



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

NEWSLETTER

1 June 2004

(26)

WASA RELOADED

You beauty!!

With the WA pet reptile/amphibian keeping system in place WASAH is at last coming out of recess. There are no current financial members because we have not taken on new members, nor renewed old memberships while the new system was being established by CALM. However, we now have to change direction because WASAH was initiated in 1990 solely as a lobby group to get herp keeping allowed in WA, bringing this state into line with the rest of Australia. We have a meeting on Sunday 11th July 2004 in the Forster Hall, Abernathy Road (Cnr Keane Street), Cloverdale (details inside). On the agenda at this meeting is the formal retirement of the old executive and the setting up of a steering committee to direct the society into the new era as a herp-keeping club. Those that take on this job will need to rewrite the constitution so that reflects the new direction of WASAH. Please try to attend the meeting, especially if you are interested in being involved in the running of the new club.

Friday 20th September 2002 was a special day for Western Australian people with an interest in keeping reptiles and frogs. After nearly 13 years of spitting the dummy, lobbying politicians and negotiating with CALM, we finally got the legal foundation to allow a pet reptile keeping system to operate in this state with publication of the *Wildlife Conservation (Reptiles And Amphibians) Regulations 2002* in *WA Government Gazette No. 169*.

The regulations are great, although considering that this is a *pet keeping system* their administration appears overly bureaucratic. There are eighteen license conditions attached to the entry-level Category 2 and 3 Licenses! Licensees may find some of these an imposition in the short term, but we have been advised by CALM that during the system's introductory couple of years the department wants to keep tight control. If things go smoothly and not too many problems arise, then we may see a policy relaxation down the track.

The WASAH executive and subcommittee have already raised with CALM, in correspondence of 21st April '03 and at a meeting on 22nd May '03, many of the points we have concerns about, however these wont be addressed in the short term. Some of our requests were,

1. Revert to the original recommendation of annual [rather than quarterly] returns for Category 3 in the *2000 Public Comment Draft* and apply this to Category 2 as well. All other states have annual returns for reptile keepers.
2. Only prohibit commercial display of animals kept on pet licences, thereby allowing reptile and frog owners to show them at school and enter them in pet shows, etc. There should be a firm recommendation that the animals be transported in secure cages to and from the venue.
3. Remove the restriction on which room lower category species can be kept in [as per 13 (2) of the regulations]. We understand that CALM officers have restrictions on access to bedrooms and bathrooms, but many children will quite reasonably want to keep their Stimson's python, bearded dragon or gecko in their bedroom and should be allowed to do so.
4. Allow the easy arrangement of temporary care of animals in the event of the licensed keeper being absent for any reason, such as a written authority from the licensed keeper allowing a friend to look after the animal(s) in their absence. *Currently an unlicensed person can care for the pet at the licensee's address only.*
5. Split Category 5 (Expert) into two subcategories, separating the dangerously venomous species from the nonvenomous, or preferably, move the nonvenomous species to Category 4 (Advanced). Including the large monitors and olive python in Category 5 implies a similar risk associated with the dangerously venomous species when this is not the case. A distinction should be made between management complexities and outright risk.
6. Make a copy of the respective licence conditions (for ALL licence categories) available at the time of application. It would also be in the licensee's favour to "activate" the licence from the date of acquisition of their first animal. Due to some of the issues now facing prospective dealers and breeders, it may be months before some of those now licensed obtain their first animals.

7. Include considerably more latitude in defining a commercial breeder, i.e., increase the current “more than one clutch” to “more than five”. The fee of \$1,000.00 for a Farmers Licence would not be recouped with the sale of two clutches of reptiles in many of the lower category species.

Shortly after the establishment of the new system, there was available for purchase bobtail lizards sourced from a supplier interstate. This may have been the Eastern subspecies *aspera*? If so, it is not currently listed on Category 2. CALM confiscated the suspect lizards to confirm subspecies. To provide you, the purchaser, with some legal protection if you source a reptile or frog of suspect provenance, it might be prudent to obtain a letter from the supplier confirming that the species or subspecies is definitely as advertised and is listed on its respective category.

Remember, when you source your application to keep, ensure you have perused the conditions likely to be attached to your licence before applying. It will also be best if you hold off applying until you have confirmed a source for the animal(s) you want to keep. We expect a long delay in the availability of many of the listed species. We also expect the prices for individual animals to be much higher than Eastern states prices for comparable species. Because of the potential spread of Inclusion Body Disease (IBD), there is a CALM imposed prohibition on the import of pythons from interstate.

A great starting place on the internet and a tremendous resource for keepers and those considering keeping, along with Pet reptile & frog licence application forms in PDF format, is CALM’s homepage at,

http://www.naturebase.net/plants_animals/reptiles/index.html

You can also source application forms by contacting CALM by telephone on 9334 0333. If you have any questions regarding the reptile and amphibian keeping system then contact CALM’s Adrian Coleman on ‘phone 9334 0433, fax 9334 0278 or e-mail adrianc@calm.wa.gov.au When filling out application for Category 2 or 3 licences, there is no need to include references, however they are required for Category 4 and 5 licences.

Licence fees:

- . Category 2 Licence for 1 year \$20
 - 2 years \$35
 - 3 years \$40
- . Category 3 Licence for 1 year \$40
 - 2 years \$75
 - 3 years \$100
- . Category 4 Licence for 1 year \$100
 - 2 years \$180
 - 3 years \$240
- . Category 5 Licence for 1 year \$300
 - 2 years \$500
 - 3 years \$650

Good luck participating in the new Western Australian pet reptile and amphibian keeping system.

A TALE OF TEN TURTLES: One plus nine

By Tinsley Beck, 7 Willaring Drive,
Beckenham (9358 2383)

It was a sunny afternoon on 20th October 2000 I heard our two dogs barking near the back fence and went to investigate. They had a long-necked or oblong turtle under surveillance, believing that she was not one of our regular inhabitants.

I carried the turtle to the front of the house, where the dogs do not have access, and released her at the foot of the garden, about forty metres from the Canning River at Beckenham, I left her to the watchful care of Grandchildren

The turtle immediately went to the shelter of a shrub, dug a hole in the garden sand (the natural ground below is heavy loam over clay), laid nine eggs, filled in the hole and went on her way.

My wife and I decided that we should mark the spot with an upturned wire basket, to monitor the results and protect the eggs from stray dogs and foxes that might smell a meal. We were not able to see the exact spot, so I scratched around to find an egg. Having found one about 30 mm below the surface. I decided to keep digging to check the number of eggs, although the children had watched, we were not certain of the exact number laid. They were pretty well one below the other in a very narrow hole. I felt a bit guilty for disturbing them, but at least we knew there were nine eggs and exactly where they were, having replaced them as near as possible in their original position

We made a few enquiries and concluded that the incubation period could be anything from two or three months to about ten months. We checked the nest frequently during the summer and autumn. The shrubbery covered the site and I guess we became less optimistic - nothing was likely to happen now until spring, the eggs had probably rotted anyway.

On Saturday 23 June 2001, a young relative came to stay for a few days. I suggested we go for a walk outside before dark and check the river, ducks, garden and so on. We were going past the nest so I thought we should check it.

On the surface there seemed to be something different - a small, dark oval-shaped blob. I looked closely and thought I saw the tiniest movement - perhaps a foot? Yes, definitely! A bit of excitement: quick, get a dish and some rainwater it was closer than the river water. Here's another one. I think it moved. More digging!

There were broken eggshells, all nine babies being completely out of the eggs. The last one was at the full depth where the egg had been, but a bit to the side. During the eight months, roots had grown into the area and I doubt that this ninth baby could have dug its way out to the top. Nevertheless, I did wonder if we were interfering (again!) with the natural process and whether the babies were in fact ready to deal with the big wide world. Apparently they can remain underground for some time before they needed to eat and swim.

As each baby was found, curled up tightly under its shell, we thought it might be dead, but then tiny movements were seen. As soon as we had the

ninth one, we went to the river and replaced the rainwater with river water. Within about five minutes all nine were hunting into life, walking and swimming in the shallow water within the dish.

Our son wanted some video footage. Various grandchildren and neighbours had to witness the results. The children at kindy would want to see some babies too. So they lived in the laundry trough for a couple of days with a bit of grass, mud, insects and an upturned earthenware saucer onto which they could crawl when they wanted a rest from swimming.

The carapace length and breadth ranged from about 30 x 22 to 32 x 23 mm. Each foot had four claws. When they tuck their neck into the groove in front of the shell, some point the head to the left and others to the right. I think an individual turtle might vary also, going left or right at different times, though I forgot to make certain of that before they were released.

On 26th June, with camera rolling, ducks looking on, but not close enough to do immediate damage, the little fellows swam enthusiastically away into the deeper water of the Canning River.



OLDEN DAYS' SNAKE-CHARMERS AND THEIR ART OF PLAYING 'BAAN'

By Somnath Sircar

We in India are familiar with the snake-charmer and some of the amazing tricks he performs with snakes to enthrall the audience. I have personally seen a snake-charmer with huge dangling locks perform incredible tricks in the front -

yard of my ancestral house but what I am about to discuss is something I have never had the opportunity to see but heard from authentic sources and that includes my father: a down to earth and pragmatic human being and a brilliant student of science.

Snake-charmers of the olden days used to entertain the audience after the snake show was over by playing "baan" meaning missiles. In Bengali it is known as "Baan Khala". Now what were these missiles? People who have had the opportunity to see such shows tell me that the head snake-charmer used to play the flute and his assistants (usually 3 or 4) then started attacking each other either verbally by uttering magic formulas (mantras), or through any tiny object which could be held by two fingers and blown away with one puff from the palm. These usually included food grains. The utterances and grains were the "baans" and they were aimed at each other causing the victim either to blackout temporarily or fall down with a sudden thud and remain dizzy for a while.

My father in his childhood was watching one such display with my two uncles and challenged the authenticity of the show saying that the entire thing was rigged, as the men falling down were the snake-charmer's own men. This allegation infuriated the snake-charmer and he dared any outsider to face him and promised that he would flatten the challenger in a matter of seconds. It so happened that my father and his friends knew of one man in the neighbourhood who was supposed to be well versed in the art of baan playing - a simple washerman named Bhanu.

So Bhanu was cajoled into having a joust with the snake-charmer and both had a good look at each other before locking horns. Both kept their eyes firmly fixed on each other with the snake-charmer playing his flute and the washerman uttering to himself - Then there followed a sudden frenzied movement by the snake-charmer with his flute pointing towards Bhanu and the next moment Bhanu was lying flat on his back, unconscious and frothing from the mouth. My father and his friends had a trying time reviving him and when they succeeded in doing so, Bhanu asked one of them to fetch him an unhusked grain of rice and it was hurriedly brought to him. No sooner did he get hold of it, he got up and held the grain closed in his right palm and whispered a few "mantras", blew into his closed palm and then all of a sudden threw the grain at the snake-charmer who still had the flute in his mouth possibly as a means of defence. And lo and behold - the narrow playing end of that very flute got stuck in his mouth. In spite of his best efforts the charmer could not get it out. He gestured through his hands towards Bhanu to release his "grip" and that he was "surrendering". Bhanu again uttered to himself and the next moment the flute was out of the charmer's mouth, which was bleeding profusely! An incredible phenomenon indeed if it was actually what it was portrayed by the combatants to be.

My father till today remains sceptical about the entire thing saying that the grain-throwing could be one of the many codes for those who play this particular "game" to act in certain manners and in this case pretend that the flute is stuck in the mouth. Call it whatever you may but the snake-charmers of

the olden days sure did have their "charms" and it would have been a real spectacle to watch such a performance in the modern day world. And yes, my father could not explain to me where the blood from the snake-charmer's mouth came from. And it was real blood he says!

I know of only one baan playing incident in the recent past and heard it from a neighbourhood friend called Shekhar. He tells me that about 5 years back a snake-charmer was performing with his snakes in one of the corners of our neighbourhood and quite a sizeable crowd gathered but one of his cobras kept slipping into the soil for no apparent reason- After watching this happen, the charmer threw a warning to the crowd saying that whoever was causing this should refrain from doing so any further or else face the consequences, But his cobra continued to slip and losing his composure the charmer just grabbed a handful of dust from the soil and threw it into the air and suddenly there was a commotion in the crowd - one among them was lying unconscious on the ground frothing from the mouth,

Truth or fiction I do not know but it does have its effects on the layman and in any case such dangerous art forms should die a natural death with the advent of civilization.



Times of India
(New Delhi) May 7, 2002

Bangalore: It could be the worst nightmare of the season. They have been appearing suddenly and silently in the dark, and disappear instantly leaving behind fear, awe and sometimes death. The city, with the present most conducive climate to spot

snakes in the open, has reported 36 bites in the past two months. Twenty-four of them are reported to be that of Russell's vipers. While two humans and 11 pet dogs succumbed to deadly bites, four others have got their limbs amputated. Even as snake distress calls during the night and awareness programmes on snakes are on the rise, doctors attending to Russell's viper bite cases mostly attribute the deaths and amputation to sheer ignorance and lack of improper first aid. Snake rescuer and herpetologist Mohammed Anees says: "Russell's vipers are usually mistaken for pythons. Pythons, which are often illegally reared as pets, are found nowhere in the city." A 30-year-old watchman at a farm in Awarahalli, who was bitten by a Russell's viper, was first taken to a witch doctor nearby before he breathed his last at St John's Hospital on Thursday, another fatal bite to a 40-year-old man was never attended to due to the misconception of Russell's viper being a non-venomous python. The cases of amputation have also pointed fingers at the Russell's viper being mistaken for a python. Anees explains: "All the four species of venomous snakes (except cobra) existing in the city are nocturnal varieties.

Unlike a python, Russell's vipers have diamond-shaped oval patches with longest solenoglyphous fangs (like a hypodermic syringe) which is three-fourths an inch. In fact, this is a snake with most intense delivery rate of heterotoxic venom. "Even as the cobra is referred to as the infamous snake for its venomous bites, the Russell's viper bites are known to be deadlier.

"The defence mechanism of a Russell's viper is relatively

sharper. Sometimes without the hissing noise, it can strike just by sensing the body warmth," Anees notes. While the size, quality of the venom and the degree of resistance of the victim matter during a bite, experts suggest that a victim must first ensure the availability of anti-venom before rushing to any hospital. There are anti-snake venom serum (ASVS) available for all the four venomous species in the city -- Cobra, Krait, Russell's viper and saw-scaled viper. "All the vacant spaces in the city are getting encroached upon and the number of snake bite cases are bound to shoot up, if proper care is not taken," Anees, who volunteers more than 300 calls a month during this season, points out.



Slithering danger in Iraq - Local expert says soldiers will see creepy, deadly critters

By Corydon Ireland, *Democrat and Chronicle*. Will Yurman:

Local wildlife expert Tom Hudak holds a leopard gecko, a harmless lizard native to Iraq. But Hudak warns that troops are likely to encounter saw-scaled vipers, death stalker scorpions and other deadly creatures in Iraq.

Soldiers could face more dangers than bombs and bullets from the Republican Guard.

Saw-scaled vipers, those small, buff-coloured snakes, found throughout Asia and the Middle East, are ill tempered and aggressive and strike with the most toxic venom in the world.

Or death stalker scorpions. Their near-fatal sting, said Rochester wildlife expert Tom Hudak, "could ruin your whole

day."

Hudak, a 25-year student of exotic animals, will be a guest on CBS's Late Show with David Letterman. He will take along a 100-pound alligator snapping turtle -- the same one upstaged on the show last year by guest George Clooney.

"The hazards that our troops are facing over there come at them from a wide range of directions," including land mines, he said. "But if they are inching along the ground, they have to be aware of living hazards. You have to keep a portion of your mind alert for animals that can put you out of commission or even kill you."

Hudak will also take a harmless leopard gecko found in the Middle East, a deadly Egyptian cobra and a centipede so large that it eats mice.

During the Vietnam War, he said, the same kinds of natural hazards were an issue with soldiers. The jungles there were full of king cobras, scorpions and the venomous krait, an amphibious snake.

In the deserts of Central Asia and the Middle East, running into dangerous critters is even more likely. "You tend to deal with animals that hunker down, like you do," said Hudak, 43. "In a combat situation, this is just one more thing to think about."

One example: death stalker scorpions, common in Iraq, burrow into dry desert ground to hunt for moisture. Their sting can deliver extreme pain, paralysis, and convulsions - even death.

And the saw-scaled vipers of Iraq and Afghanistan live in rocky outcroppings or sandy soil. Their potent venom breaks down the vascular system and

causes bleeding from the eyes, ears and nose. "You die slow," said Hudak, a biologist and world traveller. "But you wished you died fast."

He runs a wildlife education business called Scales & Tails www.scalesandtails.com out of his Merchants Road-area home. There, Hudak can impress visitors with a glimpse of the other desert warfare: cobras that "hood up" or scorpions poised with stingers curled high.

He and his wife, Kitty, also live with what must be Rochester's most fantastical menagerie: 124 animals, representing 74 species. And that doesn't include four cats, two dogs, an armadillo and a prairie dog.

Military training on hazardous critters is "not extensive" and relies on a few dry manuals, said Hudak, who is planning a desert warfare training video. This month, in Rochester, he is training police and animal control officers on how to handle dangerous reptiles.

"You can't make people experts," he said. "But you can give them a heads-up."

Army reservist Tim Mueller of Irondequoit, who spent nine months in Afghanistan last year with the Webster-based 401st Civil Affairs Battalion, said scorpions were abundant and aggressive, though no one he knew ever got stung. Mueller's team regularly drove out into the desert or hiked up to mountain villages.

Snakes, spiders and other critters were not much in evidence, said Mueller. But unseen snakes burrowed into the sandbags lining the windows of his Kabul compound, leaving shed skins behind.

Experienced soldiers know to watch for insects and other hazardous wildlife, said Mueller, who has tented in the desert at the Army's National Training Centre at Fort Irwin, California.

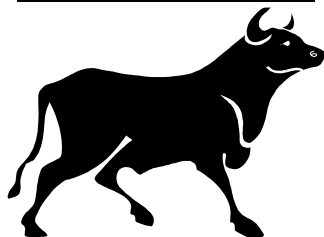
"Normal (combat) skills," he said, "include shaking out your sleeping bag" and checking your boots before putting them on.

The Defence Intelligence Agency, an arm of the Defence Department, prepared medical personnel, at least. Its "medical capabilities study" on Iraq included the litany of dangerous snakes, centipedes, scorpions and spiders found in that country, along with common diseases and the hazards of stored biological weapons.

Iraq and Afghanistan are also full of creatures that could startle – but not harm troops, said Hudak.

"Soldiers that are fearless in battle might not escape a fear of snakes."

HERPTALES



SNAKES ALIVE!

By Bruce Budrey, Kambalda WA

One morning in mid November I received a phone call of a large snake taking a snooze inside A bird aviary in the main street of Kalgoorlie, I knew I had a half hour drive ahead and

thought The snake would probably be gone when I got there but decided to go anyway. After arriving at the address I found a lady of about 175 years of age with reflexes like an old carpet snake in the middle of winter. Once I heard about the twenty minutes of terror on how the snake had chased the dog around I convinced the old lady to shuffle out the back and show me were this mighty beast was last seen. After about fifteen minutes of searching around the car bodies and in the long spear grass it was suggested I take a look in the shed, she was convinced it had gone in there. Well open the door and let me at him I said, so when the door flung open I flew in, only to find an old motorbike, a car and about eight coffins of all shapes and sizes. With the hairs standing up on the back of my neck I continued the search but could not find the reptile any were and there was no way I was looking under the lid of any pine box that was not my own. With this in mind I convinced the old lady the snake was gone and so was I. Was it a bad omen? I don't know but it will be a while before I forget about that little adventure.

An Excuse to Chat to Nurses (I reckon!)

Who is the bloke that was recently bitten by a neonatal king brown? Not only did it make him crook, like drinking too many of those other king' browns', causing him to lay on the lounge chundering! But it gave him such a bad hangover that we couldn't get him away from the hospital! At least that's what he reckons! I reckon it was that young nurse

looking after him in there – he was depressed each time he had to leave her, so just had to go back again.

Ed here: This case is a great reminder of the punch juvenile individuals of the larger species have – keep in mind that the quickest documented deaths from snakebite involved baby snakes! In 1982 a twenty-seven year-old female died within thirty minutes of receiving a bite on the foot from an eighteen centimetre long *Pseudonaja* species.

Letter to Editor

From: Tony Troughton-Smith
Email: tts@iinet.net.au

I'm the bloke who accosted you outside the Mundaring Hotel. As I mentioned, I'd been intending to get in touch with you but wasn't sure how, and hadn't attempted looking on the 'net. Armed with your email address I then realised I wasn't sure of your name ("Bush" was certainly a distinct probability, but what about your first?) so I Googled "snakes Western Australia" and your home page was top of the list – so I could've found you easily if I'd tried. Never mind, now's as good a time as ever. .

I have occasionally recounted the (TRUE!) story I'm about to tell you at parties, or when trying to impress others with fishy anecdotes (quite possibly just after the "I played harmonica for John Lennon" yarn – also true, up to a point!). Thus kept to mind, and since the advent of the internet and its opportunity to conduct research from the comfort of home, two or three years or so ago I eventually decided to look up records of the largest known snake species. I was

really surprised to learn that the largest on record are either reticulated pythons at about 10 metres or possible South American anacondas, reputed to reach 11 metres. If I'm right about that, someone's in for a surprise one day. Let me explain.

In April 1973, at 21, I took up a job helping their owner to run three trade stores and a coffee plantation in Wau, Papua New Guinea. Wau is about 3 hours' drive west of Lae, past Bulolo, and is near the end of the road – or it was back then. In those days, too, the road was dirt apart for the last few miles into Lae itself. I haven't been back since (much as I'd like to go) so I don't know what it's like now.

Wau lies at about 1,300 metres altitude in a valley surrounded by mountains going up to about 3,000 metres. Driving to Lae requires climbing up to a pass (I forget its name) at about 3,000 metres before descending into the Markham Valley. This valley is broad and pretty flat, cradling the big, fast-flowing Markham River running down to the sea. In those days the road passed through real tropical rainforest – jungle – for about 30 Kms of this valley, before crossing north over the river via a concrete bridge on the approach to Lae.

One of my tasks as part of the job was to be driving down to Lae every week or so to buy supplies. To prepare me for this, soon after arriving I went as a passenger with our local truck driver in our 3-ton truck. He always left Wau at about 3:00am, giving time for a quick bite of breakfast before starting work driving to the suppliers and loading up at about 7:00am. Despite the early hour, I was wide awake as this was the first time I'd been down the Lae road, and it was

extremely exciting for a 21 year-old just to be there – I often felt I'd accidentally landed in a movie, and wondered where the cameras were! The name of the town more or less summed up my experiences (Wau, that is. We won't mention Lae!)

The trip was pretty uneventful at first. My command of Pidgin was extremely limited so early on, but Dubai the driver was very patient with me and we managed to understand one another, and were getting along really well. We were probably not too different in age, and this was the beginning of a good friendship – one of many I still recall with great affection. Coming down the very last slight descent to what would have been near river level (although you didn't glimpse the river for another ten or more kilometres due to the dense forest), the road was wide enough for two trucks to pass easily with room to spare – possibly three truck widths wide.

We rounded a curve to see what I thought at first was a log across the road. It was about 30cm in diameter, and stretched right across the width of the roadway, with its ends buried in the jungle at each side. Dubai began to brake, uttering some expletive or other. It was then that I noticed the log was moving, pretty swiftly, from left to right, and I realised with absolute horror that it wasn't a tree trunk, but a snake! I'm not really very proud of my initial reaction – from surprise and fear I urged Dubai to keep going and drive over it. He refused – but not really out of higher principles: he said if we did that it would crush the truck, with us in it. He could well have been right! All this time the snake was still travelling. Dubai pulled the

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

truck to a halt, and we sat and waited.

After sitting and watching for a few seconds, the body tapered off and the tip of the tail emerged from the undergrowth to the left, whisking speedily across the roadway to vanish into the jungle on our right. I don't know how wide the road was exactly, but I'd estimate 9 or 10 metres. The snake must have been visible for at least five seconds (from the time we rounded the bend and first saw it), and all that time it was really moving: when its tail passed by it was going at least as fast as a brisk walk – more like a good jog. I am sure the creature must have been at least 20 metres long, and possibly much longer. This didn't mean much to me at the time – I just thought it was a bloody big snake! Only recently, learning the size of the currently largest-known animals, did I realise that I had seen something that is still unknown to science.

I think a keen herpetologist should mount an expedition into the Markham valley and possibly get his name applied to the longest reptile in the

world. The one I saw may be still there – and it could have grown some in the ensuing 30 years! I'd love to go along, but I'm really not sure I'd want to meet the creature face to face in the jungle.

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Young Herp's Wish

The NSW NPWS has been approached to assist the Starlight Children's Foundation Australia to grant a dying child's wish to have an Australian Green Python (*Chondropython viridis*) as a pet.

Four year old Harry from western Sydney has a brain tumour and is not expected to live longer than six months. His favourite children's story is about a juvenile Green Python that wants to stay yellow all its life, but it finally has to accept the inevitability of turning green. The little boy wants a real live yellow juvenile or subadult green python as a pet for his last few months.

The NPWS explained to the Foundation and the boy's mother that the possibility of getting a young Green Python would not be great, and that Harry might have to settle for another more common species with yellow and green colouring such as a carpet/diamond. The cost was also not an issue. The dying boy's wish has not altered and they want to pursue all possibilities to make that wish come true.

As the Service has access to licensing data and several web discussion groups, it has agreed to help try and source a reptile.

Also, if one can be found, it has agreed to grant a special licence to the boy's mother to allow the acquisition of an animal. It is expected that some arrangement will be made with an experienced python keeper to mentor and assist in the care of any python that might be acquired.

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Antivenom for animals but people must wait

By Bryan Littlely

CATS and dogs will benefit this year from the most effective snakebite antivenom available, while humans will have to make do with an increasingly outdated substitute. Venom Supplies, in Tanunda, has developed a new antivenom, which is able to counteract the effects of poisoning from any one of Australia's deadly snakes. However, it is only available for veterinary use.

Venom Supplies managing director Peter Mirtschin said the antivenom had been seven years in the making, and the development process had also uncovered the possibility of making universal antivenom.

"We're proposing to make a totally universal antivenom by using the same technology we've experimentally discovered," Mr Mirtschin said yesterday.

"It has taken us seven years to develop this new brownsnake antivenom. While we were doing that, we found we could develop an antivenom for a whole range of snakes by using just a few venoms."

But the new antivenom must pass more animal testing before it is available for use on people.

Mr Mirtschin said there were about forty antivenom producers throughout the world, but up to half of them were likely to close because of crippling costs.

“We’re faced with a situation that in two to three years’ time there will be a shortage of antivenom world-wide,” he said. “We will be able to achieve better economies of scale by developing a universal antivenom.”

The new brownsnake antivenom will be available to veterinary surgeries in time for this year’s snakebite season, which is likely to start within a month.

The antivenom has been produced by injecting snake venom into chickens, which produce antibodies to fight the poisons.

The antibodies are transferred from the blood of the chicken to the egg yolk, from where it is harvested and purified in a laboratory.

Sheep are also injected with venom and they too produce antibodies, which are harvested by bleeding the sheep. The antibodies from the two animals are blended to create the new antivenom.

Venom Supplies has attracted business interest from abroad and hopes to secure about \$500,000 to finalise its research and development for the universal antivenom. However, Mr Mirtschin said interference by government agencies had hampered efforts to improve antivenoms.

“We’re out having to fight off government departments who

either want to put their hand in our pockets or not co-operate by allowing us to keep the snakes we need,” he said. “The system of having exotic snakes in Australia is very complicated. If we’re going to import these things, we agree we need security and we need quarantine - we are already being responsible.”



Cane toads approach Darwin

By Rod McGuirk

DARWIN residents have been put on alert to stop cane toads breeding, with the first toxic invaders expected to reach the northern capital this wet season. While the main invasion force is probably two years away, Frog Watch coordinator Graeme Sawyer fears hitchhikers from Kakadu National Park and infested towns along the Stuart Highway could breed in Darwin soon.

“What we’ll get this wet season is more and more hitchhikers and that’s what we’re trying to prevent,” Mr Sawyer said.

“What’s happened in a couple of other places is that you get a number of toads introduced by hitchhiking and as soon as a male and female breed, you get 20,000 eggs.

“So you get an explosion of cane toads way ahead of the front of the invasion.”

Householders are asked to listen for the whirring motor-like mating call of the toad in backyards and to check ponds for their distinctive strings of eggs.

A 30cm high fence around ponds will enable most native

frogs to breed but stop cane toads, which are poor jumpers. Breeding-age toads are big, tend not to hide and are easy to catch. The recommended humane way of killing toads is to place them in a freezer.

Hitchhikers had created large toad populations in places such as Gapuwijak in Arnhem Land, in the Northern Territory’s east, while the natural spread was still a wet season away. The spread slows during the tropical dry season and accelerates during the wet, which officially begins next month. Mr Sawyer said there was no chance of preventing cane toads becoming established in Darwin.

“What we’re trying to do is minimise the prospect of them getting into Darwin in big numbers as long as possible,” he said.

The following titles are just a couple of the many available from Brad Maryan. Contact him on 9446 412 or by e-mail at -

Lerista1@bigpond.com

Care of Australian Reptiles in Captivity

John Weigel

Available for \$17 - the bible on herp keeping in this country and a must for any personal library.

Attracting Frogs to your Garden

K. Casey

Available for \$15 - a must for people wanting to create an amphibian-friendly garden.

**WASAH
GENERAL MEETING
Sunday 11th July
3.00pm
Forster Hall
Corner Abernathy Rd & Keane St
CLOVERDALE
(See map on Page 12)**

SPECIAL
**L e t ' s g e t W A S A H
b a c k o n t r a c k !**

Or pull the pin altogether

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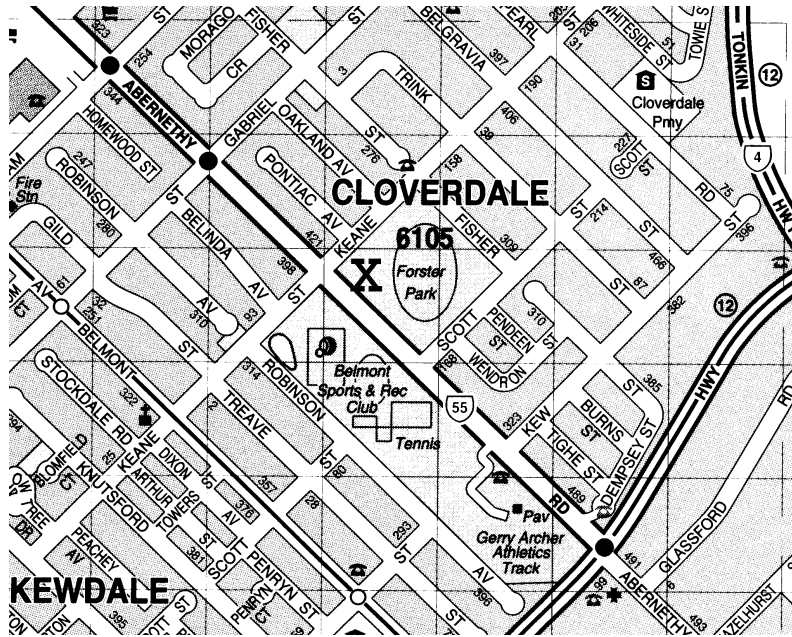
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*Don't miss -
Copperhead
Cannibals Downunder
on Foxtel (NGTV's
Snake Wrangler series)
on 1st July 2004.*

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.



Reproduced from UBD's Map 290

“X” marks the hall -
corner of Abernethy Road and Keane Street



The White-lipped Snake

(Drysdalia coronoides)

The smallest of Tasmania's three venomous snakes



Southern Copperhead

(Austrelaps superbus)

Photographed in Tasmania – what a great snake!

Many snakes in WA are referred to as “copperhead”, but the true copperheads are three species of *Austrelaps* restricted to southeastern Australia.



Habu

(Trimeresurus flavoviridis)

Photographed on Amamioshima, Japan

*If you get this newsletter in time you might catch NGTV's
Honour of the Habu – Snake Wrangler: Part 11 on 17th June 2004*