

Electronic publication of the Victorian Herpetological Society

# ODATRIA

Issue 2 February 2009



**Are you ready for the EXPO?**

# Odatria

## Newsletter of the Victorian Herpetological Society No. 2, February 2009

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### The VHS would like to thank the following individuals for their help & support:

Brian Barnett, Lani Barnett, Daavid Turnbull, Judy Turnbull, Jennifer Lewin, Anthony Bettink, Victoria Sullivan, Mark Borg, Marianne Beatty, Kerrie Alexander, Robyn Welsh, Simon Watharow



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**Brown Tree Snake *Boiga irregularis* by**  
**Phil Elliott**

# EDITORIAL

by Brian Barnett

The last thing that I thought that I would ever be doing, would be writing an editorial for the VHS. But, strange things happen in life and I suppose that this is one of them.

When I retired from the VHS many years ago, after serving nearly 20 years as President, I vowed to keep my nose out of things and let the younger generation take over. I suppose that how it has been running in recent days is up to one's own opinion. My opinion is that it could have been renamed the Titanic society.

It has always been difficult to obtain good committee members who can afford the time and expertise in running such a society. Sometimes, through no fault of their own, committees can fail to reach the expectations of their members and certainly cop the blame and criticism.

Societies, such as the VHS, have gone through major changes over the last decade or so. In the glory days of the VHS where we had over 700 members, would have up to 300 turn up to a meeting and the after supper resembled that of a Roman banquet. Herps in those days were deprived of almost everything and would fully support everything that we did. We didn't have the publications that are available these days, our publication 'Monitor' was the king with 64 pages almost totally free of adverts. We didn't have Foxtel and its excellent nature programmes or the internet and the forums. These days herps generally don't have to rely on societies to be able to obtain the required information. We will never reach the heights of the 'old days' but there are still enough members willing to participate in herpetological societies. A good society can be judged, not by its numbers, but by the members being willing to contribute.

Unfortunately 'Monitor' had to be given a rest as it was costing far more than the subscriptions received each year. It was even difficult to get the (then) committee to accept that this should be put to rest, you don't have events like an Expo just to hold up a failing publication. Material was also becoming more difficult to obtain. It was very strange and also disappointing that some of the very long term members deserted the society because of the demise of 'Monitor'. One would think that common sense would indicate why.

Attitudes seem quite different to a decade or so ago. Most members these days are very 'what can we get out of it' and very few assist or contribute for the general interest or support of the hobby. I suppose it is just changing times.

One of the big disappointments last year was the relatively small number that attended the Greg Maxwell Chondro Day after last years VHS Expo. I really could not believe that members were not 'hanging from the rafters' for this one. A few of us private members (not the VHS) sponsored Greg's plane fare etc, from the U.S, for this one off talk, which was, incidentally, one of the better presentations I have ever attended. Those that did not turn up were really the ones that missed out. And the excuses.....I would be embarrassed to repeat them here.

With all of that in mind, I had a good talk with the present committee and suggested that they be involved in society matters as time permits (family comes first) and don't bust the bubble by trying to do too much, create too many new ideas or the like. You will get very little support and only put yourself under duress.

*Odatria* is not the replacement for 'Monitor' and was never intended to be. The first issue was a bumper one but will now be presented in a more modest form. It is to be a communication link with some material from the past, that current members would not have the opportunity to see elsewhere.

My election as President is intended to be short term and I am definitely not in for the long haul. I took it on as a 'whip cracker' to attempt to get things done instead of just talking, talking, talking. I agreed to be the sole VHS communicator with Simon Watharow who was appointed the VHS Expo co-ordinator. One on one has worked remarkably well. Things seem to be going along fine, we will always be looking for committee members who can contribute and hope that the 'critical/vocal few' may consider showing us how to do things better.

I am having very little to do with the herpetological side of the society but I'm putting my limited available time into the administration section in the running of the VHS.

We look forward to your support, I am always approachable by phone or email, so any problems, get in touch.

Yours in herp,

Brian Barnett  
VHS President 2009



## *Obituaries*

Since our last edition of Odatria the VHS has sadly lost two valued members and friends of our society. It is always difficult to know what to say in these situations, but we felt we had to pay tribute to them.

### *Leslie 'Les' Hugh Williams*



Ballan snake catcher Les Williams passed away peacefully at the Bacchus Marsh Hospital on 15-01-09 after a battle with cancer. Les was a valued member and supporter of both the VHS and VAAH. He was passionate about native wildlife and the welfare of all animals. The following quote is taken from Les' website-

*"Les Williams is a great believer in treating snakes and all native animals with respect, as his overruling philosophy is to help keep mother nature alive".*

Our thoughts are with his wife Fleur, daughter Tamara, son-in-law Aidyn and all his extended family and friends.

Keep Mother Nature Alive!



### *Abigail Rose Bettink*

The daughter of Kate and Anthony Bettink.

Anthony wrote the following-

Kate and I would like to thank all VHS members for their contributions over the last few months to commiserate the passing of our daughter.

Abigail Rose Bettink- born 15-12-2008, passed 15-12-2008. (Dad) Anthony delivered her and held her as she took her only breath of life. You will be forever in our hearts. I pray nobody has to lose their child, it is an unexplainable feeling of emptiness.

Kate dedicated the following scripture to Abigail Rose at the service.

*God saw that you were weary  
The road to steep to climb  
He gently closed your tired eyes  
And whispered  
Peace in thine*

Anthony also wrote:- "And to Les, God bless you and we will see you again. My prayers are with your family right now. It might not feel like it but he is in a better place that I can only imagine. Les has been down a very hard road of late and my prayers are with you. If I have been to bold please forgive me.

## *Rest In Peace*

# 2009 VHS Reptile & Amphibian Expo

## 28th February 2009

### Melbourne Showgrounds (Nicholas Pavillion)

The Victorian Reptile and Amphibian Expo is so close you can almost see the lines of people waiting. See the spectacular reptiles and frogs. This year's event is proudly sponsored by Zoo Med who for the first time will be at an Australian reptile expo. Make sure you chat to the staff of Zoo Med who will really show the incredible range of products that have been designed and developed with reptiles in mind. Zoo Med is the face of reptile products worldwide and we have no doubt that all keepers will be hooked on their range. Slitherin has also been a significant contributor, to this years expo, their range of reptile racks and vivariums show why they are the number one for reptile housing.

This is an exciting, not to be missed, event for all Australian reptile enthusiasts. This year's expo will be the biggest yet, with various sponsors, shops, wholesalers and dealers selling a range of 'herp' products and animals. With animals available directly from the breeder, it will be a great chance to grab a bargain on pythons, monitors, geckos, dragons and frogs. The expo is largely a cash and carry event so remember to bring a fat wallet and your valid Wildlife Licence!

There will be numerous stalls and products on display for buying! So what's the latest buzz? Reptile One has arranged for the special animals:- Pygmy Freshwater Crocodiles, Mertens' Water Monitors, Black - Palmed Monitors and Kimberley Rock Monitors. It will be a real treat for those who have never seen these special lizards in real life. For the turtle lovers there will be Pig Nosed Turtles, a magnificent species that glides through the water. Naturally other Darwin species will be on display at the Black Snake Productions display area with Golden Tree Snakes, Frilled Lizards etc.

The demonstrations and talks during the course of the day will revolve around Zoo Med and Black Snake Productions - both providing a great chance to get all your questions answered.

At around 3.00PM The Victorian Herpetological Society will be conducting a super mega auction which will include rare and hard to find reptile books and articles, animals, enclosures and heaps of reptile products. Keep your eye on our website in the days leading up to the auction for lists of the items to go under the hammer.

To guarantee buying satisfaction ensure you have plenty of cash on the day. Some sellers will have credit card facility but 80% will not, especially the private sellers.

Mike Swan Herp Books will be conducting a public launch of the new 'Keeping and Breeding Australian Lizards'. Other stalls include:- The Herp Shop, Chemical Essentials (F10), D & L Aviaries, Snakeranch, Pails for Scales, Reptiles Australia, Scales and Tails Australia, Amazing Amazon, Upmarket Aquariums, Mad About Pets, Totally Reptiles, Amphibian Research Centre, Reptile Rescue, Reptiles Australia, Everything Reptiles and heaps more.

"People often ask what I like the most about expos and my response is that it is the one day a year I get to meet and greet my fellow herper friends and make heaps of new ones. I can buy everything I need and just soak up being a reptile nut in an environment created for us. Under no circumstances should you miss this year's expo, it will be long remembered."

Simon Watharow, Expo Co-ordinator.

If you are interested in having your own stall at the expo, please contact the Expo Co-ordinator  
**Simon Watharow - [simon@snakepro.com.au](mailto:simon@snakepro.com.au) 0400 809922**

# 2009 VHS Reptile & Amphibian Expo







# A Beginner's Guide to Keeping .... Turtles



## Introduction

A decade ago or more, except for a handful of pioneering enthusiasts, genuine breeders were virtually non-existent. Their patience, improved husbandry techniques and record keeping has paid off. Many of the commonly encountered problems are rarely seen today, and captive breeding is a regular event on the calendar. Today we are able to enjoy the determination and achievements of past and present enthusiasts, with freshwater turtles being one of the more commonly encountered reptiles maintained in private collections throughout Australia. Given a few simple requirements, freshwater turtles are easy to maintain in captivity and require less time and space than other animals such as cats and dogs. Because turtles are less demanding than other companion animals, parents find them a great learning tool for children. Kids love turtles, and the responsibility of owning a turtle prepares them for life's greater responsibilities.

Keeping turtles in captivity is an exciting, and sometimes contagious experience for both children and adults. Kids even get enjoyment out of feeding "Dads" turtles. The responsive, and sometimes comical, interaction with the keeper has its own rewards that can only be shared by other enthusiasts. The benefits of owning such an animal are many and varied, in fact some of Australia's finest herpetologists began their interest in reptiles with a pet turtle. The information gained through captive husbandry greatly improves our understanding of biodiversity, and knowledge of the biology and conservation of the species. But you don't have to be a budding young herpetologist to own a turtle, for some people the therapeutic value of relaxing in front of the aquarium is enough. Turtle enthusiasts, regardless of the size of their collection, find their hobby as equally rewarding as those people who rock climb, race cars, listen to music, paint pictures or collect stamps. The value of their hobby is important to themselves.



This beginners guide should answer many of the common questions asked by novices, and thus improve husbandry standards for keeping turtles. This guide should not replace a good book on keeping turtles, or be a substitute for advice from experienced turtle enthusiasts and veterinarians. We all have our own techniques, however the basics are very similar. This guide is based on 25 years of intensive turtle husbandry and research by the author.

## Outdoor Ponds



Outdoor ponds provide turtles with access to natural sunlight and foods that may wander into the enclosure. An outdoor enclosure also gives the turtle more space than can generally be provided in an indoor enclosure. The strongest type of pond, and most permanent, is the concrete pond. Alternatively pre-made fibreglass or plastic come in a range of sizes, shapes and prices. These can be buried to ground level.

Ponds should be a minimum of 500mm deep to reduce overheating in summer or freezing in winter, and as large as possible. The pond should be constructed in such a way that the turtle can easily get out of the water and bask on the surrounding land area. A plank may be beneficial for the turtles to bask on, or act as a ramp out of the water. The turtles should have access to both sunlight and shade at any time of the day.

Enclosure walls are typically made from corrugated iron, tin, cement sheet, smooth walled brick, or wire netting, with a wire mesh roof. This obviously prevents your turtle from escaping, but also keeps unwanted predatory animals out. Ensure that rocks, logs, branches, grasses and small shrubs are not used as a ladder to escape over the walls, as most turtles are good climbers despite their somewhat cumbersome appearance.

## Indoor Enclosures

Glass aquariums are one of the most common enclosures in which to house turtles indoors. They should be of adequate size so that overcrowding does not occur, ensuring that individuals don't bump into each other as they swim. As an alternative, fibreglass or plastic containers of an appropriate size, also make good enclosures. Farm feeder troughs are ideal as they are much larger than the smaller tubs found in some stores. If you use decorations, like rocks or timber, be sure that the turtle cannot dislodge the furnishings or wedge itself, which may result in drowning.

A land area such as a platform or similar shelf must also be provided for the turtle to leave the water and bask, and thereby dry itself completely. The size of the platform depends on the turtle and as a general rule all the turtles in the enclosure should be able to sit comfortably on the platform. The platform may be siliconed or sat in position, then covered with carpet grass for a more natural appearance, a small ramp may also be fastened in place with silicone to make an exit from the water much easier for the turtle. Carpet grass, or some other type of plastic mat, may extend down the ramp, alternatively, beads of silicone may be used as a ladder for turtles to exit the water. An advantage of the shelf is that turtles can swim underneath, thus maximising the amount of space in an aquarium/tub.



## Lighting & Heating

Turtles that are maintained indoors will need an artificial light and heat source to provide a day/night cycle. One cannot underestimate the importance in quality of light for turtles, especially those which are housed indoors. Lighting which is specially manufactured for reptiles is generally termed full spectrum lighting and provides reptiles with beneficial light waves, similar to that of the sun. The lights should not be too high in UV output as this can be detrimental to the turtle's health, such as burning the eyes. A light bulb over the land platform will help raise the air temperature and when placed above the land area it doubles as a basking light which helps stimulate natural behaviour patterns. The water temperature should be maintained between 22 to 28°C, with the air temperature a few degrees higher, depending on the species. The temperature can be dropped a few degrees over winter.

## Water Quality

When it comes to water quality, whether it be a pond or an aquarium, the primary concern for most turtle keepers is keeping the water clean, odourless and clear. This may be done using a good filtration system, weekly water changes and regular monitoring of water quality. If the water is unable to support fish then it is also unsatisfactory for turtles, therefore, the basic aquarium principles that apply to keeping fish are relevant to keeping turtles. This means monitoring pH, hardness, ammonia, nitrates and keeping the water oxygenated. Turtles tend to produce more waste material than other aquatic animals such as fish, so regular water changes will be needed. The water will also need to have a good quality filtration system, one that can handle the damage incurred by turtles.

## Feeding

The amount of food offered to turtles can be difficult to judge, as most are opportunistic feeders and will gorge themselves in anticipation of the lean times ahead. Turtles should not be over fed as this may lead to obesity or other diet related disorders. Most turtles often swim frantically towards you when you walk into the room, this is often interpreted as the turtle begging for food or being hungry, and as tempting as it may be, do not offer food unless it is feeding time. Feeding time should be done two to three times a week, depending on how active your turtle is. As a guide, offer the turtle a portion of food about the size of its head at each feeding.

The best foods to offer turtles should consist of plant material such as algae, *Vallisneria*, *Elodea*, water cress, duckweed, alfalfa, swiss chard, non-fibrous greens, celery tops, cabbage, spinach, kale, lettuce (darkly coloured), squash, tomato, sweet potato, pumpkin, zucchini, corn, dried (dehydrated) or fresh fruits (eg. figs, melons, apples, peaches). Likewise, turtles will readily eat beetles, bugs, crickets, daphnia, dragonflies, earwigs, fish, flies, grasshoppers, mice, moths, mussels, nymphs and larvae, shrimps, slaters, snails, spiders, water boatmen, worms, yabbies, non-fatty meats and organ meats (eg. chicken or ox heart and liver), tinned dog or cat foods, dry dog or cat food (soaked or un-soaked), fish flakes, trout pellets, yabby pellets and commercial reptile foods.

It will be necessary to supplement foods like meat with vitamins and minerals, particularly for turtles kept indoors. Multi-vitamins can be sprinkled over, or packed into the food and are available pre-packed (eg. ZooMed Reptivite®, Herptivite®, Nekton-Rep®). Varying the diet as much as possible will help to provide a broader range of vitamins and minerals to your turtle and reduce the risk of nutritional disorders.



## Ailments & Disorders

The majority of ailments and disorders affecting captive turtles usually result from improper husbandry. Some examples include insufficient heat and light, being fed in cold conditions, dirty enclosures and putrefied water (eg. faeces, rotten food, etc), contact with other sick animals, and injuries. Early stages of ailments can be determined by careful observation. If your turtle is routinely inspected then you will recognise changes from normal behaviour. Treatment needs to be provided as soon as a problem is noticed, before it becomes too advanced. As with any ailment or disorder, a veterinarian should always be consulted for positive identification. An experienced reptile veterinarian will usually discuss your husbandry before embarking on any course of treatment.



# VHS MEETING REVIEW

**DECEMBER 5<sup>th</sup>, 2008  
GREG FYFE**

It was off to the East again for the last VHS meeting of 2008.

The night started off a bit easier for some as three new VHS signs with arrows made it easier for people to find our venue! We have been told of people in the past making the trip out, only to get lost in Monash University. Hopefully with the new signs, new map on the website and the emergency mobile phone number (attached to the map), this will never happen again.

One of the first things that strikes you as you enter the venue are the animals on display, thanks to Black Snake Productions. On this occasion there were two desert enclosures set up to coincide with our talks, a beautiful Woma in one and a Spiny Tailed Monitor in the other. The VHS would like to thank Mike and Kerrie Alexander of Black Snake Productions for their time in creating this great addition to our meetings.

Mike Swan was also back with a great array of herp books for sale. Many people were asking when his next book, "Keeping and Breeding Australian Lizards", is due out. He assures us it's at the printers as we speak!

If that wasn't enough, we also had a laptop showing footage of the 2008 VHS Reptile Expo including interviews with many big name herpers (Greg Maxwell, Brian Barnett, John Weigel and Roy Pails just to name a few). Keep your eye on the VHS website as we hope to have this DVD available to purchase in early 2009.



Guest speaker - Greg Fyfe

We then all headed into the theatre for the AGM in which the committee for the following 12 months was announced. The father of the VHS, Brian Barnett, has come back and taken on the role of President. Brian had a word about some of his opinions and plans for the future. He hopes to rejuvenate enthusiasm in the VHS and looks forward to this challenge.

The auction kicked off and it was great to see our guest speaker straight in on the bidding. There were many herp products up for auction including herp related books, herp products and reptile tucker in the form of frozen chicks. But, as usual, it was the animals that generated the most attention and eager bidding! A couple of pairs of Black Rock Scorpions, a Long Neck Turtle, a Short Neck Turtle and a pair of Blue Tongue Lizards found new homes on the night. Thanks to all those who donated items (including Black Snake Productions, the Herp Shop, Snake Handler the Lost Herps Home and Andrew Owen) and to everyone who placed a bid and helped raise funds for the VHS.



Inside the meeting venue

It was finally time for our guest speaker, Greg Fyfe, to take the stage. Greg was a senior zookeeper (mammals and reptiles) and then acting curator at the Alice Springs Desert Park for over 10 years. His working life spans Melbourne Zoo, the Conservation Commission of the Northern Territory (ranger in Kakadu and Ayers Rock - Mount Olga National Park) and a small business owner pioneering habitat based animal displays, opening the Arid Australia Reptile Display in Alice Springs.



Greg Fyfe and a great photo of a Gidgee Skink

The first of Greg's talks was "Field techniques for finding and capturing reptiles". Greg described some of Australia's different habitats and the best methods and tools for locating herps in each environment. Who would have thought one of the best tools would be a 600ml plastic drink bottle which can easily be converted into an effective funnel! Greg discussed capturing reptiles using these funnels at regular intervals along temporary fencing, however, cautioned that it is vital to check them regularly as animals can quickly over-heat in the midday sun. The audience was also reminded that our native habitats can be very fragile and disturbance by herpers needs to be kept to a minimum. I'm sure Greg had everyone daydreaming of their next herping adventure with a few new tips to try. Always be sure to check the legality of herping in areas you intend to go and be sure to replace any habitat you may disturb in searching for the herp.



Greg Fyfe speaking about searching for the Floodplains Skink



Greg showing one of his photos of the Floodplains Skink

After a short break and socialising it was time to head back in the theatre for Greg's second talk, "Searching for the Floodplains Skink (*Egernia slateri*) and its close relatives". You can tell this is an animal Greg is truly fascinated with, his enthusiasm in speaking of his experience with this small lizard really brought the audience into his talk. Greg detailed how he came from knowing little about '*slateris*' to being able to identify suitable habitat and locate animals. He described how he would often spend a couple of hours searching burrows and mounds that seemed to be perfect *slateri* habitat and finding nothing ... only to look through binoculars to the area he just came from and to see a *slateri* basking in a bush! Once Greg mastered locating these animals he even came across them some metres from the busiest highways in their range.



Greg Fyfe and audience inside the theatre at Monash

Greg happily answered questions from the audience until it was time to head out for some pizza and a few more herping stories. Once again a great night was had by all.

We look forward to seeing you at the next VHS event, the 2009 Reptile and Amphibian Expo.



## *Black Saturday*

The recent horrific bushfires in our state have pretty much directly affected us all in one way or another. Treasured family members and friends are no longer here with us and many more have lost homes and all their possessions. The events of Saturday 7th February 2009 are indelibly etched in our minds forever and will dictate the way in which we live in the future in this fire prone state of ours.

There are many stories out there - both horrific and heroic and all deserve to be told. The following is an email sent by the VHS webmaster and Odatria editor Andrew Owen to his friends. We have decided to include it here in it's entirety (with Andrew and Jen's permission) to highlight the rollercoaster of emotions experienced by this particular young family.

Hi all,

Firstly, I'm sorry for not getting back to everyone who has tried to contact us. My phone has been going crazy. I ran out of battery & didn't have my charger.

I know many people want to know how we are so I thought I would send out this email, please forward it on to our friends whose email address I don't have. Jen can't access her email at the moment to get other addresses.

As most of you will now know, we lost our home in Saturday's bushfires.

What a rollercoaster of a week or so. The birth of our boy Nate on the 30/01/09 was such a high for us, and we now owe him a lot. We were concerned for him being a month premature, but his birth weight (3.56kg) suggested he was a healthy bub. Nate came home on Tues the 3rd with so many gifts & cards from people it looked like we had been to the show. With Saturday tipped to be in the 40's again, we decided that without air-conditioning at home we should head down to my mums air-conditioned place in Craigieburn for Nate's sake. We had heard of fires in Kilmore, and after driving for 10mins we could clearly see smoke. I wish at this point I turned around and got my animals from home, but I didn't.

After a couple of hours the fires were sounding worse, so I headed off to go home to grab what I could. The wind on the way was unbelievable. I was stopped past Whittlesea by the CFA, shattered at the time that I couldn't get through. I was working on going through a back way when my brother rang me to convince me otherwise.

After staying at mums, we woke on Sunday hearing bad reports about the fires. Nate seemed crook so we headed off to the hospital to get him checked out. He had jaundice so we had to stay in hospital for his treatment. We decided to head out Sunday arvo leaving Nate with the midwives to see if we could get home or find out any information. Couldn't get up the mountain, but ran into my old footy mate Chicken Heal in Whittlesea. He had managed to get up the mountain during the day, he knew where we lived & gave us the news that our house was gone. What a kick in the guts. We finally managed to get up the mountain yesterday afternoon. It was a difficult sight to see. We have all heard it before in fires, about how some houses are untouched (like the weatherboard house about 100m away from us), and others are destroyed. All the houses in our street were destroyed and there was nothing at home we could salvage. On a brighter note, our plasma TV that I hung above our kanara is still mounted, so if anyone needs a hand putting one up, I can make it stay on even if a second story & the entire roof falls on it! Also our ute out the front, although badly singed & melted, started first go.

Over the past few days we have realised just how lucky we were. If our little life saver Nate hadn't come early, I'm sure with Jen prego and the heat, we would've just been layzin around at home.

After leaving hospital Tuesday we have come back to Craigieburn. I can't believe the support & amount of clothes for us & Nate, toiletries, baby furniture and well wishes from everyone. We went to Diamond Creek community centre yesterday, they gave us so much. You can't help but feel awkward accepting everything, but it is great. When we left we heard that they were turning people with donations away, simply no more room to put everything. How good are Aussies. I think we have now cried just as much from the generosity of everyone as we have for losing our home. I really don't know what to say to everyone who has given us donations. Many of these things have come from people we don't even directly know.

Thank you.

Of course the main tragedy of these fires is the terrible loss of so many people. I'm sure most people will know someone who lost their life and our sympathies go out to them - again we feel so lucky just to be here.



Lastly, I would like to pay my respects to our beautiful animals that we have had the privilege of caring for for many years.

Their unconditional love, beauty & companionship is something we can never replace. They were my mates & I will miss them.

7 Black-Headed Pythons (baby hatchlings from this year)

2 Centralian Carpet Pythons

2 Children's Pythons ('Zeek' & Zeeks baby that I had kept from a breeding with my first snake 'Siss')

11 Green & Golden Bell Frogs (including 'Bella', the fattest frog we have ever had!)

10 Green Tree Frogs (including the two 'Grandpas' that have been in my life for 15 years)

2 Green Tree Pythons (the native Australian Greens, my dream snake. I had the privilege of caring for them for 6 months)

3 Spiny-Leaf Insects

16 Spotted Pythons (Heartly & her un-named boyfriend, 5 one year old babys & 11 hatchlings from this year)

2 Scrub Pythons (Floyd & Hermione, what a privilege to have Australia's largest snake species at home to play with)

4 White-Lipped Tree Frogs

59 lives that I wish I could have saved.

We are still holding out hope for our cats, Fred & Phoebe.

Thankfully (due to my laziness) I still have 4 snakes that I had left at Jen's parents place. We moved all our animals a couple of weeks ago when our new floorboards were polished. My two Black-Headed Pythons (Franklin & Jasmine) and my two Diamond Pythons (Watson & Zodi).

We will keep everyone updated with how we go over the next few weeks. We have certainly been given a great head start thanks to everyone.

I hope to catch up & have a beer with everyone soon.

For now I think we just need some time.

All the best,

Andrew, Jen & Nate



**Little Nate William Owen - arrived early to an  
extra special bond with his Mum and Dad**

The VHS extends its deepest sympathies to all who are affected by the fires. If you have a story you wish to tell please contact us and we will include it in a future issue of *Odatra*.

# Reptiles on the Loose

by Simon Watharow - Lost Reptiles Home

## INTRODUCTION

One of the skills all keepers learn is security. Reptile security that is. Most reptiles have always surprised many keepers with their unique brand of audacity in climbing fences, squeezing out of a light socket or forcing open a vent to escape. So what happens when reptiles escape and are there any ways that you can find them? In this brief article I will attempt to cover a few aspects of searching for escaped reptiles and identify key points in prevention, also what the Lost Reptiles Home does when they find escaped reptiles.

Wildlife controllers can often collect / rescue harmless reptiles but any member of the public or concerned herpetologists can contact the service about reptiles. Animals may be handed in to the Lost Reptiles Home and we attempt to find new homes for them.



## LOST A REPTILE?

When presented with a missing reptile, open door or an obvious sign of exit, firstly check the enclosure thoroughly. It is common for small pythons (juveniles or sub adults) to hide inside cracks within logs, inside fluorescent tube holders and underneath water bowls.

Try to establish the exit point from the cage - was it through the glass front (common for tree snakes and little pythons to squeeze through the sliding glass doors on many enclosures).

Snakes can also force their way through poorly sealed vents.

It helps to think like a snake or lizard. If you are an arboreal python it's likely you will slowly work your way up, so scan the immediate area and imagine where the snake would go. Likewise, a terrestrial snake would go moving on the floor and come in contact with a wall, and edge along until?? Investigate all the immediate surrounding boxes, cupboards, chest of drawers etc. Carpet Pythons, tree snakes, Diamond Pythons and other arboreal type snakes often go above. Check above the curtains on top of any cupboards and even behind picture frames. In the event there are small or large entries to the roof, it will be important to investigate the roof cavity if safe to do so.



**Short lived freedom!**

Try to ascertain how many doors or windows were open, reptiles will naturally seek an exit out of the house. Typically reptiles will also be drawn to any windows where sun light is present. Check behind each curtain and window ledge.

In winter snakes especially often go for warm environments e.g. water heaters, gas heating,

gas ducts etc.

Check the room at night when all the lights are off as the snakes may become active when human activity is reduced.

### HELPFUL POINTS

Reptiles escape all year round.

Snakes are usually the most successful escapees.

Search inside the first room then expand out methodically.

Check every nook and cranny possible.

Search for nocturnal species at night as well.

The use of heat pads can attract animals to thermoregulate.

Using rodent bedding inside a bird aviary works well for small pythons.

Where possible prevent escapes by checking rooms on warm evenings and during thunderstorms, which is when escapes are often made.

### RECORD BOOKS

Compliance officers from the Department of Sustainability and Environment expect lost reptiles to be recorded as lost within 24 hours.

Report lost reptiles to your neighbours, explain how unusual or unfortunate the escaped reptile was and offer a reward! It is quite normal for a neighbour to become upset or annoyed but bear with it and explain its harmless nature and that you are usually very careful and will give free beer or dinner for the/any inconvenience!!

### LOST REPTILES HOME

The service must make all reasonable efforts to find the rescued animal's owner. Regular updates will occur at Victorian Herpetological

Society meetings, in *Odatria* or on the VHS website and in The Melbourne Trading Post.

To report a lost reptile/discuss placing a reptile in the home or to have a fruit box reptile collected please contact **0400 809922**.

If you are the owner of any of the animals listed below you need to make contact with the refuge. If you have lost a pet reptile it's also important to let the home know. All information is confidential.

### Current guests in the Lost Reptiles Home

Carpet Python

Diamond Python

Bearded Dragon

Shingleback

Long necked Turtle

Diamond Python



### Animals to be auctioned at the Expo

Sand Goanna

Long necked Turtle

Shingleback



## BOOK REVIEW

by Kevin Welsh



### Keeping and Breeding Australian Lizards

Edited by Mike Swan

Mike Swan Herp Books

PB 618 pp.

1,016 images

RRP \$70.00

Keeping and Breeding of Australian Lizards is one of the most eagerly awaited herpetological book follow ups of our time. Mike's original offering for the python aficionado has finally been joined by an even more detailed resource for the lizard lovers amongst us. I knew when Mike first mooted this book that it would become a massive time consuming project but I had no idea the finished product would become the detailed resource that it has.

Mike has managed to compile a series of fantastic stand alone articles from some of Australia's leading herpetologists. Any publication featuring contributions from the following writers is sure to be a standout:-

**John McGrath** - Family Gekkonidae – Geckos - Subfamily **Diplodactylinae** including Chameleon Gecko, Terrestrial Geckos, Knob-tailed Geckos, Velvet Geckos, Leaf-tailed Geckos, Giant Cave Geckos, Spiny-tailed, Golden-tailed, Striped and Jewelled Geckos, Thick-tailed Geckos, Subfamily **Gekkoninae** including Marbled Geckos, Ring-tailed Geckos, Dtellas, Asian House Gecko, Prickly Geckos, Chained Geckos and Nactus Geckos.

**Rob Porter** - Family Pygopodidae - Flap-footed Lizards including Worm Lizards, Flap-footed Lizards, Snake-lizards, Scaly-foots and other Flap-footed Lizards.

**Greg Fyfe** – Family Scincidae - Skinks including Rainbow Skinks, Wall Skinks, Striped Skinks, Blue-tongued Skinks, Spiny Skinks, Desert Skinks, Large-sized Skinks (Land Mullet, Major Skink, Yakka Skink, King's Skink), Tree Skinks, Black Rock Skinks, Swamp Skinks, White's Skinks, Heath Skinks, Sandswimmers and Burrowing Skinks, Water Skinks, Prickly Forest Skink, and other small skinks.

**Kieran Aland** - Family Agamidae – Dragons including Tree Dragons, Mulga Dragon and Chameleon Dragon, Frilled Lizard, Arid Dragons, Rock Dragons, Military Dragons, Tommy Roundhead Dragons, Rainforest Dragons, Thorny Devil, Water Dragons, Bearded Dragons, Heath Dragons and Earless Dragons.

**Grant Husband** and **Matthew Bonnett** - Family Varanidae – Monitors including Spiny-tailed Monitors, Pygmy Desert Monitors, Terrestrial Monitors, Mulga Monitors, Rock Monitors, Tree Monitors, Water Monitors and Lace Monitor.

The chapters are jam packed full of tables and graphs which will assist the newcomer and intermediate herper no end in their quest to keep and breed lizards. The complete newbie will find the book invaluable in assisting them to select an appropriate lizard type for their specific needs and space constraints. One other element I liked in the species chapters was the reference summary at the end of each one. The references are priceless in directing those who wish to investigate the species by further reading.

The chapters are well written by writers who have a passion for the species they are dealing with. They are all very generous in their sharing of information and the book has been structured specifically to be useful to herpers of all levels. Maps show where the animals occur naturally in the wild and a detailed description is given as to the type of terrain and environment in which they live. There are also copious historical notes on the first sighting of the species and some information as to how they were each named. As well as everything else the book is a timeline of Australian herpetological research and development.

Very detailed instructions are given as to how to best care for the animal in captivity. It is wonderful to be given an overview of such requirements and to be able to compare the different needs and desires of each of the species. Mike has done a great job in compiling all of this information into one standalone volume.

As well as the extensive specific species chapters there are two wonderful introductory chapters, the first one being on Captive Husbandry, featuring extensive information on topics such as selecting specimens, housing ratios, handling, enclosure design and construction, substrates and enclosure furnishings, heating and temperature, lighting, feeding, water, sloughing and record keeping. The second introductory chapter on Breeding is further broken down into:- sexing, annual breeding cycle, winter cooling, mating, egg development, egg-laying, egg incubation and live young, hatchlings and juvenile care.

**Dr Franciscus Scheelings** has contributed an informative chapter on Diseases and Disorders of Australian Lizards whilst **Rob Porter** looks into Breeding Live Insect Food for Lizards.

Another aspect of the book is the fantastic photography that accompanies the text. Photographs are by well known Australian wildlife photographers and include Steve Wilson, Michael Cermak and Damian Goodall. Some images are appearing in print for the first time. To my way of thinking the book would be worth it alone for the quality of the photographs. Each species description is enhanced with many pictures showing the colour phases and the natural environment in which the animal could be expected to be found.

Keeping and Breeding Australian Lizards is another "must have" in any Aussie herper's collection. If you haven't purchased the book yet – do yourself a favour and come to the official launch at the 2009 VHS Reptile and Amphibian Expo. You'll be able to pick yourself up a copy and collect some autographs too! I can promise you will not be disappointed. The book is another invaluable resource which you will continue to refer to for years to come. I can't wait to see what might be the next project on the horizon for Mike – could it be some delving into the world of Amphibians?

# HERP HAPPENINGS

## Boy, 7, feeds live zoo animals to croc

A SEVEN-YEAR-OLD boy broke into a Territory reptile farm and sadistically fed a stream of its main exhibits to the resident 3m crocodile.

He also bludgeoned three lizards to death in their pens.

Police cannot charge the boy because of his age.

Security camera video footage clearly shows every move of the youngster's 35-minute rampage. One CCTV image shows him with a big smile on his face as he watches the saltie splash around its pool as it attacks a northern blue tongue lizard.



The boy throws a turtle out of its enclosure

The malicious foray happened at the Alice Springs Reptile Centre in broad daylight between about 8am and 8.30am on Wednesday.

Centre director Rex Neindorf said the behaviour was "disgusting".

"I'm just devastated at the age of the child and the fact no one wants to take responsibility," he said.

"The fact a seven-year-old can wreak so much havoc in such a short time, let alone even think of doing something like this, is unbelievable."

"If it was back in my day he'd get a big boot up the arse."

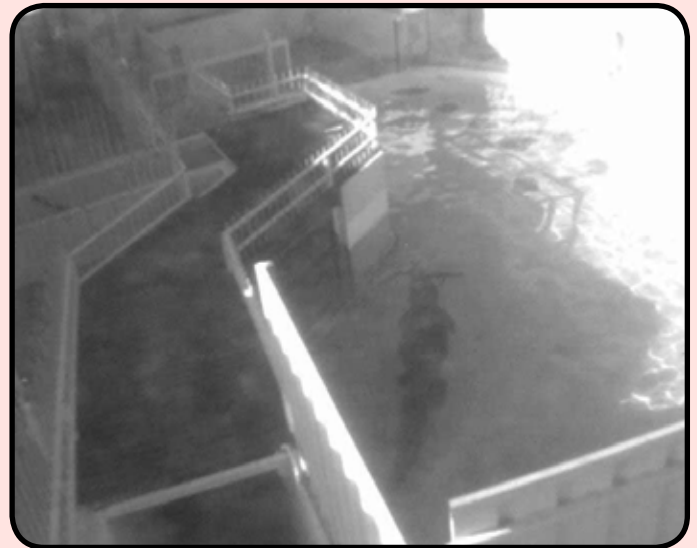
Mr Neindorf said 10 reptiles - a turtle, four western blue tongue lizards, two bearded dragons, two thorny devils and a 1.8m adult female Spencer's goanna - were thrown into the jaws of the 200kg crocodile named Terry.

A further three lizards - a blue tongue and two thorny devils - were found dead after being "brutally bludgeoned".

He said the boy was lucky he did not also become Terry's dinner.

"The croc could have easily taken him from the landing he was standing on," he said.

"If he slipped and fell in he would have been gone."



The croc swims away with a large goanna in it's mouth

Police spoke to the boy and his mother yesterday.

They could not press charges because legally he is too young below the age of legal responsibility.

Mr Neindorf said the animals would be hard to replace, in particular the female Spencer's goanna, which was about 20 years old and had been at the centre for nine years.



Justin Rutherford with one of the remaining blue-tounge lizards.  
Picture; Pieter Naessens

REBEKAH CAVANAGH  
October 3rd, 2008  
Northern Territory News

# Journey Of A Green Turtle From Indonesia Into Australia Opens Mystery Of 'Oceanic Superhighway'

The remarkable journey of a green turtle from Indonesia into Australian waters is helping conservationists to track the migratory route of this species to the Kimberley-Pilbara coast - one of the few relatively pristine coastal areas left on Earth.

Ana, a female green turtle, was tagged in Indonesia in November as part of a turtle tracking project by WWF and Udayana University in Bali, Indonesia, and has slowly made her way from a nesting beach in East Java, across the Indian Ocean, and is on track for the beaches of the Kimberley in Western Australia.

Her journey, monitored online by WWF, demonstrates the strong biological ties between Indonesia and the reefs on the west Australian coast.

"Ana's journey is unique. She has revealed an 'oceanic superhighway' that helps us better understand how marine turtles navigate around the world's oceans as well as highlighting the strong ecological and evolutionary connections between Indonesia and Australia's Kimberley-Pilbara coast," said Gilly Llewellyn, WWF Ocean's Program Leader.

"This new finding throws the spotlight on the true natural values of the magnificent Kimberley marine ecosystem and its link to the Coral Triangle to the north – the world's epicentre of marine biodiversity and the cross-roads of migration routes and breeding grounds for whales, turtles, dolphins and other precious marine species."

The Coral Triangle spans Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Solomon Islands and Timor Leste, and contains critical habitat for six of the world's seven species of marine turtles, including green, hawksbill, olive ridley, leatherback, loggerhead and flatback turtles.

All of these species are threatened with extinction as a result of pollution, long-line and trawl fishing that results in the accidental catch of marine turtles, and an illegal trade in turtle eggs, meat, shells and skin.

"The tropical seas of the Coral Triangle have global significance. Decision makers need to keep this in mind when weighing up the need to protect it - and the millions of marine livelihoods that depend on coral reefs across the regions."



Green turtle swimming. The remarkable journey of a green turtle from Indonesia into Australian waters is helping conservationists to track the migratory route of this species to the Kimberley-Pilbara coast - one of the few relatively pristine coastal areas left on Earth. (Credit: iStockphoto)

WWF's Coral Triangle Program is currently working to ensure the health of the region's wildlife in the face of human threats in the Indian and Pacific oceans that include long-line and trawl fishing and pollution.

WWF's marine conservation efforts in the region include the development of a network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) to protect and conserve marine wildlife, and to ensure that all fishing is carried out in a sustainable manner. This includes reducing marine animal bycatch, specifically that of turtles, by fishing operations in the Indo Pacific.

Worldwide, hundreds of thousands of marine turtles are caught annually in the hooks, lines and nets of fishing operations, while on land their nesting beaches are increasingly under threat from industrial development, human disturbance and climate change.

"Ana's journey has shown us areas where we need to focus our efforts. We need to tap into the secret lives of species such as turtles, so we can design networks of marine protected areas that conserve the full range of plant and animal life, and ensure their longevity for years to come."

ScienceDaily  
January 7th, 2009



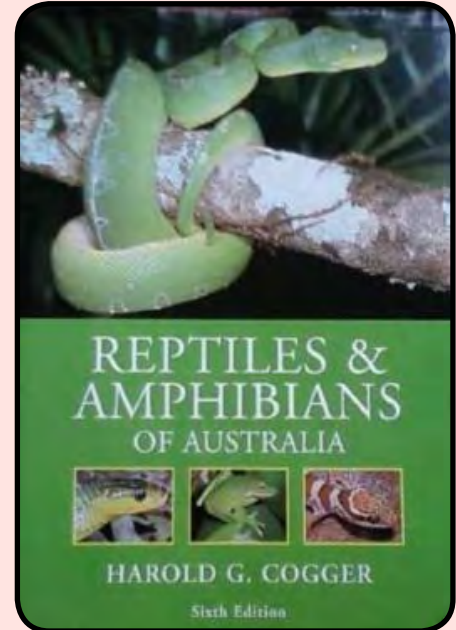
## **"Reptiles and Amphibians of Australia" by Harold G. Cogger sells for \$810!**

Cogger's book is certainly close to the most sought after herp book out there now, and at the VHS we are always on the look out to pick up one of these *investments*.

Recently our executive committee member Peter Comber had his eye on one for sale on eBay, it sold for \$810, we believe that to be a record price for the book! I'm sure this has Mr Comber thinking about selling one of his spare copies!!

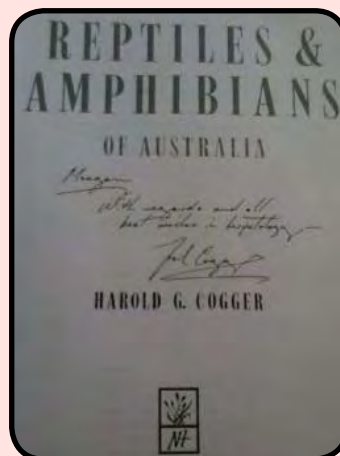
Congratulations to the seller from Sydney and to the buyer, I'm sure they will be very happy with the new addition to their herp library.

The following is some of the photos used & description in the ad:-



"This book is in very good condition, no tears or marks, as picture shows there is wear on the bottom/top of book due to storage. This is the much sought after final 6th edition book by harold g cogger. It is signed as per above photo, made out to myself.

This book is a comprehensive guide to Australia's rich herpetofauna - more than 1000 species of frogs, crocodiles, turtles, tortoises, lizard sand snakes. Included is up-to-date information about habitats, full-color photographs, distribution maps and identification keys".



# Hungry Snake Discovers You Are What You Eat

A New South Wales man has had an interesting encounter with not one but two snakes, and he has the photos to prove it.

Tony Barton from South Gundagai says he and his wife had just been out for lunch about a month ago when they returned home and spotted a black snake alongside the car.

It turned out to be a red belly black snake about 165 centimetres long - a species well known for a taste for other snakes.

"It looked like there was a stick or branch off a tree that was coming up towards it, so we drove past to about get 10 metres away from it and I ducked up the back lawn and around to have a close look," he said.

Mr Barton says his wife called out to him to ask him what he was staring at.

He yelled back, "Well, it's a jolly big black snake eating another one! Consuming it! You keep an eye on it and I'll duck in and get the camera."



Mr Barton says it took about 10 to 15 minutes for the black snake to fully consume the brown snake, which he says was about 135 centimetres long.

Then it went off for a snooze.

"It was fairly sluggish after such a huge meal," he said.

Initially, Mr Barton thought someone had killed the snake and it was all a practical joke.

He says when the black snake finished eating the brown snake, something irritated the black and it moved off to try to get a bit of relief from the discomfort.

Not long after, the snake returned - this time to the back lawn.

"I walked up and got within three metres of it," he said.



"I was having a close look at it when it opened its mouth a little bit and I spotted this beady eye and the head of the brown snake in its mouth!"

"So I got the camera ready, took the shot as the brown snake came out a few inches, fastened onto the black's lower jaw and pulled itself completely out.

"It had all this mucus all over it. Then the two parted ways."

Mr Barton reckons that somehow the brown snake turned itself around inside the black snake.

"When you tell these stories no-one believes you, but I have the photographs," he said.



**ABC News**  
**February 2009**

# Four-metre Monster Caught In Shed

TOWNSVILLE snake catchers have caught the largest scrub python they have ever seen.

The 4.1m monstrosity was captured in a backyard shed in Mundingburra yesterday, where it was believed to have been resting after gorging itself on possums.

The non-venomous snake's head was the size of a man's hand, and its body as wide as a leg.

It required at least four people to lift it into a bag to be taken away and released.

O'Dowd St resident Averil Chadwick, who first spotted the 15.1kg reptile in her backyard on Tuesday, said she always had possums around the shed, however they had since disappeared.

"I have possums up in the shed but when I looked up there I thought it was the wrong shape for a possum," Mrs Chadwick said.

"It looked like a snake, and sure enough it was.

"There are no possums around now. I didn't see any bulges in his stomach, but reckon he's given them a bit of a fright."

Snake catcher Brian West, who was called to remove the snake, said he needed a second pair of hands to help capture the animal.

Mr West, who has caught more than 1000 snakes in Townsville over a nine-year period, said it was easily the largest scrub python he had ever caught.

"I've caught two of these – one down at the port that was 3.3m and another that was about 2.2m over at Annandale," he said.

"They're not uncommon, but this is, by far, the biggest I've ever caught."

Scrub pythons, also known as amethystine pythons, have been caught near Tully measuring 5.4m long.

The snakes, which are usually found in rainforest areas throughout tropical North Queensland, feed mostly on birds, fruit bats, rats, possums and other small animals.

The python will be released in Bluewater.

While the python was harmless, Mr West said it could have posed a danger, in terms of its size, for small children.

"It would create a bit of a problem for a small child - they would have a real problem with something that big," he said.

North Queensland Herpetological Society spokeswoman Tanya Ross said the immense size of the snake showed the river habitat in Mundingburra was thriving.

"It's really good to see animals of that size surviving in the environment," Ms Ross said.

She said Mrs Chadwick had done the right thing by contacting snake catchers to remove it from her garden.

Mrs Chadwick had only contacted them after she knew the snake would not move away from her backyard on its own accord.

"If people need to have a snake removed, they can either contact wildlife carers, or the EPA.

"They will put you on to a snake catcher – we're all volunteers, so you only get who's available – and someone will come out with experience and remove it.

"Don't try and remove it yourself, because something like that can do a lot of damage, and you may not know whether it is venomous or not," Ms Ross said.

**News**  
**February 2009**





# Randy Reptile Becomes Father at 111

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) -- A captive reptile in New Zealand has unexpectedly become a father at the ripe old age of 111 after receiving treatment for a cancer that made him hostile toward prospective mates.

The centenarian tuatara, named Henry, was thought well past the mating game until he was caught canoodling with a female named Mildred last March - a consummation that resulted in 11 babies being hatched on Monday.

Tuatara are indigenous New Zealand creatures that resemble lizards but descend from a distinct lineage of reptile that walked the earth with the dinosaurs 225 million years ago, zoologists say.



An endangered species, the hatchlings born at the Southland Museum and Art Gallery will provide a badly needed boost to the tuatara's genetic diversity, said the gallery's

tuatara curator, Lindsay Hazley.

Henry was at least 70 years old when he arrived at the museum, "a grumpy old man" who attacked other reptiles, including females, until a cancerous tumor was removed from his genitals in 2002, said Hazley.

"I went off the idea he was good for breeding," Hazley told The Associated Press, but once the tumor was removed, "he was no longer aggressive."

The museum now has 72 of the reptiles after 42 hatchings in the past two years.

Hazley hopes to use Henry regularly in the breeding program that is helping expand tuatara numbers after they had been savaged by predators.

Tuatara are estimated to number about 50,000, most of them living in predator-free sanctuaries, including offshore islands.

A male Tuatara takes 70 years to fully mature but reaches sexual maturity about age 20.

While there's no scientific data on the life span of the ancient reptiles, "they go beyond 100 well and truly," Hazley said. "They can be around for 150 to 250 years."

**By RAY LILLEY**  
**Associated Press Writer**  
**February 2009**



**2009 Victorian**  
**Reptile & Amphibian**  
**Expo**

Victorian Herpetological Society

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*It's on again the must see reptile & amphibian expo. Hundreds of animals for sale, see awesome displays of reptiles & amphibians. Browse through the best and latest reptile products, services. Bid at the sensational VHS auction for rare, valuable and prized items. See old friends and shoot the breeze in an air conditioned venue. Allow time to listen to seminars and reptile husbandry tips from the best herpers around. Door prizes and a great day is the least that will happen! Vendor spaces filling fast please book immediately!*

**Saturday 28 February 2009**  
**Melbourne Showgrounds**  
**Town Square Hoecker**  
**9am - 5pm**

**Adults: \$10**  
**Child: \$5**



**Reptile sales & purchases can be conducted on the day.**  
**Contact [simon@snakepro.com.au](mailto:simon@snakepro.com.au) or 0400 809 922 to book your table.**  
**Latest Expo news at [www.vhs.com.au](http://www.vhs.com.au)**



# Magpies legend Peter Daicos credits fitness for snakebite survival

PETER Daicos' remarkable fitness, 15 years after he last played for Collingwood, has helped save his life after he was bitten by a snake.

The 47-year-old footy maestro, wearing only thongs on his feet in the evening heat, was bitten as he put out the bins at his Balwyn home on Wednesday night.

A potentially lethal red-bellied black snake wrapped itself around his ankle and sank its fangs into the bottom and side of his left big toe.

"I must have stepped on it," Daicos told the Herald Sun last night. "The first bite was like stepping on a pin, but the next one was like someone driving nails through your toe.

"It was intense pain. I'm still really nauseated."

Daicos, who soon felt chest pain and acute stomach ache, was told that had the bites been higher on his body, it could have spelt real trouble.

"Where it was (on the foot), it (the venom) takes a lot longer to get up to the heart," he said.

"The ambos were fantastic. They were here in 10 minutes.

"We had a bit of a treat with the siren on. They took me to St V's and I was still being sick.

"The staff were saying, 'Well, what sort of snake was it?'"

It had been dark when Daicos was bitten, about 9.30pm.

"I said it was dark brown or black," Daicos said. "And they did the test and it came back that it was a tiger snake or a red-bellied black snake - it was coming up as either one.

"The tiger snake antivenom covers both, apparently.

"But it didn't settle down. By this time, the thing's throbbing, and my leg's blown up."

Daicos was told that the snake that had bitten him could cause muscle to waste.

"Blood samples were taken every 90 minutes. I didn't get much sleep," he said.

But after a night in a high-care St Vincent's Hospital emergency room, a sore, sorry and still swollen Daicos was back on his feet yesterday.

"My heart rate was great - at the lowest end," Daicos said.

"They said, 'You're really fit', and apparently that has a lot to do with it as well.

"My blood pressure was fantastic. If your metabolism's high, your heart would have just been racing away, your heart pumping everything through - which is the last thing you want."

But his assailant was not so lucky: Daicos' mother, Phyllis, killed the snake yesterday after finding it under the lawn mower while sweeping.

"That snake would have seen my mum with the broom, put its hands up, crawled up to the roof and jumped," Daicos joked.

"She had a war cry happening - nothing will be seen in this area for a while."

Though potentially lethal, red-bellied black snakes rarely cause death.

Daicos' wife, Colleen Forrest, said she had been about to put the bins out when Daicos arrived home.

"He said: 'What are you doing? I'll do that'," she said.

"Of course, with this weather, we've all got thongs on."

Melbourne Zoo reptile supervisor Peter Comber said red-bellied black snakes were common around Melbourne: "We have even had them turn up in the city centre."

TERRY BROWN AND ALAN HOWE  
February 06, 2009  
Herald Sun





## Australia Zoo handler bitten by snake

An experienced reptile handler at Australia Zoo is in a serious but stable condition in hospital after receiving a snake bite.

The 26-year-old man was feeding the king brown snake about 5pm yesterday when it bit him.

The zoo's first-aid team treated the man at the scene, before he was transported to Nambour Hospital in an ambulance.

King brown snakes, the second-largest venomous snake in Australia, can produce up to 150 milligrams of venom from a single bite.

The zoo, which keeps several king browns and other reptiles, is best known for its crocodiles, thanks to the Crocodile Hunter, the late Steve Irwin.

Irwin, who died in 2006 from a stingray barb to the chest while shooting a documentary, and his family co-founded the park, which was recently named the top tourist attraction in the state.

Two other people were bitten on the Sunshine Coast yesterday, highlighting the need for Queenslanders to take precautions during snake season.

Brisbane snake catcher Geoff Jacobs said residents could take several precautions to safeguard themselves against a snake bite:

- \* Always disturb a garden bed before putting your hands in it;
- \* Wear thick gloves and long pants wherever possible when gardening;
- \* Clean up leftover pet food, which can attract rodents and, therefore, snakes; and
- \* Shake boxes in storerooms and garages before putting your hands in - you should hear the snake moving about.

If you find a snake, do not try to catch it, as this is what results in the majority of snake bites, Mr Jacobs said. With the current storm patterns, Mr Jacobs said snakes tend to seek out safe hiding places during the rain and are at their most active three days after a storm, when fine conditions return.

MELISSA SINGER  
January 8th, 2009  
Brisbane Times

## Blast from the past!



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 I 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 from 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 to Mr Lyons' 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".

MARIA BILLIAS  
December 1998  
Northern Territory News

**READ UPDATE ON THIS STORY - OVER PAGE**



# 'How I let a King Brown bite me nine times'

**THE man whose story of being bitten nine times by the same deadly snake went around the world many times has been found - living quietly in the NT.**

Gordon Lyons, 55, had an arm amputated and almost died on the operating table after his heart stopped.

The incident with the King Brown happened 12 years ago. But the story has been retold thousands of times in newspapers across the globe.

It has just resurfaced in Australia - only to be dismissed as an urban myth by radio commentators. But the extraordinary tale is true - and has an amazing new twist.

The story was broken in the Northern Territory News in 1998.

Mr Lyons went to ground afterwards and was assumed to have moved interstate or died.

But the NT News tracked him down in Tennant Creek, where he works as a caretaker. And for the first time he revealed the full story of that near-fatal day.

Darwin-born Mr Lyons said his battle with one of the world's deadliest snakes was no drunken mishap - he was trying to kill himself.

"I had lost my wife and was fighting for custody of my kids," he said. "I decided I didn't want to be here. I put the snake on me. I caught it and let it bite me.

"I'd always loved snakes and decided it was a good way to go - live by the sword, die by the sword.

"But I'm all right now and wouldn't do it again."

Mr Lyons was driving along Mandorah Rd on the Cox Peninsula with a friend when he saw the snake.

"We stopped and I caught it," he said.

The snake was put in a bag and the two men continued their journey.

After a few minutes, Mr Lyons made a spur-of-the-moment decision - to let the King Brown kill him.

"I took it out of the bag, shook it to stir it up and it bit me, again and again," he said. "My mate was a big, burly bloke but he was horrified. He was crying."

As Mr Lyons began to lose consciousness, his friend poured beer over his head in a bid to revive him.

The men were met by an ambulance at Noonamah.

Mr Lyons' heart stopped three times during the operation to remove his left arm. He was kept alive by Royal Darwin Hospital staff with a dialysis machine and ventilator for two months.

"When I left hospital, doctors told me I had the strength of a 5-year-old girl."

He said it took three years for him to come out of a "stupor".

"It was surreal - I walked around in a haze."

**Suicide prevention hotline: 13 11 14**

NIGEL ADLAM  
February 13th, 2009  
Northern Territory News







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