



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

NEWSLETTER

20 February, 1999
(18)

WA Snakebusters busted

“As I advised at the 12 November meeting, I believe the time has come to look to the future and to develop workable and reasonable reptile keeping regulations that meet current and future needs. I hope WASAH will continue to work closely with CALM in the development of such a keeping system.”

*Cheryl Edwardes (Mrs) MLA
Minister for the Environment
29 December 1998*

Shortly after WASAH received the above, three of its executives were raided on the evening of the 7th January, 1999 and a number of unlicensed reptiles confiscated. These were being kept for private study,

rehabilitation or hobbyists purposes, the same as many people keep birds, fish or mammals.

Perusing the news reports of this event I was disappointed with the merging of fact and fiction in the information given. Educating the community on venomous animals is difficult enough without government officials contributing to the difficulty by publicising falsehoods. All this does is perpetuate myth, exaggerate the seriousness of the alleged offences and portrays those with an interest in reptiles as weird.

Although, given that those busted live in WA, where hobbyist keeping is prohibited, they must be weird. One would think, if they wished to pursue their hobby, they would move interstate where keeping reptiles and frogs is

allowed, just as avifauna is here.

One news commentator stated in reference to some of the venomous snakes confiscated, “Expert wildlife officers are reluctant to handle them.”

Due to problems related to insurance and the government employees not being specialist snake people, they are generally prohibited from handling venomous snakes while undertaking their duties. WA’s wildlife authority relies on volunteer snakebusters for this purpose. It is ironic that on the night of the bust and the following day the alleged offenders were continuing to assist CALM and members of the public by removing snakes for them. All three have contributed to our knowledge of this faunal group and one so significantly that in

recognition of this two reptiles have been formally named after him. The latest, *Ctenotus maryani* Aplin & Adams (1998) has only recently been published.

Many of the reptiles confiscated were captive-bred or collected under licence however, as CALM policy and regulations uniquely prohibit keeping for hobbyist purposes, permits to maintain them were not issued, even though in several cases applications for these were made. The reptiles confiscated are legally traded and procedurally licensed in the Eastern States. Because of this and the lack of a licensing system in this state, species not native to WA get carried in and dumped. As any private citizen who has had reptile-related dealings with CALM knows, correspondence is either rarely answered at all, rarely answered in an appropriate time, or rarely answered positively. However, this apathy on CALM's behalf is infectious, causing the correspondent to eventually respond in kind and not bother notifying them at all.

One of the snakes confiscated was a Red-bellied Black Snake (*Pseudechis porphyriacus*). This species is already being legally held in WA and is far less venomous than the local Dugite and Tiger Snake. Contrary to the comments of one CALM official, **antivenom for this species is readily available in WA**. Medically, Tiger Snake Antivenom is often the preferred first-option to neutralise its venom and to

suggest otherwise could be quite dangerous.

CALM, during discussions with WASAH, accept that the current licensing system precludes hobbyists and have been negotiating with the society's representatives to implement changes bringing this state into line with the rest of Australia. The final discussions took place on Tuesday 5th January, two days before the raid. When interstate systems were established amnesties were held allowing hobbyists to become legal. CALM's Gordon Wyre had made it known to the executive and subcommittee that he did not want to reward those breaking the law with a NSW-type amnesty, but on at least three occasions (1 Apr '98, 1 Dec '98 & 14 Dec '98) methods of legalising unlicensed animals were discussed. Some possible scenarios suggested by Gordon for achieving this were: declare and forfeit altogether, declare and have the chance of bidding at a public auction to recover, or declare and pay a penalty per animal. There was no mention of raids to remove unlicensed reptiles, although it was reported in the media that these were planned for two months - when the WASAH-CALM meetings were being held. The current actions of CALM will serve no good purpose, only further alienate amateur herpetologists and perpetuate in good-people a mistrust of this Department.

Following is the unedited press release issued by the society shortly after.

WASAH's PRESS RELEASE

11 January, 1999

CALM's "BIGGEST RAID"
- heavy-handed treatment of
WA amateur herpetologists
on the eve of new regulations.

"In its biggest raid, the Department of Conservation and Land Management has seized more than 70 illegally-held reptiles from homes in suburban Perth" *The West Australian* 9th January 1999

"The CALM Wildlife Enforcement Officers have really excelled themselves this time" says Mr Brian Bush, the President of the West Australian Society of Amateur Herpetologists.

"In a world where reptiles and other fauna are under constant threat from development and environmental pollution, and where illegal trade sees many Australian reptiles shipped over to Europe and the United States, the 'biggest' thing our Enforcement Officers can manage is to persecute local people who not only have struggled for years to maintain their interest in reptiles, but have also made an enormous contribution in the areas of community service, public education and scientific knowledge".

"The people that CALM have targeted are not elusive backyard operators as portrayed, but are all licensed members

of the volunteer “Snakebusters” team who for many years have been removing dangerous snakes and other reptiles from private and commercial properties around Perth. The ‘Snakebusters’ list is held by CALM and most calls are referred via CALM. Believe it or not, two of the three individuals raided on Thursday night have since had snake removal calls referred to them via CALM! How hypocritical can you get!!!!”.

“Two of the alleged culprits, Mr Brad Maryan of Mount Hawthorn and Mr Bruce George of Gosnells, have carried out numerous field surveys of reptiles for CALM and for the West Australian Museum. Russell Brown of Westfield has assisted in metropolitan nature reserve surveys. Mr Maryan is also listed as an official tour leader in CALM’s own 1999 *Landscape Expeditions Program*, where he is described as “an honorary technical officer with CALM”. I can only wonder whether CALM are still expecting him to lead their expeditions, given their recent course of action?”

In most other Australian States the private keeping of reptiles has been possible for many years, regulated by licensing systems comparable to those already in place in WA for birds. After many years of lobbying by WASAH and other concerned parties, the Minister for the Environment and CALM publicly acknowledged the inequities of this situation, and set about working on

replacement regulations to facilitate private keeping under the current *Wildlife Conservation Act 1950*. WASAH have played a major role in the drafting of the new regulations, advising on the suitability of different species for captive keeping and breeding. CALM themselves have very little expertise in this area.

“People might reasonably ask why the three ‘culprits’ couldn’t wait for another six months before getting licenses under the new system?”, asks Bush.

“The fact of the matter is that quite a lot of the snakes and other reptiles picked up on ‘snake-removal’ calls are not local animals, but have been brought into the Perth area either from up north or from interstate. This often happens accidentally, with frogs or reptiles getting a ride on a truck or in a fruit-box, but some animals are also brought to Perth by less-dedicated animal-keepers who subsequently release the animal into a garden or nearby bushland. This is bad-news from the biological point of view, as the ‘foreigners’ can compete with locally occurring species or may be carrying new diseases or parasites”.

Under CALM’s ‘snake-removal’ license, the snakebuster has 72 hours in which to “dispose” of the animal. For a locally occurring species, such as a Dugite or Tiger Snake, this can be done by releasing the snake into one of the larger suburban bushland areas.

“Non-local species pose a real dilemma” says Bush. “In most cases, we don’t know exactly where these animals come from. And even if we did, who is going to travel to the Pilbara or Kimberley to release a snake or lizard? Perth Zoo is not able to accommodate the numbers of animals involved and CALM itself does not have any facility or procedure in place to deal with these animals.” “An added complication is that these non-local animals are often in very poor condition, either after a long road trip or due to neglect on the part of their former owner. In some cases, months of diligent nursing are needed to restore an animal to good health. Despite what many people seem to think, the captive care of reptiles is neither easy nor is it cheap.”

Bush is passionate when he speaks of this dilemma. “Those of us involved in this area are constantly caught between a rock and hard place. To obey the letter of the law, we are forced to act against fundamental scientific and moral principles. But if we do what we feel is best for the animals and for nature, then we are forced into acting like criminals. Some of us have gone grey worrying about this!”

Current CALM regulations do allow for captive-keeping of reptiles for ‘scientific’ purposes, but only a small number of ‘research’ licenses have been granted. Several members of WASAH hold licenses of this kind, enabling them to take part in various captive-breeding projects in

collaboration with staff of the WA Museum and CALM.

“Many of our members have applied for research licenses on the grounds that we know little about the husbandry requirements of many of our native reptiles, let alone breed them successfully in captivity”, says Bush. “In the future, many of our rare reptiles may need to be bred in captivity in order to save them from extinction.”

Already, one reptile species, the Western Swamp Tortoise, has been brought back from the brink of extinction by a captive-breeding program. In this case, the lack of local expertise led CALM and Perth Zoo to call in a European turtle-breeding specialist, Dr Gerald Kuchling.

“Many of our license requests and other correspondence with CALM has simply gone unanswered over the years” says Bush. “This has even happened when we’ve notified them of non-local animals that simply can’t be released into the wild. Okay, we know that these are difficult issues, but in the meantime we are being left caring for growing numbers of illegally-held reptiles”.

The forthcoming changes in reptile-keeping regulations have been welcomed by reptile enthusiasts in WA and around Australia. However, they have also led to fears that many animals will be taken from the wild in anticipation of the new, more liberal system.

Bush is adamant that this will not happen. “We have made it clear to all of our members that the new laws are to regulate the keeping of an essentially captive-bred population of reptiles” he says. “Under no circumstances would we condone the wholesale removal of animals from the wild”.

“The reasoning behind Thursday’s ‘reptile-busts’ really has me puzzled” says Bush. “Overall we’ve been really happy with the progress made in drafting the new regulations. Both WASAH and CALM have acknowledged that we had to go through a process of transition to the new system and that this would involve the ‘legalising’ of various long-term captive stock. What I can’t understand is why CALM has felt it necessary to take this heavy-handed action against people who have only ever tried to do the right thing both by the outdated laws and by the animals that they feel so passionate about!”

Despite the recent actions by CALM officers, members of WASAH plan to continue their snakebuster and other activities. “Above all else, we just love reptiles” says Bush. “If we’re not out there rescuing people from snakes and snakes from people, then a whole lot more animals are going to be slaughtered needlessly over the coming months”.

“Our other big worry at the moment”, say Bush, “is the welfare of the 70 animals seized by CALM on

Thursday evening. “The CALM Wildlife Officers simply don’t have the expertise to adequately care for such a large number and variety of reptiles and frogs. Many of them need special diets and have very specific routines that can’t be altered without seriously stressing the animals”.

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

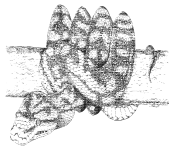
Legal Costs Fundraising

WASAH proposes to raise funds to assist members in obtaining legal aid when they are discriminately targeted with frivolous (ie, no intent to illegally traffic or exploit) charges under the *Wildlife Conservation Act 1950*. This Act is not in the *Criminal Code* - breaches are defined as simple offences and are heard in the Court of Petty Sessions, and until proven otherwise the defendants are presumed to be innocent.

Rod Jacobson has kindly suggested the following and

made himself available for this fund-raising activity. He often trades second-hand goods at the Sunday markets, and is willing to offer his services along with ute and trailer to pick up and sell WASAH members' junk at the markets to raise money. Anyone else's help is more than welcome, as is their junk, with all proceeds going towards the legal costs for those concerned. If you can help contact Rod on - **014 885547**

WASAH
will also accept cash donations for this purpose.



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Hissed Off

with **Selective Enforcement**

by Robert Browne-Cooper

In late January I had the displeasure of removing a dead Carpet Python from a yard in Stirling. The resident had killed it with a blowtorch. I hate to think of the pain the snake went through.

On another occasion, I was requested to remove a "snake" from a backyard. The woman who telephoned me had dropped a brick on a juvenile Bobtail. It died that night.

I have other examples, as would many snakebusters. These DOA (dead on arrival) call-outs are probably quite frequent, given the widespread fear persisting in many members of the community and their need to kill these harmless native animals. In doing so however, they may be in breach of two State Government Acts: the *Wildlife Conservation Act* and the *Cruelty to Animals Act*. Conveniently for the government and fortunately for these people, if in the rare event of being legally pressed, they would probably avoid prosecution by pleading ignorance in these situations.

For those commissioned to enforce State Government legislation, interpreting the complex issues regarding people's perceptions of danger versus protecting fauna must pose a difficult task indeed. The lack of

attempted prosecutions in this area suggest the legislation is too hard to enforce.

It is a shame that similar incidents to the two mentioned above are ignored while amateur herpetologists, who never forget them, can be victimised by the apparent selective enforcement of unworkable legislation. Killing a reptile through ignorance and fear is tolerated, while keeping a reptile out of genuine interest and fascination is not.

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A REMARKABLE LIZARD

by Brad Maryan

Australia is a great place - heaps of herp, great climate and wide open spaces. When I say, "heaps of herp" I am surely understating the situation here. We are approaching the year 2000 and the descriptions of new species in scientific journals continues. It is mind blowing!

It is even more remarkable when we consider that in the past five years, two new species of skink lizard from Queensland were so unusual that new genera had to be described for them.

Recently Robert Browne-Cooper and I had the great privilege to see and photograph one of these amazing new discoveries. The lizard is called *Nangura spinosa* and it must surely be one of Australia's most distinctive skinks. To date it is only known from two populations near Murgon (250-300k NW of Brisbane) where it occurs in the most amazing habitat. Unfortunately agriculture has severely altered this and what remains are a few isolated pockets mostly restricted to state forest reserves. The habitat is called semi-evergreen vine-thicket and it grows primarily on creek lines. I must say it did seem like rainforest but is quite different.

The population we visited at Nangur State Forest (hence

the generic name) was the first discovered. Forestry management staff were conducting fauna surveys in these vine thickets and were becoming increasingly frustrated due to lack of success. Then, on a slope adjacent to a creek, they noticed a burrow and excavated it revealing a weird looking lizard - the rest is history.

The most distinctive characteristics about *Nangura* is the spiny body and large black eyes - a fascinating combination. Most spiny Australian skinks are associated with rock or woodland areas and do not dig burrows. We know little about the life-style of *Nangura* apart from it occupying its own burrow, usually excavated under a root system, and remaining within it and the general area for long periods of time, maybe even its lifetime. I would imagine that during the breeding season there would be some wider forays by the sexually active males. It has never been observed foraging far during the day, preferring to remain within a very short distance of its burrow. It has been speculated that they do all their feeding from the burrow, ambushing insects as they wander pass. This is one lizard that definitely could not tolerate even a little habitat disturbance - its burrow is extremely important.

Steve Wilson, who took us to Nangur State Forest, made an amazing observation while sitting patiently at a burrow entrance hoping to get some *in situ* photographs. He was

rewarded with an adult appearing at the burrow entrance with a baby on the back. As you can imagine, Steve was beside himself and rolled of a heap of shots. An article on this amazing lizard by Steve was published in *GEO Magazine* Vol. 16: 3 detailing the observations made so far.

Rob and I were indeed very fortunate to have this opportunity and we thank Steve Wilson of the Queensland Museum for providing it. Yes! We did pinch ourselves while photographing *Nangura spinosa*. You beauty!

WASAH Inc. Income & Expenditure to Dec 1998

Dec '97 Balance .. \$2,063.37
'98 INCOME

Subscriptions1,395.00
Donations205.00
Hoop Bags, hooks
& jiggers 820.00
Books/journals776.00
T-Shirts132.00
Keeping Kit30.00
Total \$3,358.00

'98 EXPENDITURE

Books652.36
Herpetofauna770.00
Postage558.92
Printing597.00
Hoop Bags/hooks847.00
T-Shirts110.00
Beverages..... .63.00
EDO Renewal35.00
Advertising39.60
Total \$3,672.88

BANK BALANCE at
22 Dec '98\$1,748.49

Frog Dilemma in WA

The frog fungus which has decimated frog populations in Queensland and Central America has been confirmed as a serious threat to our local frogs. A detailed report, released yesterday by the WA Museum's Curator of Reptiles and Frogs, Dr. Ken Aplin, reports acute fungal infections in five species of local frogs, with infected animals coming from various suburbs of Perth, several localities in the Darling Range, and the Margaret River, Manjimup and Albany regions in the southern regions. As yet, no samples have been tested from outside of the south-west.

"These results are deeply worrying" says Dr Aplin, one of the authors of the report. "The fact that so many species are showing acute infections and across such a wide geographic area means that we are staring in the face of an ecological disaster."

In other parts of Australia and in Panama, the fungal disease has caused many species to become extinct, with even more species suffering population crashes from which they have yet to show any real recovery. In Australia, the disease seems to have first broken out in south-east Queensland, perhaps 15-20 years ago, and has since spread both north and south at a rate of about 100 km per year.

"Frogs are of great ecological significance", says Dr Aplin.

"Over the course of the year, tadpoles and adult frogs eat an enormous amount of both algae and invertebrates, and they also themselves provide a huge quantity of protein for other creatures higher up the food chain, especially many species of birds. We can't even start to imagine the long term consequences of taking frogs out of the ecological equation".

The frog fungus belongs to a group called chytrids which are normally found in soil and waterways. The discovery of a chytrid in the skin of dead and dying frogs came as a great surprise to researchers Dr Rick Speare of James Cook University, Townsville and Dr Lee Berger of CSIRO, Geelong, both of whom have contributed to the Western Australian study. The discovery was announced last year in a major American science journal, following several years of intensive work involving scientists from around the world. The discovery has been heralded internationally as a major breakthrough in the study of globally declining frogs.

"We believe that the frog fungus is a new pathogen which has probably been introduced into Australia from overseas", says Dr Speare. "It seems to be identical to the fungus which is affecting frogs in Panama, but whether it comes from there or from some other area is not yet known". The frog fungus does not pose any known human threat .

Many of the samples used in the study were donated by

members of the Alcoa Frogwatch program, following a call for assistance in November of last year. Frogwatch members keep records on frog activity in their local area, and send information to Dr Aplin, who maintains a database at the Museum. The program has been running since 1995.

"Several Alcoa Frogwatch members had reported unusually low levels of frog activity in their local area during 1998, but I had dismissed these as probably just due to local changes", says Dr Aplin. "In some cases, we now know that the decline in frog numbers was associated with outbreaks of the fungal disease".

"Spot outbreaks of this kind are characteristic for the early stage of a fungus epidemic", says Dr Speare. "In time, we can expect these spots to expand, eventually wiping out any healthy populations in the intervening areas".

Little work has yet been done on finding a cure for the disease. "Individual frogs can probably be treated with fungicide", says Dr Speare, "but this does not help us with the bigger problem, which is to eradicate the frog fungus from the general environment. Much more research is needed into the fungus itself, so that we can identify any possible weak points in its life-cycle".

Dr Aplin is optimistic that extinctions of frog species can be avoided in WA "Thanks to the strong response from the community, we have been

able to catch this epidemic at an early stage”, he says. “We now need to move quickly to ensure maximum protection of our most vulnerable species, and to assess the level of threat to each of the more common and widespread species”.

In the meantime, everyone can help control the spread of the fungus by not intentionally transporting frogs or tadpoles from one area to another, and by also avoiding the transportation of water samples or soil, especially from wetland habitats. Members of the public can also help by reporting any observations of dead or sick frogs to Dr Aplin at the WA Museum on 08 - 94272826.

A HERP THANK YOU

Bruce George, Russell Brown and I want to thank all those members for their supportive phone calls following CALM’s raids on the 7th January. It was really great hearing from people I have not seen for many years. It was also terrific that many of the calls came from CALM personnel too, themselves appalled at this heavy-handed act.

BM

MEMBERS!!!
PLEASE NOTIFY CALM
IF YOU NEED TO HOLD
AN ANIMAL LONGER
THAN THE 72 HOURS

FREE HANDLING VENOMOUS SNAKES

A couple of members have raised their concerns with me of members being shown in the media free-handling tame venomous snakes. They are of the opinion that this reflects poorly on WASAH and may influence members of the public to do the same thing.

I do this quite often myself and believe it is no more serious than the media showing photographs or footage of divers swimming with sharks, rock climbers, horse riders, or apiarists covered in bees!

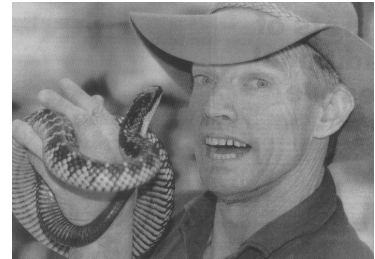
This discussion has been ongoing throughout Australia and the rest of the world during modern times. The opposition generally is based to a greater extent on the almost inherent fear of snakes in many people.

We as educators, with some affinity with snakes, are duty bound to present these animals as no more fearsome than any other organism. All wild things are going to respond defensively if touched. The danger is not the beast *per se* but an individual’s attitude. Presently in WA too few people have a close relationship with dangerously venomous snakes for a well balanced discussion to be entered into. Saying that, I would be interested in members’ views on this topic

so that they can be published in future editions of the *WASAH Newsletter*.

Ed.

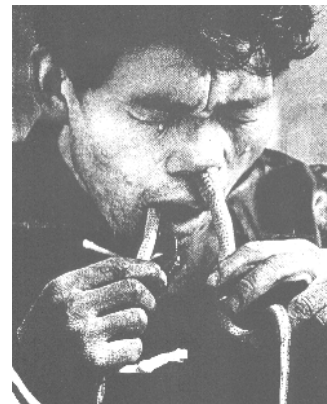
**Check
these
out!**



Isn't the above a more positive portrayal than that in the following photos?



**or
this!**



An insight into Brad Maryan WASAH's Vice-President

Back in the 1995 *WASAH Newsletter* No. 3 there was an article by Brad Maryan allowing members an insight into the president, yours truly. As Brad is the vice-president, it is only fitting that I respond in kind, and the time is appropriate for this now.

I have known Brad Maryan for over 20 years and, along with many of those close to him, I am proud to call him both friend and, in regard to our mutual love for and study of reptiles (and to a lesser extent amphibians) colleague. Brad has always had an interest in herpetology and has assisted amateur and professional workers Australia-wide and internationally. His commitment to increasing our knowledge of this faunal group is legendary and the only reward he expects in return is the enjoyment he experiences working with herpetofauna. His donation of specimens, both roadkilled and field collected, to the Western Australian Museum, his co-authorship of the best-seller, *Reptiles and Frogs of the Perth Region*, his articles on reptiles often referred to in other publications, his work with the Western Australian Naturalists' Club and his assistance to me over the years all reflect a person of the utmost integrity committed to increasing our knowledge in herpetology and thereby allowing improved management of wild populations to ensure their continued existence.

At this point I must mention his concern, along with Robert Browne-Cooper's, at the decline in numbers of the skink *Ctenotus lanceolini* on Lancelin Island. He brought this to CALM's attention and made himself available free of charge to accompany researchers and some other WASAH members on field-trips to the island and the adjacent area, where eventually the first specimen known from the mainland was found. This is one example amongst many involving volunteer work for CALM. He has also managed several urban nature reserve surveys for WASAH.

Brad's contribution to date has been recognised with the naming of reptiles after him by two of Australia's leading taxonomists, the late Dr Glen Storr (1991) and more recently Dr Ken Aplin (with Dr Mark Adams, 1998), both of which respectively held and hold senior research positions with the WA Museum.

Without appearing too melodramatic, if there was anyone I would entrust my life with, if a gauge of their ability to succeed in this was measured by their capacity to commit themselves, then Brad's my man. His history of a profound personal commitment to herpetology stands him head and shoulders above the majority.

Storr, G.M. 1991. A new subspecies of *Lerista planiventralis* (Lacertilia: Scincidae) from Western Australia. *Rec. West. Aust. Mus.* 15 (2): 483-485.

Aplin, K.P. & Adams, M. 1998. Morphological and genetic discrimination of new species and subspecies of gekkonid and scincid lizards (Squamata: Lacertilia) from the Carnarvon Basin region of Western Australia. *J. Roy. Soc. West. Aust.* 81: 201-223.

The Tony Pattison Encouragement Grant

In memory of an enthusiastic lad with a profound love of herpetology, one hundred dollars will be made available by WASAH annually to a successful applicant for any herpetologically related project. Grant funds are the result of donations WASAH received after Tony's funeral. His parents Dave and Lyn requested that people do this rather than purchase flowers. They have also kindly donated as a component of each grant a terrarium made to the successful applicant's specifications.

All applicants must be members of the society and less than eighteen years of age. The money will be used to assist in the project, such as for fares or fuel to visit a study area, towards equipment ie, terrariums, terrarium fittings, to purchase reference books, etc.

The successful applicant will be required to provide an article for the *WASAH Newsletter* on their project within twelve months of obtaining the grant. This will include mention of the *Tony Pattison Encouragement Grant* and how this was used to assist in their project.

Applications to be made in writing to reach the executive by September of each year with the successful applicant being notified in writing shortly after and their name published in the following *WASAH Newsletter*.

Anyone wishing to contribute money towards the *Tony Pattison Encouragement Grant* can do so anonymously or by filling in the following and returning it to 169 Egina Street, Mount Hawthorn WA 6016.

Name

Address

Donation enclosed

**WASAH
GENERAL MEETING
Saturday 6 March, 1999
7.30pm
Perth Zoo Ed Centre
Entry off Labouchere Road
SPECIAL
Guest Speaker:**

Dr Mike Bamford
(Regular Writer for *Earth 2000*)
“The biology of Bobtails”

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(08) 9445 2409
Treasurer: Russell Brown
(08) 9390 8091
Executive Minder: Bruce George
(08) 9490 2107

**CALM-WASAH
LIAISON
SUBCOMMITTEE**
Home numbers
Simon Ball 9448
2168
Mike Lynch 9300 2496
Jamie Stuart 9571
1832

WASAH is an informal group of people with similar interests - all wishing to keep for private study and "love", frogs, turtles, lizards or snakes!

WASAH joined the Affiliation of Australasian Herpetological Societies in 1994.

Address all correspondence related to this newsletter to:
The Editor, 9 Birch Place, Stoneville, Australia 6081

Snake victim's horror ordeal: 'my arm cut off, but I'm lucky to be here'

by Maria Billias, *Northern Territory News*, Monday, December 14, 1998

A Darwin man told yesterday how his left arm was amputated after being bitten nine times by a deadly snake.

Gordon Lyons said he almost died after his heart stopped three times on the operating table at Royal Darwin Hospital. He spent seven weeks in a coma and was kept alive with a dialysis machine and ventilator after a king brown bit his left arm two months ago.

Mr Lyons, who has still not regained movement in his legs, said doctors revived him three times on the operating table.

He said: "I'm lucky to be here right now.

"But I still can't believe my arm's been chopped off just for one snake. I still have my life and I guess that's the most important thing."

Mr Lyons said he was bitten by the snake, considered to be one of the most venomous, after he picked it up from the side of the road near Litchfield.

Mr Lyons, who admitted he was drunk at the time, said he and a mate had been driving from Mandorah to Darwin when they saw it.

He said: "I remembered the guys at the Mandorah Pub wanted something to put in their huge fish tank.

"But made the stupid mistake of grabbing it with my left hand because I was holding a beer in my right one. I had its head in my hand but it got loose and grabbed the web of my left hand ... its fangs were that big it ripped my hand open.

"I tore it off me and put it in a plastic bag and threw it in the back of the car.

"For some stupid reason, I stuck my hand back in the bag, and it must have smelled blood, and it bit me another eight times."

Mr Lyons said he began vomiting and suffering diarrhoea "about three seconds later".

He said: "My mate was trying to keep me awake by whacking me in the head and pouring beer on me."

Mr Lyons said his last memory was passing out, covered in blood, at the Noonamah Hotel moments before being taken by ambulance to the Royal Darwin Hospital.

RDH specialist physician Bart Currie said the venom had caused severe damage Mr Lyon's muscles, which led to his left arm turning black and becoming "dead". Mr Currie said: "Of all the snake bites in Australia I'm aware of, this man is the sickest to have ever survived

Hit out

"It will take a long time and a lot of rehabilitation before he has full muscle improvement."

Territory snake expert Graeme Gow hit out at the actions that lead to the bite. Mr Gow said the only time any snake would attack was if it was provoked.

Mr Gow said Mr Lyons was "extremely lucky to be alive" and that he owed his life to Royal Darwin Hospital doctors.

Mr Gow said: "It is simply a miracle, It's a credit to the workers at RDH."

How often do snakes slough?

by Robert Browne-Cooper, 24 Wotan Road, INNALOO WA 6018

One of the most commonly asked questions during reptile presentations is how often do snakes slough? I find that my response quickly turns into a lecture discussing factors which may effect sloughing frequency such as species, age, seasonality, growth rate, individuality and captive-bred versus wild-caught.

To investigate the question I had a look back through data recorded for captive carpet pythons and selected two animals in my care. One is a long-term male held for 7 years, the other is a captive born 1 year old juvenile male.

I worked out the number of days between sloughing. For the adult, I have included its slough frequency before and after a change was made to its cage heating regime. The juvenile is given access to warmth constantly.

During the early captive history of the adult male, it developed

symptoms of respiratory infection. This illness is often attributed to insufficient heating. Until this occurred I had been providing it with additional warmth during the warmer months and cooling it off over winter by not providing any additional warmth for up to five months. This “cooling off” was the most likely cause of the respiratory problem. To overcome this I installed a timer to provide some warmth every day for all snakes during winter. This cured the respiratory problem, and is relevant to this study because it appeared to effect this python’s sloughing frequency (see Table).

From the results, the juvenile carpet python sloughed more frequently than the adult. This agrees with what I have been telling people who ask the question about slough frequency ie, young snakes slough more often than older snakes.

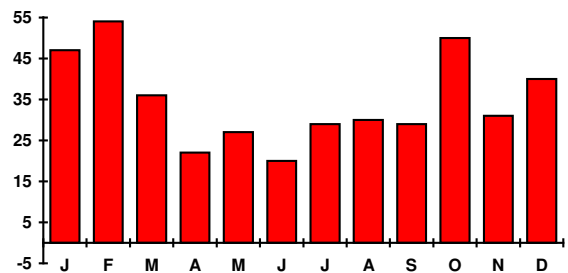
The slough frequency increased for the adult after the heating regime was changed to include winter warming. So this would indicate that captive conditions have a great effect on sloughing frequency. The sloughing range is highly variable for both snakes. Data on the juvenile includes the post natal slough which occurred 13 days after hatching. The adult sloughed only twice during winter over the 7 years, so his sloughing would seem to be highly seasonal, which probably relates to some extent to cage temperature and agrees with data of its sloughing when cooled down during winter.

This study is obviously too small to make any bold statements about the question posed but it does support what I often tell people who ask. It also demonstrates the value of recording notes on captive animals.

	Juvenile (1 yr)	Adult (7 yr)
Cooled during winter	no data	173 (n=5, 44-294)
Not cooled during winter	58 (n=6, 13-100)	89 (n=13, 52-192)

Table showing sloughing frequency for two male Carpet Pythons (collected over one year for the juvenile and seven years for the adult) and presented as the mean number of days between sloughs, ie the less number of days the greater the frequency. n = number of sloughs.

SLOUGH FREQUENCY RELATIVE TO MONTH
(Data from 425 records)



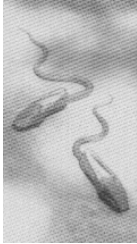
Graph based on unpublished data by Brian Bush demonstrating seasonal influence (probably cooler air temperature) on a winter heated collection of snakes.

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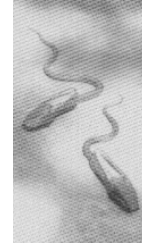
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In 1997 Steven Holland was awarded the Samstag International Visual Arts Scholarship. This allowed him to attend the Royal College of Art in London and engage in detailed study in natural history illustration of *Pseudonaja affinis*, commonly known as the dugite.

Holland's practice focuses on the relationship between human and non-human lives. His work looks at natural history as a system of representation and language which imposes meaning onto the lives of animals - he believes, "We are limited by a human understanding of the world and we rarely afford nature its own vocabulary - it's a one way relationship."

'LAMIA'S SLIPPERS' was specifically developed for the 1999 Festival of Perth and for all Western Australians. **At 4pm on Saturday 13 February** snakehandler Brian Bush - with some very alive snakes! - will open the exhibition at the Fremantle Arts Centre.

A number of Artist's Talks are also associated with the exhibition: as part of **ARTiculations at PICA - Sunday 14 February at 3pm,**

Artist Talk with slides at Fremantle Arts Centre - **Wednesday 17 February at 6pm.**

Weekend Workshops at Fremantle Arts Centre include **SNAKES IN ART - SNAKE DRAWING** with Steven Holland - **Saturday 20 February** and **BIRDS BIRDS BIRDS** with Steven Holland - **Sunday 24 February.**

**LIVE SNAKES AT CENTRE : Saturday 20 February at 11.30am & 3pm with Brian Bush
Saturday 27 February at 2.30pm with Jamie Stuart**

Further information on **9335 8244**

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