



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

NEWSLETTER

10 December, 1997
(13)

HELLO MEMBERS

Since the last newsletter the WASAH/CALM Liaison Subcommittee comprising members Simon Ball, Jamie Stewart and Mike Lynch had a meeting with Dr Paul Biggs, representative of Cheryl Edwards, Minister for the Environment, outlining WASAH's arguments for amateur keeping of reptiles and frogs. One of the Subcommittee will appraise us more fully on this meeting at our December picnic meeting. Briefly, they received a positive response from Dr Biggs however it was expected that Dr Gordon Wyre from CALM would be attending also. This would have been a good opportunity to gauge if CALM is genuinely interested in considering our requests.

Unfortunately he was unable to attend on the day.

I have received correspondence from the minister regarding the meeting wherein she advises us that it is relevant that keeping of reptiles in Western Australia be reviewed over the coming months along with other possible changes to the Wildlife Conservation Act.

On another subject altogether regarding *Snakebusters* and Regulation 4 and 15 licences. Some members have contacted me with concerns that these licences are an unnecessary regulation as the reptiles are being removed under **Open Season** (*Government Gazette No. 41 of 22 June 1984*). While this may be the case, I have contacted Terry Hales, CALM's Volunteer

Coordinator, to check on the insurance situation for registered snakebusters. Some discussion on the pros and cons of these licences can be found in the Appendix to this newsletter.

SEASON'S GREETINGS TO ALL

September '97 MEETING REPORT

Fifty three members and guests attended the September meeting at the Harry Waring Marsupial Reserve to experience a new idea in WASAH meetings.

The day can only be described as a great success. Bob Cooper welcomed us and underlined this by providing the makings for coffee and tea, which was greatly appreciated by all. He invited us back for another go further down the track and offered the accommodation there if we wished to hold an overnight workshop or similar.

Thanks heaps Bob.

There was no formal guest speaker as such but Brad Maryan and Bruce George were more than equal to the task! The youngsters and adults alike enjoyed your impromptu presentations. I reckon more than one visitor went away with a much enlightened positive appreciation of snakes because of the pair of you, with a little help from both visual and tactile aids.

Good on you fellows.



Don't let it go until you've checked it out!

Australian herpetology like any other field of study is never complete. What do I mean by this? Simple, there will always be more that we don't know compared to what we do know. Take the southern death adder (*Acanthopis antarcticus*) and the western brown snake (*Pseudonaja nuchalis*). Both

are well known venomous snakes that were described to science back in the 19th century and yet their respective taxonomies have still not been satisfactorily resolved. It was only recently that the taxonomical relationships of the different races of the bobtail (*Tiliqua rugosa*) were beginning to be understood. There are many examples of an incomplete herpetological knowledge.

Some of us might think, "Well so what, what difference does it make if there is one bobtail race or a hundred?" To be blunt, only the narrow-minded would believe ignorance is better than knowledge. Without studies of amphibian & reptile distributions and variations, we would not be capable of telling one organism apart from another and there would be no field guides. Imagine that, no Cogger or Wilson & Knowles to help you with that identification. In addition without detailed studies of natural histories of these creatures we are fascinated by we could not appreciate spectacular adaptations to different lifestyles and more importantly, especially in this day and age, massive blunders would be made with our wildlife management decisions. I have had people suggest to me, "Leave them alone and they will look after themselves." What nonsense! I'm sure the western swamp turtle or Californian condor would be everywhere today if we just stood back and let them be - not! Unfortunately we do have a tendency to let our emotions get the better of our thoughts. In Australia

Homo sapiens have been collecting frogs and reptiles for museums. running them over by the millions and keeping captive herps for a long time and yet not one species has become threatened through these activities. Habitat destruction is the killer, and yes, we are all responsible for this unless you live in a natural cave out in the middle of nowhere and are living off the land. Let's get real and enjoy life. These critters are still going to be running, slithering and hopping around long after you and me are gone. As long as their habitat remains. Collecting herps for museums is not going to wipe out anything. There are simply not enough people doing it in Australia anyway.

I am not saying that all should be collecting for museums. My main point here is that if you have an understanding of herp distributions, variations, rarity, etc and encounter a beast that is noteworthy, **DON'T LET IT GO!** The next best thing is a photographic record if you do not have a camera get someone else to photograph it. If you are not sure about your find contact someone who does know. Also, don't forget to write it down and if it is worthy of publication submit it somewhere. Keeping it to yourself equals "when you are dead the data is gone!" Contribute something by sharing your records with the herpetological community. We simply do not know enough about these animals and never will. To illustrate

my point I will share a few examples with you:

A) Did you know a specimen of the black-striped Snake (*Neelaps calonotus*) was recently found up near Dongara on the west coast. Since being described in 1854 its recorded distribution until this record was Mandurah north to Lancelin.

B) Did you know that during a recent biological survey the Perth lined lerista (*Lerista lineata*), a burrowing skink, was found near Woodleigh Station east of Shark Bay. This is the only record of this species north of the Swan River since its description in 1833.

C) Did you know that only recently it was found that the bobtail or shingleback skink is monogamous (at least in South Australia). The same pairs come together each year when the breeding season commences.

D) Did you know that last year a new species of burrowing skink was found on Fraser's Island, Queensland with more teeth than any of its congeners. Not only was it a new species, *Coggeria naufragus*, but represented an entirely new genus named after Harold Cogger. It is apparently a worm-feeder.

And it goes on and on.

BM

A Bardick (*Echiopsis curta*) Breeding Record

By Glen Gaikhorst, Armadale
Reptile Centre.

The bardick is a small elapid found in southern Australia. We have maintained an adult pair of Western Australian bardicks together for the past 18 months. A brown female was acquired on 14 June, 1995 and olive brown male on 1 July, 1995. When first introduced on 10 September, 1995 the male immediately became very interested in the female. No mating was actually observed however the female's appetite increased substantially indicating that insemination probably had occurred.

On 5 April, 1996 three live young (See Table 1) were found and colouration was identical to their mother. Neonate *4 was born dead. We thought that parturition was close as several weeks before birth the female had ceased feeding. We determined neonatal sex by tail length. In most Australian elapids males have longer tails than females though the adult lengths in bardicks are similar (Shine, 1992). It is interesting to note that even though the two males had longer tails the females were slightly heavier.

Of the three neonates *1 was healthy *3 was lethargic and *2 died about three hours after birth. Postnatal sloughs occurred one week later and then we assist fed them small fish (guppies). Unfortunately

these two neonates died after a few weeks. The poor condition of the neonates may be due to a lack of adequate heating in the adults' enclosure. Access to warmth is extremely important in the development of eggs or young in a gravid female snake as is indicated by the number of pregnant reptiles found soaking up warmth from roads in the spring.

We have subsequently provided heat to our bardicks and observed a mating on 28 June, 1996 that lasted for almost an hour.

REFERENCE

Shine, R. 1982. Ecology of the Australian elapid snake *Echiopsis curta*. *J. of Herp.* 16 (4): 388-393.

Table 1. Data on adults and young in a reproductive record of *Echiopsis curta*: mass (W), total length (TL), snout-vent length (SVL) and tail length (TIL).

Neonate	W (gm)	TL (cm)	SVL (cm)	TIL (cm)
1 X	3.5	14.2	12.3	1.9
2 E	3.0	12.5	10.3	2.2
3 X	3.5	13.6	11.7	1.9
4 E	2.0	12.1	10.0	2.1
Mean	3.0	13.1	11.1	2.0
Parents				
E	n/a	38.2	31.9	6.3
X	n/a	44.0	37.8	6.2

Tragedy at Transvaal Snake Park

At approximately 15h30 on Sunday 26 October, Mr. Paul St. John Olsen (25), the Senior Curator of the Transvaal Snake Park, Halfway House, South Africa was bitten in the right-hand wrist by a 1.2 metre snouted cobra (*Naja annulifera annulifera*) whilst performing a public demonstration.

Mr. Olsen immediately reported the incident to his colleagues before losing consciousness. Paramedics and doctors were immediately summoned and arrived promptly within 10 minutes of his receiving the bite. Shortly before their arrival, Mr. Olsen went into cardiac arrest and despite the initiation of CPR by his colleagues, its continuance by the paramedics, over 100ml of IV polyvalent and copious quantities of adrenalin, he could not be resuscitated. Mr. Olsen was finally pronounced dead at 18h06.

It is believed at this time that his rapid collapse may have been attributable to a hitherto unknown hypersensitivity to Egyptian cobra venom. Mr. Olsen had been bitten once previously by a puff adder two years prior to this event.

Mr. Olsen had been working at the Park for four years prior to his death. He was an exceedingly popular member of staff with both his colleagues and the visiting public. He was possessed of the unique gift of the ability

to communicate to both young and old and was greatly liked by all who came into contact with him. His approach to his work was highly professional with regard to both the visiting public and the animals he worked with.

I am sure that the international herpetological community will share the tragic sense of loss that we, his colleagues, and his family feel in the passing of this brilliant and dedicated young man.

DAVE MORGAN General
Manager, Transvaal Snake
Park

The Parthenon

By Gregory J. Watkins-
Colwell, Dept. of Biology,
Sacred Heart University,
Fairfield, CT 06432 USA

There are at least 53 species of reptile known or suspected to be parthenogenetic. There are a few in which populations are known entirely from female specimens.... in which case parthenogenesis is only suspected and not verified. Among those suspected, but not verified are populations of *Basiliscus basiliscus* in Central America and a few mainland anoles.... and at least one population of *Hemidactylus mabouia* on the islands off Africa (all the suspected populations of this species are insular).

Among the squamate reptiles that are known to be

parthenogenetic... lizards outnumber snakes.... with geckos and teiids being the dominant force. Of snakes, I can think of only one species in which parthenogenesis is certain (there may be others).... it is the blind snake *Ramphotyphlops braminus*.... an excellent coloniser found throughout the southern US, Hawaii, and even one good population under the buildings on State Street in Boston, Mass. The species eats termites almost exclusively and travels from country to country via the tropical plant industry. It lays clutches of 3-5 eggs essentially year round, as I recall (check your field guides).

For lizards: the whiptails (*Cnemidophorus*) have the most parthenogenetic species. One even has the species name "uniparens" meaning, of course, ONE PARENT. For geckos, I can only think of examples within the genera *Hemidactylus*, *Heteronotia* and *Lepidodactylus*.... I suspect there are others (seems that a population of *Cosymbotus* is suspected also... but I cannot recall). [Dr Ken Aplin, WAM, suspects that there are also parthenogenetic populations of the common dwarf skink (*Menetia greyii*).]

For lizards, the trick seems to be polyploidy and hybrid origin. For the *Cnemidophorus*, all the parthenogenetic species are of hybrid origin as determined by molecular data analysis (including mitochondrial sequencing... revealing the species that was the female in the hybrid

cross... mitochondria are inherited from the mother, not the father... they simply won't fit in a sperm cell). If I remember correctly, all the known Cnemi parthenogens are hybrids in which at least one of the parent species belonged to the *tigrinus* (or *tesselatus*?) species group. Most of the Cnemis are at least triploid.. a few tetraploid also.

Oh.... a bit of food for thought when you see "jungle runners" offered for sale. There are many species of the genus *Leiolepis* (including butterfly "agamas")...one is very, very large and is triploid and thought to be parthenogenetic. It is *Leiolepis triplida*. So, when you see a large "butterfly agama" or "jungle runner" offered for sale, check the sex of it. If it's female... it MIGHT be the triploid which MIGHT be unisexual. Pretty dang cool.

Also, there is at least one laboratory strain of mouse that is parthenogenetic... but I think the embryos don't go full term if they are produced parthenogenetically. I think there are males of this strain... so breeding is possible and might (I'm stretching my memory circuits here) be the only way they can reproduce effectively. BUT, virgin females do become spontaneously pregnant.... but spontaneously abort prior to birth.

Re. Frog Conservation

The story in Australia grows uglier by the day regarding the protazoa come fungus frog plague. Looks like it is a primary cause of dramatic extinctions of frog populations in NSW, and has more than likely permeated through froggy places in Central America and Australia on the boots of those who have been most interested in their conservation - researchers. An entire population of spotted tree frogs (the only population in NSW) disappeared virtually overnight after several specimens were 'borrowed' by researchers, then returned to the site. The dreaded frog pox was then, last week, found in the researcher's collection...

Where might it have come from? Africa? Anyone with facts to report, this is quite possibly THE herp conservation issue of our times.

John Weigel

Additional reptile records for Mount Dale/Boulder Rock

By Tony Pattison

A list of the known species of reptiles for the Mount Dale/Boulder Rock area was compiled by Maryan (1995). Here I provide three

additional species bringing the number recorded to thirty five.

Black-headed Monitor

(*Varanus tristis tristis*)

Found in crevices at Boulder Rock.

King's Skink (*Egernia kingii*)

Several found in crevices and beneath granite slabs at Boulder Rock. One found under granite slab at Mount Dale.

Reticulated Whip Snake

(*Demansia psammophis reticulata*)

During a visit accompanied by Bruce George on 27 September 1997 I located a single individual. Bruce photographed it and I recorded the following details in centimetres:-

Total length - 82.7

Snout-vent length - 64.5

Tail length - 18.2

Body width - 1.8

Head width - 1.2

REFERENCE

Maryan, B. 1995. Reptiles of Mount Dale and Boulder Rock. *WASAH Newsletter* 3: 8-9.

Ed here. This is the type of information that many might consider irrelevant but it does contribute significantly to the data bank. In Reptiles of the Perth Region we list this species as rare in the Darling Range however the current status of many species may be negatively influenced by the available knowledge because that knowledge is based on a lack of field work. Tony is only a youngster but he is already on the right track.

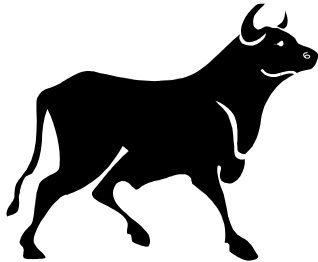
Species removed
from Charles Riley
Reserve

(See minutes this issue)

- 4 x **Western Slender
Bluetongue**
(*Cyclodomorphus celatus*)
- 1 x **Snake-eyed Skink**
(*Cryptoblepharus
plagiocephalus*)
- 18 x **Two-toed Earless
Skink** (*Hemiergis
quadrilineata*)
- 2 x **West Coast 4-toed
Lerista** (*Lerista elegans*)
- 1 x **Bobtail** (*Tiliqua rugosa*)

Thanks to Robert-Browne
Cooper and Tom Fronck for a
job well done.

HERPTALES



The following short stories are a
continuation provided by Rod
Jacobson and are from: **Brundvand,
J.H.** (1988). *The Mexican Pet -
More "New" Urban Legends and
Some Old Favourites*. W.W. Norton
& Associates, New York. 221
pages. ISBN 0-393-30542-2. In
some I have Australianised them and
remember - **they are urban myths.**

The Fatal Boot (*Oh Yeh..... sure!*)

There is a stockman who
stomps on the head of death
adders after stunning them
with a rope. The man sickens

and dies one day. The man's
son inherits his horseman's
boots, and he too sickens and
dies. Then yet another male
relative begins to wear the
boots, then dies. Finally
another relative takes a good
look at the heels on the boots
and discovers a death adder's
fang broken off and still
seeping venom!

Carnival Surprise (*Bizarre.....*)

A man took his little girl to a
carnival and put her on the
merry-go-round. She soon
began to complain that the
horse was biting her, and she
begged to be taken off. The
father kept saying "Don't be
silly. The horse can't be
biting you." Soon the little
girl slumped over and died,
and it was discovered that the
old wooden horses, which
were full of cracks, were also
full of snakes. It seems that
when the horses were stored
for the winter, they became a
haven for the snakes.

The Snake in the Strawberry Patch (*Weird.....*)

A woman fed her small baby
some milk and then took the
child with her to a nearby
field to pick strawberries.
The child was asleep, so she
pulled the car very close to
the area in which she was
picking. It was a fairly cool
day, and she left the windows
open, both for ventilation and
in order to hear. A snake
crawled into the car and
down the child's throat after
the milk and strangled the
child.

Crocodiles in the Sewers

(*Good one.....*)

Perhaps you have heard about
the blind white crocodiles
that live in the Victorian
sewers. They're the
descendants of tiny crocs
brought in pet shops over the
years. People living in flats
and such didn't know what to
do with them once the
novelty wore off, and in
desperation flushed them
down the toilet. The beasts
are white because they don't
get any sunlight paddling
along under the streets, and
blind because it is too dark to
see.

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.*

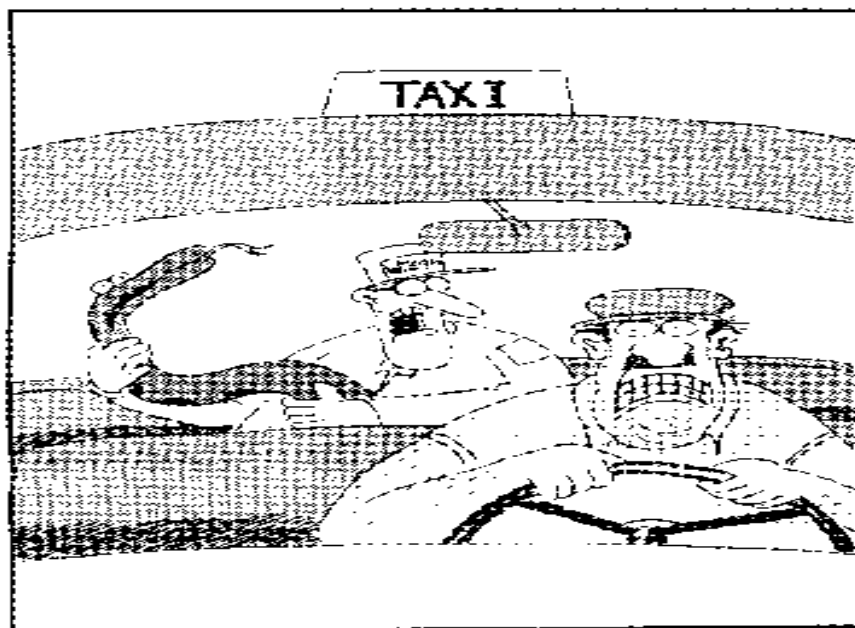
Brian Bush

☹ 1998 ☹
**SUBS ARE
DUE NOW**

BOOK SALE

If there are any members into collecting herpetological books I have a list of available titles of which some appear below. If you would like a copy of the list and other details please contact me on (08) 9295 3007 to arrange for a copy to be sent to you, or contact seller on (08) 9430 4383. As you will note from the sample list, they are on overseas reptiles and amphibians.

- | | |
|--|------|
| 1) ALLEN, Ross/ NEILL Wilfred T. <i>Keep Them Alive</i> . 3rd edition, revised & enlarged. Florida, Ross Allen's Rept. Inst. special publ, no. 1. pp20. sl. soiled. wr..... | \$ 5 |
| 2) BARKER, Will. <i>Familiar Reptiles & Amphibians of America</i> . Drawings by J.C.R Yrizzary. N.Y., H & Row, 1st edition, 1964..... | \$15 |
| 3) BEVANS, Michael H. <i>The Book of Reptiles and Amphibians</i> . N.Y., Garden City, 1956. pp63, laminated picture bds, colour ills..... | \$ 7 |
| 5) CONANT, Roger. <i>Field Guide to Reptiles and Amphibians of US and Canada</i> , east of 100th meridian. Ills by Isabella Conant. Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1958. 1st printing. pp336, col and b&w ills, torn d/w..... | \$25 |
| 6) CROMPTON, John. <i>Snake Lore</i> . N.Y., Doubleday, 1964. pp152, b&w ills, gilt decorated cl cover. Ex-lib, tape marks, blacked out stamps, d/w..... | \$18 |
| 7) DITMARS, Raymond L. <i>A Field Book of North American Snakes</i> . N.Y., Doubleday, 1939. pp305, plates 1-48. d/w, sl frayed..... | \$55 |
| 8) DITMARS, R. L. <i>Reptiles of the World</i> . New revised edition. N.Y., Mac M, 1960. pp324, plates 89. Frontis photo. Gilt dec. dl. cover, sl browned at edges, frayed d/w..... | \$50 |
| 9) DITMARS, R.L. <i>Snakes of the World</i> . N.Y., Mac M, 1957. Frontis. 12th printing. pp xi, 207, b&w plates 84. Covers flecked, torn d/w | \$50 |
| 10) FOWLIE, Jack A. <i>The Snakes of Arizona - California</i> . McGraw-Hill, 1965. pp 164, b&w ills, qual paper, no d/w | \$50 |



“For God’s sake, hurry, driver! ... She’s dropping babies all over the place!”
 (The above cartoon by Larson, *The Far Side* was kindly sent in by Michelle Crow)

GENERAL MEETING
21 September 1997
MINUTES

1. **Convene Meeting** - 10.12am. Previous meeting minutes accepted by Brad Maryan, seconded by Robert Browne-Cooper.
2. **Attendance** - 23 members and 15 visitors signed but 53 were present on a head count.
3. **Apologies** - Simon Ball, Russell Brown (vehicle trouble on way to meeting)
4. **Correspondence Tabled** - Nil
5. **President's Report** -
 - Notifies members that volunteers are required to catch and relocate tiger snakes and oblong turtles from a wetland site being developed at Swan Bank Road, Maylands. BB calls for an expression of interest and gives suggestions of sites for relocation: Cockburn Cement's artificial wetland and extensive wetland in the Harry Waring Marsupial Reserve.
 - Charles Riley Reserve, Karrinyup was searched by Robert Browne-Cooper and Tom Fronck in response to a request by Challis Tillbrook. A species list was being prepared for Ms Tillbrook.
 - Mentions WASAH Submission. CALM required WASAH to develop a system of implementing and managing keepers licences which would be cost minimal to CALM. WASAH has submitted a proposal to CALM which may be incorporated into the CALM Act and Regulation amendments proposed for 1998.
 - T-shirts available at meeting. Black shirts with white lettering also now available.
6. **Vice-President's Report** -
 - WASAH Reptile Keeping Kit available at meeting for \$5. CALM has copy and we have asked for their input which has not been forthcoming to date.
 - Fauna survey of Modong Reserve to commence soon. WASAH has applied for a permit to undertake the work. Calls for volunteers to install and check traps.
7. **Treasurer's Report** - Nil
8. **General Business** -
 - BB mentions that we have received a permit from CALM for Modong.
 - BB mentions news article on tiger snakes on Garden Island.
9. **Editor's Report** - • As usual, calls for more articles to be submitted by members other than the usual ones.
10. **Call for further business** - • BB introduces Bob Cooper, Warden of Harry Waring Marsupial Reserve. Bob gives background history of Reserve and possible WASAH involvement in Reserve including surveys and workshops.
11. **Meeting Adjourned** - • Formally at 10.30am followed by a couple of hours of informal 'show & tell' by Brad Maryan, Bruce George and Brian Bush while everyone partaked of a brew and got some good photos and video footage.

**WASAH
GENERAL MEETING
Sunday 21 December
10.00am**

Bickley Brook Reservoir Bar-B-Q Area
Hardinge Road, Orange Grove
ENTRY ON LEFT HAND SIDE COMING FROM TONKIN HIGHWAY

SPECIAL

This is another picnic meeting. There are coin-operated bar-b-q's available if required. There is some pretty country to peruse from the picnic area or from several bush walks.

**WASAH EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE**

President/Editor: Brian Bush
(08) 9295 3007

Vice-President: Brad Maryan
(08) 9444 6412

Secretary: Robert Browne-Cooper
(08) 9445 2409

Treasurer: Russell Brown
(08) 9390 2680

Address all correspondence related to
this newsletter to:

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STONEVILLE 6081

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 \$23 for 2 issues to:

VHS
16 Suspension Street
ARDEER VIC 3022

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.

SNAKE BUSTERS LIST



COTTESLOE

Don Howe(H) 9384 1184
..... *Mobile* (019) 114 221

NEDLANDS

Don Howe(W) 9386 3040

SCARBOROUGH

Robert Browne-Cooper(H) 9445 2409

MOUNT HAWTHORN

Brad Maryan(H) 9444 6412

MOUNT LAWLEY

Rico Schmidiger(H) 9328 1760

MORLEY

Mitch Ladyman(H) 9379 0979

WILSON

Paul Orange(H) 9451 6972

GOSNELLS

Bruce George(H) 9490 2107
..... *Mobile* (019) 379 403

WESTFIELD/KELMSCOTT

Russell Brown(H) 9390 2680

ARMADALE

Klaas Gaikhorst(H) 9399 6927

WANNEROO (small snakes)

Linda Gwinnett(H) 9405 2383
..... *Mobile* (019) 955 283

YOKINE/WANNEROO

Tom Fronek(H) 9345 4387
..... *Mobile* (019) 371 281

LESMURDIE

Dave Hall(H) 9291 5009

FORRESTFIELD

David Pattison 9453 9623
Natalie Kais(H) 9453 1221

MIDLAND

Russel & Kristie Trehare .(H) 9274 3201

MIDVALE

Jay Houston(H) 9274 4125

WEST SWAN

Gayne Doyle9296 4597

David Thorne9274 2202

MUNDARING

Brian Bush9295 3007

Ray Dixon9299 6615

SPEARWOOD

Steve Smartt9418 1719

.....*Mobile* (015) 981 709

SAFETY BAY

Bob Goodale9527 4289

.....*Mobile* (014) 085 576

ROCKINGHAM

Jim Maher(H) 9593 1841

.....(W) 9550 0432

.....*Mobile* (018) 949 751

Rod Bradfield9527 7508

John Rogerson9593 2998

MANDURAH

John Smith9581 5713

MANNING/BENTLEY (no large snakes)

Rod Jacobson*Mobile* (014) 885 547

QUINNS ROCK (no large snakes)

Sandy Griffin*Mobile* (014) 885 547

COOLOONGUP

Nigel Hare(H) 9593 0990

SOUTH PERTH

Perth Zoo (Reptile Section) ...9474 0342

Please check to ensure the telephone number(s) listed here are correct. If any details are incorrect please contact Brian Bush on (08) 9295 3007

Thank you

This report was requested by Terry Hales, CALM's Volunteer Coordinator, in correspondence to me dated 23 June 1995, for the SGIC in relation to insurance for CALM registered Snakebusters carrying out their voluntary duties removing snakes. Terry has advised me on 26 November 1997 that registered personnel are insured with the SGIC.

*Although most reptiles are removed under **Open Season (Government Gazette No. 41 of 22 June 1984)** and therefore licensing is not a requirement, the benefit of being licensed and registered with CALM is the peace of mind of being insured. The downside is, once licensed, you are exposed to prosecution when a clerical error on your part is deemed non-compliance with the conditions attached to the above licences. This could make life difficult for the most honest person. The Western Australian Wildlife Conservation Act, 1950-1979 is a criminal act so a minor clerical error can result in a criminal record. Further compounding the negatives associated with the criminal record, any wildlife licences issued can be rescinded and, at the end of the day, it is doubtful that future applications for licences would be successful.*

*Regarding non-compliance offences and wildlife crime - I recently completed reading a report by Don McDowell entitled, Wildlife Crime Policy and the Law. An Australian Study (1997. Aus. Gov. Publ. Ser.). Although the author attempts to portray wildlife crime in Australia as a problem, all he succeeds in doing is convey to the reader that the reverse is the reality. He also states that by far **the most common recorded wildlife 'crime' in this country is of the minor, non-criminal, non-compliance type.***

It is interesting to compare the number of Australian animals saved from illegal export with the number that are killed on the road, or taken by the feral cat. In the twelve year period between 24 July 1984 and 10 July 1996 successful prosecutions involved (Australian) 670 reptiles, 226 birds, 187 birds' eggs and one mammal totaling 1084 individuals or about 90 saved each year. When compared with a conservative five million [reptiles and frogs] estimated by Cogger and Ehmman (1985) to die on the roads, or 2 billion [includes invertebrates] killed by feral cats (Mirtschin, 1994). "Why bother with all the regulation?" I hear you ask, "No answer" I reply. Money used detecting, apprehending and prosecuting these types of offences would be far more beneficially spent installing drift walls and culverts along roads, or to employ people to shoot cats. Surely we need to reduce domestic wildlife regulation, especially if we are fair dinkum about conservation.

With regards to snakebusters being 'registered' this refers to Regulation 4 & 15 licence holders who have completed the appropriate notification - to do this contact Terry Hales on 93340251 to obtain the relevant form.

SNAKE REMOVAL FROM PRIVATE PROPERTY IN THE PERTH METROPOLITAN AREA

Prepared by BRIAN BUSH, 9 Birch Place, Stoneville WA 6081, for the Department of Conservation and Land Management in June 1995.

INTRODUCTION

Snakes are an integral part of the Australian bush with 110 species being known from Western Australia. Twenty four occur in the Perth Metro. area, of which 19 are technically venomous, 9 dangerously so to humans. Four of these are sea snakes and are of little concern here as they are unlikely to be found in a

backyard situation. Only two of the five large venomous land snakes found locally are common, ie Dugite (*Pseudonaja affinis*) and Tiger Snake (*Notechis scutatus*).

The highest incidence of snakebite in humans is a result of the victim treading on a snake. The second highest

incidence is during attempts to kill snakes (see Figure 1).

The Dugite is an especially mobile snake that will forage widely into backyards and buildings in search of mice. The potential for snakebite is far greater in the backyard. A feeling of security and a reduced awareness of snakes in this

environment increases the chance of treading on one that maybe there. Also, if a snake is seen the resident often feels obliged to kill it. The snake removal service, *Snake Busters*, provides volunteers licensed by CALM to remove pest snakes. These volunteers are generally proficient in the safe handling of venomous snakes. They require an endorsement from a person recognised by CALM as a specialised live snake catcher prior to being issued with a Regulation 4 licence for this purpose.

The service was set up primarily to reduce the likelihood of accidental snakebite, but also provides 'pest' snakes for research, education, etc. This reduces the pressure on wild populations occupying natural areas by alleviating the need to remove individuals from these.

REGISTERED VOLUNTEERS

See above and list provided by CALM.

FREQUENCY OF ASSISTANCE

Each volunteer may receive in excess of 50 calls yearly to remove snakes from private or public property. In approximately 40% of these cases the snake has vanished prior to the snake-catcher arriving. Between 15 and 30 snakes may be bagged by a single volunteer each year. Figure 2 shows the monthly frequency based on a single volunteer's records for the past 5 years.

HISTORY OF ASSISTANCE and ACCIDENTS

History:

Snake Busters was set up in 1987 to provide a volunteer service to the public, and also allow for an increased opportunity to impart positive educational information to those needing the service. Duty CALM personnel, Police Communications, the Poisons Information Service, local shires and their rangers are all provided with a *Snake Busters* list. This allows a member of the public to access a telephone number of a snake-catcher when required.

Snake-catching is a specialised activity with few people being psychologically suited. Snakes are very aware of their surroundings and have an uncanny ability to detect nervousness in an individual person. This manifests itself in the snake with a rapid and pronounced behavioural change to defensive readiness. A common comment after a 'pest' snake has been bagged is "I could have done that myself. It looked so easy." It is far better for someone proficient in snake-handling to undertake this chore than someone with a dislike or fear of snakes!

Accidents:

In my position as coordinator of *Snake Busters* and president of the Western Australian Society of Amateur Herpetologists (WASAH) I am unaware of any serious accidents¹ involving registered snake-catchers responding to snake-removal calls in the past 5 years. The most serious accidents to date

¹ Oct '95 Dongara District High School - catcher hospitalised in CGH

involve occasional scratches experienced scrambling beneath bushes.

SUPERVISION BY CALM OFFICERS

As a government wildlife authority's resources are limited, it is not feasible to have officers situated in various suburbs waiting by the telephone day and night to respond to snake-removal calls. On occasions wildlife officers have accompanied and assisted snake-catchers. On other occasions a snake-catcher and a wildlife officer have responded to the same call. There have also been occasions where a wildlife officer has had to bag a 'pest' snake because no one else is available, although these occasions are not common. The ability to catch snakes appears to be a natural attribute rather than something that can be taught. Many wildlife officers would prefer not to have to catch snakes.

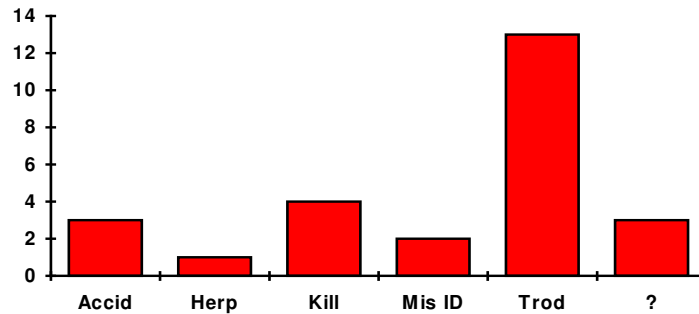
The Western Australian Society of Amateur Herpetologists, formally recognised by CALM, have at times carried out training on the safe catching of large venomous snakes. However, as mentioned above, not everyone is suited to this.

☹ 1998 ☹

SUBS ARE DUE NOW

####

CAUSES OF SNAKEBITE
(resulting in death 1980-1995)



Explanation of Causes:

- Accid** - unavoidable without exceptional awareness.
- Herp** - herpetologist bitten while handling snake.
- Kill** - bitten while killing snake.
- Mis ID** - bitten while handling venomous snake believing it to be harmless.
- Trod** - bitten after treading on snake.
- ?** - insufficient data to determine cause.

Figure 1. Graph showing the relative frequency of causes of snakebite in Australia resulting in the deaths of 26 people over a 16 year period (from Bush, BG, 1995. Australia's venomous snakes: the modern myth. *Monitor* 7 [1]: 12-18).

MONTHLY FREQUENCY OF SNAKE REMOVALS

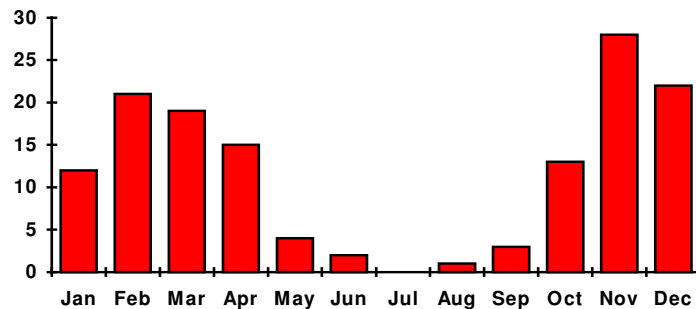


Figure 2. Graph showing monthly frequencies of venomous snake-removal compiled over a five year period for one snake-catcher in the Perth area. A total of 142 snakes were removed involving 119 Dugites, 13 Tiger Snakes, 2 Death Adders, 2 Gwardars, 2 Black-naped snakes, 2 Gould's Hooded Snakes and 2 Half-girdled snakes.

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Membership Form

1998

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

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

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

Given names.....

Postal address.....

Post Code.....

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

Remittance enclosed (\$15/year to a maximum of 5 years).....

Constitution & rules will be forwarded to you upon joining

Date.....

Signature.....