



WESTERN AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY of AMATEUR HERPETOLOGISTS (Inc)
(Member of the Australasian Affiliation of Herpetological Societies)
9 Birch Place, STONEVILLE WA 6081

NEWSLETTER

30 December, 1995
(6)

MERRY XMAS ALL

Our final newsletter for the year, December, Christmas, the first month of summer, many gravid female reptiles about and the time for goodwill to all marks the end of our inaugural year as an incorporated organisation. We managed to finish the year in the black. Next year should be even bigger!

There are a few projects in the pipeline we hope to get up and running for 1996. In particular the south-west Woma (*Aspidites ramsayi*) and the Lake Cronin Snake (*Echiopsis atriceps*). This latter species was found at a new locality recently. Greg Harold and colleague

collected a young adult male beneath a granite slab on top of Peak Eleanora (near Peak Charles) while carrying out survey work in that area. This is exciting stuff. It raises questions though. How widespread and abundant is this snake? Is its scarcity (known from only a handful of individuals) a result of our poor understanding of its ecology? Or, is it sparsely distributed naturally?

Best wishes for the New Year to all members, their families and friends.

BOOK LAUNCHED

Mr Harry Butler launched *A Guide to the Reptiles & Frogs of the Perth Region* at

the Sunken Garden, UWA on 6 November. All members of WASAH should have received an invitation to this. It was a great turnout with many members amongst the guests. The only improvement would have been an evening function with a keg for those that partake.

The four authors are coincidentally WASAH's executive. They have been working on this book for several years and, with a few exceptions, provided all the photographs used therein. It goes 226 pages with 133 coloured photographs. Included are WA distribution maps for each species or subspecies and several line drawings. Congratulations fellows!

If any member requires a copy there is an order form included in this newsletter. It

will cost you \$1 extra, due to postage, if you buy it through WASAH. However, you will be assisting our financial position if you buy it through the society. Availability will be a problem for those living in regional areas other than Perth. Local booksellers may not stock it.

WASAH at ROYAL SHOW!

At the 1995 Royal Perth Show, WASAH mounted a small snake display in the Landcare Pavilion. Promoted by the Department of Agriculture, the theme was Northam - the Avon Region. Our display included the Dugite, Gwardar, Southern Death Adder, Mulga Snake, Carpet Python and Stimson's Python. All of which occur in that region. Complementing the live animals was information on each, on WASAH, Snakebusters and reptiles generally. It was very successful!

Along with many positive comments there was much interest in our 'fledgling' society by members of the public. This resulted in the recruitment of several new members.

Landcare is keen to have us back next year. As is the nature of WASAH, always growing, we expect to mount a bigger display. A huge thanks to Simon, Rico, Russell and Robert for their efforts. I now know what it is

like for President Bush: standing on your feet for 12 hours answering questions on herpetology - it's a tough life!

The only 'hiccup' we experienced setting the whole thing up involved our application for a licence to exhibit. We were unsuccessful at first although after including more information CALM reversed this decision.

BM

Sorry

On the reptile and frog list for the Dryandra State Forest in *Newsletter* *5 I omitted the Southern Pale-flecked Morethia (*Morethia obscura*). This small skink is very common in that area, often observed foraging amongst the leaf litter and other ground debris.

BM

Re. change of address

If you move could you please inform the secretary on (09) **444 6412** or by mail to **169 Egina Street, Mount Hawthorn WA 6016.**

On the Questionnaire

Do not forget to send these in. They will assist us in determining the way to go in the future.

RKA up & running again

The Reptile Keepers Association (RKA) is a like-minded organisation with its headquarters in Gosford, NSW. They thought they had been successful in improving the licensing system for herpetoculturalists in that state. After numerous positive 'round table' discussions with their wildlife authority over the past 10 years the RKA thought things were advancing. It would appear that it has been all for nothing. Correspondence received by WASAH (tabled at our November 5 meeting) from the RKA asked us to write to the NSW Minister for the Environment supporting their endeavours. It also requested financial support for possible legal representation.

We agreed at the above WASAH meeting to send a letter (copy attached to this newsletter) and provide a donation of \$100 towards their cause.

BB

Public AWARENESS

An advertisement of WASAH appeared in the *Earth 2000* section of the *West Australian Newspaper* on 4 December 1995. Let us hope we can grow even larger as a lobby group to cause a sensible situation to occur in WA. The contents of the advertisement targeted increasing the public's awareness of WASAH and called for expressions of interest from potential herpetoculturalists.

On Conservation by a 'Devil's Advocate'

(With the greatest respect to those who believe in creation)

Those of us believing ourselves to be conservationists tend to consider all animate and inanimate organisms as we do our friends and family. We may even mourn their loss almost as much as we would the loss of a family member or friend.

Many of us consider human behaviours such as mining, farming, harvesting forests etc as unnatural. We tend to consider ourselves aliens on our planet! We are so presumptuous as to believe we are above the laws of nature, that we can control all around us!

The truth is that we are an integral part of this living planet, a result of evolution. Thus, all that we do impacts on the environment and other life forms either beneficially or detrimentally. It has been proven historically that we can no more determine our destiny than we can our birth. That is not to say we do not consciously try, nor should we give up trying.

What sets us apart? Why do we resist our destiny? Could it be that the evolution of the human brain to the degree where it allows us to reason, feel guilt, have pride, free thought and the ability to make non-instinctive decisions and judgements also causes us to set ourselves apart from the competition.

Sure we change things, marginally more than a cyclone or plague of locusts and, in doing so, are paradoxically entrenched in the competition. A competition that will see some organisms excluded and others adapting.

We can no more effect the conservation of an organism, by reversing the evolutionary process, than we can cause the destruction of the world. We can only change it as we know it. It will be here long after humans have become

extinct, **but will it be a better place!**

SOUTH-WEST WOMA update

Brad and Brian headed north to reconnoitre the Badgingarra, Watheroo and Marchagee area for potential Woma localities. No Womas were located however some potentially good sites were found.

It was a rewarding trip as we collected a Javelin Legless Lizard (*Aclys concinna*) first sighted, by the hawk-eyed one, leaping across the road. It was great as neither of us have had the good fortune to photograph this species previously.

Following is a list of species observed:-

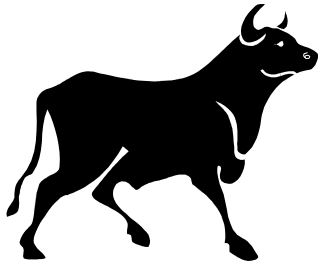
Diplodactylus alboguttatus
Diplodactylus g. granariensis
Gehyra variegata
Strophurus michaelsoni
Strophurus s. spinigerus
Aclys concinna
Delma greyii
Moloch horridus
Tiliqua r. rugosa
Pseudechis australis
Rhinoplocephalus nigriceps-fresh roadkill.
Simoselaps semifasciata-active on road at 1.15am in foggy conditions.

We have also put together a "Woma awareness" leaflet to distribute to roadhouses and

farmers in the area. Thanks to Brad's tireless motivation we already have many of the farmers' addresses from the respective shire offices.

Remember, anyone interested in heading up the Marchagee Track or the Watheroo road spotlighting, go ahead. If you notify Brad or Brian they will advise you on where to look. Make sure you keep a record of any species you identify while you are at it.

HERPTALES



In this section we include all the information about particular people and goings on that most of us would prefer no one knew. Also, if you wish to submit something to be included here go ahead. It's 'tongue in cheek' and all in good fun.

Snake saves Pilbara town from certain death!

Recently President Bush was spending some quality weeks in the Pilbara. He was opening people's minds and eyes to the wonderful world of reptiles. If only the residents of Karratha knew how close they came to a fate much worse than death during that time.

You see, on this particular evening the spotlighting was somewhat quiet. This caused our hero to become somewhat desperate. He was finding bugger all (sic). A real worry considering the richness of the herp in that area. A member who accompanied our blind President spotlighting that night told me that BB made the statement. "If we do not get a live snake tonight, I will run naked through the Karratha City shopping centre".

Can you imagine that! Better still don't!! I mean, Busho is bad enough with his clothes on, let alone in the raw.

(Ed's note: some people reckon he looks pretty good naked)

All those wrinkles and dead flesh on full display! I suppose if you were lucky, as he would be running, a fleeting glimpse is all you would get. There would be more survivors if the French dropped a bomb on Karratha.

Anyway, as the night wore on this catastrophic holocaust was becoming a deadly reality. Then, the yell went out, "SNAKE, SNAKE!" It was just before midnight when a small Moon Snake (*Furina ornata*), no pun intended, answered Karratha's prayers and saved the shoppers by wriggling onto the road. Busho was fully clothed, but the WASAH member accompanying him was extremely nervous just before that moment.

(Ed again: the hero in this story was not nervous at all.

He had the faith, and eyes like an old Perentie. It was an exceptional night, one in a million, not a reptile moving throughout the Pilbara. His willpower caused that one snake to move at the right time when no other was. What a Man!).

BM

Tales from beyond the black stump

Paul Orange, member, sent in the following experience. Paul is the guy whose harassment by CALM, culminating in a court appearance in 1990 which he successfully defended with costs awarded against CALM, was instrumental in causing WASAH.

Until November 1994 I lived in the Eastern Goldfields town of Kambalda. As a local 'snakeman' I operated a snake removal service, which over the years led to some interesting experiences. Of these, one of the more notable involved the then manager of the Single Persons' Quarters.

The Single Persons' Quarters (SPQ) in Kambalda is virtually surrounded by bush. Consequently, over the years I received a number of snake-calls from there. Most yielded nothing - a frightened, disturbed snake merely headed back to the bush from where it had come. Occasionally the culprit was a Yellow-faced Whip Snake (*Demansia psammophis*) which I would duly bag and return to the bush some distance from the SPQ. As a

result of these visits I got to know the manager, who seemed interested, if not enthusiastic about the snakes. At least he took the time to call me rather than bash the snake over the head.

I received a call from him one hot, humid overcast day. There was a large snake under his house. Judging by his description, and the weather, it sounded like a Gwardar (*Pseudonaja nuchalis*). At last a change from the usual whips! When I arrived I asked if it was still under the house. He thought so, if it had come out his dog would surely have barked. Okay!

Built on a slight rise the house was raised off the ground on wooden pillars. I crawled under on all fours and began searching for the snake or its tracks. Gradually, as I moved up the slope, I was reduced to crawling flat on my stomach. Great! If I met the gwardar now I'd have some fun, it would have a definite advantage. I needn't have worried though, there was no sign of it or its tracks. There was however a large number of Redback Spiders. Although I do not normally mind redbacks, I was not particularly keen on crawling through their webs. I headed back out. By now I was very hot, very sweaty and very dusty. Not to worry, I have been to false alarms before.

I questioned the manager further as I searched beneath suitable debris in his yard. He had seen the snake earlier in the day and it must have gone under his house, where else could it have gone? And he

was concerned for his children and the dog. I couldn't really argue, I just resolved to ask more questions before I went crawling under houses in the future.

During the next week or so I received a couple of further calls from the manager. Each time he described a gwardar, and it was definitely under the house. Each time I crawled under the house and found nothing. I began to suspect I was supplying him with stories for the pub - persuading some mad pommie snakecatcher to crawl under his house had to be worth a couple of beers off his mates. Then I received a further call which put such suspicions out of my mind. The snake was back and had killed his dog.

Feeling mortified I got there in double quick time, determined to catch this elusive gwardar. The manager was in the backyard when I arrived, staring forlornly at the empty dog kennel. I said I was sorry about his dog and asked if he had actually seen the snake bite it. "No, but I came out here earlier this morning and the dog didn't look too good. I reckoned the snake must have bitten him, so I took him out the bush and shot him so he would not suffer...."

I didn't bother crawling under the house that day, nor did I get any more snake-calls from the manager. He left town a couple of months later.

(Insert photo of Bruce George)

Nothing stops a herp

The bloke in the 'photo' above looks like a criminal. No! It may surprise you to know he is actually one of our members. Bruce George is his name and until recently he hailed from Pannawonica. All them north-westerners look like criminals. Just take a look at our own Beerbottle (Dave Robinson, Treasurer, for those wondering who?) when you get the chance. Rough!

You can't see it too well in the image above but Bruce is on crutches. He came off his bike and busted his leg. That didn't stop him responding to a call from a concerned resident with snakes all about the place. He, in his incapacitated state, was hanging off rafters, battling giant spiders and large bat-like things while chasing snakes out Kelmscott way.

The resident did not mind the snakes around the place but his wife could not tolerate them. Anyway, another satisfied customer of *Snakebusters*.

What a man! A true herp, just like the Old Man Perentie.

WASAH GENERAL MEETING

Friday 9 February

7.30pm

Perth Zoo Ed Centre

Entry off Labouchere Road

(WASAH sign will be obvious)

G u e s t S p e a k e r s :

Klass Gaikhorst

(Manager/Partner of/in the Armadale Reptile Centre)

On setting up a reptile park in WA

Gordon Wyre

(Senior Ecologist at CALM's Wildlife Licensing Dept)

On CALM Policy Statement 22 Re. reptile keeping in WA

WASAH Inc. Income & Expenditure to Dec 1995

INCOME

Subscriptions.....1,420.00
Donations.....384.75
Hooks, bags &
jiggers.....345.00
Book/poster
sales.....2,998.00
Displays.....400.00

Total Income..... \$5,547.75

EXPENDITURE

Herpetofauna.....402.50
Newsletters (inc of
postage).....234.10
Turtle posters.....84.00
Barker's book.....856.00
Perth Reptiles &
Frogs.....1,125.18
Advertising:
Incorporation.....97.50
WASAH.....230.00
Stationary.....28.00
Hooks, Bags &
Jiggers.....415.00
Incorporation.....77.00
Postage
(*Herpetofauna*).....97.75

Total Expend.....\$3647.22

BALANCE.....\$1900.53

WASAH EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

President/Editor: Brian Bush
(09) 295 3007
Vice-President: Brad Maryan
(09) 444 6412
Secretary: Robert Browne-Cooper
(09) 445 2409
Treasurer: Dave Robinson

Address all correspondence related
to this newsletter to:

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9 Birch Place
STONEVILLE 6081

Journals & Bulletins

HERPETOFAUNA

A worthwhile publication recommended by us for all the readers of this Newsletter. Send a cheque for \$15/one year or \$40/three years to:

The Editor
PO Box R307
Royal Exchange
SYDNEY 2000

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MONITOR

The journal/newsletter and bulletin of the Victorian Herpetological Society. The VHS is the largest herp society in Australia and *Monitor* reflects that. Send \$25 for 3 issues/year to:

The Secretary
VHS Inc
16 Suspension St
ARDEER, VIC 3022

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Hawkesbury Herpetological Society

The Secretary
PO Box 2
WHALAN, NSW 277

*

Cape York Herpetological Society

The Secretary
PO Box 114
PALMCOVE, QLD 4879

*

Orana Herpetological Society

841 Ridge Road, COOKS
GAP (via MUDGEES) NSW
2850

*

Victorian Association of Amateur Herpetologists

222 Flinders Avenue, LARA
VICTORIA 3212
Membership: \$20 per year.

We wish the above societies good luck! They have been included on our mailing list so their members can keep abreast of what is going on in the west.

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.