member, Dean Burford gave us a great talk and slide show on the western swamp 'turtle' (*Pseudemys umbrina*). It is so easy to be caught into believing those ectotherms are only active in the warm months. This is not the case with this beast! Members may be able to have a close look at one of Australia's rarest reptiles when the new exhibit of the WST is open at the Perth Zoo. **Thanks Dean!**

Briefly, regarding the other lesser important distraction on the night: While I have the chair you are invited to raise any concerns you have with the running of WASAH, but for continuity it may be best if these are forwarded to me

in writing prior to the meeting. If raised on the night, try to restrict them to general comments and only briefly refer to specifics as examples. Constructive spontaneity is not one of my strong points - I also have a problem with letting others put their point of view - an inherent flaw!

If anyone else, including Dave Mell, interpreted my letter as a personal attack on the addressee, I apologise - that was not my intent.

NSW Update

For those unaware of the New South Wales situation, there has been an amnesty in that State allowing unlicensed keepers to declare the species they have and obtain licences. This amnesty has been extended at least once.

To 13 March 1998, there had been 4,344 licences issued for 11,082 individual reptiles. A small sample of the species and numbers follow. It becomes obvious, when one looks at these, which reptiles are most popular for keeping.

16 Boyd's Forest Dragon (*Hypsilurus boydii*),
18 Frilled Dragon (*Chlamydosaurus kingii*),
428 Bearded Dragons (*Pogona* spp.),
560 Eastern Water Dragon (*Physignathus lesueurii*),
21 Golden Spiny-tailed Gecko (*Strophurus taenicaudus*),
26 Common Rough Knob-tail Gecko (*Nephurus asper*),

18 Centralian Knob-tail Gecko (*N. amya*),
23 Giant Cave Gecko (*Pseudothecadactylus lindneri*),
133 Thick-tailed Gecko (*Underwoodisaurus milii*),
7 Coen Rainbow Skink (*Carlia coensis*),
242 Bobtail (*Tiliqua rugosa*),
1,029 Common Bluetongue (*T. scincoides*),
80 Lace Monitor (*Varanus varius*),
23 Storr's Monitor (*V. storri*),
103 Black-headed Python (*Aspidites melanocephalus*),
31 Woma (*A. ramsayi*),
1,810 Diamond/Carpet Pythons (*Morelia* spp.),
26 Green Python (*M. viridis*),
31 Amethystine Python (*M. amethystina*),
131 Red-bellied Black Snake (*Pseudechis porphyriacus*)
6 blind snakes (*Ramphotyphlops nigrescens*) held between two keepers, although no sandswimming skinks (Brad will be sad) of the genus *Lerista*.

Some of the overseas exotics

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

licensed -

1 Horned Puff Adder (*Bitis caudalis*),
24 Boa Constrictor (*Boa constrictor*),
3 Pacific Ground Boa (*Candoia carinata*),
3 Garden Tree Boa (*Corallus endris*),
37 Corn Snake (*Elaphe guttata*),

4 Grey-banded King Snake (*Lampropeltis alterna*). *In North America up until the 2nd World War there were only about five specimens known to science. There is almost that many in Australia today! Definitely one species benefited because of keepers.*

8 California King Snake (*L. californica*),
11 Sinaloan Milk Snake (*L. sinaloa*),
3 Burmese Python (*Python molurus*), including 73 of the tortoise, **Red-eared Slider** (*Trachemys scripta*).

A few WA endemics appear on the list such as **Spotted Mulga Snake** (*Pseudechis butleri*), **King's Skink** (*Egernia kingii*), **Pygmy Spiny-tailed Skink** (*E. depressa*) - although not endemic it is likely the original stock is from WA.



Keep warm!
Out in the Wilds of
the Southern
Suburbs

By Ross Daglish

I first heard of the Samson Park survey when Brad Maryan rang me one evening to ask if I was interested in participating. Naturally I responded positively and a meeting of the people involved was organised for the following Sunday. We met outside a deli near to the park and Brad and David arrived in a four wheel drive replete with shovels, 20 plastic buckets, PVC piping, fly wire, cloth bags and so on; the complete herping set-up.

After a bit of a yak we set off into the wilds of Samson Park. The 8.5 ha park is unfortunately very disturbed, with a large grassed section in the middle surrounded by a bit of remnant native vegetation including tuarts, red gums, blackboys and banksia. Young Thomas Rasmussen at thirteen years of age is one of the keenest herpetologists I've ever met and before long he dived off into the bush to return with a fine specimen of *Lerista elegans*. Good-o, at least we knew the local cats and dogs hadn't killed everything.

Pit traps and drift lines were set up in 6 different parts of the park. We tried to keep away from the main paths and placed our traps in more secluded sections of the park, although in such a small area we were a little concerned for our equipment. Fortunately our fears seem to have been needless.

The four people undertaking the survey, Roger Reynolds, Kylie Oliver, Thomas Rasmussen and myself, organised our monitoring times with each of us undertaking to check the traps every morning for a week so the survey was carried out for a period of 4 weeks. I had the first round of mornings and was pleased to discover 7 species of reptiles still inhabiting the area. The other members of the team had similar results. The most interesting species found where *Ramphotyphlops australis*, complete with smelly rectal gland and several *Ctenotus lesueurii*, a lovely little animal quite keen to bite the hand that finds it. I spotted pairs of foraging *C. lesueurii* on three occasions while walking through the park, normally by waiting next to a blackboy after hearing a rustle in the leaf litter around the tree. It was great to see the little critters poke their heads out after a while and scamper off in search of some tucker

Brad stayed in touch with all of us and his enthusiasm is fantastic. After Kylie finished the fourth week of the survey she and Brad filled in the traps and now we're waiting for winter and some rain to complete the second part of the survey and find what frogs we have there.

It's been a great exercise for everybody and lots of fun discovering a few of our scaly mates hanging out in a such a suburban environment.

Thanks to WASAH for giving us the opportunity to be involved and especially to

Brad Maryan for his unflagging enthusiasm and time.

Oh, to live in South Australia!

By Rod Jacobson and Sandy Griffin

Recently, we were fortunate enough to spend some time in Adelaide, staying with a herp enthusiast and Adelaide Snake Catcher (SA equivalent of Snake Busters). Needless to say, we were extremely envious of his private herp collection - a Qld Carpet Python, a Brown Tree Snake, a Children's Python, a Red-bellied Black Snake, three adult Inland Bearded Dragons, one adult and two baby Water Dragons, two adult Bobtails and numerous frogs. In his back yard he has a Lizardry (an aviary with reptiles instead of birds) large enough to walk into and swing a cat (not that he would have a feral in his yard!).

The owner of this menagerie is totally dedicated to the well-being of his pets and conservation of reptiles in general, and we were astounded by his knowledge of reptile behaviour and biology. In fact, one particular balmy SA evening, we had a BBQ where much Amber Liquid Anti-venom was consumed, and three so-called "amateur" herpetologists were discussing the behaviour of their Inland Bearded Dragons - we were very impressed with their collective knowledge on this species,

and it left us wondering if there were many “professionals” in this country who knew as much as they did. We see this as a strong argument for the keeping of reptiles as pets - these people were learning things about the biology of their “pets” that government departments spend 1000’s of dollars to employ a scientist for the same knowledge. And it hasn’t cost the tax payer a thing! The best part of this is that every house we went to had an equally impressive display of healthy well cared for reptiles. All had bought their reptiles from pet shops and had the appropriate (easily-obtainable) permits.

One of the arguments against the keeping of reptiles has been that people will take from the wild, or that people will dump their pets in the bush when it gets to be too much to look after them. But everyone we spoke to in South Australia, thought that this was ridiculous as the penalties for taking from the wild were great and no-one wanted to risk not being allowed to keep natives as pets any more (which is what would happen if they were caught). Similarly, the reptiles aren’t cheap. People do not enter into the keeping of natives lightly when it costs several hundred dollars for a snake (for example). So why would you waste several hundred dollars of hard earned money by dumping your pets when you can sell them (legally) and get your money back? Of course we heard a story about an unscrupulous lizard dealer, but you would get people like that with or without

legislation for keeping native wildlife.

We’ve never been into browsing pet shops - but when you can see Olive Pythons, and Water Dragons and Desert Hopping Mice (for those who also enjoy mammals) for sale, it suddenly becomes a worthwhile past-time. It became a very frustrating exercise after a while though, seeing what we, as Western Australians, were missing out on.

Here are some useful books we came across while we were there - some of the details are a bit sketchy, but if you want copies we can let you know where to get them.

- What’s Wrong With My Snake? - John Rossi and Roxanne Rossi. ISBN 1-882770-35-8
- Keeping and Breeding Snakes - Chris Mathison. ISBN 0-7137-2579-6
- Caring for Water Dragons - Paul Curtis. Published for the South Australian Herpetology Group. Available from The Nature Education Centre, SA. (\$5)
- Caring for Bearded Dragons - Paul Curtis. Published for the South Australian Herpetology Group. Available from The Nature Education Centre, SA. (\$5)
- Caring for Large Skinks - Paul Curtis. Published for the South Australian Herpetology Group. Available from The Nature Education Centre, SA. (\$5)
- The Complete Guide to Keeping Monitors - A

Reptile News Publication. Available from The Nature Education Centre, SA. (\$10)

- Starting Right - The Complete Guide to Basic Reptile Care. - A Reptile News Publication. Available from The Nature Education Centre, SA. (\$10)

Also, here are some useful internet sites on reptiles for those of you who have mastered the technology :

- <http://www.zoobook.com>
- <http://www.sonic.net/~melissk/parent.html>
- <http://www.sonic.net/~melissk/liteheat.html>
- <http://www.sonic.net/daltonsm/elissa/gehrman2.html>
- http://www.wch.sa.gov.au/paedm/clintox/jwpubs_list.html
- <http://www.disc-masters.com.au/snakes/info.htm>

Also, in South Australia there is an organisation called the Environmental Defenders Office (SA) Inc. which provides legal advice to people about matters pertaining to the environment. This could be related to pollution, or land clearing, or being hassled by a government department illegally. It is non-profit, and community based, and funded by membership fees, donations, and government grants. Does anyone know of anything similar here in WA?

(WASAH is a member of this organisation - it requested WASAH’s assistance regarding a revised Wildlife Conservation Act.....Ed)

Results don't happen overnight!

By Brian Bush

Following is an extract from my notes regarding an ongoing study I have undertaken of ontogenetic colour change in the spotted mulga snake (*Pseudechis butleri*). This is not necessarily an exceptional case. It illustrates however the long-term study required in some cases to get results. It also illustrates the hidden setbacks that can occur.

14 Oct 87 - ♀ from Yalgoo rubbish tip 29 Sept 1987 placed with X from Leonora 25 Sept 1985 until she was noticeably gravid. Copulation not observed.

4 Jan 88 - X x-rayed in an attempt to determine when oviposition would occur. Eggs discernible approx. 60 mm in length.

7 Feb - Deposited 5 developed & 2 partly developed eggs. Only 2 developed eggs appear fertile.

29 Feb - After 22 days incubation all healthy eggs failing. *Could too many rads be the cause?*

20 Dec - Placed with male.

21 Dec - Copulation observed.

21 Feb 89 Deposited 4 unhealthy eggs.

12 Jun - Noticeable swelling X's right side immediately posterior to cloaca. Tender. Made 4 mm incision between subcaudal scales - discharged whitish "curdled" fluid and thick "paste". Swabbed out with Betadine antiseptic liquid.

19 Jun - Repeated above treatment.

23 Jun - ditto

1 Jul - Wound dry and looks good.

No breeding attempted **89/90** and none occurred **90/91**.

20 Jan 92 - X placed with ♀. Copulation not observed.

25 Mar - Deposited 1 healthy egg.

26 Mar - Deposited 2 unhealthy eggs.

27 Mar - Deposited 1 healthy & 3 unhealthy eggs.

X's SVL 130 cm, weight 398.85 gm. Relative clutch mass (RCM) = 0.25
Eggs in 210 gm vermiculite to 105 gm cooled boiled water. Incubator temp. 26-32°C

Only the larger of the healthy eggs viable, the other failed almost immediately.

27 Apr - Remaining egg incubating for 30 days.

30 Apr - Egg collapsing (33 days).

2 May - Egg opened. Contains white "paste" no embryo - infertile again!!!

25 Feb 94 - X placed with ♀, copulation not observed.

Applied to CALM for approval to collect another female to use in ontogeny study. The Leonora X must be incapable of successful reproduction. Application refused.

31 Mar - Again! Eggs are palpable within X's body.

8 Apr - Deposited five yellow "slugs".

28 Jan 95 - X placed with ♀, copulation not observed.

27 Feb - Feels gravid, eggs palpable within body.

13 Mar - Deposited four yellow "slugs".

SUCCESS AT LAST!

15 Oct 96 - X placed with ♀, copulation observed.

12 Dec - X sloughed.

15 Dec - X ate three 20g mice. This was to be her last feed pre-parturition.

1 Jan 97 - 77 days post mating deposited eleven fertile eggs. Total mass 310.3g. Embryos obvious when candled (approximately 3 cm long) surrounded by a large area of dense blood-vessels encompassing at least 25% of inner surface of egg. X's weight immediately post-parturition 600g. RCM = 0.52.

9 Mar - X sloughed.

11 Mar - First neonate pipped after 71 days at 30°C.

13 Mar - Last pipped after 73 days at 30°C.

Almost 12 years, 6 months lapsed from the date the female was collected until I successfully bred this species. My results did not compare with those previously published so now I must enlarge my sample size with further breeding. I expect to complete this study towards the end of 1998, however ongoing work is required to determine if neonates vary significantly between clutches.

LETTER TO WASAH...

I would like to thank all those people who have been supportive of my family and me during my tribulations with CALM. I still have no idea if I am to be charged - this decision is made by the Crown Prosecutor.

I would like to point out that the local CALM wildlife officer along with a local fisheries officer both recommended that no action be taken in my case. Sadly, their recommendations were not heeded by those at CALM's Como office. Paradoxically, I have found the local Karratha CALM personnel only too willing to help me in this matter. I would also like to take the opportunity to thank them.

I cannot overlook all the great support I received from WASAH. Those members that have been especially helpful are Brian Bush, Brad Maryan, Dave (Beerbottle) Robinson and Cheryl Sutherland.

The educational program I was undertaking before the muck hit the fan was starting to yield fruit - the number of call-outs to remove reptiles from in and around Karratha had doubled in the past year. This alone is proof of the need to educate people *that the only good snake is a live one*, and that much of the public's fear of snakes results from a lack of knowledge.

Once again, thank you all at WASAH - it is an honour to be part of this great group. Remember also, there is always a bed here if anyone is up this way.

*Peter Anyon - WASAH
Member - 48 Koombana
Avenue, South Hedland.
(08) 91402358*

LETTER TO THE
EDITOR...

WILDLIFE PROTECTION VERSUS WILDLIFE LICENSING

With reference to comments in the March 1998 *WASAH Newsletter* by CALM's Chief Wildlife Officer, Dave Mell, on WASAH members, wildlife laws and related issues, I believe I should respond.

Over the last twenty odd years, wildlife departments around Australia have introduced highly restrictive wildlife licensing laws. These have effectively banned collection from the wild for all but very limited purposes and been punitive in the extreme for those who may violate them.

Wildlife authorities have been quick to call the wildlife licensing laws 'wildlife protection laws'. However this term is inappropriate as not only have these laws failed in any substantial way to conserve the wildlife in question, but they have quite probably been to the detriment of many species, including those rainforest frogs from Queensland which were banned from captivity and are now extinct.

Current wildlife licensing laws have been to the detriment of wildlife for

several reasons including the following:-

1/ Government resources have been used enforcing laws that have little conservation (species protection) benefit.

2/ The public's led to believe that wildlife is safe when this is not necessarily the case.

3/ Many people who may have worked privately in conservation and/or research have been discouraged from doing so by the great maze of confusing (often contradicting) laws governing such activity and the risk of sanctions (including jail) for transgressions which may at most be described as 'honest mistakes' or simply doing the best thing for the animals in question.

4/ Researchers and conservation personnel have often had to divert huge amounts of time, money and other resources to complying with laws that do not benefit the species involved; (eg. the 30cm of documentation generated by an Israeli researcher, Professor Yehuda Werner, attempting to export common geckos for research purposes).

With regard to the above points, wildlife licensing laws are far from synonymous with wildlife protection laws.

Mell's assumption that WASAH should, if it is fair dinkum about wildlife conservation, support CALM's flawed legislation is disturbing. I note that WA has one of the highest extinction rates in the world

for vertebrates. Maybe the disassociation of the public from it's wildlife (via licensing laws) has been a contributing factor towards these extinctions? I for one would call on WASAH to steadfastly oppose current legislation/policy which prohibits keeping, and push for the inclusion therein of more realistic conservation-driven alternatives.

Mell's statement re. 'anti-smuggling legislation' and WASAH's alleged lack of support for it is also a bit odd. All wildlife trade becomes smuggling if it is illegal. The assumption that trade in native animals should be prohibited has proliferated in Australian bureaucracies and requires strong opposition from groups like WASAH. Increasing legal trade will exclude those at present illegally participating solely for the money and will actually add to the control by wildlife departments.

There should be little if any restriction on taking live reptiles and frogs from the wild. Such activity should be actively encouraged as it is well known that people with regular contact with wildlife are more likely to seek to conserve it than those who have little if any such contact. I hope many of WASAH's members agree and support these views.

*Raymond Hoser - WASAH
Member - Melbourne,
Australia.*

Paul Orange's

BOOK REVIEW

Pythons of Australia by Brian A. Kend. Canyonlands Publishing Group, Provo, Utah, USA. 1997. 280pp. \$A54.

This book represents one of my favourite genres of herpetological literature - the popular, anecdotal natural history. Books of this type usually make for enjoyable reading and this one is no exception. Four comprehensive chapters include evolution, systematics, nomenclature, ecology and reproductive biology. Individual accounts for each Australian python are provided to subspecies level. A foreword, acknowledgements, epilogue, personal communication, glossary, references, index and colour plates complete the volume.

The book is well researched throughout (as is evidenced by the extensive reference section), translating and combining the scientific with the popular. The result is a useful and readable summary of the current knowledge of Australian pythons. The interpretations of certain species-groups' relationships (*Antaresia childreni*, *Liasis olivaceus* and *Morelia spilota*) are particularly welcome. This is where books of this type are most effective; collating information from a variety of sources and presenting it in an accessible manner.

The use of common names in a book such as this is unavoidable. Fortunately

most Australian pythons are familiar enough for these to be applied without too much confusion. Thus I found the use of Northern Brown Python instead of Children's Python for *Antaresia childreni* a constant source of irritation. Whilst I can appreciate the sentiments behind its use I see little value in replacing a common, and quite literally familiar, name with one that is effectively meaningless - both *Liasis fuscus* and *L. olivaceus* are northern brown pythons. Whilst on the subject of common names (listed under contents); for a book that relies so heavily upon them, their omission from the index is a considerable oversight.

The colour plates are generally of a high standard (even Brad's), although somewhat small on the page and the black surrounding them is distracting. The habitat photographs provide an interesting addition, especially for armchair herpetologists (like me since my move to Perth), or those unfamiliar with Australia.

In conclusion, this is a creditable book, meticulously researched, and would make a valuable addition to any herpetologist's library (don't be put off by the somewhat lurid cover). Any criticisms are of a minor nature and do not detract significantly from its overall merit. I would certainly recommend it to WASAH members in general and not just those with an interest in pythons. Coincidentally, copies are available from WASAH at \$54 each. Contact Brad Maryan for details.

A Youngster's Notes

The following was submitted by a very young herp named **Keiron** and is his notes on a Western Heath Dragon (*Tympanocryptis adelaidensis*) he was rehabilitating.

.....
Sex: male

Date obtained: 24/12/97

.....
27/12/97 - ate one cricket, spends all day basking on the log.

29/12/97 - ate very small cricket, likes hiding in grass.

3/01/98 - it changes colours.

10/01/98 - ate one grasshopper, it runs fast.

11/01/98 - ate two grasshoppers, it grabs them first go, it takes a swim.

15/01/98 - ate one moth, it catches it by itself.

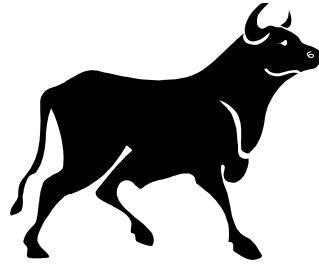
24/0198 - did not feed, looks crook, not very well.

26/0198 - looks crooker, close inspection shows it passed away, dead.
.....



**Don't worry
Summer's coming**

HERPTALES



Steptoe & Gary

WASAH Members are very talented. In his spare time one member, who until recently resided in Broome and made a name for himself there as a wrestler of olive pythons and a rescuer of maidens, has the ability to convert just about anything (and especially other people's old rubbish) into a snake cage. Nothing is wasted with this bloke, milk crates, cardboard beer cartons (of which he always has an excess of), old television sets, cupboards, shoe boxes, etc are all used to house his scaly mates. Is this fellow rough or what? He reckons beer cartons are the best though - after drinking the contents with your mates (if they brought the carton, you beauty!), all you need do is punch a few air holes in the box with a knife, fork, screwdriver, or whatever and you have an instant snake box. Like a scavenging raven he is often seen lurking around rubbish tips (that old Perentie is always chasing him out of his shed) ready to pounce on that next piece of garbage so that he may covert it into a state-of-the-art snake terrarium. Good on ya Gary!

Anon.....

Barnacle Bruce asks

Can anyone enlighten me as to a cure for seasickness. On a recent trip to Augusta, one of our members became extremely quiet (usually this individual just wont shut up!). When I looked up I noticed an emerald-green glow around this bloke emanating from his cranium. Then the admission of the dreaded *landlubber-in-a-boat* syndrome when he mumbled almost inaudibly,

“Stop rocking the boat.”

We recently journeyed again to the same region. During this visit it was required that we take a very, very short boat trip to a nearby island. While walking along the jetty, before even entering the dinghy, the radiance of green commenced again - and a deathly silence too!

Now I know the secret of how to maintain a calming silence on future trips with this person - I will endeavour to drive as close to any body of moving water available, or, less successfully but it does work in deserts, periodically repeat the phrase 'water motion' when he is nearby.

Don't worry Brad, I will do all the boat trips from now on!

E-mail Interception

The following was intercepted on its way to the USA

Last week a mate and I were chasing two gecko sp. nov. from the Exmouth Region for Ken Aplin of the Western Australian Museum - he required tissue samples, the only specimens he had were pickled. It was a good trip despite being too dry because

we added another gecko species to the list for that area

(*Diplodactylus alboguttatus*) and considerably extended the distribution north of a legless lizard (*Delma australis*). The bloke (a mate nicknamed Bobtail) accompanying me was, for a long time, regarded as the “only bloke in the world whose feet smell in a pair of thongs” - I now can

say, after a week without

washing, that the odour emanating from his bum was far from pleasant and I reckon marginally exceeded, in disgustingness, that emanating from his feet in thongs! :)

Hey, if you can't rubbish your mates who can you rubbish?

FROGS AND REPTILES OF THE NORTH LAKE, BIBRA LAKE AND SOUTH LAKE AREAS

List of species compiled by Thomas Rasmussen

The vegetation at **North Lake** is dense with a few scattered clearings, some of which are quite large and partially shaded by eucalypt and melaleuca trees. The whole area is criss-crossed by sandy tracks. **Bibra Lake** is a large, extremely degraded wetland with an introduced lawn grass clearing and concrete pathways all around the lake. Inside this artificial setting, immediately adjacent to the fluctuating area of water are a few melaleucas. **South Lake** is a small wetland with mostly native vegetation apart from some introduced grasses. All three study sites have been considerably degraded through exposure to a history of farming and visitors. I have been surveying these areas for close to twelve months now and have recorded 19 reptile and 6 frog species.

MOANING FROG (*Heleioporus eyrei*)

MARbled BURROWING FROG (*Heleioporus psammophilus*)

WESTERN BANJO FROG (*Limnodynastes dorsalis*)

RED-THIGHED FROGLET (*Crinia georgiana*)

SLENDER TREE FROG (*Litoria adelaidensis*)

WESTERN GREEN TREE FROG (*Litoria moorei*)

MARbled GECKO (*Phyllodactylus marmorata*)

SOUTH-WESTERN SPINY-TAILED GECKO (*Strophurus inornatus*)

SOUTH-WESTERN SANDPLAIN Worm LIZARD (*Aprasia repens*)

TWO-TOED EARLESS SKINK (*Hemiergis quadrilineata*)

FENCE SKINK (*Cryptoblepharus plagiocephalus*)

SOUTH-WESTERN COOL SKINK (*Bassiana trilineata*)

COMMON DWARF SKINK (*Menetia greyii*)

SOUTHERN PALE-FLECKED MORETHIA (*Morethia obscura*)

WESTERN LIMESTONE CTENOTUS (*Ctenotus lesueurii*)

PERTH LINED LERISTA (*Lerista lineata*)

WEST COAST FOUR-TOED LERISTA (*Lerista elegans*)

SOUTH-WESTERN FOUR-TOED (*Lerista distinguenda*)

WESTERN GLOSSY SWAMP EGERNIA (*Egernia luctuosa*)

SHINGLEBACK (*Tiliqua rugosa*)

WESTERN BEARDED DRAGON (*Pogona minor*)

TIGER SNAKE (*Notechis scutatus*)

DUGITE (*Pseudonaja affinis*)

SOUTHERN BLIND SNAKE (*Ramphotyphlops australis*)

OBLONG TURTLE (*Chelodina oblonga*)

GENERAL MEETING

20 March 1998

MINUTES

1. **Convene Meeting** - 7.30pm at Perth Zoo Education Centre
2. **Attendance** - 32 members, 11 visitors
3. **Apologies** - Simon Ball
4. **Correspondence Tabled** -
 - Letter from CALM's Dr Peter Mawson responding to WASAH's 1997 Submission. He raised several points he believed were not adequately covered in the Sub. and some concerns. A response has been drafted by the Executive and Liaison Subcommittee.
 - Letter from Woodside Petroleum advising Snakebusters that it had been nominated for a grant - no one attending the meeting was aware of the nominator.
5. **President's Report** -
 - Mentions the WASAH Liaison Subcommittee/Executive meeting on 10 March 1997 with The Hon. Cheryl Edwardes (Min. for the Environment) and Bernie Masters (Member for Vasse) at parliament house. This was basically an introduction to the Minister of WASAH representatives and an opportunity to put our case regarding amending the *Wildlife Conservation Act 1950* to better service the needs of amateur herpetologists [and other private keepers] and WASAH's involvement in this.
 - Asks if members of the executive had received completed nomination forms to date. The reply was a negative in all members.
6. **Vice-President's Report** - Nil
7. **Treasurer's Report** -
 - Advises that many 'members' are currently unfinancial with outstanding 1998 membership fees and gives friendly warning that the June newsletter wont be forwarded to individuals not paid up.
8. **General Business** -
 - BB refers to the 1984 gazetted 'open season' and how this basically extinguishes Regulation 4 licences. Also mentions his letter to CALM requesting changes to Reg. 4 and 15 licence conditions relating to animal release and frequency of returns. He asks members to consider whether this letter be sent on a WASAH letterhead or on his own business stationary. During discussion on this Eric Kidd pointed out the fact that it was WASAH business and that the last paragraph relating to this be deleted; this was agreed on. Voting with a show of hands, the majority were in favour of using WASAH stationary in this instance.
 - BB mentions that a number of captive-bred carpet pythons (*Morelia spilota imbricata*) were available if CALM issues licences to respective applicants - availability will be based on 'first licensed, first served'.
9. **Editor's Report** -
 - Advises that he has had to exclude some articles from the *WASAH Newsletter* because they are technically inappropriate.
 - Mike Lynch comments that a letter by BB in response to one by CALM's Chief Wildlife Officer, D Mell, included content personally criticising DM and should not have appeared in the *WASAH Newsletter*. BB explained that he responded to DM's *Letter to the Editor* as the author of a piece in an earlier *NL* that DM's letter related to, and not as an executive member of WASAH. BB also explained that any criticism perceived by ML was of the false philosophy promoted by wildlife bureaucracies and not the addressee. BB also explained that the subject being discussed was of significant importance to WASAH members and, therefore, as editor, it would have been irresponsible to preclude publishing a reply to DM's letter. BB also pointed out that while he is the editor, minimal censorship would be exercised.
10. **Call for further business** - Nil
11. **Speaker** -
 - BB introduces Dean Burford, Curator/keeper of Western Swamp Tortoises at the Perth Zoo, to speak on the zoo's WST breeding program and the captive husbandry involved.
12. **Meeting Closed** - • 9.00pm

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Answers to questions are as supplied by the relevant Minister's office

AMPHIBIANS AND REPTILES - LICENSING SYSTEM

2898. Mr PENDAL to the Minister for the Environment:

- (1) With reference to the continuing requests by the Western Australian Society of Amateur Herpetologists that amateur reptile and amphibian enthusiasts be allowed to keep these animals on similar conditions to people in every other State of Australia, is the Minister aware that Western Australia is now the only State in Australia that does not allow amateur reptile and amphibian enthusiast to keep these animals?
- (2) Is the Minister aware that New South Wales recently brought in a licensing system to regulate the keeping of amphibians and reptiles by amateur enthusiasts?
- (3) Does the Minister intend to implement a comparable licensing system for Western Australia?
- (4) If not, why not?

Mrs EDWARDES replied:

- (1) There is considerable variability between States and Territories in the approach they take in licensing the keeping of reptiles, with Western Australia the most restrictive in terms of pet reptiles. Reptiles may currently be kept in Western Australia under licence for scientific and private study purposes and also public display purposes, but not as pets.

The *Wildlife Conservation Act 1950* and wildlife conservation regulations have no specific provisions to enable a properly regulated pet reptile keeping system to be operated. There is therefore no immediate prospect for licensing the keeping of reptiles as pets. Unrestricted private reptile keeping is not something we would consider for Western Australia, because of the concerns it would raise for the conservation of various reptile species in the wild.

- (2) Yes.
- (3) An improved licensing system which could be applied to the keeping of reptiles is under consideration as part of the development of a replacement Bill for the *Wildlife Conservation Act 1950*. The WA Society of Amateur Herpetologists will be consulted in the development of the Bill.
- (4) See (3) above.

.....

3259 Dr EDWARDS to the Minister for the Environment:

- (1) What work has been done to initiate a review of the *Wildlife Conservation Act 1950*?
- (2) What consultation has been undertaken with stakeholders?
- (3) When will the draft be released for public comment?

Mrs EDWARDES replied:

- (1) Review of the *Wildlife Conservation Act 1950* has commenced taking into account public submissions received in response to a draft wildlife conservation Bill released in November 1992, legislative changes made elsewhere in the intervening period and Government policy with regard to conservation of biological diversity.
- (2) Consultation with stakeholders will commence shortly.
- (3) Drafting the Bill will not be undertaken until the review process is completed.

**WASAH
GENERAL MEETING
Friday 19 June
7.30pm
Perth Zoo Ed Centre
Entry off Labouchere Road**

**SPECIAL
Guest Speaker:**

Dr Peter Mawson
(CALM's Senior Ecologist)

On My position!

Dr Mawson, a good friend of Dave (Beerbottle) Robinson's through their mutual time at the Agriculture Dept., is the person making the decisions on those applications. This should be of interest to all with a leaning towards natural history, and/or the problems facing those given the task of managing natural resources.

WASAH EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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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.

Address all correspondence related to this newsletter to:
The Editor, 9 Birch Place, Stoneville, Australia 6081

TO KEEP OR NOT TO KEEP?

By MIKE LYNCH, 9 Chala Lane, Joondalup, WA 6027

This is the question that our politicians will have to consider when reviewing the new Wildlife Conservation Act. Under the current act, the only native fauna allowed to be kept by hobbyists are birds. We would, of course, like to see that extended to include reptiles and amphibians. However, the issues involved really extend to all fauna groups. Our politicians will have to consider this broader question of the keeping of native fauna generally, before looking at specific interest groups like ourselves. If we hope to gather their support, then it is plain commonsense that we also address this broader question and should be actively campaigning for the **keeping of native fauna** in Western Australia, rather than limiting ourselves solely to the keeping of reptiles and frogs. The added advantage of this approach is that it allies us with existing hobbyists with interests in fish, birds and invertebrates. Collectively these people represent a significant lobby group.

Unquestionably the overriding concern will be **conservation** - the ongoing protection, preservation and careful management of our natural resources and the environment. The new legislation will necessarily embody the principles and

practices of conservation and the keeping of native fauna would therefore need to be a regulated activity under the control of the statutory body responsible for wildlife management - in our case CALM. It is important to recognise that the keeping of native fauna must not, in any way, compromise the conservation of our wildlife. We therefore need to have a clear understanding of the potential interactions between keeping and conservation and to accept the limitations that are necessary on such keeping so that it does not conflict with conservation.

In order to win political favour for our cause, I believe that it is important to understand some of the opinions that exist within the community at large and endeavour to correct those which are incorrect or ill-informed. A prime example is that some well-intentioned, conservation-minded individuals view the keeping of native fauna by hobbyists as contradictory to conservation. This belief seems to emanate from a simple observation - in order to keep native fauna, animals must necessarily be removed from the wild. This, of course, is correct. What is not correct is the presumed effects that this has on the natural populations of native animals. All populations

have a certain reproductive capacity. In healthy populations this reproductive capacity exceeds that needed to maintain the population in the long term. The size of populations is not normally limited by their reproductive capacity but by some other factor, such as the availability of resources, physical components of their environments or the activities of other organisms. As Charles Darwin recognised more than a century and a half ago, more offspring are produced than can possibly survive. Harvesting of animals, within limits set by the dynamics of a given population and taking into account any flow-on effects to other organisms via the food web, can occur with no ill effects whatsoever to natural populations.

Unregulated exploitation can certainly lead to decline in natural populations. This has been demonstrated with many animals, particularly those of high commercial value. A particularly relevant Australian example is the Salt Water Crocodile *Crocodylus porosus*. The skin of this crocodile is the most prized of all crocodylian skins for fashion leather. As a result, commercial hunting of this species, during the middle part of this century, saw its numbers reduced to the point where sightings of

adult-sized crocodiles in the wild were rare, even in remote locations. Protection of this species in the late 1960's and early 1970's has seen its numbers return to the point where it is once again abundant in the rivers, creeks and swamps of northern Australia. It is now farmed commercially, with problem animals used as a source of breeding stock and annually harvested wild eggs producing hatchlings for rearing. Annual monitoring of wild populations shows they are still increasing, so it would appear that the current widespread but regulated egg harvesting is providing a sustainable yield. Through appropriate management, based on sound knowledge of the population dynamics, the Northern Territory now has an important tourist attraction in the 'top end' and a viable and growing export industry based on a renewable resource.

Sustainable yields can be reaped from almost all natural populations. What is required is a sound understanding of those factors affecting the distribution and abundance of the species - the population dynamics. Obviously an accurate understanding of these factors becomes critical for populations of organisms that are considered vulnerable, threatened or endangered. And it is only through an informed approach that effective management strategies can be formulated and implemented to move these populations to a more secure status. In some cases this has meant

deliberate removal of individuals from the wild in order to establish a captive breeding program. Our own Western Swamp Tortoise *Pseudemydura umbrina* is a classic example. Removal of animals from the wild and conservation are not diametrically opposed activities. Removal has the capacity to be damaging to conservation (where it is unregulated), effect neutral or even to positively assist conservation programs. It is dependent on appropriate informed management.

The point to be made to those concerned about taking animals from the wild is that it can be done without having any discernible effect on natural populations. From the hobbyist's point of view, captive bred animals are generally far superior to those collected from the wild. Captive bred individuals are usually free of parasites, do not require any period of readjustment, are established feeders and generally display a quiet disposition. Given these advantages, removal of animals from the wild for hobbyist keeping would primarily be for the purposes of establishing breeding stock and providing genetic diversity. In practical terms this would mean a minimal number of animals would be taken from natural populations.

There are a number of real advantages to allowing people to keep native fauna, not the least of which is that it provides a rich source of **information** about much of the animals' basic biology. It

is the ultimate satisfaction and recognition of good husbandry for a keeper to successfully breed his or her animals. In so doing, they can contribute to our understanding of factors affecting mating, fecundity, pre-natal and post-natal development, feeding, and so forth. Not every keeper needs to contribute directly, for when experiences are shared, both successes and failures, a collective knowledge and understanding develops. People learn from and build on each others experiences. Whether the information comes about through carefully controlled experimentation, intuitive "feel" or just plain serendipity, does not really matter. It all contributes to a better understanding of the animals concerned. There are of course some very real limitations to what information can be obtained from captive animals versus those studied in their natural habitats. But formal studies in the wild are usually difficult and expensive, and therefore very limited in number. For this reason alone, amateur observations and investigations have the capacity to make a significant contribution to our understanding of much of our wildlife.

There is an established opinion amongst some people that keeping native animals is **cruel**. Yet these same people do not seem to have a problem with keeping a cat in the house, a dog in the backyard or a goldfish in a bowl. What they fail to appreciate is that what is

needed for good husbandry of any animal is a sound **knowledge** of that animal's **requirements** and how to provide them. Take for example the poor goldfish in the fishbowl filled to the brim. It might have plenty of water to swim around in but struggles to obtain sufficient oxygen. Oxygen from the air saturates only the top few centimetres of surface water and without a means of circulating the water, the small surface area at the top of the bowl provides insufficient gas intake to meet the fish's needs. This situation is often exacerbated by placing the fishbowl on top of the fridge or television, both appliances that give off heat, further reducing the oxygen carrying capacity of the water. That gulping activity of the fish at the surface is not food seeking but a much needed supplement to the oxygen taken in through the gills. The goldfish only survives because its swim bladder is specially adapted to allow it to extract oxygen from gulped air. Life would be much easier for the goldfish if the bowl were only a little over half full, it contained an air stone and was kept in the coolest spot in the room. The same level of understanding needs to be applied to the different breeds of dogs and cats, birds... in fact any captive animal. The RSPCA exists not because people keep animals but because some people simply do not provide what is required for their animals' welfare. It is not the keeping of animals that is cruel. It is not providing for their needs where cruelty can arise.

What is also evident in people who pass summary judgement against keeping wild animals, is that they do not appreciate just how **tough nature is on animals** in the wild. It really is a jungle out there. The high mortality rates in natural populations are testimony to this. Death through starvation, dehydration, extremes of heat and cold, being eaten alive by predators, floods, bushfires, parasites, infections and numerous other hazards plague the existence of wild animals. Good husbandry guarantees a much better state of health and less stress for captive animals - a veritable life of luxury in comparison to the rigours of nature.

One aspect of allowing people to develop a close association with our wildlife which should not be undervalued is the effect it has on them as individuals. It is a very salutary experience to see the positive and concerned attitudes that keepers of native fauna develop, not only towards their specific animals but to natural populations and the plight of the environment in general. They value their own charges but also display genuine concern for the on-going viability of wild populations. As for the argument that familiarity breeds contempt... experience would indicate that this is not the case. Take for example Mark Shepherd, a highly experienced aviculturist and respected author on that subject. On an R.A.O.U. expedition to Lake

Disappointment, near the Canning Stock Route, in search of the rare Night Parrot, he noted that "Unfortunately the Night Parrot was not seen on this expedition, but, as some consolation, Alexandra's Parrot was!" This latter bird is also known as the Princess Parrot and although rare in the wild, it is a very common parrot in avicultural collections throughout Australia. Mark himself has kept and bred the bird for many years, yet he still manages a sense of profound satisfaction at encountering this animal in its natural habitat. This is by no means an atypical scenario. This and many other such examples add weight to the assertion that a close association with animals tends to deepen the appreciation of these creatures and their place in the natural world.

There are a number of other important issues related to the keeping of native fauna, most of which are not raised in the public arena but still need to be addressed. This is being done through the WASAH Executive and Liaison Committee. I hope that the points I have raised provide at least some basis for reasonable and rational argument in favour of West Australians being able to keep our native fauna.