



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

NEWSLETTER

10 September, 1998
(16)

FRUSTRATION'S SHOWING

Time's moving on and some of us haven't too many years left! Several members have commented that although we have been getting positive reports from the WASAH/CALM Liaison Subcommittee, we do not have a firm commitment in writing from CALM demonstrating their support for an improved system allowing easy access to herptile-keeping licences.

The events of the next month or so should allow us to determine the true direction our endeavours are taking. The adage *actions speak louder than words* will be especially relevant during this time. Whose actions am I referring to? Those of the CALM personnel and politicians whose

endorsement of an improved system we need, as well as those by members demonstrating responsible behaviour.

Members' Responsibilities

I wish to reinforce here our responsibilities. WASAH members need to demonstrate the behaviour stated in the *WASA Constitution*, and agreed to when signing the declaration included in the WASAH membership form as follows:-

25.0 MEMBERS' CODE OF BEHAVIOUR (in part)

25.3 Members' actions will reflect an attitude of conservation and education concerning herpetofauna at all times.

25.7 Members will cooperate and assist major research institutions ie. WAM, CALM Wildlife Research, universities etc.

The Executive cannot support those demonstrating a blatant disregard for the rules of the society generally, but especially 25.3 above. For your information see BM's article, *What is rare*, in this issue.

Future Plans

The Executive plans to introduce a wider variety of activities for members in the future. These will include excursions to such places as the Armadale Reptile Centre, Perth Zoo and the WA Museum. Considering this latter venue, maybe we can twist Dr Ken Aplin's arm to show us behind the scenes. We believe this will be a tremendous eye-opener for participants.

Other activities will include trips to places such as Melaleuca Park and Maralla Road, Ellenbrook to introduce members to both the cryptic nature of many of the reptiles and frogs, and the tools required when undertaking herpetofauna surveys.

We also propose spotlighting and specific species trips such as a visit to Herdsman Lake to observe tiger snakes and swamp egerias in the wild, as well as the great Oz B-B-Q and cricket match.

JUNE MEETING

Apart from the fact that this meeting clashed with an Eagles game, it was another success. Several visitors showed their support by becoming members on the night.

David Knowles, co-author of *Australia's Terrestrial Reptiles*, did a great job as guest speaker at the meeting. This was especially so considering the very short notice he was given to prepare for his talk and slide show on sail-tailed dragons of South-east Asia. He was a wild-looking man in his younger day - totally unrecognisable compared with now. It would appear from what David said and illustrated with slides that there is considerable taxonomic work to be done on these dragons.

Thanks a heap David!

Thanks also to the Perth Zoo for allowing WASAH to use the zoo's facilities.



Warmer!

OLD SNAKEMAN MOVES ON!

By David Williams

Veteran Queensland snakeman, Edward Royce Ramsamy, known to all as Ram Chandra, died on Friday, 31 July, 1998 of a heart attack caused by a blood clot in the lung after having been admitted to hospital in Mackay for surgery to his foot.



Ram Chandra started his career in the 1940's performing snake shows at touring Carnivals and Country Shows. During the 1950's he joined the likes of the late Eric Worrell MBE, Ken Slater, the late Kevin Budden, and others who genuinely risked their lives to capture live taipan snakes for venom research and antivenom production. Ironically, Ram Chandra was bitten by a taipan in 1956, and

his life saved using antivenom manufactured from the venom of one of his own snakes. Ram continued to work with his beloved reptiles right up to his death, despite having been crippled for many years as a consequence of polio, and his many snakebites.

Ram Chandra was not a scientist, he was an ordinary man who lived a quiet, respectable life with his wife Noleah at Slade Point just outside Mackay, Central Queensland. For many years he travelled Australia, teaching school children, ambulance officers and others about our dangerous snakes, and amassing a tremendous wealth of knowledge about the distributions, habits and life histories of many species.

During the 1950's and 60's when the scientific community steadfastly refused to accept that the taipan was distributed outside of North Queensland, Ram Chandra waged a heated campaign, lobbying government ministers and others to accept his warnings that the species actually ranged south to beyond Brisbane and into northern New South Wales, and to make antivenom more widely available in hospitals outside Cairns and Mackay. Authorities at the Queensland Museum and elsewhere actively used the media to discredit Chandra's warnings claiming that he was little more than a showman and scaremonger, however he prevailed, and the fact that the distribution of the species into the areas he claimed has been recognised subsequently

by the herpetological community, serves to vindicate his endeavours.

The ostracism he faced from professional herpetologists and others in the scientific community was surely one of the great travesties of our time from a herpetological perspective. Shunned by his peers, Ram Chandra can be forgiven for being cynical, and distrusting of other herpetologists who sought him out for information. The great tragedy is that a huge wealth of information about the herpetofauna of Queensland has now been lost for all time.

I grew up admiring the Ram Chandras of this world, and had the privilege of speaking with Ram on a number of occasions, and while it is clear that he was a showman, one only had to talk to the man to gauge an appreciation of his humanity, intelligence and knowledge. Ram Chandra always put other people ahead of himself, and he never refused a call for help. The number of people who can thank him for their own lives must number in the hundreds.

In the 1970's he was awarded the British Empire Medal by Her Majesty, Elizabeth II for services to herpetology, and the Australian Government added an Order of Australia to this in 1995.

Ram Chandra leaves behind his wife of nearly 5 decades, Noleah (83), his 10 children, 36 grandchildren and 64 great grandchildren. His funeral service was held at the

Assemblies of God church in North Mackay.

Ram Chandra was a modern hero to many Queenslanders, and in an age where herpetologists and herpetoculturalists wear their snakebite scars like medieval badges of courage, we would all do well to remember that this man was truly courageous in a time when one mistake meant certain death. It is only through the efforts of Ram Chandra and others of his generation, that we have the opportunity today to walk away from our mistakes.

Vale

Edward Royce Ramsamy
OA BEM

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

NSW Update

It is interesting to note that the rumour suggesting three WA endemic rough-scaled pythons (*Morelia carinata*) were in a private collection in

NSW and declared under amnesty has been confirmed.

My sources advise me that CALM asked the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service to confiscate these and return them to WA. However, as they were declared under amnesty, the NPWS had to decline CALM's request.

What is rare?

Most of us probably know that the majority of Australia's 900 plus amphibians and reptiles are common. How you define what is common or rare will vary on the available information you have to work with. An example here is the dugite - a very common snake in the metro area - at least to those involved in snakebusting, but possibly considered uncommon by other people not in a position to observe it as frequently. The crown snake would be considered rare locally by all active snakecatchers, but is extremely abundant on the south coast. A person spending all his/her time herping in the metro area could be forgiven for mistakenly considering it to be rare throughout its range.

The fundamental factor in preservation of species is habitat retention. Exceptions exist though, with the frogs on the east coast of Australia and overseas being examples of this.

However, to keep it simple, in each state there are lists of rare and endangered fauna prepared by government agencies. These lists are modified periodically based on input from advisers - people with a knowledge of the subject.

We should all be aware of the critically endangered western swamp turtle. This species has been on the list for a long time and rightly so. Considerable resources continue to be invested into an ultimate solution to alleviating its plight. This is an obvious one.

In WA there are two lists that we should be concerned with.

They are:-

Schedule 1: Fauna that is rare or likely to become extinct.

White-bellied Froglet
(*Geocrinia alba*)

To our knowledge restricted to a few creek systems in the lower south-west.

Yellow-bellied Froglet
(*Geocrinia vitellina*) As above.

Sunset or Harlequin Frog
(*Spicospina flammocaerulea*)

To our knowledge restricted to a few peat bog swamps in the lower south-west.

Loggerhead Turtle
(*Caretta caretta*)

Leathery Turtle
(*Dermodochelys coriacea*)

Western Swamp Turtle
(*Pseudemydura umbrina*)

Yinnietharra Rock Dragon
(*Ctenophorus yinnietharra*)

To our knowledge restricted to low rocky outcrops in the vicinity of Yinnietharra Station, Upper Gascoyne Region.

Airlie Island Skink
(*Ctenotus angusticeps*)

To our knowledge restricted to Airlie Island off the coast of Onslow and one locality immediately south of Broome - *Weird distribution!!!*

Lancelin Island Skink
(*Ctenotus lancelini*)

To our knowledge restricted to Lancelin Island and one adjacent mainland locality.

Hamelin Striped Skink
(*Ctenotus zasticus*)

To our knowledge restricted to a patch of mallee over triodia between Hamelin and Coburn Stations, Shark Bay.

Baudin Island Spiny-tailed Skink
(*Egernia stokesii aethiops*)

To our knowledge restricted to Baudin Island, Shark Bay.

Stokes' Spiny-tailed Skink
(*Egernia stokesii badia*)

Pilbara Olive Python
(*Liasis olivaceus barroni*)

Schedule 4: Other specially protected fauna.

Freshwater Crocodile
(*Crocodylus johnstoni*)

Saltwater Crocodile
(*Crocodylus porosus*)

Woma or Sand Python
(*Aspidites ramsayi*)

Carpet Python
(*Morelia spilota imbricata*)

There is another list for those considered insufficiently known and in need of monitoring. In my opinion most of the above species should be included on this list also. You will note that I mention "to our knowledge"

in the comments beneath many of the above. This is because we know so little about these animals. There is also some inconsistencies in these lists. An obvious one is the woma - in *The Action Plan for Australian Reptiles* (Cogger *et al.*, 1993). the south-western woma is recognised separately as a critically endangered population, whereas on the WA list the species generally is recognised. This is quite odd as it is primarily a desert animal and we have no idea how common or otherwise it is - there is a great expanse of desert out there! On the other hand we know the south-western population has declined dramatically in recent years and may even represent an undescribed taxon. It should be recognised in WA as distinct and elevated to Schedule 1.

At the end of the day these lists are not worth the paper they are written on unless sufficient resources are directed to determining the true status of all taxa listed.

Learn what you can about members of these lists and obtain a copy of the *Action Plan for Australian Reptiles*. This is a worthwhile reference and highlights some of the problems facing several of our reptiles.

Remember also, your responsibility to advise the WAM, or at least the Executive of any field observations you may make of the reptiles and amphibians on Schedule 1.

BM

DIURNAL GECKOS!

Reptiles generally have a preferred time of day or night when they are active. For example, monitor lizards are almost exclusively diurnal, while geckos are well-known for their nocturnal behaviour.

There is an over-riding factor though which seems to determine whether a reptile will become active. This is temperature. All reptiles have a preferred body temperature (PBT) which may vary throughout an individual's daily or yearly cycle. A reptile will alter its behaviour in many ways in order to maintain PBT - this is known as thermal regulation (Heatwole & Taylor, 1987). Reptiles also thermoregulate to avoid temperature extremes. The dugite (*Pseudonaja affinis*) in the Perth area is a classic example - this normally diurnal snake will become active at night in summer when day temperatures are excessive.

The Pilbara region is famous for its very hot summer. I recently experienced this during a visit with Russel Traher in March 1997. With temperatures in excess of 45°C in the shade at midday, it is not a good time to go herping. The only reptiles you might encounter are the high-temperature active dragons (Agamidae).

We were a few kilometres south of Karratha when we observed several geckos (*Gehyra punctata*) active. They had emerged from their

crevice shelters and had taken up exposed positions on the shady sides of rocks. It appears that the intense heat had forced them out of their daytime retreats into the open shade where they could cool off a little. Even though this diurnal behaviour seemed unusual at the time, upon reflection it is an extreme case of thermal regulation.

I observed diurnal behaviour in this gecko on another occasion while herping on the Burrup Peninsular, just north of Karratha, with Brad Maryan and Bruce George in May '98. Several times we noticed geckos had emerged from crevices in the cool early morning and were positioned on the shaded sides of boulders. In this situation it appears the geckos had left the cool crevices to raise their body temperature through exposure to the warm air.

It is apparent from the above observations, in attempting to maintain PBT, these normally nocturnal geckos will "bite the bullet" and come out of hiding during the day to escape both high and low temperatures.

RBC

\$5 only

For Brad's complete and current taxonomic list of Australian herp.



**You Beauty
Spring's here!!!**

OH FOR THE GOOD OLD DAYS!

I have a confession to make. For many years I have been photographing frogs and reptiles. In order to do this I have often had to handle them. Without a licence this is illegal.

"Son, for this bad behaviour your camera will be confiscated and you will go to hell!"

Sorry for being flippant, but it is the only way this subject can be treated - as a joke!

I have been prompted to write this after a recent event in Queensland concerning, along with others, two known WA naturalists. It is about time Australia's state wildlife authorities realised how impractical their respective wildlife laws are. The problem relates to the statutory protection [from disturbance] the fauna is given, and the need to breach this to obtain photographs. This technically makes it a requirement to obtain a wildlife licence to photograph. As most herp photographers know, you usually have to handle a reptile in order to get a reasonable photo. Although defined as an illegal act, one would expect a little more commonsense to be exercised by those whose job it is to uphold the law.

I couldn't count the number of animals I have encountered fortuitously on roads and taken the opportunity to

photograph. In so doing probably saving the individual from being permanently impregnated in the bitumen road.

Let us imagine for a moment all photographers followed the letter of the law. There would be numerous photographs of reptiles on bitumen substrates, lizards' rear ends as they vanish into leaf litter and blurred shots of frogs flying through the air.

Quality film is expensive and we don't want to waste it.

Imagine how poorly illustrated the field guides would be? They would definitely be no good as identification guides!

Although it would be great to be able to photograph animals as we encountered them, this is all but impossible in most cases, especially with the more fossorial species.

Imagine removing a *Delma* legless lizard from a valve pit during the day in the Pilbara? The ground temperature is so high you can not walk on it in bare feet, even in the shade! To get a shot, this lizard must be placed in a bag until the morning. Sure, you have to handle your subjects if you are fair dinkum about photography.

OK, so we have this indefensible situation, exacerbated by unrealistic attitudes in many wildlife enforcement personnel towards those with a natural history interest. If you are observed handling a reptile in the field you must be one of

those *difficult to detect, organised crime connected traffickers that threatens the conservation status of all Australian fauna*, not a mere naturalist taking a photograph.

Appendix IV is a copy of my 1986 licence for twelve months to collect for and issued by the WA Museum. As this licence allowed the holder to disturb animals, it covered photography as well. A similar licensing system, recognised Australia-wide, needs to be reintroduced for photographers. As I have mentioned above, lots of animal photographs result from chance encounters. Short term and specific locality licences are impracticable for this purpose. Currently, in WA, CALM does issue licences endorsed for taking *for photographic purposes only*. I am sure these are not easily obtained, however, and believe, until a more satisfactory system is in place, applicants for these should require no more than a couple of character references to be eligible.

What about non-photographing naturalists? Licence access should not differ substantially for these people. Simplistic systems work the best and, as government resources are always in short supply, lessen the workload in their execution.

This is definitely something that needs considering, but in the meantime - oh for the good old days!

We will conserve only what we love. We will love only what we know. We will know only what we are taught!

(See App. II, letter to Nat. Orgs.)

BM

A prolapse in death adder

A few months ago I experienced a major scare with one of my snakes. As I routinely checked them on that morning I noticed a Pilbara death adder (*Acanthophis wellsei*) with something hanging out of its vent. At first I thought it was defecating, then it hit me, a prolapse!

This is basically when something normally restrained inside the body protrudes outside. It definitely doesn't look too pleasant for the animal. Prolapses can occur in all reptiles and involve the intestines, rectum, hemipenes or oviducts. A major problem can be a rapid desiccation of the exposed tissue complicating things. Severe cases may require surgical removal of the damaged part.

I really freaked out wondering how to get the insides on the outside inside again!

I was told later that my snake had a rectal prolapse.

I took my snake to the Perth Zoo's Senior Veterinarian, Dr Sherri Huntriss. The treatment she administered was surprisingly simple. It consisted of an application of

white sugar to the everted tissue and, with this causing it to shrink, antibiotic cream to nullify any infection. Then it was gently manipulated back through the vent. What a relief!

I am not certain what caused this problem but suspect it was related to a recent change of diet from lizards to haired weaner mice. I did remove a very solid faecal pellet from the rectum during treatment. After this I fed it only hairless pinkies for a couple of months before again advancing it to weaners. It is doing fine now but this is a potential problem that it is best to keep in mind.

BM

Have you sighted a spiny-tailed skink?

There are two spiny-tailed skinks in WA. One is the smaller, exceptionally common depressed spiny-tailed skink (*Egernia depressa*) and the other is the Stokes' spiny-tailed skink (*E. stokesii*). Personnel at the WA Museum would like recent sightings of the latter species as part of a study to determine its conservation status and develop a management plan.

This species' mainland distribution is primarily the habitat-degraded Northern and Central Wheatbelt. It is currently on Schedule 1 as *fauna that is rare or likely to become extinct* and included in *The Action Plan for*

Australian Reptiles (Cogger *et al.*, 1993).

It occurs both in woodlands (ie, York and salmon gums), where it occupies standing and deadfall tree hollows, as well as agriculturally cleared areas, where it lives in derelict buildings, old walls, woodpiles, machinery, etc.

Separate subspecies occur in the Abrolhos and on Baudin Island. There is also a very distinctive black population on granite outcrops west of Cue.

If you have sighted this lizard, please let me know and I will pass on your information to the appropriate people.

BM

Herp books for sale

If you are like me you want all the herp-related books you can get. Here in Perth the major bookshops never stock a great variety of books on this subject, probably due to the very limited market over here. On the east coast it is a different story because herpetoculture is far more advanced (they are allowed to keep).

If you are interested in obtaining a comprehensive list of titles contact the following major natural-history book suppliers for their respective catalogues.

Andrew Isles Natural History Books - 113-115 Greville St. Prahran, Vic. 3181

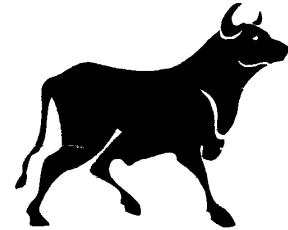
Mike Swan Herp Books - 15 George St. Lilydale, Vic. 3140

If you would like to obtain a copy of the best reference work available on Australian snakes, BB has a spare unopened copy of **Allen Greer's 1997 *The biology and Evolution of Australian Snakes* for \$88.00**

Contact Brian quickly and save waiting for your copy to arrive in the mail - he can personally hand deliver it to you at the September meeting.

See Appendix III for Dr Greer's comments on WA.

HERPTALES



**There'll be a bull
in the bush
rather than bull
from Bush!**

The people behind the forthcoming Perenjori Agricultural Show had a tough decision to make recently. As space and funds are at a premium, they had to choose between a Busho snake display and a mechanical bull. Sorry Busho, but they went for the bull rather than the bull faeces!

GENERAL MEETING

19 June 1998

MINUTES

1. **Convene Meeting** - 7.45 pm at Perth Zoo Education Centre
2. **Attendance** - 28 members, 8 visitors
3. **Apologies** - Jamie Stuart, Tom Fronck, Jay Houston
4. **Correspondence Tabled** -
 - Apology letter dated 16 June from Gordon Wyre (CALM Wildlife Licensing) regarding Peter Mawson's unavailability to speak at this meeting. It was considered inappropriate by Gordon that Peter addresses a WASAH meeting on "his position" given his responsibilities as a public servant, which does not give him the luxury of having a personal position on matters he deals with at work.
 - Letter (undated) inviting WASAH to participate (at a fee to the society) in *Earthfest 98* on Sunday 20 September 1998.
5. **President's Report** - • Nil
6. **Vice-President's Report** - • Advises that extendible pocket hooks are available for sale from WASAH at \$20 each.
 - Mentions the Modong Reserve survey is completed and Samson Park survey is continuing.
7. **Treasurer's Report** - • Advises that many 'members' are currently unfinancial for 1998 - membership fees should be paid ASAP.
8. **General Business** - • Apology from President for this WASAH meeting clashing with West Coast Eagles game tonight.
 - Calls for the WASAH/CALM Liaison Subcommittee to give a verbal report on progress to the meeting.

Mike Lynch responds on the subcommittee's behalf reporting on their meeting with CALM on 1 April 1998. Mike mentions an assurance given to them that WASAH will have an input to the draft of the Wildlife Conservation Bill. He also comments on the positive feeling the subcommittee experienced at the completion of their April meeting and the benefit expected from continued negotiations with CALM.
 - BB notes that WASAH was apparently nominated for a grant (see Minutes of March '98) and a letter attesting to this was received from Woodside Petroleum advising that this has been unsuccessful. BB asks if any members present had nominated WASAH or *Snakebusters* for this - no one present responded in the affirmative.
 - The possibility of changing the meetings from the current Friday night to mid-week was raised by Ross Daghish. He, and believed others also, had a problem attending on occasions because of social commitments. He suggests Thursday evening as an alternative. Other members commented on the convenience of Friday night because they had to travel from country areas. BB calls for a show of hands to ascertain the members' preference - this issue will be discussed further at a later date.
9. **Editor's Report** - • Nil
10. **Call for further business** - WASAH t-shirts available after meeting
11. **Speaker** - • BB introduces David Knowles, Co-editor of *Australia's Terrestrial Reptiles*, to speak on South-East Asian water dragons (sail-tailed lizards) and other herpetofauna of the region.
12. **Meeting Closed** - • 8.45 pm.

WASAH GENERAL MEETING

Friday 18 September

7.30pm

Perth Zoo Ed Centre

Entry off Labouchere Road

Members' Slide Night:

If you have herp or herp-related slides bring them along (about 10 but max of 20 per member). We are going to load these into the projector randomly - as each image appears on the screen the respective photographer will speak briefly on it from their seat. This is something different we are trying which should be both informative and entertaining for all attending the meeting.

Sunday 27 September

10am

Field Excursion:

WASAH is involved in a survey of Manning Park, Hamilton Hill. The pits are in so you wont have to do any digging, but it will give you an opportunity to experience herp-survey techniques such as pit-trapping and raking. There is considerable limestone and some junk scattered over this site. Bring camera, food, drink and a 3-pronged cultivator if you have one - wear bush clothes and footwear. Picnic and toilet facilities available. Entry off Davilak Ave or Azelia Rd.

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 8091

Executive Minder: Bruce George
(08) 9 490 2107

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

The Krefft's Tiger Snake - *Notechis ater ater* (Krefft 1866)

By Peter Mirtschin, Venom Supplies P/L, PO Box 547, Tanunda, South Australia 5352

The Krefft's black tiger snake, which occurs in the southern Flinders Ranges, is currently listed in the National Action Plan for Australian Reptiles as **Vulnerable** (ANCA Endangered Species program 1993).

The reasons for its decline are overgrazing, clearance of habitat, soil erosion, water pollution, inappropriate fire regimes and possible loss of food source (frogs) to an introduced predator (trout).

One of the strategies for recovery is the securing of more habitat under the reserves system.

It has been heartening to see local land holders embrace this issue and carry out some re-vegetation along one of the watercourses which was previous habitat for this species.

The Department of Environment, Heritage and Aboriginal Affairs now have the opportunity to secure some prime Krefft's tiger snake habitat land which has just been listed for sale. The land, described as "Hillams", located half way between Wilmington and Melrose in the Southern Flinders Ranges, includes the headwaters of Spring Creek one of the last strongholds of the species. The asking price is \$300,000, the cost of supporting 3 executives in DEHAA. If \$300,000 is spent now it will secure this prime habitat for all time.

The only specific strategy DEHAA have ever implemented for conservation of dangerous snakes has been a raft of mindless regulation imposed on snake keepers. These regulations have done absolutely nothing to stop the decline of most venomous snake species and has seriously impeded herpetologists and scientific researchers to the extent there have been a number of complaints to the Ombudsman over the last 12 months. No monies have ever been specifically put aside for the conservation of a venomous snake. The Wilmington and Melrose local communities have done far more in that regard. They have donated their lands and the precious time, during very tough times for the rural community, to do something themselves for conservation of a Vulnerable species. It's about time the department hurt a bit and cast aside some of their "environmental fat cats" to use the money to secure the future of one of our Vulnerable species for all time. They should take the lead from the local community.

If you want to photograph a Krefft's black tiger snake, ring:

Steve Giddings
122 Phillip Highway
Elizabeth SA 5112
Phone 08 8255 6238

If you want to talk to someone on the ground (non-environmental fat cat but a hard working Indians) from DEHAA, talk to:

Shirley Myer
Mount Remarkable National Park **08 8634 7068**

Nick Bailey, Investigator, Wildlife Protection
Department of Environment & Natural Resources
9 MacKay Street
Port Augusta SA 5700 **08 8648 5300**

I visited the area in November 1997 and found the activity of Krefft's tiger snake very low probably due to the dry season. Tadpole numbers also appeared to be low.

I would suggest that this species is one of the most endangered elapids in Australia and is in urgent need of safe habitats as a respite to the continuing loss of habitat in surrounding areas.

SNAKES Harmful & Harmless

9 Birch Place, Stoneville, Western Australia 6081

Ph (08) 9295 3007, Fax (by appointment) (08) 9295 3858, Email bush@nettrek.com.au

The Editor

Dear Sir,

It has happened again!

Two known Western Australian naturalists, along with others from interstate, have recently received summonses for disturbing fauna while on a photographing expedition in North Queensland. Rather than go into the details of this particular case for legal reasons, it has caused me and others to realise private and professional naturalists need a national organisation to fight for their rights in these situations. Wildlife laws must also be developed with input from all stakeholders and contain a proviso excluding the acts of genuine naturalists where these do not include criminal or malicious intent.

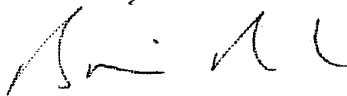
Naturalists, particularly those into photographing herpetofauna and invertebratefauna, in Australia run the gauntlet of prosecution because of overzealous wildlife officers and inadequate state wildlife laws every time they go into the field! Applying for a licence to disturb fauna for this purpose is often unsuccessful unless the applicant is associated with a recognised institution. I experienced this when I applied to the South Australian wildlife authority for just such a licence for a group of WA people leaving for the Second World Congress in 1993. This was to cover us if we opportunistically came across reptiles on the road that we wished to photograph. The reply I received stated we did not require a licence to photograph unless we disturbed the animal. This we would need to do - who wants a shot of a beast on a bitumen substrate?

Just imagine the numerous reams of official documentation that would have been generated in order to obtain the numerous published educational portraits of Australian wildlife. A minor degree of interference was required to get these and I doubt that permits were issued in most cases. How many thousands of animals have been saved by interference eg, taken off roads? Current wildlife laws make criminals out of educators!

What we require in this country, and this was first suggested to me by David Knowles, himself an avid photographer and co-author of *Australia's Terrestrial Reptiles*, is a national register of Australian naturalists. This would include the issuing of identification cards with sufficient information to allow any investigating wildlife officer to check out the registered individual and contact him/her at a later date if needed. This would provide a financial return to the Crown by reducing the burden on the courts and all other government instrumentalities involved. It would also provide a source of funds to defend registered individuals during unnecessary legal proceedings that may result from mistakes or a lack of commonsensical discretion by over-zealous public servants.

The way I see this operating is the applicant requires two acceptable referees, pays an annual fee for registration and then receives an identification card. The immediate problem is finding an organisation to manage the whole thing - maybe the federal wildlife authority, Environment Australia, the Australasian Affiliation of Herpetological Societies, the Australian Museum, or some similar national body. I am personally available to assist in any way I can, but would love a benefactor to set up the whole thing.

Yours faithfully,



Brian Bush

cc. Australian naturalists organisations for publication in respective newsletters to generate discussion.

A paragraph from Dr Allen Greer's *The Biology and Evolution of Australian Snakes*

Greer, A. 1997. *The Biology and Evolution of Australian Snakes*. Surrey Beatty and Sons Pty Ltd, Chipping Norton, NSW. 358pp.

Allen Greer is a Senior Research Scientist in the Herpetology Section at the Australian Museum. His previous book, *The Biology and Evolution of Australian Lizards* won the Whitley Award of the Royal Zoological Society of New South Wales.

This compilation and relative interpretation of much of the available knowledge of Australian snakes, up to December 1995, is a very important reference for those seriously interested in this component of our herpetofauna.

The following extract (Page xi) needs to be read with the understanding that NSW has since established a system, WA has not. Also, as relevant CALM personnel appear not to want the present situation changed (this interpretation reinforced at WASAH/CALM meeting on 25 August '98), one can further appreciate Dr Greer's words. They, along with those from Butler, Cogger, Ehmann, Shine, Shea etc, are a serious indictment of CALM.

"I would also like to express my admiration of the contribution made by unpaid herpetologists ("amateurs") to our knowledge of Australian snakes as well as other reptiles. These herpetologists have contributed enormously in areas of field work, keeping in captivity and photography. I estimate their contribution to our total knowledge of Australian reptiles at about 20%. And they do this in the face of severe prohibitions imposed by state faunal control agencies, most notably in New South Wales and Western Australia. The people in the faunal control agencies that are responsible for the decisions that effectively exclude interested and competent unpaid herpetologists from easy access to the local herpetofauna are ignorant, incompetent, or working to some hidden, non-scientific agenda. They may be protecting a few animals as individuals, but in effectively retarding the development of knowledge on which management plans are based, they are actually hastening the demise of animals as populations and species. These functionaries need to be weeded out of these agencies, and the agencies themselves made to realise that unpaid herpetologists are a vital part of the effort to learn about and to conserve the Australian herpetofauna."

A Licence 'To Take' From Old

(See Brad Maryan's article, *Oh For The Good Old Days!* on Page 5)

This annual licence was issued by the Western Australian Museum to allow the taking of flora and fauna. Note the eight weeks time frame in which the specimens need to be lodged with the WAM.

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