



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

NEWSLETTER

30 February, 2000
(21)

Hiccups and ALL

I owe everyone an apology for the lateness of this newsletter - a bloke must be getting too old to handle the pressure of running a business and being the editor also. This issue was expected to be published in December. Somehow it just got lost in the pre-Christmas frenzy. If there is anyone out there that wants to have a go at being editor, please come forward. I will provide you with a newsletter format on disc and you can go from there.

You will note the fee increase from \$15 to \$20 per year. We had to do this because we were not breaking even financially. Remember also that WASAH is not a lending institution - please get any outstanding money to Brad if you still owe for books, tee-shirts, hooks, etc. He does a great job of ordering in the things of interest for members. So please, let us all reduce his workload, benefit all other

WASA members and give ourselves peace of mind by paying any outstanding money we owe the society promptly.

There has been a reshuffle of the executive which was required to more truly reflect the workload currently undertaken by each of the respective office holders. Robert Browne-Cooper moves from secretary to vice-president, Brad Maryan from vice-president to secretary/treasurer, Russell Brown from treasurer to executive officer joining Bruce George. Russell and Bruce are going to be more involved in the organisation of activities such as field trips.

If any member wishes to oppose this, contribute any other ideas, or just say hello, please do so in writing to 169 Egina Street, Mount Hawthorn 6016.

The first draft of the revised wildlife regulations to allow keeping has been returned to CALM by Crown Law so things are slowly moving forward. WASAH expects to

have a chance to comment on these before they go to parliament.

Last of 3 Execs' Trials: THE FIGHT CONTINUES!

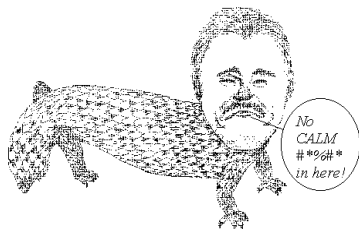
At 11.10 am on Thursday 27 January the last of the WASAH executives' trials commenced with the prosecution summarising the thirteen charges against the then Vice-president, Brad Maryan. These involved ten snakes and seven mulga snake eggs. Initially Brad advised his lawyer that he wished to plead not guilty, however a couple of days before the trial, after his lawyer advised him that he would attempt to bring up the history between CALM and Brad in mitigation, he changed his plea to guilty. This late change in his plea was probably what went against him the most in the magistrate's final determination.

Sitting in on this and previous court cases has caused me

considerable concern for the failings in the legal system. Especially the manipulation of the truth as presented in court by the prosecution on CALM's behalf. Some examples during Brad's case were, in regard to available reptile carers and number of reptile-specific licences issued - the prosecution stating that her advise from CALM was that there where in excess of one hundred of these! Fortunately prosecution, probably embarrassed, retracted the lie shortly afterwards.

Regarding CALM's policy on injured reptiles, the prosecution presented the ad hoc and poorly thought-out policy CALM initiated after Bruce George's case. Considering that this was more than six months after the raids, that is, not in place previous to or during the time the offences are said to have occurred, then this was another attempt to influence the court with misleading information.

Further, the prosecution, no doubt to discredit WASAH, compared our organisation with the gun lobby - her inference being that we are both radical groups, especially referring to several cartoons with anti-CALM slogans found on Brad's wall during the raid. I think the following one was mentioned, however it is obvious the prosecution had not seen it with her own eyes because she described it as, "... a lizard's body with a human head." Everyone seeing it for the first time note the uncanny resemblance of the head to Brads!




Brad didn't do too badly though - he was given a suspended sentence and a spent conviction order was made so that there wont be any record of the offences. There were no fines involved. The magistrate directed Brad to pay the crown's costs of \$3,800. This was a bit of a sting in the tail of the whole thing, however Brad can handle it.

Brad found out 22 days after his trial that CALM is appealing the magistrate's decision!

FOR SALE

The durable super professional, and scintillating extendable pocket snake hook.

ONLY \$20 each



MITE WARNING

I have been receiving more and more enquiries regarding snake mite. Articles have previously appeared in this newsletter on these insidious little buggers however, with an ever increasing membership, it is wise to reinforce keepers' vigilance once again.

For information on mite control and quarantine to exclude infestations and diseases see Inclusion Body Disease article (Appendix 1) later in this newsletter.

Keeper's Story

By Amelia Briggs

My two carpet pythons live in an aquarium in my room, which has a lid made of wood and covered in flyscreen. Before I get into this story, I should tell you that the smaller snake (Tony) has a tendency to be greedy. If I leave two mice in the aquarium, one each, without fail he will get to them first and eat the biggest one - or even both of them! This time, however, I think his eyes were definitely bigger than his stomach!

I usually feed my 'babies' once a week, on Mondays, but last week I was away in Manjimup. I thought that it would not matter that they skipped a feed, and fed an extra large mouse each the week before I left to compensate. While I was away, Tony shed his skin - this is an event that is guaranteed to make him peckish. Since I was going to be back the next day, my family did not bother to feed him straight away.

I arrived back on the Sunday, and all seemed to be well until I checked the aquarium and found him gone. A quick search of the room failed to turn him up, although I did find the hole he got through. We were going out that night, so I did not have time to search the room properly. I reasoned that he must not have gone far (apparently he had been there yesterday), so I stuffed a towel under the door to prevent him escaping into the rest of the house.

My bedroom lies just off the main family room, and here lives another of the many animals in my house - my brother's pet rat, Tiny. Tiny is perhaps a misleading name -

she is a big boned lass (actually she is just plain fat!). Tiny lives in another aquarium that stands in the corner of the room on a wooden stand. Anyway, back to the story. We had gone to our dinner, and my sister, being tired, decided to leave early while the rest of us stayed for a while longer. Ashleigh came into the living room, and found my escapee sitting on top of the rat's cage pushing his head through the wire! Here was my boy, all 55g of him, willing to tackle prey that must be at least 6 times his size! Luckily Ashleigh found him before he actually got into the cage, or things could have got nasty. Needless to say, he was grumpy at being interrupted when he was just trying to find something to eat, and Tiny was decidedly shaky! It was a classic, 'David meets Goliath' tale, or maybe it should be 'David eats Goliath'! I learned two things from this episode.

1: Never assume a cage is completely secure, and

2: If you do not feed your pets, they are likely to try and feed themselves!

Ellenbrook Excursion

Sunday 17th October, 1999

This excursion to Ellenbrook was notable for the fact that the only WASAH executive member who was able to attend was Bruce George. He and Dave Pattison must be thanked for what was a most successful day – we think that in future, none of the other executives should come, coz we had more luck without them!!! There was a great turn-out of young and new members – word must have got around that the

executives wouldn't be there! Of note, was the mode of transport of some members – one rode his push bike 3,654 kms (sic) to attend the event, and another decided to test his 4WD skills by getting it bogged doing a U-turn! Hee hee.

Once all and sundry had gathered, we set off to inspect the pit-trap lines. It was either rigged or we were extraordinarily lucky (except Bruce, who had several close encounters with a snappy little Gould's Hooded Snake). In the pits, we caught a Western Heath Dragon, a Southern Blind Snake, two Gould's Hooded Snakes, and (check with Bruce for full list). After all that excitement, we collectively wandered off and opportunistically collected several Bobtails, a Western Bearded Dragon, a Gould's Monitor, a Southern Half-Girdled Snake and (check with Bruce for full list). All the Bobtails were tick infested, so there were series of de-ticking exercises. Rod Jacobson thought he had an important herp find – a local rattlesnake community – only to discover that a pesky little *Davesia* plant had rattling seed pods. Bruce thought that was amusing, but he too was caught out later on in the day. Rod also discovered an old tip site, which sent the masses running off down the road in search of scaly friends – and it was a good spot too!

One good lesson learned, even the mildly venomous snakes need to be handled with caution. A few hours after several bites by the Gould's Hooded Snake, Bruce went a wee bit wobbly. A good lesson to us all – treat ALL bites seriously.

All in all, a great day out.

Sandy

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

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.



Cage wrecker

I have a soft spot for the mulga or king brown. A big fella sliding across a Kimberley road is sure a sight to behold. I just wish I was up there more often to see them.

In the last newsletter there was an article by Busho on one of his king browns eating its own faeces! What a dag of a snake - a real "garbage guts".

In captivity they do have a lot of character though, and keep the keeper busy with cage cleaning.

I have never experienced another elapid that wrecks its cage so much. All individuals are the same - they literally turn the furnishings upside-down and spread them everywhere immediately after you have just cleaned it. If that's not bad enough, they have this habit of lifting the tail and spraying faecal matter everywhere, and then crawling through it only to smear it up the terrarium's sides and glass missed during the poop-showering defecation!

The substrate newspaper is pushed, pierced and shredded, and invariably ends up in the water bowl. It is good practise to avoid filling this above about halfway as it sure will be given a hard time and a full water bowl will have half its contents splashed throughout the terrarium in no time. They will even curl up in it on a cold winter's day.

King browns are also keen nose-rubbers, which does not cause too many problems because they *wannabe* bulldozers anyway! Rocks and branches usually get shoved back and forth for no reason

other than the snake appears to enjoy doing this.

Feeding them is funny too. When you chuck in a mouse they will often swing around with mouth agap (the mouse is nowhere near) and grab anything the mouth contacts. It takes them some time to realise that the electric blanket, the newspaper, the rock, log or even their own body is not the mouse.

King browns have character! They are such dags that they are a pleasure to maintain - just keep plenty of spare newspaper handy!

BM

Help Wanted

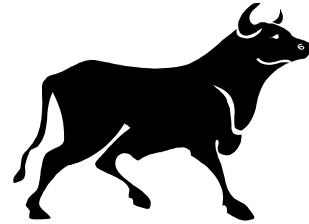
This is Robert Browne-Cooper. As many of you are aware, I have been studying a small captive population of the square-nosed snake (*Elaphognathus minor*). I have published much of the information I have gathered to date in the 1999 *Herpetofauna* 29 (1), Pp 25-31. My work commitments and other studies are such that I am unable to continue with this project. If you are interested in taking it on could you contact me on 9445 2409. Keep in mind that you will have to satisfy CALM with relevant information in an application to that department.

LIFE HANGING ON THE FRINGE

Research into the geographical ranges of 245 endangered or recently extinct species found that "hundreds" are "surviving on the fringes of their historical habitat rather than its centre," reports South Africa's *Independent* 7/1/00. The

research has "major implications for conservation strategy" in that resources may be better used to "focus efforts on the traditionally neglected habitat fringes where the animals hang out."

HERPTALES



National Geographic

Anyone with access to cable television will be able to see a couple of the WASAH executives on TV in March or April. Bush and Maryan, along with North American herpetologist, Dr Brady Barr and the film crew went chasing death adders in the Pilbara for Bryan Greig Fry of the Queensland University. For nearly two weeks they spent their time doing drive-bys, re-enactments, school visits and also found time to catch reptiles.

Busho's credibility was on the line for a while there because no death adders were sighted for the first three days.

Busho reckons he never got flat tyres - that's not what I heard - between Newman and Nullagine he got two and the new Toyota hired by the film crew got one. Both vehicles got another one each out the back of Roebourne towards the end of the trip.

The cameraman, an Aussie contracted from Sydney, reckoned he did his best work

naked - you should see the footage of Busho and Brady lying on their backs in the waterhole on the Robe River - they looked decidedly nervous when the close-ups were being shot!

Busho reckons all the best footage of him will probably be doctored with the replacement of his head with Brady's - we can't blame the producer for doing that now, can we?

I have been advised that Brad did a great job of rolling out his bedroll too, but really excelled when taking GPS readings for the camera!

Good onya fellows - we can't wait to see the show.

Snakes and Members!

While we are giving it to Busho, I thought I might add the following information for the members' interest.

Recently he was asked to talk at an open day at the Sunseekers' Nudist Club in Hovea. Being an open day for the public he thought that everyone would be wearing clothes. On the off chance that there might be some exposed dangling bits, his wife Judy decided to accompany him. You can imagine their surprise when they pulled in at the entrance where a couple of fellows were sitting behind a table, only to have them stand up with their unencumbered members hanging at eye-level - talk about an eye-full. Brian and Judy didn't know whether to laugh or cry, or whether it was good manners to avert their eyes altogether! That was only the beginning - there must have been a couple of hundred naked people of all shapes and

sizes wandering about the place. Judy was heard to remark,

"I've never seen so many pr...ks in one place before in my life!"

Busho, on the other hand, was forever the gentleman, not allowing his eyes to drop below head level the whole day. Well, for most of the day anyway!

The Beerbottle Chronicles

Beerbottle and an unnamed passenger were doing a bit of road spotting one night in the hills near Darlington. There was very little activity so he decided to stop at a dead snake. As he began to reverse back to it an idiot stopped behind him. He left his reversing lights on to indicate his intentions, the idiot behind switched on his flashing red and blue lights and two young men in blue uniforms materialised at the driver's window.

One politely asked for Beerbottle's licence and while he did a vehicle check the other one asked if Beerbottle had been hitting the beerbottle, why he was reversing around a blind corner at night and to "blow into the mouthpiece until I tell you to stop."

He double-checked the breathalyser when Beerbottle said he was going back to look at a dead snake on the side of the road and walked back with us. We couldn't find our torch so we borrowed the policeman's. He stood well

back from the snake and asked questions.

What type is it?

Dugite.

Are you sure it's dead?

Yes, very sure. (It was squashed flat with a length of sun-dried intestines stretched out behind it and smelt like Brad's famous feet.)

Is it poisonous?

Yes. (I don't believe that an adult would not know that a dugite is venomous.)

Is it really dead?

Very dead. (I was beginning to think he didn't like snakes.)

Why do you want to look at a snake?

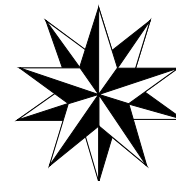
Beerbottle was suddenly struck by inspiration and said that he'd heard that someone had released some red-bellied black snakes in the area and he wanted to check to see what type of snake it was. (Later he said he didn't know if there was any truth in the story but it sounded good at the time.)

"S---!" said the policeman and took several steps backwards.

They wished us a good night, reminded Beerbottle about corners and drove off.

Later in this issue I have included Beerbottle's famous Key to Roadkill - although it has appeared in an early edition (1995: No. 5), it is somewhat appropriate here.

Editor



LIZARDS LEARN THE VALUE OF GOING TO SCHOOL

Bangkok Post 6 February, 2000

The Common Butterfly Lizard (or yae na, as they are known locally in Asia) was becoming much less common due to its popularity as a food item. In one region, the orange spotted lizards moved en masse onto the football field of the Baan Takongsamakkee School in Buri Ram during their flight from predation. Fortunately for the lizards, the students and faculty of the school adopted the lizards as mascots. The school's headmaster has declared the school a lizard preservation zone and the students feed the lizards, in addition to keeping away human and animal predators.

On February 16 of each year the school sponsors Yae Na Preservation Day, during which local villagers and provincial authorities are educated about the plight of the lizard. Several hundred visitors attend each year, and the school is constructing a lizard observation stand for better viewing of the animals. Luckily for all concerned, the lizards spend much of the day in underground burrows, so they do not disrupt the football schedule.

US funds frog-loss research

ABIX - Australasian Business
Intelligence: *The Canberra Times*
7 January, 2000

The United States National Science Foundation has promised \$A400,000 in funding to help examine the global fall in frog numbers. Geelong CSIRO principal research scientist Alex Hyatt

said on 6 January, 2000 that the grant represents three years work for two scientists, with a key focus being the viruses and fungi believed to be responsible for killing the frogs. Frog numbers have been declining for some 20 years, while in areas such as the Atherton Tablelands and Queensland, they have disappeared altogether.

New ES herp society

Ron Dencio

Just a message to let you know that in June 1999 I founded the Monaro Amphibian & Reptile Keepers (MARK) here in Canberra. The meetings have been well attended with numbers between 35 & 66 per meeting.

We meet on the second Wednesday of each month (except December). We have been meeting at the Canberra Institute of Technology until November 1999 but will be located at the Canberra Senior Citizens Centre in the suburb of Turner from January 2000.

WASAH members visiting Canberra are welcome at our meeting.

Request to all licensed Snakebusters

If you hold a Regulation 4 and/or 15 Licence you are required as a licence condition to submit a quarterly return listing all Reg. 4 and 15 animals handled. Failing to comply with this licence condition is an offence, so please ensure you submit the quarterly returns (4 & 15 animals included on the

one form) promptly when due. Additional forms are available from CALM's Wildlife Branch along with postage prepaid envelopes for licensees. Original return forms can be photocopied for future use.

If you capture an animal that requires rehabilitation or is locally exotic (not naturally occurring at the place of capture), please notify CALM Wildlife Branch within 24 hours so that someone there can make the decision as to its disposal.

Barkers' *Pythons of the World Vol. 1 Australia*

Information by Sandy and Rod

Just in case we're not the only ones chasing a copy, we have found out that *Pythons of the World Vol. 1 - Australia* by Barker and Barker is available at:

1. Pondside Herp Supply
<http://www.herpsupplies.com>
The price is US\$24.00 each...
If you're in Australia, then shipping will be as follows (one copy): Global Priority Mail (flat-rate large envelope): US\$10.00 - takes about 7 to 10 days... Surface Mail ('book rate'): US\$5.00 - takes 4 to 8 weeks...
2. www.LLLReptile.com/books.html US\$34.95 soft cover.
3. UK Reptiles - £24.65 (soft cover) plus postage.
4. The Bean Farm - US\$55.00 ea (hard cover) plus postage.
5. J G Natural History Books, London £37.50 plus pp.
6. An Australian arm of an American bookshop (can't remember name - think it is Lexicon books) - total rip off AU\$100 plus postage.

Our investigations showed that Pondside gave the best deal, whereas the business in Oz was the biggest rip-off.

*The following is from Peter Mirtschin,
Venom Supplies Pty Ltd., PO Box 547 Tanunda, South Australia 5352
and is probably appropriate for all Australian States and Territories*

In South Australia the *Advertiser* 28 December, 1999 states:

The Australian Bureau of Statistics reports that fewer people now care about the environment. In a survey across the nation, the proportion of people who care at least about one environmental issue, has dropped from 75% in 1992 to 69% in 1999 - a 6% drop in 7 years.

This is an alarming trend and proves that the educational efforts of our wildlife authorities is failing. The report warns that "our commitment to the environment is fickle".

When we have departments who won't listen to good advice, who ignore the opinions and advice of experts, who ignore the enormous effort of government Senate enquiries purely to run their own self-serving agendas, what more can you expect. The proof that their costly, ineffective programmes are an abject failure are there for all of us to see.

As most of you will be aware, the recent wildlife laws in SA were reviewed and I was on the committee that looked at them. I saw first hand how devious DEHAA were at feathering their own nest rather than looking at overhauling the system to allow wildlife to be used as ambassadors of conservation. They stacked their committee with self-interested traders who had vested interest in preserving the old colonial policies of prohibition. How can you expect people to be educated, when you prevent them from experiencing the very conduit of learning.

How can you expect farmers to make the change to sustainable use practices when you stifle them with a raft of legal requirements and costly environmental impact studies. If you want to make them change from grazing sheep and cattle then the alternative has to be easier, not harder. Water doesn't run up hill. Can you imagine what reaction you would get if every head of sheep and cattle had to be accounted for on a permit book? This is what it is like with wildlife. There is no incentive to change because the bureaucrats will drown you in red tape.

The River Murray is another example of mis-use of resources. Only 20% of the original water now reaches SA. It even stops flowing every now and then, yet governments everywhere want to use more and more of its water. Phillip White - a wine writer - said recently that we must start to look at varieties of grapes that don't need as much water. Of course he is right. Governments need to take up this challenge, do the research and promote its use among vignerons. We also need to look at native plants as alternatives to the existing water hungry plants that are unsuitable for this country. Why can't our departments of environments around Australia contribute to this research instead of flogging the wildlife smuggling issue for instance.

Recently, we have seen two examples of wildlife smuggling in the media. One in SA and the other in WA. Big deal. We saved a few reptiles. Recently it was reported that the combined efforts of wildlife departments throughout Australia and Australian customs saved 956 native animals over a 9 year period

from smugglers. Great. One cat kills, 800 native animals in one year. So for the

price of a bullet, we achieve far more than the millions spent on nabbing the smugglers. [It is estimated that there are between 4.5 to 18.4 million feral cats in Australia, culling an average of 800 native animals per year each].

The Australian wildlife authorities are one of the biggest problems we have today in trying to conserve wildlife. They are a law unto themselves. They are unaccountable for the expenditures they incur in terms of wildlife they save for a given expenditure. They pursue goals that lead us nowhere but cost the taxpayer billions. They get their pay rises whether they conserve wildlife and habitat or not.

A number of wildlife departments are now using wildlife to raise funds to fund themselves. In Queensland, you can collect most non-threatened animals if you pay them \$1,000 a head. SA is now setting the scene to move in that direction. They are using these natural resources as their own wildlife supermarket goods.

Why would you want to be interested in the environment? If you want to be involved, you almost need to be a lawyer to understand all the legal requirements the bureaucrats will heap on you. Many of the bureaucrats don't even fully understand their own laws as well. It's no wonder the figures are now showing a declining interest in the environment among the people.

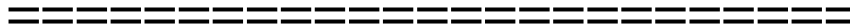
Isn't it time we all re-assessed the effectiveness of these departments?

**WASAH
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
7.30pm
Friday
17 March, 2000
at
Perth Zoo Ed Centre
Labouchere Road, South Perth**

Guest Speaker:

Dave Pearson

“Python Studies Update”



*Also
more members' slides*

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

Beerbottle's Key to Squashed Reptile Families

(applicable to 18-wheelers only)

1. Entrails protrude from all orifices; if close enough at time of impact makes *popping* sound (like small explosive); skin usually bloody and moist; all limbs broken and mangled.....FROG

Entrails hardly protrude; makes *squishing*, not popping sound; skin maybe bloody, but usually dry; limbs not mangled.....2
2. Separation (when fresh) from bitumen difficult, chisel usually required.....3

Separation (when fresh) from bitumen easy, chisel rarely required.....5
3. Hard to spot because of small, short body; bitumen sample always comes away with animal.....GECKO

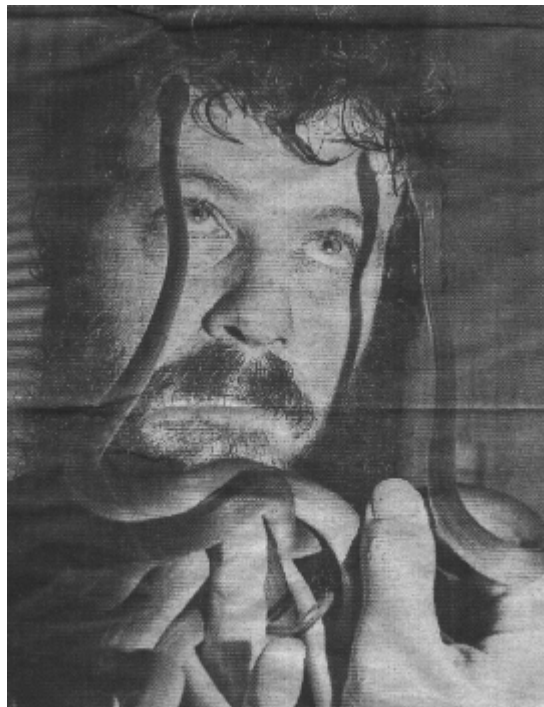
Not as hard to spot due to more elongate form; bitumen sample may or may not come away with animal.....4
4. Comes away from bitumen in several pieces (supa glue does not work); tail continues to wriggle all over road; entrails short; at moment of impact animal either in line or across; no noticeable odour present.....LEGLESS LIZARD

Comes away from bitumen in one piece; tail does not continue to wriggle after impact; entrails long; at moment of impact animal always in line (they don't see it coming); tremendously disgusting odour present, reminiscent of Brad's feet in thongs, at site of impact.....BLIND SNAKE
5. Although dead, looks almost alive (as if asleep) due to toughness of skin; entrails rarely obvious.....6

Although dead, looks dead; well and truly flattened, bludgeoned and entrails everywhere.....7
6. Hemipenes always absent; entrails rarely protrude from mouth; rarely make good mounts.....DRAGON

Hemipenes always present, even in females entrails protrude from cloacal region resembling hemipenes; entrails always protrude from mouth; usually make good mounts after a cut, tuck and compressed air hose up cloaca.....MONITOR
7. Fangs present (**Caution:** always do as I do. With large jigger upon dead animal's neck, take extremely long, long-nosed pliers and remove fangs. If head mangled avoid contact with bitumen in bare feet).....VENOMOUS SNAKE

Fangs absent (**Caution:** always do as I do. Jigger the bloody thing anyway. It is good practise, and dead beasts are the only ones I jigger).....SKINK
8. Yet to see one dead or alive; no data available.....PYTHON



Matt Yorston with baby olive pythons

\$100,000 snake theft in Top End

Northern Territory News Friday January 21, 2000

Thieves scaled new heights yesterday - stealing 75 snakes, 12 rare goannas and two lizards worth \$100,000.

Police believe the raids, on two breeders in the rural area, were the work of professionals. They suspect the haul may be sold interstate.

Howard Springs reptile breeder Matt Yorston discovered 85 reptiles were missing from his shed at 8.30am yesterday.

Lake Bennett breeder Trevor Sullivan reported two bluetongue lizards and two rare baby Spencer goannas stolen from his shed on Wednesday night.

Mr Yorston said his losses included three rare green pythons valued at more than \$50,000.

The heist also included eight baby black-headed pythons, 25 baby olive pythons, 10 rare Spencer goannas, 8 Children's pythons and 15 baby carpet pythons.

He said the stolen non-venomous snakes and goannas would be worth more than \$100,000 on the reptile market.

Mr Yorston said, "They have carefully and systematically gone through my whole collection."

Mr Yorston said he had raised the rare green pythons - bright green with yellow dots - from babies.

He knew of only 10 licensed breeders who owned green pythons in Australia including Darwin's well-known snake breeder Graeme Gow.

Mr Yorston said he had bred snakes for 12 years in the Territory and had lost his life's collection.

He said, "I am very angry these people have destroyed a life's work, it took me five years alone to breed the green pythons.

"Snakes are the passion of my life."

If anyone sights something suspiciously-like it may have come from this haul please contact Brian Bush

Inclusion Body Disease (IBD) in Pythons: a Reminder of the Importance of Quarantine

By Brian Bush, 9 Birch Place, Stoneville WA 6081

INTRODUCTION

Inclusion Body Disease (IBD) of boid snakes (pythons and boas) has been recognised since the mid 1970's (Schumacher *et al.*, 1994). Although other families of snakes have contracted IBD (Colubridae), it is primarily a python (subfamily Pythoninae) and boa (subfamily Boinae) specific disease. The first occurrence of IBD was only documented in Australia as recently as 1998 in a carpet python (*Morelia spilota variegata*) and a diamond python (*M. s. spilota*) from Queensland (Carlisle-Nowak *et al.*, 1998). Although the Carlisle-Nowak *et al.* paper is the first published record, they mention that unpublished cases of Australian pythons with clinical and histological findings consistent with IBD have been recorded in the New South Wales Taronga Park pathology register. There is also a belief in the herpetological community that IBD has already caused a significant number of deaths in a Victorian reptile collection. Possibly the first record for Western Australia is August 1999 when Dr George Scott of Deepwood Veterinary Clinic and Dr John Jardine from Vetpath Laboratory Services reported IBD Boid Virus in a python they were examining that had died from a mysterious illness.

Pythons are native to Australia and boas are exotic. Both subfamilies are kept in zoos and as pets by private individuals. There is no treatment currently available for IBD and it is invariably fatal in pythons. Although the disease can be diagnosed in sick pythons, it is usually only confirmed at autopsy. One of the principal researchers into IBD, Dr Elliott Jacobson, University of Florida, has isolated three retroviruses in snakes with IBD and expects the development of a serological test to determine exposure to these within about twelve months.

Although the route of transmission of this disease is unknown, infestation with snake mite (*Ophionyssus natricis*) is a common finding in many affected snakes and may play a role in viral transmission (Schumacher, 1996). Dave Barker, well-known North American boid breeder (pers. com., 25 Jan. 2000) states, "IBD really has proven to be almost no problem at all in collections with no mites, but it has decimated boid collections with bad mite problems."

Of considerable concern in Western Australia is three records from near Perth of snake mite infestations in wild caught carpet pythons (*Morelia spilota imbricata*). The first of these was a very dehydrated specimen from Roleystone in September 1994 and documented in the Western Australian Society of Amateur Herpetologists' WASAH Newsletter No. 2. This snake died shortly afterwards from what was believed at the time to be a

mite-related disease, however no autopsy was done to confirm if this was so. A second infested individual was collected at Martin in late 1995 and a third as recently as October 1999. The occurrence of snake mite in the wild in WA probably explains the sudden outbreaks of infestation in collections reported to me recently. Hoser (1995) refers to the establishment of mite in Melbourne, Victoria.

Both snake mite and diseases such as IBD highlight the need for quarantine procedures to be in place when animals are acquired and the need for close scrutiny of animals before their release. Given that many reptiles are temporarily held prior to relocation during Regulation 4 and 15 removals by volunteers with permanent collections of their own, it is possible that locally exotic pathogens can be introduced to the wild. The relatively recent identification of this disease and the little we know about it call for some caution at this point in time.

One of the aims of this article is to promote safeguards to

- Reduce the transmission of IBD between reptile collections and outbreaks of other diseases.
- Reduce the negative impact an outbreak could have on the new pet-keeping system to be implemented here shortly (Crown Law has completed the first draft of the legislative changes and returned them to CALM).
- Protect the wild population from symptomatic IBD.
- Warn other zoo facilities and keepers of any recorded outbreaks through some formal disease notification process.

It is also expected that further benefits of this article, through its wide readership, will be to

- Encourage minimum standards of competence in husbandry procedures in commercial facilities able to supply reptiles to the pet trade.
- Raise awareness in keepers of the importance of basic hygiene and quarantine procedures.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Quarantine should always be a fundamental protocol when introducing a new animal into a collection to reduce the risk of introducing disease or parasites. Animals brought in directly from the wild may pose a lesser risk but the acquisition of a captive animal, perhaps originating from a questionable source (eg a

confiscated or locally exotic wild caught animal) poses a real problem from a husbandry point of view. It may not be possible to totally eradicate symptomatic IBD from Western Australia, but hopefully it can be isolated from other collections and the wild population. Any collection/facility in this state with an outbreak of IBD must be quarantined until a successful treatment of this disease is found. Quarantine and safeguard procedures should include

1. No further reptiles being acquired until the collection/facility is deemed clear of IBD.
2. No reptiles being allowed to leave until it is deemed clear of IBD.
3. CALM personnel undertaking inspections of quarantined facilities being required to shower prior to visiting other collections on the same day.
4. Notification by CALM of known IBD outbreaks to all commercial keepers.

It may also be sensible for CALM to enter into a contractual arrangement with one or more private zoos for them to care for confiscated animals and as a component of this contract provide the funding for the necessary quarantine facility to be installed.

General information on mite control and quarantine:

Newly acquired reptiles should be isolated from the collection for no less than three months and kept on a white paper substrate. At the first opportunity a faecal sample should be examined for larger parasites, blood, tissue and excessive mucus - if any of these is found then identification of the parasite or the cause, by a pathologist if necessary, and the relevant treatment commenced.

Snake mites are the scourge of many keepers in the Eastern States and overseas. Their ability to both convey disease and kill reptiles in all but the most vigilant keepers' collections is widely acknowledged. Although small (a large female may be one-third the size of a pin head) they will be obvious on the white paper substrate as miniature black tick-like animals - the larger females have a whitish spot on the belly. A simple method of eradication of these on an infested reptile is the isolation of the host without water and its exposure to Sureguard Ministrips™ in minimum-ventilated (pegboard lid) glass terrariums for three cycles of twenty-four hours separated by forty-eight hours between each exposure. It is paramount for keepers handling infested reptiles to scrub their hands immediately afterwards so that the mites are not transported to uninfested reptiles.

If you already keep and you suddenly find you have a mite infestation, it is important that the transfer of live mite is not compounded by cleaning cages before killing the infestation within. This can be achieved by placing the pesticide strip within the respective cage for at least twenty-four hours before cleaning.

To reinforce quarantine as a minimum husbandry procedure after the implementation of the new keeping system in WA I recommend -

real problem from a husbandry point of view.

1. That commercial suppliers of reptiles experiencing infestations of snake mite (*Ophionyssus natricis*) and/or lizard mite (*Hirstiella trombidiformis*) be required as a condition of their licence to notify prospective clients of this.
2. In commercial suppliers experiencing high numbers of deaths, that CALM temporarily prohibits them from supplying reptiles and investigate, at the supplier's expense, to determine the cause of these deaths through postmortem examination and only lift the prohibition order once the pathogen and effective treatment have been identified.

On a positive note regarding IBD I include the following paragraph from Dave Barker (pers. com., 28 Jan. 2000),

"Python keepers have had a much easier time [than boa keepers] with IBD, basically because it appears to affect only the brain and death comes more quickly. The advantage is that the snake may show symptoms in weeks after exposure, (star-gazing, poor motor control, loss of appetite, coiling or constricting uncontrollably when they are stimulated) and so far as is known, pythons do not live longer than three months after infection. Python keepers are usually able to nip the problem in the bud very quickly."

Further, to reduce the potential for reptile disease epidemics to occur I recommend that CALM, rather than confiscating animals suspected of being illegal from known Western Australian keepers or residents, implement a "confiscation *in situ*" procedure by issuing an order to the keeper prohibiting the respective animals' movement until investigations and court cases are complete. This will benefit CALM by reducing their workload, greatly reduce the risk of transmitting disease between collections and reduce the stress on the animals in question.

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Membership Form

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

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

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

Given names.....

Postal address.....

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

Remittance enclosed (\$20/year to a maximum of 5 years).....

Constitution & rules will be forwarded to you upon joining

Date.....

Signature.....