

WASAH



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

NEWSLETTER

30 September, 1999
(20)

1st of 3 Trials of WASAH Execs

Seventeen charges brought by CALM against WASAH Executive Bruce George were heard in Perth on 25 August, 1999. The final outcome, after a day in court, was not to be known until the morning of 28 September.

The Magistrate found Bruce guilty on seven of the charges. However, if more of the relevant evidence had been presented in court I believe Bruce would have been acquitted on all seventeen charges.

Two charges involved the taking and possession of a common, everyday garden-variety fence lizard, *C. plagiocephalus*! Every child in Perth had better watch their

backs when next they catch and keep one of these skinks!

CALM's charges concerning the fence lizard were silly and only succeeded in this case because the magistrate had insufficient information - they are comparable to the Environmental Protection Authority charging someone with pollution for farting!

The following is taken from correspondence between Bruce and his lawyer prior the trial. The WASAH Executive concur with Bruce's sentiments.

It is because of my dedication to reptile conservation that I remove numerous 'problem' reptiles each year in Perth and elsewhere and in so doing assist CALM.

Contrary to what the charges imply, I believe I have behaved lawfully under the Wildlife Conservation Act 1950. The animals were legally in my possession with the possible exceptions of the Crowned Snake (Charges 4 & 5) which I was holding temporarily to determine if it

was a significant record and the Fence Lizard (Charges 16 & 17) which I provided as food to the Black-backed Snake. The legislation allows me to rehabilitate this lizard-specific predatory animal and, as it follows that to do this I must feed it, I believe this is a frivolous charge.

The prosecution had obviously been directed by CALM to try and discredit WASAH if the opportunity arose. This tends to prove what most of us already believed - that the January raids were initiated as a punitive "pay back" for WASAH's successful lobbying for a keeping system after nine years.

The prosecutor on CALM's behalf argued for the retention of Bruce's holding boxes, however the magistrate would have nothing of this and directed CALM to return them to Bruce.

Further comments on this case made immediately after the trial illustrating my [subsequently proved] optimism are included on Page Five.

Briefly

A large number of members and visitors (75 plus) presented at the Zoo Ed Centre on the 5th August to hear CALM's Gordon Wyre and Dave Mell update us on the new regulations and CALM's interpretation of the current law.

Formal apologies along with their support were received from a couple of our great country members, Desrae and Wayne Clarke. If my memory serves me correctly, this must have been the first meeting that they had not been able to attend. Good on you Desrae and Wayne for your commitment.

Everything is on track for the new system to come on line sometime before June, 2000.

You should have received the *Special Newsletter* No. 4 and the opportunity to nominate your preferred reptiles and frogs as pets and contribute to the selection of species to be listed on the inaugural keeping schedules. The results compiled from the Questionnaire appear later in this newsletter.

Some species selected may not be suitable eg, Kimberley Crevice Egernia (Advanced) and Giant Slender Bluetongue (Expert) because of the isolated nature of their limited distribution and are unlikely to find their way into the trade, but we will request that the most available similar congener be included if not already so.

Lizards, especially the pygmy monitors and larger geckos were the most popular species selected. This was a pleasant surprise to some of the executive and subcommittee as

we assumed most people would want to keep pythons. It is good to see that many lizards will be in demand also.

Meeting Report

A fortuitously fine Sunday, the 11th July, found 34 members at Melaleuca Park Nature Reserve BBQ area for a very casual lay-about meeting. Although this was intended as an informal meeting, it became somewhat formal with much discussion on things that have been happening recently.

Several members shared their keeping experiences with the others present. Brad brought along a couple of his captive-bred death adders (these may represent a *pyrrhus/wellsi* cross) for us to enjoy.

A more comprehensive update can be found in the *Minutes* later in this issue.

What's in a name

Shane Heriot, Geraldton member

Although I have never assumed an alias, some days I think it would be quite convenient to assume someone else's identity and masquerade for a while.

A very interesting turn of events revealed themselves the other day and as I found out, a very quick thinking young lad benefited quite well after being presented with an interesting set of circumstances.

As the Midwest's Snakebuster I receive more than my share of call-outs to extricate all manner of scabies. On one occasion I missed out on the opportunity

to remove a snake because of one wrongly dialled digit.

On most occasions when a wrong 'phone number is dialled, the mistake is realised and amends are made. The difference on this occasion was that the person on the receiving end of this wayward call happened to have the same name as me, although he was 20 years younger, being only 16.

The 'phone conversation unravelled as follows, as far as I can determine :

"Hello can I speak to Shane please"

"Speaking"

"Listen I have been given your number can you please come round and remove a large brown snake that is in my yard"

(Long pause with some very quick thinking on the young bloke's behalf)

"Yeah I suppose so but it will take a while to get around there as my bike has a puncture"

(He was too young to hold a driver's license)

"That's OK, I can come round straight away and pick you up and drive you to my place. The snake has gone under a piece of wood and doesn't seem to be moving."

The young lad was then swiftly picked up by the caller and taken back to his place of residence where the snake awaited capture, it was noted that he was empty handed, with no snake catching gear to be seen. When they arrived at the house the young bloke asked if he could borrow a shovel and was quickly supplied with one thinking that it was going to be used to gently pick the snake up and coax it into a bin or something. Instead it was utilised as a lethal snake dispatcher chopping up the

unfortunate beast into several small pieces.

“There you go, problem solved” said the young bloke as proud as punch of his achievement and to the amazement and disbelief of the householder.

“That’s not really what I expected you to do but I suppose you got the snake. Do I owe you anything.?” (Another session of very fast thinking by the young bloke) *“Ar, yeah that’ll be fifty bucks thanks and do you reckon I could get a lift back home”*

After getting away with the incident, everything was forgotten until about two months later when another snake found its way into the same backyard. After dialling the right number this time the householder again asked for Shane and when I answered they informed me that I was the wrong snakecatcher and they were after the young bloke that kills snakes and that they were prepared to come and pick him up again.

After a few moments of confusion and then being informed of the previous events we both figured that a wrong number was dialled in the first instance and that the young bloke had taken advantage of the situation, and got away with it after being fifty bucks better off.

The thing that gets me the most is that the kid managed to snap up fifty bucks after killing the snake while most times I’m battling to scrape up enough in donations to cover fuel after bagging em live.

All part of the fun!

Mulgas, Monitors and Beer Cans

Dave (Beerbottle - *not Beercan*)
Robinson

I was out and about recently just east of Three Springs when a moving green object caught my eye. On further investigation of this object I discovered it to be a Mulga Snake (*Pseudechis australis*) with its head caught in a beer can. This was an animal in need of special attention of a caring herp (instead of a bumbling unconstructive bureaucrat), so I caught the beast and removed the can. I might add that its relatively easy to catch an agitated Mulga

Not a pretty sight



in this situation. This was the first time I had come across a snake with its head caught in a can, although I have heard of it happening. I have found a few monitors in the same predicament in the Pilbara, mainly the Ridge Tailed Monitor (*Varanus, acanthurus*).

One of the questions I asked myself was, “What’s so interesting about putting your head in an empty can.” In this case the can was full of mouse droppings, so the thought of a good feed got him into trouble (we know it was a him because the snake was sexed before release).

In regards to the monitors, it could be the same thing although I have often thought they might be after moisture, which has formed in the bottom of the can after a cool Pilbara night. It would be interesting to get the views of other WASAH members on this.

The above situations also bring to light the threat discarded drink cans are to our larger herpetofauna. Who knows how many snakes or monitors have perished in this way, not to mention the distress and disorientation it causes to the animal. So if your out and about and happen to see any unusual objects cruising around, stop and have a look, it might be one of our scaly friends in need of your help.

If anyone is interested, all the monitors were into Swan Gold and the Mulga was into Emu Bitter.

The snake when released displayed much gratitude to its helpers.

The Passing of Joe Bredl

Peter Mirtschin

For many Australian herpetologists, it was a sad day last Wednesday (1/9/99) with the passing of Joe Bredl who died at the age of 79.

Joe was one of the last colourful characters in Australian herpetology who must have touched many lives over his career as owner of the Renmark Bredl's Reptile Park in South Australia.

For most of his adult life in Australia, he operated the reptile park with three of his sons assisting at various times. Joe Jnr, Peter and Robbie who are still very much involved in the reptile game. Some of the old devil we used to see in Joe, is now carried on by Robbie who has a similar flare for telling a good story. Both Joe and Robbie featured in a recent series on taipans and tiger snakes on channel 7.

Joe was one of those characters who had green fingers with reptiles. His knowledge and enthusiasm more than offset his lack of a formal education regarding reptiles. He was instrumental in establishing one of Australia's first sustainable-use projects for the aborigines - the crocodile farm at Edward River, Queensland

He loved snakes. One nearly got him at Goyders Lagoon. Everyone will remember the bite by the inland taipan where he was retrieved and flown to Adelaide, close to death, only to live to tell the story.

He had many adventures and he will be missed by all of us. We can only hope that we can all carry on, with distinction, what he started many years ago.

Revenge of the Undead

Borrowed from: *New Scientist* 3 July 1999 and applicable here - dead Oz elapids can bite too!

If you mess with a decapitated snake, use a long stick RATTLESNAKES can strike you from beyond the grave-and this bizarre form of posthumous revenge is surprisingly common. Two doctors in Arizona say that nearly 15% of the people they treated for rattlesnake bites were attacked by animals that had been fatally bludgeoned, shot or decapitated.

Stories of freshly killed snakes nabbing one more victim are part of rattlesnake folklore. So two years ago, Frank LoVecchio and Jeffrey Suchard of the Good Samaritan Regional Medical Center in Phoenix, Arizona, decided to study the phenomenon. Over the next 11 months, 34 rattler victims, all of them men, showed up. Five claimed their attacker had been thoroughly dead, the doctors report in *The Neal England Journal of Medicine* (Vol 340, p 1930).

In one case, the man had beaten the animal with a block of wood. Another two victims had shot a snake several times. When they went to pick it up, they were assaulted. One patient was even bitten twice. He shot the snake, lopped off its body a little below the head, waited five minutes after the animal stopped moving and then picked up the head. The truncated animal lunged, chomping down on his finger. When the shocked man grasped his stricken digit in pain, it bit him on his other hand.

The final victim was caught out even though he knew of the danger posed by dead snakes. He intended to hide the head so no one else would be in danger. He grasped it tightly with the fangs pointed away from him. But somehow, the jaw shifted, scratching him and injecting so much venom

that he had to have a finger amputated. A decapitated rattler, concludes Suchard, should be treated as a "very short snake".

Studies have shown that an isolated rattlesnake head will try to attack objects waved in front of it for up to an hour after death. Joe Slowinski, a herpetologist at the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco, says this is believed to be a reflex action, triggered by infrared sensors in the "pit organ", a structure between the nostril and eye that detects body heat.

Slowinski says that the snake's body has touch sensors that can also trigger a reaction after death. Suchard has heard of one instance where a headless body jumped, smacking an unsuspecting observer with its bloody stump. "A dead snake still has many of the reflexes it had when it was alive", he says.

Suchard advises anyone who happens to come across a slain rattlesnake to leave it alone. "If you really have to touch it", he says, "I suggest you use a very long stick." And given that rattlesnakes rarely attack people unless they are provoked, the problems could usually be avoided if people didn't feel the need to kill them in the first place. [Amen]

CALM V. WASAH Executive Bruce George

10am - 4pm, 25 August 1999
Courtroom 53, Court of Petty
Sessions, Perth.

Prosecution witnesses: Wildlife
Officer Connolly, Perth Zoo Vet
and Klaas Gaikhorst.

Defence witness: Brian Bush

The primary defence was based on 28 (2) viz, the charges of taking, keeping and non-compliance with licence conditions could not be sustained as none of these is a requirement of that section of the legislation.

Overview of proceedings based on interested onlookers' comments (the court was filled with the WASAH contingent) at the end of the day -

Pro-defence

Much of the prosecution's evidence concerned diagnoses of injuries and the use of photos demonstrating lack of injuries. *This evidence is irrelevant, however this point was not effectively presented to the Magistrate. For examples, have a look at the cover photo (Pseudonaja ingrami) and taipan photo in Gow's revised Australia's Dangerous Snakes, and the Darlington Stimson's Python in Reptiles and Frogs of the Perth Region - these are roadkill presented as 'in life' portrait shots! Over the past twenty years I have harvested numerous roadkill snakes for the WAM - these were ideal specimens without external damage and mostly removed from bitumen roads.*

The vet's and Gaikhorst's evidence actually supported the defence regarding difficulties in diagnoses of injuries in snakes without resorting to x-

rays, faecal scans, etc. and that the duration of recovery could vary from a short time to several months. *There was some defining of what is designated "derelict".*

The Magistrate commented during the defence's closing that he was "old school" and believed the onus was on the prosecution to prove its case. At this point the *Criminal Code* was discussed [*some offences available under some Sections of the Criminal Code apply to all offences in WA including breaches of the WA Wildlife Conservation Act - the defences in the Criminal Code are in fact available*¹].

Pro-prosecution

The number of charges (17) - *sounds much more serious than it is. Bruce's lawyer Michael Bowden did a good job of conveying to the magistrate that these were in blocks, each a cascade of charges arising from a single animal.*

The last medication (by injection) the black-headed python received was 7 months previous to the raids. *As it was removed from Canning Vale this snake is derelict.*

The crowned snake was in Bruce's possession for *less than 2 months* before the raids. *In mitigation here I believe Bowden must present Bruce's personal problems and those related to WASAH during this corresponding period - in and out of hospital for operations, Tony's death, and Bruce's emotional involvement in this, and the intensive discussions with Wyre et al.*

Two of the pygmy pythons (*the ones sighted by WO Warwick Rowe 3 years ago*) had been kept for that period in the hope

¹ Cannon Bowden & Co to Bush
26/8/99

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

of getting a licence. *In mitigation here is CALM's non-response to Bruce and Brad's application and CALM's knowledge of these two snakes through its wildlife officer.*

The fence lizard was taken as food for the black-backed snake. *Gee, if Bruce is found guilty of the charges relating to this lizard I will lose all faith in the system for sure. As things turned out, unless one has the resources to appeal the justice system is no more than a lottery - you can win or lose irrespective of your innocence or guilt.*

The prosecution kept suggesting that Bruce was keeping these animals for his personal enjoyment [*I don't believe this was argued to the satisfaction of the court though*].

The magistrate commended both sides for the good arguments presented. He wished to peruse the transcript, which would take a couple of weeks to get typed up, and adjourned proceedings until 28 September, 1999.

The prosecution was somewhat cheeky. He would refer to the vet as Dr what ever her name was and then carry on mentioning Gaikhorst's name

in what appeared to be an attempt to convey the inference that they both had PHD's. He even said Dr in reference to Gaikhorst at least once while I was there.

When he examined me he passed over a copy of the WASAH Constitution and asked me to read out the rule that a member will avoid breaching the Act etc., and then tried to coerce me into saying this causes members to comply with the 72 hour condition! I had to explain to him that there was no such requirement under 28 (2). He asked me if I had any academic qualifications.

All in all I feel quite confident. It was almost as if the magistrate had made a decision but did not want to upset the prosecution too quickly. I think that was the primary purpose of the commendation given at the end - although to both parties, it was intended as a softening remark for the prosecution. I just wished someone had explained to him what a fence skink was. See Page Nine Also!

LET'S GET TO WORK

Hey members, if you live near or know of an area that would be interesting survey please let me know. You can be solely responsible for checking and maintaining the traps or we can organise a group of members to assist. Previous surveys by WASAH members on Samson Park and Manning Lake have been a great success. You really get a handle on the local beasts and what they do. I can organise the permit from

CALM and provide the buckets and fences.

A great little book on this subject has been published recently by Wildlife Consultant Angela Sanders and CALM - *How to Conduct a Community Fauna Survey*. It provides all the information you need to know regarding type of traps, where to install them and heaps more. If you would like a copy please let me know - price \$10.

One last important thing. Those members in the Darling Range can contact Busho if they want an area surveyed - Perenties are great with a crowbar, I will stick to the sandplain - lerista country. You beauty!

BM

Care of Australian Reptiles in Captivity by John Weigel. Available from WASAH for **\$17** - the bible on herp keeping in this country and a must for any personal library.

*

Attracting Frogs to your Garden by K. Casey. Available from WASAH for **\$15** - a must for people wanting to create an amphibian-friendly garden.

*

The WA Museum has recently published the revised ***Lizards of WA I - Skinks*** available everywhere for **\$35**.

WILDLIFE LICENSING

Everybody has an opinion, the following is mine.

I have often wondered, what my licence to keep a small collection of snakes means, however I usually conclude, "not much".

Basically it is a list of species and the numbers I can keep, a list of conditions usually directly related to respective regulations I must abide by and an expiry date. Also, as a licensee I must provide a bimonthly report to the wildlife authority informing it of what has occurred within my collection.

I also wonder what licences mean to the issuing body, apart from producing work for the people employed to do this. In the increasingly regulated society we live in and the corresponding reduction in individual freedoms, bureaucracies have come to accept, as a procedural part of their work, the issuing of licences. Paradoxically and much more sadly, the public have generally come to accept, with hardly a whimper of defiance, that individuals and groups must have formal approval in the form of a licence from 'big brother' before doing anything.

Does wildlife licensing benefit wildlife conservation and/or management? I believe it does not. The statutory protection of Australian reptile fauna is only a recent occurrence. Before it transpired reptiles were being kept, collected for museums, traded, etc. Are they any better off now with a wildlife licensing system? One cannot accurately answer yes or no as we do not have sufficient data to make this judgement. WA's

wildlife authority does not have sufficient resources to monitor reptile populations adequately and some of these scarce resources are being absorbed into wildlife licensing.

I believe a better situation for all concerned would be the deregulation of keeping altogether apart from restrictions and subsequent licensing where gazetted rare and endangered species are involved. It is obvious that the conservation status of the Common Dwarf Skink (*Menetia greyii*) is directly opposite that of the Western Swamp Turtle (*Pseudemydura umbrina*). What confounds me is how the current system almost treats both species on the same level when applying for a licence to keep - you would need to justify your reasons for this in both cases. The great irony here is that a vast number of the reptile species protected from amateurs by WA's wildlife authority were first discovered by amateurs!

BM

ADDING ADDERS

The death adders; (Genus *Acanthophis*) are great snakes. As elapids go they are ideal captives because they don't move around too much. They are basically the python equivalent in the Australian venomous snakes and if I had my way I would have a room full of these fat little fellows. Just don't have your fingers too close when feeding as they sure are quick.

Recently I had two incidents with my adders which are worth sharing:-

On 11 May this year I arrived home from work to discover that I had become a 'father' (believe me, you do feel this way) to 20 neonate Desert Death Adders. These cute little devils only weigh 3 or 4 grams and are less than 20 centimetres long. They sure are tiny and would make great "earrings". For the past three years I have unsuccessfully attempted to breed from this pair by cooling down the male and introducing him to the female around spring. It just goes to show that if you persevere the rewards will follow. All my mates think that I must have had something to do with the insemination as that litter of 20 included a two-headed fellow. Snakes born with two heads are considered a rare event but it does happen as is the case in other animals, including humans.

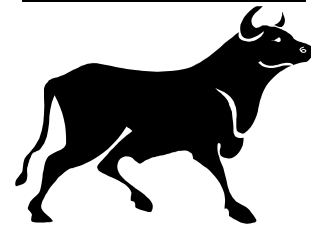
The other incident concerned my two male long term captive Southern Death Adders. Usually it is best to house large venomous snakes individually, at worst two per cage would be the maximum. You can definitely house death adders together! Well, that was what I thought. These two snakes have shared the same cage for the past three years without incident and are both well fed. Early one morning my sleep was disturbed by the noise of leaf litter and newspaper going everywhere. I discovered the slightly larger wild-caught snake had grabbed the captive bred individual by the head and was swallowing it. My first thought was, "I am going to lose it" as the fangs had pierced the back of the head. Anyway I held the snake doing the swallowing and unhooked its fangs using a pair of tweezers. The other snake was quite shaken up, as was I, and had a nice shiny smear of venom on the head.

This snake is doing fine now and feeding again although I have it housed in a separate cage. The little two-headed fellow died after a fortnight. I can offer no real explanations for what happened here, except to say that it is all part of the fun in keeping our scaly mates.

How ironic it is, CALM seized eighteen of my snakes in January and in one mating my numbers, plus a few extra, have been restored. You beauty!

BM

HERPTALES



The Karri Valley Casanova

On a recent frog-hunting trip to the southwest and while sampling a site opposite the Karri Valley Tourist Resort, Brad met an old flame. He definitely must have visited this place before because a most unattractive bird came out of the bush and made an ecstatic squawk of recognition immediately her eyes fell on Brad. In those eyes were reflected the imaged memories of love and lust, but these were not reciprocated in Brad's. As the old hen emu made a hurried advance towards him, in an attempt to rekindle the dying flame of a previous encounter, all Brad could do was rush headlong to the safety of the vehicle. Dejectedly the old "crow" turned away, only to rush back again with a glimmer

of hope every time he moved out of the vehicle.

I had a yarn to that sad bird and explained that she need not feel too bad - from Brad's perspective it was not personal, just his lack of memories *and her lack of mammaries!*

A Free Bus Trip

Only a legless person would leave an elegant lizard legless on a bus with no fare and having to forfeit its tail instead!

A Wet Member

Searching for frogs on a freezing cold night near

Bridgetown is great fun. The fog so thick you struggle to see what is in front of you.

Obviously our president experienced this problem, as well as a difficulty in maintaining his balance - a splash, a gargled yell and he was up to his neck in the cold, deep, slimy water of the dam! was up to his neck in the cold, deep, slimy water of the dam! It made the night a much more enjoyable experience for the rest of us. It is great laughing at others' misfortunes, as long as it does not happen to you. A cold and stiff member standing on the road in only his jocks and gumboots at 2am is a sorry sight indeed. Good onya Busho!

Venomous Garment

Who was that snakebuster that often used an old glove to

assist in the capture of the venomous beasts? Holding a dugite while allowing it to chew on the glove can come back to haunt you. Especially when the householder is so grateful that they present you with a large donation and in your excitement you remove your glove with your teeth.

Oh no! Cracked lips allow venom to enter - tingling lips, dry mouth, headache, nausea and aching joints all result from this experience.

Hey Bruce, sucking on cigarettes is safer!

WASAH GENERAL MEETING

“in the bush”

Sunday 17 Oct, 1999

9.30am

(bring a sandwich, drinks & herping gear)

at

**Maralla Road
Ellenbrook**

(See mud-map next page)

We have several pit-trap lines in here and to date have recorded 43 species of reptile and frog.

WOMA HUNTING

Sunday 14 Nov,
1999

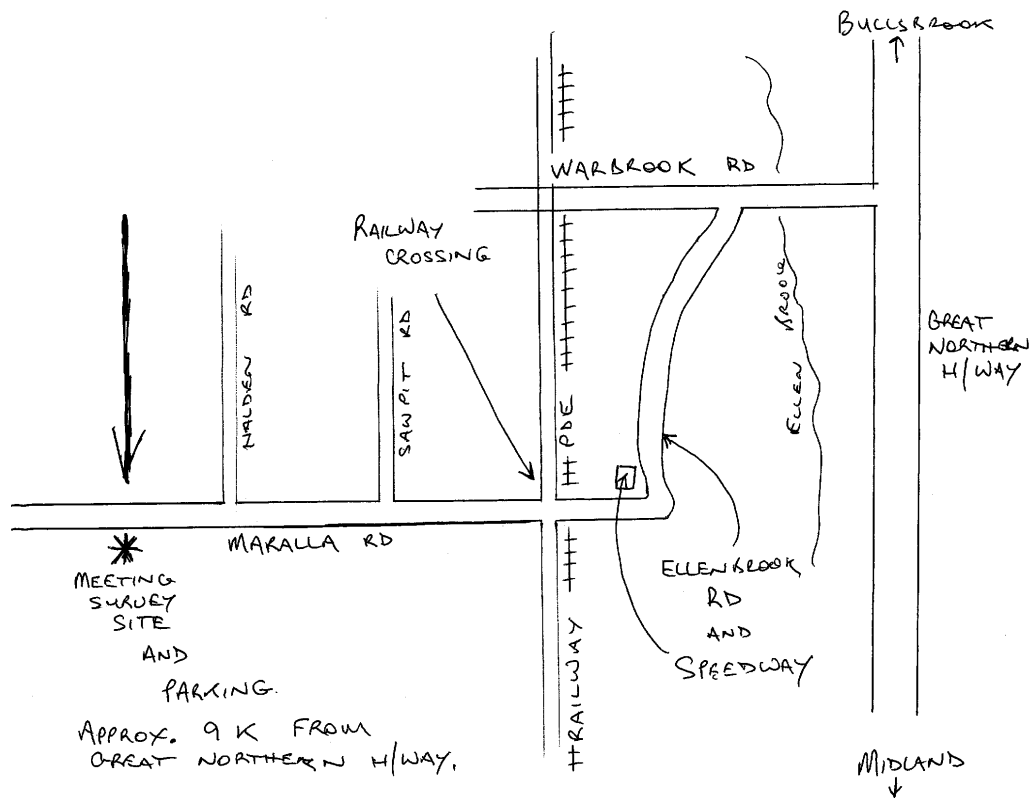
at

**Maitland Creek
15 K SW of
Goomalling**

*Meet 8.30am corner
Goomalling turn-off,
Toodyay*

Address all correspondence related to this newsletter to:

The Editor, 9 Birch Place, Stoneville, Australia 6081



BRUCE'S COMMENTS TO EACH CHARGE RESULTING IN A GUILTY VERDICT

2/17: Failing to keep records (\$200) - Black-headed Python (*Aspidites melanocephalus*) - Held under 28 (2) of Regs, not Reg 15 Licence. There is no provision under Reg 4 or 15 for injured or derelict animals.

4/17: Taking (\$200) - Crowned Snake (*Notechis coronata*) - As this species is uncommon in the Perth region, I considered this individual of herpetological importance. I took it opportunistically to allow me time to make enquiries to determine if the Western Australian Museum (WAM) required a tissue sample from it. CALM confiscated it before I was able to determine this.

5/17: Possession (\$200) - Crowned Snake (*Notechis coronata*) - Uncommon locally in this northern limit of its range. Temporarily held until I could determine its significance, if any.

7/17: Taking (\$100) - Pygmy Python (*Antaresia perthensis*) 2 x females - These derelicts were obtained several years ago. Declared to CALM Wildlife Officer, Mr Warwick Rowe who gave verbal approval to retain in early 1996 previous to application for licence being sent on 27 September 1996. CALM ignored this until November 1998 when I received a negative reply. An ongoing research project into this species reproductive biology had been initiated by this time and published in December 1998 *Herpetofauna* 28 (2): 44-46. The timing of CALM's reply to my licence application and the raids was such that I had not had sufficient time to complete my formal appeal of their refusal.

10/17: Keeping (\$100) - Carpet Python (*Morelia spilota imbricata*) female - Kept under 28 (2) of Regs., therefore no licence required. This individual was in the final stages of treatment for a severe [exotic] mite infestation and associated respiratory problems.

16/17: Taking (\$200) - Fence Skink (*Cryptoblepharus plagiocephalus*) - This lizard was found in my yard and placed in with Black-backed Snake as food.

17/17: Possession (\$200) - Fence Skink (*Cryptoblepharus plagiocephalus*) - see 16/17

GENERAL MEETING

11 July 1999

MINUTES

1. **Convene Meeting** - 12.45 at Melaleuca Park Nature Reserve BBQ Area
2. **Attendance** - 34 members, 3 visitors
3. **Apologies** - None received
4. **Correspondence Tabled** - • See President's report.
5. **President's Report** - • BB reads a letter from CALM's Wildlife Branch requesting a meeting with WASAH to apprise members on the operation of the new keeping regulations. Gordon Wyre, Wildlife Branch Manager and Dave Mell, Chief Wildlife Officer will address the meeting. A tentative date of Thursday 5 August is set for this Extraordinary Meeting to be held at the Perth Zoo Ed Centre. All WASAH members will be notified of this in a special newsletter.
 - BB raises CALM's concerns, as conveyed in GW's letter, that WASAH members were not respecting the law and abusing 28 (2)? And mentions the difficulties from a private person's perspective understanding the law when CALM has problems interpreting this themselves. He exemplifies this with the department's convoluted interpretation of 12A as opposed to its oversimplified interpretation of the '84 open season.
6. **Vice-President's Report** - NTR
7. **Treasurer's Report** - NTR
8. **General Business** - • Sandy Griffin mentions article in *Weekend Australian* by Michael Archer, eminent zoologist from Eastern Australia. Archer discusses his views on the value of native animals as pets.
 - Rod Jacobson mentions his request to the Ombudsman for an investigation into his unsuccessful application for a Regulation 12A licence and an independent legal opinion of this regulation.
 - Brad Maryan mentions the F-Files Re: Frogwatch (see article by Ken Aplin in *WASAH Newsletter* 19). Ken will be running a series of frog workshops, the first one on 17 July at the Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre. For more details 'phone Ken Aplin or Brad Maryan at the WA Museum.
 - BM invites members to become involved in a herp survey of the Watheroo/Marchagee area during September. It will be managed by Greg Harold, a well-known member, field herpetologist and photographer.
 - BM advises that the revised WA Museum *Lizards of WA I: Skinks* is now available from the WAM Bookshop.
9. **Editor's Report** - • NTR
10. **Call for further business** - Nil
11. **Speaker** - • The members' contribution topic for this meeting was "Husbandry Aspects" with various contributions on housing for the rearing of juvenile snakes, handling with the emphasis on the 'hands-off' approach where possible, the importance of reptile quarantine (especially important to snakebusters, the uncommon but serious problem of snake mite in local collections and the importance of enclosure cleanliness.
12. **Meeting Adjourned** - • 4.40 pm.

Results of WASAH Questionnaire to determine most suitable species to initiate new keeping system in Western Australia. Species included here were selected by 30% or more of respondents and are listed in descending order of popularity. The rating listed at the left of each species is respective to each Category. Three species selected may be unrealistic in the short term. These are *Egernia douglasi* (Cat. 4), *Pseudothecadactylus cavaticus* (Cat. 4) and *Cyclodomorphus maximus* (Cat. 5).

- Category 2 -

Most Popular “Basic” Pet Herpetofauna Species

<p>97 <i>Tiliqua rugosa rugosa</i> (Gray, 1825) SA WA 95 <i>Egernia depressa</i> (Günther, 1875) NT SA WA 94 <i>Pogona minor</i> (Sternfeld, 1919) NT SA WA 92 <i>Tiliqua occipitalis</i> (Peters, 1863) NSW NT Qld SA Vic WA 90 <i>Egernia napoleonis</i> (Gray, 1838) WA 85 <i>Egernia formosa</i> Fry, 1914 WA 84 <i>Tiliqua scincoides intermedia</i> Mitchell, 1955 NT Qld WA 82 <i>Tiliqua multifasciata</i> Sternfeld, 1919 NT Qld SA WA 82 <i>Strophurus ciliaris</i> (Boulenger, 1885) NSW NT Qld SA WA 81 <i>Strophurus spinigerus</i> (Gray, 1842) WA 35 <i>Litoria caerulea</i> (White, 1790) NSW NT Qld SA WA 30 <i>Litoria moorei</i> (Copland, 1957) WA</p>	<p>Bobtail Pygmy Spiny-tailed Skink Western Bearded Dragon Western Bluetongue South-western Crevice Egernia Goldfields Crevice Egernia Northern Bluetongue Centralian Bluetongue Northern Spiny-tailed Gecko South-west Spiny-tailed Gecko Northern Green Tree Frog Western Green Tree Frog</p>
---	--

- Category 3 -

Most Popular “Standard” Pet Herpetofauna Species

<p>68 <i>Varanus caudolineatus</i> Boulenger, 1885 WA 65 <i>Varanus breviceauda</i> Boulenger, 1898 NT Qld SA WA 65 <i>Varanus gilleni</i> Lucas and Frost, 1895 NT Qld SA WA 63 <i>Varanus acanthurus</i> Boulenger, 1885 NT Qld SA WA 60 <i>Underwoodisaurus milii</i> (Bory, 1825) NSW NT Qld SA Vic WA 58 <i>Egernia kingii</i> (Gray, 1838) WA 58 <i>Nephrurus levis</i> de Vis, 1886 NSW NT Qld SA WA 55 <i>Nephrurus laevisimus</i> Mertens, 1958 NT SA WA 52 <i>Egernia pulchra pulchra</i> Werner, 1910 WA 52 <i>Morelia spilota imbricata</i> Smith, 1981 SA WA 50 <i>Egernia pilbarensis</i> Storr, 1978 WA 50 <i>Antaresia childreni</i> (Gray, 1842) NT Qld WA 45 <i>Antaresia stimsoni</i> (Smith, 1985) NSW NT Qld SA WA 40 <i>Morelia spilota variegata</i> (Gray, 1842) NT Qld WA 37 <i>Antaresia perthensis</i> (Stull, 1932) WA 33 <i>Ctenophorus inermis</i> (De vis, 1888) NSW NT Qld SA WA 30 <i>Oedura marmorata</i> Gray, 1842 NSW NT Qld SA WA 30 <i>Pygopus lepidopus</i> (Lacépède, 1804) NSW Qld SA Vic WA 30 <i>Lophognathus longirostris</i> (Boulenger, 1883) NT Qld SA WA 30 <i>Pogona mitchelli</i> (Badham, 1976) NT WA 30 <i>Tympanocryptis adelaidensis</i> (Gray, 1841) SA WA 30 <i>Litoria splendida</i> Tyler, Davies & Martin, 1977 NT WA</p>	<p>Stripe-tailed Pygmy Monitor Short-tailed Pygmy Monitor Pygmy Mulga Monitor Ocellate Ridge-tailed Monitor Thick-tailed Gecko King’s Skink Three-lined Knob-tailed Gecko Smooth Knob-tailed Gecko South-west Spectacled Rock Egernia South-western Carpet Python Pilbara Egernia Children’s Python Stimson’s Python Northern Carpet Python Pygmy Python Central Netted Dragon Marbled Velvet Gecko Common Scalyfoot Long-nosed Ta-ta Dragon Nor-west Bearded Dragon Western Heath dragon Magnificent Tree Frog</p>
--	--

- Category 4 -

Most Popular “Advanced” Pet Herpetofauna Species

66 <i>Varanus tristis</i> (Schlegel, 1839) NSW NT Qld SA WA	Black-tailed Monitor
61 <i>Nephrurus wheeleri</i> Loveridge, 1932 WA	Banded Knob-tailed Gecko
61 <i>Varanus eremius</i> Lucas and Frost, 1895 NT Qld SA WA	Rusty Desert Pygmy Monitor
60 <i>Varanus glauerti</i> Mertens, 1957 NT WA	Kimberley Rock Monitor
60 <i>Varanus pilbarensis</i> Storr, 1980 WA	Pilbara Rock Monitor
55 <i>Egernia luctuosa</i> (Peters, 1866) WA	Western Glossy Swamp Egernia
50 <i>Nephrurus stellatus</i> Storr, 1968 SA WA	Stellate Knob-tailed Gecko
50 <i>Nephrurus vertebralis</i> Storr, 1963 SA WA	Midline Knob-tailed Gecko
50 <i>Egernia douglasi</i> Glauert, 1956 WA	Kimberley Crevice Egernia
48 <i>Pseudotothecadactylus cavaticus</i> Cogger, 1995 WA	Giant Cave Gecko
44 <i>Aspidites melanocephalus</i> (Krefft, 1864) NT Qld WA	Black-headed Python
30 <i>Chelosania brunnea</i> Gray, 1845 NT Qld WA	Chameleon Dragon
30 <i>Varanus mitchelli</i> Mertens, 1958 NT WA	Mitchell’s Water Monitor
30 <i>Liasis fuscus</i> Peters, 1873 NT Qld WA	Water Python
30 <i>Boiga fusca</i> (Gray, 1842) NT Qld WA	Brown Tree Snake
30 <i>Dendrelaphis punctulata</i> (Gray, 1827) NSW NT Qld WA	Common Tree Snake
30 <i>Demansia psammophis</i> (Schlegel, 1837) NSW NT Qld SA Vic WA	Yellow-faced Whip Snake
30 <i>Drysdalia coronata</i> (Schlegel, 1837) WA	Crowned Snake
30 <i>Parasuta nigriceps</i> (Günther, 1863) NSW SA Vic WA	Black-backed Snake
30 <i>Simoselaps bertholdi</i> (Jan, 1859) NT SA WA	Jan’s Banded Snake
30 <i>Suta fasciata</i> (Rosén, 1905) WA	Rosen’s Snake

- Category 5 -

Most Popular “Expert” Pet Herpetofauna Species

59 <i>Cyclodomorphus maximus</i> (Storr, 1976) WA	Giant Slender Bluetongue
57 <i>Emydura victoriae</i> (Gray, 1842) NT Qld WA	Northern Short-necked Turtle
57 <i>Nephrurus asper</i> Günther, 1876 NT Qld WA	Rough Knob-tail Gecko
57 <i>Tiliqua nigrolutea</i> (Quoy & Gaimard, 1824) NSW SA Tas Vic	Blotched Bluetongue
55 <i>Carphodactylus laevis</i> Günther, 1897 Qld	Chameleon Gecko
55 <i>Hemisphaeriodon gerrardii</i> (Gray, 1845) NSW Qld	Pinktongue Skink
52 <i>Cyrtodactylus louisadensis</i> (De Vis, 1892) Qld	Ring-tailed Gecko
52 <i>Nephrurus sheai</i> Couper in Couper & Gregson 1994 NT WA	Shea’s Knob-tail Gecko
52 <i>Varanus baritji</i> King & Horner, 1987 NT	Spotted Ridge-tailed Monitor
52 <i>Varanus semiremex</i> Peters, 1869 Qld	Rusty Monitor
37 <i>Liasis olivaceus olivaceus</i> Gray, 1842 NT Qld WA	Northern Olive Python
35 <i>Morelia spilota spilota</i> (Lacépède, 1804) NSW Vic	Diamond Python
35 <i>Aspidites ramsayi</i> (Macleay, 1882) NSW NT Qld SA Vic WA	Woma
32 <i>Morelia viridis</i> (Schlegel, 1872) Qld	Green Python
32 <i>Morelia amethystina</i> (Schneider, 1801) Qld	Amethystine Python
30 <i>Chlamydosaurus kingii</i> Gray, 1825 NT Qld WA	Frilled Lizard
30 <i>Moloch horridus</i> Gray, 1841 NT Qld SA WA	Thorny Devil
30 <i>Morelia bredli</i> (Gow, 1981) NT	Centralian Carpet Python
30 <i>Morelia oenpelliensis</i> (Gow, 1977) NT	Oenpelli Python
30 <i>Morelia spilota cheynei</i> (Wells & Wellington, 1984) Qld	Jungle Carpet Python
30 <i>Morelia spilota metcalfei</i> (W & W, 1984) NSW NT Qld SA	Inland Carpet Python
30 <i>Morelia spilota mcdowelli</i> (W & W, 1984) NSW Qld	Coastal Carpet Python
30 <i>Morelia spilota metcalfei</i> (W & W, 1984) NSW NT Qld SA	Inland Carpet Python
30 <i>Stegonotus cucullatus</i> (Duméril, B & D, 1854) NT Qld	Slatey-grey Snake
30 <i>Acanthophis antarcticus</i> (S & N, 1802) NSW NT Qld SA Vic WA	Southern Death Adder
30 <i>Acanthophis wellsi</i> Hoser, 1998, WA	Pilbara Death Adder
30 <i>Pseudechis butleri</i> Smith, 1982 WA	Spotted Mulga Snake
30 <i>Pseudechis colletti</i> Boulenger, 1902 Qld	Collett’s Snake
30 <i>Pseudechis porphyriacus</i> (Shaw, 1794) NSW Qld SA Vic	Red-bellied Blacksnake

The Humble Blindsnakes

By Robert Browne-Cooper, 24 Wotan Road, Innaloo 6018

October 1990 does not seem that long ago when David Knowles, Brad Maryan and I ventured to an isolated red dune field on Turee Creek Station. You will find this spot on any decent map, sandwiched between the Pilbara and Gascoyne Regions. Negotiating the rugged terrain was a real tribulation however we arrive eventually.

During the several days camped at a beautiful spring bordered to the east by the dune field, and west by rocky country we pit-trapped, head-torched and raked the area to sample its reptilian wonders.

One of the most exciting methods of finding herps is by following their track left in loose sand. Brad and I had that opportunity one night when we discovered the trail of a slender snake heading east across the red sand. We quickly determined the direction in which the serpent was travelling and pursued for about twenty metres across the swale and up towards the dune ridge. The snake seemed to be moving in a very straight deliberate direction, but then we paused as the trail showed hesitation and abruptly made a right angle turn northward along the dune ridge. This seemed unusual but we followed with intrigue and anticipation. The serpent's trail continued for some distance and suddenly disappeared.

"What the.....?" Brad exclaimed. We were about to back-track when we noticed hundreds of ants carrying eggs and pupae out of their subterranean nest where the snake trail had vanished. How peculiar, why would ants carry their babies to the surface and assemble them around the nest in this hostile arid environment? As we watched in fascination and having temporarily forgotten the snake track, the head of a blind snake suddenly popped through the loose red sand within

the nest. Having feasted on ants eggs the blind snake was caught in the act of leaving the banquet.

We discussed the observation while walking back to camp. Blind snakes are well equipped to repel the defensive bites and stings of ants, their scales are so smooth and close fitting, their is no chink in their armour. Faced with this situation, the ants may have realised the futility of opposing the marauding monster plundering their nursery. The Queen Ant must have made an executive decision and given the command **"Get My Babies Out.... NOW!"**

Blind snakes are known for their strategy of detecting and following the pheromone trails of ants and thereby having a feed. Our observation seemed to be an example of this as the snake came across the an old ant trail and suddenly turned towards the source.

Although not endowed superficially with external features and colours that catch our attention, the little we know about blind snake biology is fascinating.

One species known as the flower pot snake (*Ramphotyphlops braminus*) consists entirely of females who reproduce without the need for mating. A useful trick which has enabled individuals to easily colonise new habitats.

Another species (*Rhinotyphlops schlegelii*) from South Africa grows to massive proportions of 1 metre long and 5 cm thick. At this size it must surely be a candidate for a radio tracking study. While another (*Ramphotyphlops angusticeps*) has taken elongation to the extreme with its 600 or more vertebrae.

Anyone who takes it upon them self to identify a blind snake will soon

realise the painful challenge they may face. Distinguishing features that separate one species from another are usually very subtle, try for instance counting the mid-body scales rows of a blind snake, that is if you can actually perceive the individual scales. Added to this difficulty is the nagging thought in the back of the mind that the animal in question is another completely new species and may not even be in the text book in front of you!

These snakes are a very poorly studied group. And it is not surprising, they are usually subterranean and not considered a very inspiring group of serpents amongst the herpetological world. The shame though it is, they number over 300 species world wide which accounts for more that 10% of the world's entire snake fauna. And their number continues to grow by the year as new species are discovered and described. Ken Aplin of the WA Museum described three new species from the northwest just last year (Aplin 1998), and there must be dozens more in institutions around the country that are yet to be assigned a scientific name. Not to mention the species that still await discovery, this may well be the tip of the ice burg to a much bigger can of "worms".

Reference

APLIN, K.P. 1998. Three new blindsnakes (Squamata: Typhlopidae) form northwestern Australia. *Rec. West. Aust. Mus* **19**: 1-12.

