



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

NEWSLETTER

1 June 2001
(25)

So Close!

The final draft of the *Wildlife (Reptiles and Amphibians) Regulations 2000* and peripheral legislation has not gone to parliament yet. We expect CALM to hand it to Dr Judy Edwards any day now. We are hoping it has an uneventful pass through parliament, although don't be surprised if there is a hiccup. The Greens may oppose it and as they hold the balance of power in the upper house, their opposition may carry more weight than it is entitled to. If the two major parties support it then the Greens' are a non-event, however there is a small possibility, if they are resolute enough, that a deal could be made with the ALP to shelve our legislation in return for the Greens' support of something else that the ALP considers more important.

Although WASAH has not been formally notified, all

reports coming out of CALM regarding the submissions it received during the public discussion period (23 Dec '00 – 28 Feb '01) suggest that very few of these opposed the keeping system. There were some concerns with the possibility of introducing disease by allowing the import of eastern states animals. There were also concerns with the high fees, especially on the upper categories and that these were somewhat elitist. Basically however, the submissions were overwhelmingly in favour. I think Dr Mawson was actually hoping for more opposite views, or at least more constructive criticism. The very fact that this was not to be is evidence of the good work done, especially by Gordon Wyre, CALM's Acting Conservator of Wildlife, and WASAH's Liaison Subcommittee.

To get an insight into the mind of at least one of the opponents of keeping, and an example of the arrogance

in which some want to enforce their flawed philosophy on the rest of humanity, go to this issue's Appendix I. You will also find WASAH's response there too – OK, it is a little subjective, but sometimes you have to fight fire with fire! It has me beat how anyone can believe the continuation of the current keeping prohibition or otherwise in WA can impact in anyway on the world's legal and illegal trade scene.

It is weird how government and non-government conservation organisations attract those with an animal rights philosophy. These people confuse conservation with the protection of the 'rights of individual animals' to die out of sight; during land clearing, on roads and as part of the natural process.

Animal rights proponents are more likely to be detrimental to conservation by reducing the credibility in the eyes of the public of

any environment-related GO and NGO that proffers, promotes or argues this philosophy as relevant.

Appendix II demonstrates just how superfluous individual animal protection is.

Other things of interest in this belated newsletter are copies of the leaflet, *Thinking About Buying a Reptile or Frog?* It is designed to be folded twice – a little challenge for everyone to undertake to get the folds just right. This includes good advice for anyone wishing to purchase a pet reptile or frog for the first time. The principle author of this great document is Liaison Subcommittee member Mike Lynch.

The recently recorded occurrence of the exotic fire ant in Queensland is reported in this issue too. Because these ants eat reptile eggs they can be especially devastating to the smaller oviparous species.

Brad is able to supply a range of herp-related books at the right price to everyone in WA. Lookout for the list included here later.

COME ON UP & SAVE WASAH!

Enclosed herein is a nomination form (photocopy original if needed) for WASAH executive positions in 2002.

The society needs new blood: new personalities, new ideas and new direction in the form of a new executive. To continue we need to replace all current office bearers.

Now that the new legislation is just around the corner (we all hope so), the current executive's enthusiasm has waned. They are burnt out! Work and personal commitments have made it too difficult for them to continue past the end of 2001.

To take on any of these positions you don't need training. In fact, it is probably best that you are not influenced by any of us. Heaven knows, we have our share of faults and lousy people skills are probably amongst them. All you need is a bit of imagination and a couple of friends to volunteer for the positions also - it does help if you can work with someone you know, rather than complete strangers.

If you don't put yourself forward for the job WASAH will fold altogether. If that happened we would have to refund all the memberships to those that have paid their fees in advance – and we don't like parting with anyone's money.

With the new keeping system there will need to be ongoing communications with CALM by a user end organisation. WASAH will be needed in the future to represent the best interests of keepers.

Don't be intimidated – get your nominations in immediately!
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WASAH MEETINGS ON HOLD!

Until we know whether the new legislation is law or not, we are going into recess and wont be having any more formal meetings until the end of this year or first thing in 2002. If nothing has happened by the end of November '01 then we have to get together to discuss future tactics to push it along and get it back on track.

We have to have a meeting anyway to introduce the new executive. If there is an overwhelming number of nominees we will need to have an election, but it is most likely that those putting their hands up will fill the positions un-opposed and we only have to do the changeover.

There is not much point having meetings beforehand as we will only be going over old ground, however there is a field trip planned in the near future instead, probably in late August or early September. A special newsletter will be sent out with the details closer to the time.



Winter

Leading venom researchers face axe

By Penny Fannin, Science Reporter, Age Newspaper

Australia's only antivenom research group is likely to close at the end of June, after the withdrawal of its funding.

More than 3500 Australians are admitted to hospital each year with potentially deadly venom-related complaints. For the past seven years the Australian Venom Research Unit (AVRU) has researched new treatments and developed antivenoms. But the unit's annual funding of \$100,000 from the State Government will not be renewed. The funding pays the salaries of the unit's director and deputy director.

The unit was established at Melbourne University in 1994 after Commonwealth Serum Laboratories was privatised and its 65-year interest in venom and antivenom research ended. CSL still produces all of Australia's antivenoms.

State Government advisers have told the unit's director, Ken Winkel, that the unit's funding should be the responsibility of the Federal Government.

A spokesman for the Victorian Department of Human Services said the unit had received \$770,000 in funding since 1994. "We recognise that the unit does important work, but we're not the only beneficiary and

we should not carry the financial burden."

"We have approached the Commonwealth and they have been receptive to our approaches and to the unit's plight, but they have not made a commitment as yet."

Dr Winkel said the unit's loss of funding compounded a global crisis in antivenom production and venom research that had arisen because governments and pharmaceutical companies did not consider it a priority. Australia has provided international leadership in antivenom research and is the only country to produce antivenoms for sea snakes, box jellyfish, blue-ringed octopus and stonefish.

The venom unit provides a 24-hour advisory service to medical practitioners on the management of bites and stings, investigates the impact of envenomations on public health and researches new antivenoms.

"This is not just about Australia, it has international implications," Dr Winkel said. "If this unit disappears, it will be a symbolic as well as a practical loss.

"People are dying every year in Australia and thousands more are dying overseas."

Last week a woman was in a critical condition after being stung by a jellyfish in Western Australia.

"This illustrates that the problems are not solved. We still have challenges every day. There's still so much to

learn about Australia's venomous creatures and managing the effects of their toxins."

It is suspected that the woman who was bitten last week was a victim of Irukandji syndrome (named after the jellyfish that causes it), a life-threatening condition that the venom unit has made recent breakthroughs in understanding. But "the potential of a future antivenom is threatened by the closure of the unit", Dr Winkel said.

Fighting for survival of the bitten

More by Penny Fannin

It was late afternoon on March 4 when 10-year-old Jackson Brown told his family he thought he had been stung by a jellyfish. Then his back started aching, he developed a fever and started to lose consciousness.

Jackson had been swimming off Rosemary Island in the Dampier Archipelago; about 20 kilometres off the Western Australian coast, and vaguely remembered something swimming in the water. He had in fact been bitten by a sea snake. A couple of hours later Jackson was recovering in a Karratha hospital after sea snake antivenom had been administered.

"Without antivenom he might have died because sea snake bites can be lethal,"

said Ken Winkel, director of the Australian Venom Research Unit.

Australia is the only country to make sea snake antivenom, although such snakes are found throughout the Indo-Pacific. "In fact, all our marine antivenoms are the only ones in the world," Dr Winkel said. "Stone fish antivenom is the most widely used internationally."

It was also the first marine antivenom developed in Australia - in 1959. All these antivenoms are produced by CSL, the former Commonwealth Serum Laboratories.

After CSL was privatised in 1994, its 65-year interest in venom and antivenom research ended and Professor Struan Sutherland, who was head of immunology at CSL, left to start up the AVRU based at the University of Melbourne's pharmacology department.

What is under threat is new antivenoms that not only save lives but also reduce or remove the long-term side-effects associated with snake and spider bites, jellyfish stings or wasp, bee and ant stings.

When Professor Sutherland left CSL he had been working on purified ant venom for treating people who have allergic reactions to these insects. The project was abandoned when he left.

"People have died since then from ant sting allergies and

maybe they did not need to die," Dr Winkel said.

To prevent allergic deaths purified venoms are used in small amounts to build up people's immunities to these insect bites, a process called immunotherapy. Despite the importance of immunotherapy research, the venom unit's limited funding means its staff are focusing on developing an antivenom for the tiny Irukandji jellyfish and treatments for necrotising arachnidism - the skin blistering and ulceration that some people develop after spider bites.

The Irukandji sting has not yet been fatal but can cause severe muscle pain as well as confusion and, in some cases, life threatening hypertension, heart failure and fluid in the lungs.

Two spiders - the white-tailed spider and the black widow or house spider - have been known to cause necrotising arachnidism, which, in some cases leads to intense scarring requiring skin grafting. Dr Winkel's team is investigating whether antivenoms can control this response to spider bite or if it is a result of a person's body chemistry.

"The Irukandji and necrotising arachnidism both represent national unsolved envenomation issues because there is no antivenom. And, in the case of the Irukandji, it presents more of a morbidity issue than box jellyfish stings for which there is antivenom.

"Necrotising arachnidism is a significant problem for doctors and patients. Defining who is affected where and how much it is costing is the subject of a collaborative project between the unit, the Research Centre for Injury Studies and the National Centre for Classification and Health," he said.

"One of the key questions, that takes us out of Australia, is what use our antivenoms are for snake envenomations in Asia," Dr Winkel said. "The number of antivenom producers around the world is reducing and if some antivenoms are useful in areas where they have not previously been used then that will hopefully help ease the shortage."

Australian antivenoms are already used in a number of countries - Saudi Arabia, Hawaii, Singapore, PNG and Mauritius - but there are subtle differences between the snakes of these areas.

William Chapman, director of clinical services at the Freeport International SOS Hospital in West Papua, recently spent a week in Melbourne, at the AVRU and CSL, trying to find out how he could save more lives.

Forty per cent of the snakebite patients he sees each year die. Most are men who have been bitten while foraging in the jungle.

Doctors routinely use snake venom detection kits to find out what species people have been bitten by. Dr Chapman brought some

samples with him but the test kit could not identify venom from the small-eyed snake, which is widespread in Papua New Guinea. "If the venom is not showing up then there's no point in giving antivenom because it's not going to do any good," he said. "In that regard there's a lot more research that could be done. It could be that some preventable deaths are due to this snake."

Dr Winkel said the venom unit was keen to help people like Dr Chapman improve the survival of snakebite victims.

"In the midst of a global crisis in antivenom production, Australia has the opportunity to continue its tradition of global leadership in venom and antivenom research," he said. "The loss of such leadership will be a loss for the world."

**The Herp Shop
is now on the
Internet**
@
www.herpsshop.com.au

Fire Ants (*Solenopsis invicta*)

By Peter Mirtschin

According to Rob Black (Queensland newspaper report), Fire Ants are found naturally in the Amazon in South America. Their

natural predators are armadillos and the phorid fly.

These aggressive little ants build a 40 cm high domed nest and have been found in South Eastern Queensland (27 nests so far). The DPI in QLD has already been on the job trying to eradicate them and determine the extent of the infestation. The QLD Premier has issued a plea to people to urgently report any ant colonies that appear suspicious.

According to my friends who have seen the extent of their damage in USA where they are now established, they have had a major impact on small reptiles and there have been predictions that these ants could pose a greater threat to native fauna than the cane toad or feral cats and foxes. This ant species also poses a major pest potential to primary industry. It causes billions of dollars in damage in the US each year. One person in QLD has already suffered an anaphylaxis due their bites and spent some time in a QLD hospital intensive care ward.

Given the potential threat this ant species could pose to wildlife, humans and commercial primary industries, both the Federal Government and Queensland Government should assure us that they are responding appropriately with sufficient funds because if the problem is not beaten now whilst it is small and manageable, it will become a major ongoing cost to the community if it becomes established.

The other thing that should be considered is the its mode of entry into Australia. Presumably a few individual ants could not establish colonies. If so, how did a nest or nests get into Australia?

It should be possible to track it back from the infestation epicentre from all the consignments that entered Australia and were sent to this area. Anything that contained soil such as imported plants from either the US or South America should be prime suspects. This avenue must be blocked in future.

Don't mess with the wrong ants!

By Justin O. Schmidt & Brian Bush

Ants can theoretically bite, but bites are typically trivial (yes there are army ants, bull ants etc that can bite and get one's attention). If an ant hurts you like a sting, it is a sting! Most ant venoms are protein based, but some (the fire ants and relatives) have alkaloidal venoms (piperidines, pyrrolidines, methylindolizidines, etc.) and some even have terpenes. Formic acid is not a true injectable venom in ants and is sprayed on adversaries. Formic acid is found in only one subfamily, the Formicinae.

The amount of venom in a fire ant is trivial compared to a bee or wasp. Honeybees have 150-250 ug

of venom; wasps have 50-150 ug (species dependent); and fire ants have perhaps 20 nl of liquid venom per individual. Also, the sting of ONE fire ant is trivial compared to that of ONE honeybee or common wasp. Granted, fire ant stings tend to come in multiples, and that enhances the effect. But again, so do tropical honeybee stings, which have resulted in several deaths in people, dogs and horses overseas.

Perhaps the most potent arthropod venom is that of the harvester ant (*Pogonomyrmex maricopa*) which has an LD50 (intravenous) in mice of about 120 ug/kg, which is twice as toxic as our common death adder venom. Other lethal venoms are those of the bull ants (*Myrmecia*) at 180 ug/kg, almost twice as toxic as the mulga snake. In comparison, honeybees have an LD50 of 2800 ug/kg and an assortment of rattlesnakes are between 56 ug in tiger rattlesnake (*Crotalus tigris*) and 12590 ug/kg in red pygmy rattlesnake (*Sistrurus milaris barbouri*). The African Boomslang (*Dispholidus typus*) is 71 ug/kg and the black mamba (*Dendroaspis polylepis*) and Aussie death adder (*Acanthopis antarcticus*) have 250 ug/kg. The northern taipan (*Oxyuranus scutellatus*) 13 ug, eastern brown (*Pseudonaja textilis*) 10 ug, tiger snake (*Notechis scutatus*) 40 ug and mulga snake (*Pseudechis australis*) 300 ug/kg. The Russell's viper, which kills thousands of people each year, is 133 ug/kg and likewise, saw-

scaled viper (*Echis carinatus* species-group) ranges from 640 ug (Egyptian *pyramidum*) to 3260 ug/kg (Iranian *multisquamatus*).

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Home's where the snake is

By Penny Fannin, Science Reporter

The fate of the hundreds of venomous snakes removed from back yards and businesses in Victoria each year is being studied by researchers at the Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research and Deakin University.

Nick Clemann, a scientist at the institute, said the study would look at whether the relocation of snakes, usually to bushland, was working. "There's been no evaluation of how successful relocation is for the people who call snake catchers and the impact on the snakes themselves - what's the fate of them," he said.

Relocating a snake might just move the problem elsewhere, he said.

But it could also affect other snake populations by introducing diseases and parasites or leave the reptiles vulnerable to being preyed on by raptors or run over as they tried to find their way home.

Dr Tara McGee, a Deakin University social scientist, will send questionnaires to

snake catchers, people who have had snakes near their homes and council authorities to study the relocation.

Mr Clemann will work with snake catchers to implant transmitters into relocated snakes and track them to discover what happens to them.

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Dragon Fungus Letter

I'm writing you to see if you have any information on a skin fungus that seems to be popping up here in the USA in central bearded dragon (*Pogona vitticeps*). I have a full medical history archived from the Pogona list of the parents if you are interested in reading it. Basically, no one has been successful in treating this fungus and it eventually kills the infected dragon. It is contagious and a juvenile dragon started to show signs of the fungus after its parents passed away and the owner, who is an experienced herper, took added precautions to insure this fungus wasn't spread to the babies. In other words, the infected mother passed this fungus to the embryo inside the egg. It always starts with a red sore on the dragon's belly. This is a snip from an email I just received from the owner.

"I treated the sore and it disappeared. After a shed the baby looked perfect. She started another shed that looked unusually rough so having suspicions, I started soaks and applications of

triple antibiotic ointment ...again. After yesterday's bath that skin 'dissolved', not shed, revealing a horrible fungus-like rash."

I've written everyone I know in the States and consulted with several very qualified herp vets to no avail. I'm hoping that you may know what this is and have some kind of a suggestion for a possible treatment. Please let me know if you'd like any additional information or better photos and I'll send everything I can. The owner has spent over \$1000 at the vets trying to save her dragons and has a complete medical history including blood panels, biopsies, and meds used to try to treat this.

Thanks,

Ronnie Buck
Australian Beardies
Herpetoculture
Orlando, FL
407-918-0444
www.australianbeardies.com

**REPTILES OF
THE SOLOMON
ISLANDS**

is now available on CD. This is a revised edition of my 1980 book of the same title. The contents of the CD are in html format and can be read by any web browser on either Mac or PC platforms. Navigation through the CD is easy with an interactive Contents page and interactive Photo Index as well as numerous links within the keys and species accounts. There are detailed accounts of all the reptiles currently known from the

Solomons - over 80 species. Almost all of these species are illustrated - many with colour variants - in 156 high quality photographs.

A sample page from the CD can be viewed at: <http://members.dingoblue.net.au/~mikemccoy/geckos/Geckos1.html>

I am selling this CD for AUD\$44 (incl. GST and postage). Payment can be made by bank draft, personal check (in Australian dollars only) or by credit card (Visa or MasterCard only, 3% surcharge applies).

For further details, contact me:
mikemccoy@dingoblue.net.au

Mike McCoy
PO Box 501
KURANDA 4872
Australia

Mite Treatment

Tania Carter

The vaccination that you refer to I believe is a drug called Ivermectin sold under a number of brand names. When injected into the snake it acts systemically and becomes toxic to any mites that bite it. I doubt the effect would last more than a couple of months and there are a number of disadvantages.

1. It is highly toxic and the dosages have to be precise

2. Mite will only be affected by the drug after biting the snake, therefore not eliminating the transfer of viral diseases.
3. It does not prevent mites continuing to live in your caged environment and substrate, so as soon as the drug starts to wear off the mites are waiting.

Leggy snake slithers out of obscurity

AAP -- A team of Israeli, American and Brazilian researchers has reached into a dusty drawer and pulled out a snake with legs.

The discovery could upset at least some theories about the evolution of snakes.

The fossil had been sitting in the museum drawer at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem since the death in the early 1980s of researcher George Haas, said Olivier Rieppel of the Field Museum in Chicago.

A team of researchers led by Rieppel rediscovered the fossil and gave it a scientific description and official name - *Haasiophis terrasanctus* - in a recent issue of the journal *Science*.

The snake's legs aren't much to brag about. They are too small in relation to the animal's body to have any

function in moving the snake, Rieppel said.

Modern pythons have a rudimentary hind limb, usually little more than a claw of cartilage tipped with bone that they use during mating and occasional fighting, and it is possible that *Haasiophis*' leg served a similar purpose, he said.

Found in the West Bank area of Israel, *Haasiophis* was a marine snake, Rieppel said. It appears to have been able to widen its jaw like boas and pythons, enabling it to eat prey larger than its body.

Haasiophis is the second limbed snake to come from the same site.

The first, *Pachyrhachis problematicus*, had been thought by some researchers to be at the base of the snake family tree, indicating a marine origin for snakes. Others speculate that snakes evolved from small land lizards.

Rieppel said the new find appears to be closely related to *Pachyrhachis*.

But his team's analysis also indicates that these two snakes were not primitive ancestors, but advanced snakes similar to modern boas and pythons. The new anatomical interpretation suggests that neither *Pachyrhachis* nor *Haasiophis* have anything to do with snake origins. - AP

HERPTALES



Whip Snake Packs a Punch

GD took a bite on the finger from a Reticulated Whip Snake (*Demansia psammophis reticulata*). Now anyone meeting GD would know he looks like Davey Crockett; a wild man and as tough as nails - the typical local swelling and mild discomfort usual after a bite from this species was all he expected.

However, a week or so later after the swelling had subsided, the finger suddenly swelled again with considerable pain. It just so happened that GD was at the hospital for treatment to his broken arm when he mentioned his finger to the Doc.

GD regained consciousness in the recovery ward after total anaesthetic and an operation to drain the puss and corruption from his finger.

All animal bites can result in infection. This is only the second such case involving an Australian elapid that I am aware of - the other resulted from a bite of the Red-bellied Black Snake (Pseudechis porphyriacus) three months later.
Ed.

Fresh & Frozen Reptile Food		
Live Mice		
Adults	\$	1.00
Juv	\$	0.80
Pinkies	\$	0.50
Frozen Mice		
Adult Pk of 12	\$	10.00
Juv Pk of 12	\$	8.00
Inoc each	\$	1.50
Live Rats		
Adults	\$	2.50
Juv	\$	1.50
Pinkies	\$	1.00
Frozen Rats		
Adults Pk of 12	\$	25.00
Juv Pk of 12	\$	15.00
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FX	08 9497 4922	
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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

BOOKS

Postage not included

Reptiles and Frogs of the Perth Region 2000 (Reprint) - \$15.00

By Brian Bush, Brad Maryan, Robert Browne-Cooper and David Robinson.

This best selling regional guide provides easy identification of Perth herpetofauna along with additional information - a must for all naturalists.

Care of Australian Reptiles in Captivity 1988 - \$17.00

By John Weigel

Considered the bible on reptile keeping in this country.

Attracting Frogs to your Garden 1996 - \$15.00

By Kevin Casey

Building a frog-friendly garden is becoming very popular and this book shows how.

Frogs as Pets - A Guide to Keeping the Australian Green Tree Frog 1996 - \$14.00

By Michael Tyler

A popular book for an equally popular pet.

Keeping Bearded Dragons 1999 - \$5.00

By Darren Green and Ty Larson

Everything you need to know about keeping these great Aussie lizards.

Keeping Shingleback Lizards 1999 - \$10.00

By Darren Green.

If you are thinking of keeping this popular skink then you will need this book. In WA these lizards are called Bobtails.

Keeping Long-Necked Turtles (Chelodina spp.) 2000 - \$10.00

By Darren Green.

A must for turtle fanciers.

Keeping Short-Necked Turtles (Emydura spp.) 2000 - \$20.00

By Darren Green.

A must for turtle keepers.

Understanding Reptile Parasites 1993 - \$17.00

By Roger Klingenberg.

This book will tell you what parasites inflict reptiles and how to treat them.

The following titles available soon:

Australian Goannas 1999

By Matt Vincent and Steve Wilson.

Pythons of Australia - Natural History 2000

By Geordie Torr

Available from Brad at 169 Egina Street, Mount Hawthorn 6016

Phone/Fax: 9444 6412 Email: Lerista@bigpond.com

WASAH YEAR 2000 PROFIT & LOSS

Balance at November 1999: \$1328.94

Credit		Debit	
Memberships:	1410.00	Newsletter Print/post:	398.98
Books:	920.00	<i>Herpetofauna J.</i> Post:	220.47
Donations:	45.00	<i>Herpetofauna J.</i> :	735.00
Hoop bag/jigger:	120.00	Books:	979.60
Pocket Hooks:	40.00	Zoo Venue Hire:	104.55
		Drinks, Tea, Sugar:	37.00
Total:	2535.10	Total:	2475.00

Balance at January 2001 -----\$1388.94

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

GENERAL MEETING

9 February 2001

MINUTES

1. **Convene Meeting** - 7.45 pm at Perth Zoo Education Centre.
2. **Attendance** - 20 members, 5 visitors. These are people who signed book – there were more than this present.
3. **Apologies** - Bruce George, Eric Kidd, Sue Chipchase, Sandy Griffin (arrived later) and David Pearson.
4. **Correspondence Tabled** - Letter received from PIJAC Executive Director, Ian Mustchin in response to WASAH correspondence (3rd January 2001), in relation to new regulations and how PIJAC members in WA welcome the opportunity to at last be able to trade legally in reptiles and frogs. Their members have been invited to embrace and adapt a *Voluntary Code of Practice for Commercial Trade* in these animals.
 - WASAH is currently preparing their own unique style of care sheets pertaining to those species on lower category. Depending on production costs, these will be coloured, laminated and sold to pet shops and all other interested parties.
5. **President's Report** - Herptile keeping regulations and how important it was to get submissions into CALM before closing date. Points raised in special newsletter included current executive workload and the need for WASAH to change direction. Nominations for WASAH steering committee (New Executive) will be included in next newsletter.
6. **Vice-President's Report** - NTR
7. **Treasurer's Report** - A combination of renewals and new members has steadied the ship. The recent reprint of *Reptiles & Frogs of the Perth Region* will help our cause further. Otherwise our financial situation has improved since last report.
8. **General Business** - More general discussion on new regulations. It was decided to wait until something was up and going and work on the 'lumps and bumps' as they appear. Emphasis on all groups working together - CALM, WASAH and PIJAC. Envisaged it would be a parliamentary formality once new regulations are finalised and tabled.
 - BM brought in sample of herp keeping books available from him at a very reasonable price.
 - Raffle offering mystery herp prize initiated for the *first time* to pay for venue hire.
9. **Editor's Report** - Same old, same old. Minimal support from members regarding herp related articles for newsletter despite continued requests. We will use anything; so put pen to paper and support your society.
10. **Call for further business** - NTR
11. **Speaker** - Brad Maryan presented a slide show of Queensland herp from his recent trip with Robert Browne Cooper.
12. **Meeting Adjourned** - 9.15 pm

This letter has been reproduced here with the permission of *The Greener Times*, which is the Conservation Council's newsletter. It appeared on Page 19 of the May 2001 issue. Following it is a copy of WASAH's letter in reply expected to be published in that newsletter in June.

Exploitation of Wildlife Condemned

I WAS sickened by the recent ABC Four Corners Program on the poaching, smuggling and trading in wildlife. The program revealed that the worldwide illegal trade in reptiles and amphibians is flourishing. It runs in association with a legal trade in reptiles and amphibians now permitted in many countries. The two seem to complement each other.

While attending the pet industry fairs, and under the guise of legal trade, contacts are made and illegal deals cemented. These pet industry fairs specialise in promoting amphibians as pets Snakes, turtles etc are kept in confined cages and are treated as novelty objects. There is no compassion shown, or consideration of their quality of life. The animals are demeaned and their worth diminished.

Countries like Cameroon are being virtually cleaned out of animals. The removal of species from many third world countries is not illegal unless the species is considered to be endangered. These creatures are shipped all over the world without any regard for their welfare. Around 90% die in transit.

The push is now on in Australia. The Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council in New South Wales has launched an expensive campaign to change the policy of the National Parks and Wildlife Service with regard to the commercial trade in wildlife. They are using the naive public to push their campaign. People are being encouraged to write to their local Member of Parliament demanding that regulations, which currently prevent them purchasing a reptile for a pet, be relaxed.

It is insatiable consumerism at work again. The pet industry is after profits, and they only need to convince people that they must have something different and the profits will come rolling in. Denying people something they begin to think they must have, their new toy, can become too difficult and eventually Government regulations are relaxed and more native species become commodities.

Closer to home, the Department of Conservation and Land Management has released a proposal to change the Regulations to allow for the keeping of reptiles and amphibians as domestic pets. CALM is responding to intense lobbying by the pet industry and amateur herpetologists who both want to trade and keep reptiles and amphibians without the current restrictions. CALM does not appear to have any philosophical objectives to utilising wildlife for profit.

The animal's quality of life is being ignored and the right to exist in their own natural environment without interference has not been recognised. If the Regulations are passed species would be taken from the wild. Licensed breeding would also occur.

If you also feel strongly about these proposed regulatory changes please let CALM and the Government know before it is too late.

Joan Payne
Mt Lawley

I refer to Joan Payne's letter in the May 2001 issue of *The Greener Times*.

I suppose emotions run wild when we see utter waste, especially when it involves animals and their illegal trade. The ABC Four Corners program referred to is a rehash of old events, much of which was put together, no doubt, to illicit the type of emotive response demonstrated by Joan.

Her assertion that legal trade complements illegal trade is only partly valid. There is always going to be unscrupulous types that will attempt to use any umbrella of legality available to cover their covert activities, but to present everyone, as she does, with an interest in keeping non-traditional pets as uncaring villains cannot be sustained.

It is sad that Joan's *animal rights* philosophy has clouded her objectivity, and this is at odds with the earth's life processes, of which humans are a part – what does she suggest we do about the 1.2 million reptiles and 3.8 million frogs conservatively estimated by Ehmann and Cogger (1985) to get killed yearly on Australian roads? I suppose if one is stuck in a city and can't see it, then it is not a problem. Keep in mind also that these figures probably far exceed those for deaths related to the combined effect of legal and illegal trade worldwide annually. However, roadkill is not as visually obvious, nor does it get the same emotive coverage in the media; it is too difficult to do much about in a road-dependant Australia anyway.

Maintaining reptiles and amphibians (herptiles) as pets in artificial environments is a common part of human society almost everywhere in the world but Western Australia. Why should those wishing to participate here be excluded just because we are WA residents? Why should we be excluded because others' philosophies oppose it? I don't try to enforce my philosophy in this regard on those not wishing to participate and all I ask is that others do the same. For the record, you can already purchase a herptile for a pet in New South Wales and every other Australian state and territory. The WA Society of Amateur Herpetologists Inc (WASAH) has been working with CALM for several years now formulating guidelines for the draft *Pet Reptile and Amphibian Keeping Regulations* and there are integral safeguards to make this legislation one of the best of its type in Australia. It is user pays and licence fees and other costs will generally reflect our intrinsic value of the organisms involved. The support for this is large, with WASAH's original government submission being accompanied by over four thousand signatures and, more recently, CALM received an overwhelming number of affirmative submissions in response to its call for these during the public discussion period (23 Dec '00 – 28 Feb 01).

An animal's quality of life will in most cases be enhanced when in the care of a keeper. It won't become one of the majority of its species excluded through competition only to die a slow lingering death through starvation, or closer at home, be killed by a shovel or shotgun competing with *Homo sapiens*!

Joan writes about consumerism, profits and exploitation – these are not dirty words as she implies, but required attributes of every successful organism existing today.

Everyone with a serious conservation ethic must get away from this antiquated emotional preoccupation with individual organisms and embrace the far more beneficial long-term protection of biodiversity.

Brian Bush
24 May 2001

EHMANN, H. & COGGER, H. 1985. Australia's endangered herpetofauna: a review of criteria and policies. *In: The Biology of Australasian Frogs and Reptiles*. Edited by Gordon Grigg, Richard Shine & Harry Ehmann. Surrey Beatty and Sons P/L in Assoc. Roy. Zool. Soc. NSW. Pp. 435-447.

Humane Society International News Release

100 Million Reptiles Killed A Year By Land Clearing Says Leading Scientist

“Conserving Australia’s reptiles - are we serious?”

Monday, 28th May 2001

Leading reptile scientist, Dr Hal Cogger from the Australian Museum, has calculated that over a billion reptiles were killed by vegetation clearing in Australia during the decade between 1983 and 1993. In Queensland, annual clearing rates between 1997 and 1999 averaged 425,000 ha. This would have resulted in the elimination - killing - and permanent removal of nearly 170 million reptiles in a recent 2-year period.

The situation has scarcely improved since the introduction of the *Queensland Vegetation Management Act* in September 2000. One area of grave concern is the Queensland Brigalow Belt, which provides a home to a high diversity of reptile species and has been hard hit by land clearing. Permits to clear a further 71,000 ha of brigalow were approved between September 2000 and February 2001. Dr Cogger predicts that this will result in the deaths of a further 14 million reptiles.

The mega-diversity and ecological significance of Australia’s reptile fauna is only recently being appreciated. Australia has 850 species of reptiles - about 12% of the world’s entire reptile fauna. Of these, a little over 89% are endemic, found nowhere else but Australia. In fact, 10% of the world’s reptiles are endemic to Australia. That Australia’s reptiles are a significant component of our fauna is clear – they outnumber birds (784 species, 43% endemic) and mammals 296 (species, 82% endemic) in both species richness and endemism.

“While it is painfully self-evident, it needs constantly to be pointed out that only

Australians can carry out the effective conservation of Australian endemic species and that the decline or extinction of those species in Australia means their decline or extinction globally” said Dr Cogger.

The Action Plan for Australian Reptiles (Cogger et al., 1993) found that about 25% of Australia's reptile species are in significant decline. A significant proportion of the remaining 75% are also facing declines of unknown extent in their numbers and ranges. Professor Cogger identifies habitat loss due to clearing as the most significant cause of the decline.

“That vegetation clearance causes a ‘loss of biodiversity’ is now widely known, but it is not always appreciated that this means animals are directly killed as the clearing takes place or they escape only to die shortly after due to a lack of other suitable habitat” said Nicola Beynon, HSI’s Wildlife and Habitats Program Manager.

Scientists have also calculated that 7.5 million birds died due to landclearing across Australia in 1999. HSI hopes that the recent listing of endangered brigalow vegetation on the *Federal Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* (EPBC) will give millions of reptiles and birds a second chance to be saved.

Any clearing activities that will significantly impact on the listed threatened Brigalow vegetation will now need the additional approval of the Federal Environment Minister. This includes clearing activities approved by the Queensland Government, if the approvals’

were given after July 16th 2000 when the EPBC Act came in to force. Brigalow (*Acacia harpophylla* dominant and co-dominant) was listed as an endangered ecological community on the EPBC Act on 4th April 2001 as a direct result of scientific nominations submitted by Humane Society International.

This means the conservation of this vegetation is now a Matter of National Environmental Significance and a 'trigger' for the Federal

Environment Minister's intervention. 804,264 hectares of this endangered community remains in scattered fragments across the Brigalow Belt, a mere fraction of the nearly 7.5 million hectares that existed prior to clearing.

Dr Hal Cogger presented his findings in "Conserving Australia's Reptiles - are we serious?" an article in the latest edition of *LifeLines*.

LifeLines is a publication by the Community Biodiversity Network, which is a project of Humane Society International. The article can be found at -

http://nccnsw.org.au/member/cbn/projects/LifeLines7.2/SoB_Rept.html

Dr Hal Cogger is the John Evans Fellow at the Australian Museum, Sydney and Conjoint Professor, Faculty of Science & Mathematics, University of Newcastle, NSW.