

# ODATRIA

Issue 5 February 2010



## Snakes around Melbourne



# Odatria

## Newsletter of the Victorian Herpetological Society No. 5, February 2010

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Any articles should be sent to the editor in electronic form and/or in printed paper format. All articles are refereed to person/s in the respective field. Photos, slides and diagrams are encouraged as all can be used and should be sent via registered post or email. Taxonomy usually follows Wilson & Swan, 2003 but authors can cite other references if used. The VHS editorial staff have the right to refuse publishing any articles that are deemed unsuitable, offensive or controversial.

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

Lani Barnett, Daavid Turnbull, Judy Turnbull, Jennifer Lewin, Marianne Beatty, Kerrie Alexander, Jo Comber, Steph McKenzie, Robyn Welsh, Mike Swan, Mimmo Zagarelos



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# EDITORIAL

by Phil Elliott

Hello and welcome to your latest edition of Odatria, your online newsletter. We have tried to make it as interesting as possible.

First of all I would like to thank all those members who voted for me in the election giving me such a sweeping victory. The committee and I sincerely thank you all.

Well fellow members and herp lovers, the V.H.S. is once again moving with the times. After some long hard thinking about the current climate regarding societies in general it has been decided to try some new things. From the next meeting, (March 31st), you will be pleased to see that after many requests and "lost souls" we have decided to trial a change of venue and, as a result, the meetings for this year will be held at the Prahran RSL Club, details of which, put together by the infamous Brian Barnett, will be found elsewhere in this issue along with details for getting there and parking etc. This is a much more central location and we are sure it will more than "fit the bill" and be liked by all. It will be much more laid back than Monash and provide a better, more social environment for our meetings, there is even a rumour that alcoholic beverages may be available for consumption, (in a separate area to the meeting), but we are still working on that one! Who needs a liquor license anyway? That's a joke for the officials amongst us☺.

Apart from the venue change we are also changing the night our meetings will be held and, from the next meeting onwards we are trialling Wednesday night meetings which should please those members with families etc. who have other commitments for the weekends and also those young single members who would rather be out clubbing or whatever on the Friday nights.

On another note, work on the 2011 expo is well underway and the hall has been booked for February 19th 2011. This time around we will be holding it in the Town Square Hoecker Building which is larger than the hall we used last time and has fully climate controlled comfort. Quotes have been called for hire equipment such as the tables, booths etc. so put this date in your diary now as it will be an event not to be missed!

Expressions of interest have been called for in our quest to appoint a co-ordinator to facilitate the staging of this, our next expo.

So friends and fellow herpers I'll see you at the meeting.

**Yours in Herp, Phil**

## VHS WORKINGS

by Kevin Welsh

We thought we'd just say a few words here to give you a bit of an idea how your committee works and to outline what has been happening since we started operating in early December last year.

The committee does not have scheduled formal meetings *per se*. If a meeting is required we will organise it and meet up accordingly. Most of our work is done by email. As a matter of fact as I write this I notice that there have been over 60 emails between us so far today!

Anyway, we had one such meeting on 16th December last year. It was a good opportunity for us to look over what has happened over the last few years, plan for a busy future and enjoy some convivial company close to Christmas. Anyway, the following is a summary of the major points of that meeting and the latest position of each one.

It was decided to change the VHS meeting night to Wednesdays (as used to be the case in the old days). It was also decided to change the venue to something closer to the city. We have since selected Prahran RSL and that the first meeting for 2010 will be 31st March. Subsequent 2010 meetings will be on 30th June, 6th October and 8th December. Speakers will be arranged and will be advertised in Odatria when they have been "locked in".

Publish dates for Odatria were also agreed upon to make them more regular and bring them into line with our meeting dates. Odatria publish dates for 2010 are 12th February (this issue), 14th May, 13th August and 12th November. Remember if you have anything of interest that you think other members of the Society could benefit from please pass it on to the editors. Not all material we receive can be published or included in Odatria but we welcome your submissions.

The committee also looked at the structure of our website. At the moment any changes to the site are very time consuming and fiddly. There are also issues with non Microsoft browsers. It was agreed to look at the viability of using an external contractor to redo the site and make it easier and more efficient to all concerned. An easier to use website should be up and running before the 31st March meeting. Keep looking at the website for all the latest VHS news. Suggestions in relation to content and indeed articles are welcome and should be directed through your Odatria editors.

This brings us to possibly the most important topic of the meeting - The 2011 Reptile and Amphibian Expo.

Continued on Page 11

# Common Snake Species Around Melbourne

**by Mike Alexander**

There are four main species to be found around Melbourne and its outlying suburbs. Tiger snakes and Copperheads are very common, Eastern Brown snakes and Red-bellied Black Snakes are less so. Many of these snakes live around our homes and in the warmer months are living their lives out in our back yards without us knowing they are there at all.

## Red-bellied Black Snake

*Pseudechis porphyriacus*

**Size:** Can grow to just over 2 metres, the largest (heaviest and longest) venomous snake in Victoria.

**Scale counts:** Mid body scale rows 17; ventrals 170-215; anal paired; subcaudals single at front, remainder divided 40-65.

**Diet:** The 'red belly's' main diet consists of frogs and lizards (mainly skinks) and therefore large specimens would probably take small blue-tongued lizards. Has been known to eat smaller snakes and would most likely take mice and other small mammals as a food source.

**Reproduction:** Red-bellied Black Snakes give birth to around 5 to 30 young which are given birth to in membrane sacs. Young are then independent from birth and start feeding on small lizards and frogs. Sexually mature at around 3 years and will mate around mid September to November, young are born in January to March.

**Body:** A large wide body that the snake will flatten when provoked, neck and head are almost the same width. Can become quite large and heavy with some snakes weighing quite a few kilograms.

**Colour:** Absolutely no colour variation unless the animal is an albino, jet black that is very glossy and a red belly that ends along the lower lateral scales. The red can either be very bright or mixed in with black patches along the ventral surface.

**Natural History:** Has declined dramatically along the Murray River and some other areas of northern Victoria due to farming, land clearing as well as rival predators increasing in numbers. While in some populations the 'red belly' has done quite well as water bodies such as



Red-bellied Black Snake

dams and channels have been put in place and they are its preferred habitat. Long feared by people the name seems to be easy to remember therefore it is easily associated with a very dangerous snake, while in fact the red belly is normally shy, reluctant to bite and has caused no recorded deaths.

**Preferred Habitat:** Swampy areas, wetlands, river and creek edges, grasslands in cooler climates, heath land along coast lines as well as pasture land along the east and south east coast. The red belly can be found in dryer areas away from water within its range but it's uncommon.

**Behaviour:** Red-bellied Black Snakes will flee at the first sign of danger but if cornered, trapped or injured will flatten most of their body out, puff up and hiss loudly while turning their neck and head slightly side on to the harasser to make themselves look larger and more threatening. They will often strike with their mouths closed and thrash the rest of their body around as they react to the threat. When picked up red bellies will often slap their tail around over the hand and wrist while excreting waste and also a musky stink that can be hard to wash off.

**Size:** Can grow to 1.5 metres but mostly around 1 metre or so.



## Lowland Copperhead

### *Austrelaps superbus*



Lowland Copperhead

**Scale counts:** Mid body scale rows 15; Ventrals 140-165; anal single; Subcaudals single at 35- 55.

**Diet:** Copperheads feed mostly on frogs and skinks and due to this are very susceptible to skin worms which spend part of their life cycle in the Copperhead's prey items. Copperheads were once even more common around Melbourne when the growling grass frog (*Litoria raniformis*) was found in abundance in suburban areas but the suburban sprawl has now almost wiped out the growling grass frog. Copperheads also feed on small mammals such as mice and have been known to eat small snakes including other Copperheads.

**Reproductive:** Copperheads are live bearers and can have between 5 to 30 young which are born in February to April. Mating takes place from August to early November.

**Body:** A fairly thick body and head but is lacking the very distinctive venom gland bulge's behind the head like the Tiger Snake has.

**Colour:** A highly variable snake the Copperhead does not have any patterns to speak of but has very distinctive colouration across its body. The belly (ventral scales) is almost always a light colour such as cream or white, this extends to the lower lip and around the face. Often this cream colouration can blend into yellow, orange and red along the lateral scales and then become dark along the dorsal scales. Colour can vary from, dark red, black, caramel, olive, grey, brown and fawn and almost all Copperheads have a slightly different colouration on the head as well as a small band running across the back of the neck. Often confused with Red-bellied Black Snakes Copperheads may be dark black but are never a glossy pitch black.

**Natural History:** The Copperhead has done fairly well in some suburban areas. Some ponds and unnatural water bodies have attracted large amounts of frogs and skinks which are the main food source for the

Copperhead. A very shy snake it often retreats when approached and rarely causes bites. The Copperhead does well in the cooler climates and for this reason is the first and last snake seen basking before winter, in many case it may be seen all through winter, basking in the low winter sunlight. Copperheads can not tolerate high temperatures and will often not be seen through the hottest parts of the year but on hot days will become nocturnal and crepuscular. Still dangerously venomous it is not as bad as the tiger or brown.

**Preferred Habitat:** Copperheads prefer the wetter areas of Victoria and are not found in the northern part of the state. They are mostly found around waterways, swamps and wetlands, lush pasture land, forested areas, gully's and cool climate rain forest. These habitats are all very good places for their main food source (frogs) as well as being cooler in summer. Some populations have increased in rural areas (mostly dairy areas) due to dams and aqueducts being put in, this gives the snakes sort of pit stops as they move over the landscape and has meant that they may move to areas that they were once not so common in.



Lowland Copperhead

**Behaviour:** Different behaviours can be reported by snake catchers with different experiences of this snake. Some say it is extremely inoffensive and would take a large amount of harassment for this species to bite. In the authors opinion it depends on the animal as generally this snake is fairly reluctant to bite but individuals have been encountered that are not only very aggressive and ready to bite but will also respond to the slightest provocation. In one case a large specimen in Belgrave South actually advanced on the author when trying to capture it and then proceeded to strike repeatedly and succeeded in biting the hoop bag when it was captured. Some reports have also said that this snake has been stood on for a short period of time by a home owner and the snake has only tried to thrash around instead of trying to bite, so reports on this snake are varied but it's mostly found to be quite timid. Copperheads retreat very readily in the warmer months but in cooler times of the year will often remain very still while basking and may not move until the threat gets quite close.

**Size:** May grow to 1.5 metres but rarely grow much more than a metre.

**Scale count:** Mid body scale rows 17-19 (rarely 15); ventrals 140-190; anal single; subcaudals single 35-65.

## Eastern Tiger Snake

*Notechis scutatus*



Eastern Tiger Snake

**Diet:** Eats birds, rodents, reptiles, frogs, fish and other prey, generally a fairly un-fussy eater 'tigers' have been known to eat the nesting material of rodents due to it being covered in scent. Often attracted to peoples back yards to eat rodents around bird aviary's as well as the birds and also frogs and skinks often found around water features.

**Reproductive:** Gives birth to live young, around 20-30 is the common number but have been known to give birth to over 60 live young. Mating is from September till November but the author has encountered a pair mating in early January.

**Body:** Can have a fairly thick body and has an arrow shaped head, often with large venom glands behind the eyes (also described as a big boofy head)

**Colour:** this is a highly variable snake coming in a range of colours, it's often banded but can sometimes be plain with no banding, and banding may be in a zig zag pattern or run along the body. Colours vary from grey, olive, brown, caramel, orange, red, yellow, black, dark green while the head is often a different colour to the body and can be grey, bluish or black. The belly is often cream, yellow, light grey or a light khaki green.

**Natural History:** This snake is normally diurnal coming out to bask in the morning and then moving around for most of the day. On very hot days it will become crepuscular and nocturnal escaping the heat by moving around during the morning and afternoon. It

is observed very commonly in suburban areas and will often move around the exterior of houses looking for food and water, this is where it often encounters people and pets.

**Preferred Habitat:** Tiger snakes are very adaptable being able to live in mountain forests, wetlands, river habitats, creek edges, plains, dry forest, beach front and heath-land. Also very adaptable to living in back yards where they utilize ponds, aviaries and compost bins to find food and shelter beneath tin, rubbish, concrete slabs as well as in retaining walls and rock features. They may also often be found sunning next to or on *Agapanthus* plants and ivy as it's very hard to find the snake once it retreats into this vegetation.

**Behaviour:** Tiger Snakes readily defend themselves when threatened and will strike repeatedly at the threat, although they often do this with their mouth closed and use loud hissing and inflating the neck to help scare of the predator. Tiger Snakes like most snakes will flight before fight and often will only turn on their attacker if cornered, trapped, injured or the attacker (or snake remover) has hold of the tiger. Once this happens they will readily bite often chewing on the recipient of the bite to help pump venom into the wound. Tiger snakes are also the 4th most venomous snake in the world.

**Size:** Can grow to almost 2 metres but more likely to grow around the 1 metre mark.

**Scale count:** Midbody scale rows 17; ventrals 185-235; anal divided; subcaudals divided 45-75. Rostral scale (on tip of snout) not conspicuous or 'strap-like' when viewed from above.



Eastern Tiger Snake



## Eastern Brown Snake

*Pseudonaja textilis*



Juvenile Eastern Brown Snake

**Size:** Can grow to almost 2 metres but more likely to grow around the 1 metre mark.

**Scale count:** Midbody scale rows 17; ventrals 185-235; anal divided; subcaudals divided 45-75. Rostral scale (on tip of snout) not conspicuous or 'strap-like' when viewed from above

**Diet:** The Eastern Brown Snake feeds mostly upon native and introduced rodents and small marsupials. The introduction of the European House Mouse (*Mus musculus*) has helped this snake species explode in rural areas. The removal of bushland and other rival predators has also helped to benefit this snake. The Eastern Brown is also largely a skink and lizard feeder and large specimens can and will eat blue tongue lizards (*Tiliqua* spp.) and shingle back skinks (*Trachydosaurus rugosus*) as well as feeding on other animals such as birds, baby rabbits, frogs and other snakes but only occasionally.

**Reproductive:** Lays eggs. Mating takes place from late September to around mid November while egg laying occurs between late November until January and the female can lay up to 40 eggs, but normally around 15-20.

**Body:** Eastern Brown Snakes often have a very slim body in comparison to their length and other large species of snake around Melbourne, in conjunction with this their head is also quite slim but with large eyes as they are a diurnal hunter with good vision.

**Colour:** As named the Eastern Brown Snake is

brown, light brown, dark brown, caramel brown, olive brown, fawn and light silver brown but ultimately its one shade of brown or another. The belly can be a faded yellow, cream, whitish or a very light brown and can often have orange spots or patches on it. Juveniles will almost always have black markings around the head often with an orange colouration and sometimes may be banded; juvenile browns can often be mistaken for Little Whip Snakes (*Parasuta flagellum*) by people with no reptile background.

**Natural History:** The Eastern Brown Snake's numbers have said to have doubled due to clearing the Australian landscape for grazing and other agricultural enterprises as well as the introduction of the European House Mouse. It is still baffling as to why a large percentage of ignorant land owners in rural areas still persecute the Brown Snakes when in fact the 'brown' is helping farmers day to day by eating rodent pests that eat grain and livestock feed, destroy property and equipment as well as being a vector for diseases. Browns will often find a mouse's hole or burrow and trap the mice by blocking the entrance and then proceed to eat the adults as well as any young. Brown Snakes are fast travelling and active hunters seeking out their desired prey with speed and agility, they have keen eye sight and are fast striking with the second most lethal venom in the world.

**Preferred Habitat:** The most preferred habitat for browns is open native and rural grasslands especially if there is rocks, scattered tin or other shelter around. Brown Snakes also can be found in open dry sclerophyll forest, mallee, heath land, rocky outcrops and ridges. They are fairly common in the western and northern suburbs of Melbourne and extend east onto the edge of the Yarra valley and Warrandyte preferring the dry areas.

**Behaviour:** A fairly alert snake, brown's watch and take in what happens around them and can react very aggressively when provoked. If provoked, cornered or trapped these snakes will strike many times and will bite at any opportunity. Eastern Brown Snakes will always make a quick escape if approached but are more ready than any other Victorian species to stand their ground, in some cases if a brown has been overly upset they will actually advance on their attacker but if the attacker is to retreat then they will make an escape. In summary the brown can be volatile, aggressive and extremely dangerous if provoked but if left alone they are smart (for a snake), active and amazing to observe.





# The Blue-tongued Lizards of Westerfolds Park

By **Micah Bonnici**

images **Chris Bonnici**

I have grown up with blue-tongues nearly all of my life. I started finding them when I was five years old and living in the northern suburbs of Sydney. I then moved to the inner suburbs of Melbourne where they were a lot harder to find. It took quite some time find a decent spot to locate a good population of blue-tongues.

Starting in late 2008, my Dad got me the "Reptiles Australia" magazine. One of the articles in Volume 4 Issue 3 was called "Tracking Tigers". It was about the radio-tracking of tiger snakes in Westerfolds Park, Templestowe, Victoria. So I decided that my father and I would make a trip down there to look for reptiles. We found out pretty soon it was the perfect place to find blue-tongues and we have been there many times since. Westerfolds Park is not only a great place for reptiles but also for other animals like insects, birds, native mammals and the introduced European Rabbit.

I have found most of the blue-tongues in grasslands, thick vegetation, under logs, rocks and burrows, not far from a small creek that runs through part of the park. However, I have also found some specimens on slopes and flat surfaces next to the Yarra River, part way along the walking and bike trail.

There are two types of blue-tongues you get at Westerfolds Park (and in Melbourne), the Eastern and the Blotched Blue-tongue. They are both common species that are encountered regularly. Personally, I have found the Eastern Blue-tongue is easier to locate, partly because they are more often found out in the open than the Blotched Blue-tongue (but not always).



Eastern Blue-Tongue

Interestingly, I have found that the Blotched Blue-tongues at Westerfolds Park look rather healthy when compared to the Eastern Blue-tongues. For example, the Blotched Blue-tongues have glossy iridescent scales and appear to be in a healthy weight range. By contrast, the Eastern Blue-tongues all have had a very dull and 'scrappy' appearance. Also, they appear a little underweight and one had a marked deformity (it had a short stumpy tail and a lump on the top of its back at the base of its tail). The Blotched Blue-tongues appear to have adapted better to this environment.

## Eastern Blue-Tongue (described by Hunter 1790)

**Scientific name:** *Tiliqua scincoides scincoides*  
(*scincoides* means skink like)

**Description:** One of Australia's largest skinks, having a SVL (snout vent length) of 300 mm and attaining a total length from between 45 – 60 cm. A long body with a thick tail base and short stubby legs. Silvery-grey to a yellowish brown colouration. Dark brown-black like cross bars between nape and the end of the tail. It has a dark broad black stripe behind the eye that goes to just above the ear. The belly colouration is cream-white with some specimens having a yellowish colouration. A broad fleshy "bluetongue" hence its name.

**Habitat and Distribution:** Most of Queensland except in the West of the state, right through most of NSW, most of VIC, apart from the Mallee area, to the south east of SA. It can be found in a variety of habitats, including:

- Wet sclerophyll forests
- Dry sclerophyll forests
- Woodlands
- Coastal Dunes
- Grasslands / Shrublands
- Suburban gardens



### Predators:

include:

Birds

Goannas

Snakes (especially the Eastern Brown Snake)

**Diet:** Variety of animal and plant matter including:

Vegetation: fruit and flowers

Invertebrates: insects, snails, worms, spiders, etc.

Vertebrates: an interesting fact is they are known to consume small snakes including juvenile Eastern Brown Snakes. May also prey on smaller skinks as well as carrion.

**Reproduction:** females give birth to live young (viviparous) up to 25 per litter averaging 12, in mid to late summer.



Eastern Blue-Tongue

### Blotched Blue-Tongue (described by Quoy and Gaimard 1824)

**Scientific name:** *Tiliqua nigrolutea* (*nigrolutea* means black and yellow). It gets its name from its skins' blotched like pattern.

**Description:** A large skink having a SVL of 250mm and attaining a total length of between 450mm-550mm with a few specimens reaching around 600mm. A long body (more heavily built than the Eastern Blue-Tongue). It has a thick tail base and short stubby legs. Dorsum a chocolate brown colouration with cream to orangey pink blotches down its back and bands on its tail. Its head is greyish to light brown colour. Belly cream to white colour with some specimens having a yellowish colouration.



Blotched Blue-Tongue

**Habitat and Distribution:** Southern Victoria throughout the high country as well as NSW, most of Tasmania and islands of Bass Strait to south east SA. The variety of habitat includes:

Wet sclerophyll forests

Dry sclerophyll forests

Montane forests

Occasionally it may turn up in the suburban garden

### Predators:

Birds

Goannas

Snakes (apparently Copperheads eat these guys)

**Diet:** Variety of animal and plant matter including:

Vegetation: fruit and flowers

Invertebrates: insects, snails, worms, spiders, etc.

Vertebrates: May prey on smaller skink species as well as carrion.

**Reproduction:** Females give birth to live young (viviparous) from 2-12 young a litter in early to mid autumn.

**Conclusion:** We have been making field trips to Westerfolds Park for over a year now and it has been great fun. When it comes to herping spots, it is one of the best places around Melbourne to study one of Australia's most well known lizards.

### References

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- Gerry Swan, "A Photographic Guide to Snakes and Other Reptiles of Australia", New Holland Publishers (Australia) Pty Ltd, 1995
- Stephen Swanson, "Field Guide to Australian Reptiles", Steve Parish Publishing Pty Ltd, 2007
- Steve Wilson & Gerry Swan, "A Complete Guide to Reptiles of Australia", New Holland Publishers, 2nd Edition, 2008

Micah Bonnici is a 13 year old herp enthusiast, who belongs to a number of herpetological and wildlife societies.

# ASK the VHS

The VHS receives a number of email enquiries from both members and non-members alike about aspects of animal husbandry and other associated topics. We have reproduced a few here verbatim to give you some idea of the range of subjects we deal with. Please feel free to contact us at [vhs@optusnet.com.au](mailto:vhs@optusnet.com.au) with your questions. You never know - you may even find your question and answer published here!

*Hi*

*My name is Jack and I am interested in having a bearded or water dragon as a pet.*

*I am trying to figure out which one to get. I would like the lizard to be able to be handled, eat crickets as well as other insects in its diet, easy to maintain and not be too expensive.*

*Would you be able to send me some information about how to care for these lizards and give me a recommendation on which lizard you think will suite these specifications the best.*

*Thanks Muchly*

*Jack*

*Hi Jack,*

*My name is Peter, I am a member of the VHS committee and I am responding to your query.*

*In short, bearded dragons probably fit best with what you have described you are after - i.e. they handle well, they are easy to acquire (not too expensive), easy to care for and love crickets as well as a whole range of other invertebrates.*

*Currently the VHS does not have a care sheet available for bearded dragons and it would be beyond the scope of an e-mail to address it properly so my advice would be to get a hold of one of the readily available, cheap and very easy to read books on bearded dragons. There are a few different titles available, personally I like to 'go local' and one of the more common ones was written and published in Australia, by Australians (Keeping Bearded Dragons by Darren Green & Ty Larson) - certainly recommended.*

*Check out these two web sites for the availability of said books or your local petshop:*

*<http://www.mikeswanherpbooks.com.au/>  
<http://www.herpshop.com.au/>*

*Get a good understanding of their requirements first, get yourself set up and ready to go and then check out these websites for finding your new pet:*

*<http://www.herptrader.com.au/TraderMain.html>  
<http://www.reptilesdownunder.com/ahc/search.php>*

*My personal recommendation species wise would be to go for a Central or Inland Bearded Dragon (*Pogona vitticeps*), they best fit your requirements listed.*

*Good luck and best wishes,*

*Peter Comber, VHS.*

*Dear Sir, Madam*

*I found your website and the contact email address.*

*I have 3 Blue Tongue Lizards (Blotched) that are housed outside in a pen.*

*I live in Melbourne.*

*Recently I have noticed their eyes have problems with what looks like eye lids closed / fused.*

*Do you know what this could be and what treatment I should adopt to fix this ailment ?*

*Really hope you can help me with this problem.  
Thank you in anticipation*

*.  
Cheers - David*

*Hi David*

*My name is Peter, I am a member of the VHS committee and I am responding to your query.*

*Fused or closed and/or difficult to open eyes usually indicate some sort of a respiratory problem, a plausible explanation considering the animals are kept outside.*

*My advice would be to seek veterinary advice to first de-*



termine the reason for the fusing closing (I would suspect some sort of dried discharge) and then to remedy the original source or cause of the problem. Closed eyes may indicate a more serious underlying problem that needs more attention, fixing the eyes will probably be easy (cream or drops most likely) but preventing a recurrence may involve antibiotics - for example.

It is difficult for me to suggest what that may be without knowing exactly what the problem is yet, which brings us back to the seeking veterinary advice. If it is a respiratory issue you may want to have a bit of a look or rethink in regard to the overwintering site for these lizards and ensure that it is dry and draft free.

You haven't indicated which part of Melbourne you are from and so I have attached to this e-mail the details of a number of vets with reptile experience and spread in a more or less 'evenish' fashion around metropolitan Melbourne, I hope at least one of them isn't too far for you.

I hope for the speediest recovery of your lizards,

Regards, Peter Comber.

## MELBOURNE REPTILE VETS

Dr Brendan Carmel  
Warranwood Vet Centre  
1 Colman Rd  
Warranwood 3134  
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Dr Peter Cameron  
North Altona Veterinary Clinic  
221 Millers Rd  
North Altona 3025  
Phone: 9391 5837

Dr Jim Greenwood  
182-184 Canterbury Rd  
Canterbury 3126  
Phone: 9836 2708

Dr. Shane Simpson  
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328 Cranbourne Road  
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Kinglake 3763  
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## VHS WORKINGS

Continued from Page 3

All committee members present agreed that there would be a reptile Expo in 2011. It has since been decided that the 2011 Reptile and Amphibian Expo will be in the Town Square Hoecker Building of the Royal Melbourne Showgrounds on Saturday 19th February 2011.

Agreements have been signed with the Showgrounds and we are currently looking into hire companies for things such as tables, chairs and partitions etc. This venue is considerably better than the previous one used in 2009 and has integrated air-conditioning - a must for that time of the year.

As you can see from our website - we are actively seeking expressions of interest from interested persons to act as Expo Co-ordinator. Such an appointment (paid position) will work directly with members of the committee of the VHS in seeking promotion, vendors, sponsorship, private stall holders to ensure the successful running and promotion of our shared interest and hobby of herpetoculture. The Expression of Interest closes on 19th February 2010 and the year long countdown to the Expo commences. There is still time to put in an Expression if you think you fit the bill.

Discussion was also held into the production of a VHS\Lost Reptiles Home publicity pack which could also double to push the Expo. Negotiations and investigations are under way for the development and production of these packs.



## NEXT VHS MEETING

**Wednesday 31st March 2010**  
**7:15pm - 10:30pm**

**PRAHRAN RSL - 301 HIGH STREET - PRAHRAN**

### NOTE NEW VENUE AND DAY

**Guest speakers will be Ryan Hart,  
Heath Butler and Kwai Chang-Kum**

**For further information go to <http://www.vhs.com.au>  
or page 15 of this issue of Odatria**

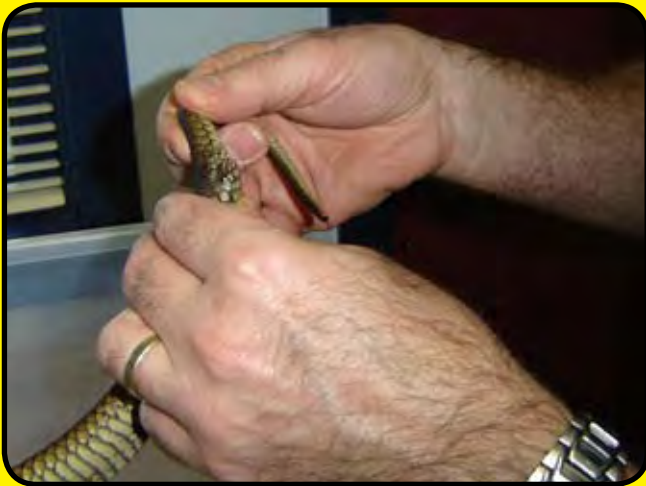
**Entry is \$5 for non members and free for members**

**ANY DONATIONS FOR THE AUCTION WELCOME**

# Copperhead Lawn Mower Injury

Text and images by Barry and Kaz Goldsmith

Some time ago I was called out to this snake that had an injury, to its cloacal area, possibly caused by a lawn mower.



At first I thought the snake would have to be euthanased, but to be sure, I took her to my vet in Karingal here on the Mornington peninsula.



Anyway, after about two weeks the swelling had gone down and the snake looked more like it might be OK.

I would like to say thankyou to Shane for his professionalism and compassion whenever I go there.

For years now he has helped with all the native wildlife (no charge) I bring in as well as the occasional doggy problems we get.



Shane Simpson was the vet and I was glad as he is one of the best.

We cleaned out the wound as best as possible and gave the animal a shot of Fortum. Shane also gave me a few weeks worth of antibiotic shots and a bottle of antiseptic and swabs.



Here are some pics of the first vet visit and you can tell by the expression on our faces that the cleaning process was also a very stinky one.

My wife Kaz nearly tossed her cookies as she was taking these pics!



# VHS MEETING REVIEW

December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2009

Jane Melville

Well before we knew it, the last Victorian Herpetological Society meeting of 2009 was upon us. As well as a guest speaker, this meeting also included the annual general meeting where the new committee was to be announced.

Before all the formalities the usual auction was held. Highest bidding of the Auction was reserved for the animals - 3 carpet pythons, a water dragon, 3 turtles and an Eastern Dwarf Tree Frog.

For the first time in VHS history we had to vote for our new President after Brian Barnett decided to stand aside. 214 voting forms were sent out to members with an attached letter from both Raymond Hoser and Phil Elliott stating why they should be the President of the VHS for 2010. 132 voting forms were returned by the members and they were counted on the night, the final tally was Phil Elliott - 113 votes, Ray Hoser - 19 votes. After Ray congratulated Phil on his victory the new committee was officially announced:-

President - Phil Elliott  
Secretary - Kevin Welsh  
Treasurer - Andrew McKenzie  
Executive - Peter Comber  
Executive - Mike Alexander



Guest speaker - Jane Melville

Other ongoing projects include the molecular systematics and evolution of *Phelsuma* geckos, the *Cordylus* genus and central Asian agamid lizards.

Jane's first talk was about a trip to Kazakhstan to conduct field work aimed at DNA sequencing some Asian agamids (dragons). She flew into Almaty, the country's largest city to meet up with some colleagues from Russia.



The audience watching Jane speak

It was then time to call on our guest speaker to take the stage. Jane's research interests combine field studies with a variety of molecular genetic analyses to study population biology, systematics, evolutionary ecology, and speciation in reptiles and amphibians. Currently, her research is primarily aimed at investigating the evolutionary processes and patterns that shape current communities. While her research focuses on agamid lizards, she has recently undertaken a project investigating historical and current population genetics in south eastern Australian frogs.



*Phrynocephalus mystaceus*

After establishing plans and loading up two Mitsubishi 4WD mini buses they headed to their first location,

Qapshaghay Bogeni Reservoir, a large man made lake north of the city, to hunt for dragons. This area was predominantly low shrubs and grasses on a sandy substrate and some people may have been mistaken for thinking some of the habitat could have been in Australia. Here the main focus of interest seemed to be samples of lizards from the genus *Phrynocephalus*, Jane showed a number of photos of various lizards, some the focus of her research, others not, as well as some token snake shots including a very fast looking 'sand snake' *Psammophis* sp. and a local viper. Some of the lizards shown to the audience shared a number of characteristics and traits and would appear to be equally at home in this country as bearded dragons (*Pogona* sp.), Military Dragons (*Ctenophorus isolepis*) and Earless Dragons (*Tympanocryptis*) were all referred to and compared with the lizards shown to us.



**Grass Snake (*Natrix natrix*)**

Original Photo By Mark Pestov

Further north to sites around Lake Balkash and to where the researchers/collectors could look east and see the snow capped mountains in Mongolia. More habitat shots showed sites that could, again, be in Australia - with Sturt's Stony Desert jumping to mind.

Armed with a variety of DNA samples and voucher specimens the follow up lab work done by Jane and her Russian colleagues showed that of the 'two species' they were focussing on were actually made up of 6 species, you can't argue with DNA!

Jane's second talk was a little closer to home and centred on the travels involved in collecting agamids in Australia - the habitat shots looked even more Australian in this talk! This second presentation was



**Sand Lizard (*Lacerta agilis exigua*)**

Original Photo By Mark Pestov



**Jane Melville speaking about her travels though Australia**

focussed on Australia's Kimberley region in Western Australia heading east through the Northern Territory and into the Gulf of Carpentaria, Queensland. The work in these areas revolved mainly around the genus *Diporiphora* and the species *lalliae*, *pindan* and *bennettii* as well as the genus *Ctenophorus*, with a focus on the *caudicinctus* 'complex' - most likely 'one species' made up of several.



**Kevin Welsh and Brian Barnett prior to Brian's talk**

The night was capped off by a talk from Brian Barnett, revisiting one of his talks from the past on his experiences with artificial incubation.

## **NEXT VHS MEETING**

**Wednesday 31st March 2010**

**7:15pm - 10:30pm**

**SEE PAGES 15/16 FOR DETAILS**





# VICTORIAN HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY

**WEDNESDAY 31st MARCH 2010 7.15pm**

**Note new meeting day and new venue.**

After suggestions by many members and confirmation of our own thoughts, it was decided to look for another meeting venue, more central to the majority of our members and on an evening which had proved to be acceptable in the past. This is on a trial period and we can always revert back to Clayton/Friday if this does not prove to be successful. Naturally, we are going to have some members who automatically disapprove but would ask everyone to take an overall view in the general interest of the majority of members. In changes such as this it is impossible to please everyone. We look forward to your support.



**The Venue:** The Prahran R.S.L sub branch is at 301 High Street Prahran. Stonnington Council occupies the downstairs area and the R.S.L the upstairs where the meetings will be held. Access is at the High Street main entrance and a VHS sign will direct you to the stairs. Once on the first floor, there is a bar area to the right and our meeting area to the left. Mens toilets are between floors and the ladies are on the top floor. Being an older style building, there are no 'special' access provisions to the first floor. If anyone needs help in this way, please contact one of the committee members.

The remaining area is available for our meetings. 80 people can be catered for and seating will be arranged in a more informal manner than in a lecture theatre set up. We hope that this will provide a more social atmosphere. Non alcoholic beverages and food may be consumed in this meeting area, alcohol in the bar area only – this will be strictly adhered to. From the expectations of both the RSL and the VHS, proper conduct will be expected and any misconduct associated with alcohol will not be tolerated. All visiting members will have to be signed in.

**Parking:** There is minimal off street parking but we have visited the area on a Wednesday evening to size up the situation. There are about 12 parking spots in the parking area besides the premises. Part of this will be taken up by the committee etc and those involved with setting the meeting up. Immediately outside of the venue in High Street, no parking is available to the west of the building and to the east of the building it is no parking 'tow away area' until 7.00pm. We have moved the starting time of our meeting to allow for this.

If you arrive shortly after 7.00pm you should have plenty of 'first in' car parking on the RSL side of High Street. If you arrive before 7.00pm, the side streets east of the RSL on the same side and High Street and side streets on the other side of the road should also allow for ample parking. Parking within a short distance will not be a problem. Soft drinks will be supplied free of charge with the pizzas and coffee will be made available throughout the evening.

**Phone contact:** For more information on the new venue or the upcoming meeting, use our hotline to make direct contact. **Brian Barnett 0413 867905** This is the meeting hotline only, don't use it for general inquiries.



## **MARCH 2010 GUEST SPEAKERS**

### **KEEPING COMPARISONS WITHIN MAJOR ZOOS**

#### **A SURVEY IN VIETNAM AND A LOOK AT OVERSEAS TRADE IN HERP**

##### **RYAN HART**

Ryan is new to Victoria, having lived all his life in Queensland, spending his last 7 years working at Australia Zoo on the Sunshine Coast. He is now employed as a senior reptile keeper by Zoos Victoria at Melbourne Zoo. Ryan will talk about his experiences in the different styles of keeping he experienced between these two institutions. The contrasts between the two climates has forced him to be much more mindful of establishing particular micro-climates for indoor exhibits where outside environmental factors can vary so greatly. Australia Zoo had Ryan out in the field on conservation properties and on croc research regularly.

He also recently conducted a survey in the Southern Mekong Delta in Vietnam which may interest members. Some of the observations of reptiles in the trade were quite alarming and unexpected. Ryan will talk about some of his findings on the survey and in the trade as it is very different to what we experience here

### **A PHOTOGRAPHIC JOURNEY ACROSS NORTHERN AUSTRALIA**

##### **HEATH BUTLER & KWAI CHANG-KUM**

Heath & Kwai are both keen naturalists, who have been keeping captive reptiles for more than 15 years. Kwai is a Keeper at Werribee Open Range Zoo, with a particular interest in native herpetofauna and fish. Heath has a degree in zoology, with a particular leaning towards the ecology of elapid snakes.

Heath and Kwai will present a photographic record of their multiple herp trips across the northern half of Australia, from the arid red centre, to the tropical savannahs of the Kimberley, and the lush vine forests of Cape York Peninsula, as they search for iconic and rare species such as Pilbara Rock Monitors, Death Adders and Green Pythons. They will provide an insight into the reptiles, amphibians and other wildlife of the north, and the diverse habitats that they occupy.



# **Wildlife Possession and Trade Advisory Committee**



## **WPTAC**

**By Peter Comber**



To all members of the V.H.S., The V.A.A.H. And all fellow Victorian reptile and amphibian keepers, the current set of wildlife regulations is due to expire in June 2012, between now and then the Wildlife Possession and Trade Advisory Committee (WPTAC) will be meeting regularly to discuss proposed changes, additions, deletions and overall streamlining of the new set of regulations due to replace those currently in place. For information relating to 'what you will need to know' please see the following web address:-

**<http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/>** - go to 'Victorian Law Today', then select 'Statutory Rules', then click on 'W', scroll down to rows 26 and 27 for the Wildlife Regulations of 1992 and 2002.

Keep an eye on the 'Keeping and Trading Wildlife in Victoria' page on the DSE website as well, links to the regulations as well as downloadable submissions forms will be posted in due time. The Wildlife and Game Licensing Service (WaGLS) of the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) will be developing a submission form expressly for the purpose of proposed changes and suggestions for the new regulations. The submissions process is open to anyone and everyone. This document will allow a consistent type of submission for consideration and processing (as it is expected there will be a lot of submissions - more than 1200 were received by the Hunting Advisory Committee for the Game Regulations) All people with sensible and achievable ideas are asked to please put pen to paper or fingers to keyboard and get your thoughts in, only those received by WPTAC on the submission forms designed for this purpose will be accepted and considered - telling your friends your good ideas or posting them on forums for discussion and dissection will not work.

Until the submission forms are developed and made available I can only (so far) accept expressions of interest from those people who wish to receive said forms as soon as they become available.

Please pass this information to friends and fellow keepers who you suspect may not be reached by the current means.

Please direct all queries via e-mail to myself at **[PC-WPTAC@live.com](mailto:PC-WPTAC@live.com)**

Thanks to all in advance,

**Peter Comber, Victorian Herpetological Society Inc., Executive Committee, February 2010.**

# HERP HAPPENINGS

## Bikini Fools Dance Atop Nt Croc Trap

A PHOTO has emerged of people risking life and limb by larking atop a crocodile trap in the Northern Territory.

These bikini-clad ladies were spotted singing in the rain, using champagne bottles as microphones, while standing on a croc trap in a crocodile-infested river in Maningrida.



Two young women are snapped atop an NT crocodile trap

Their mates were in a fishing boat several metres away taking photos. The image, taken at the weekend, surfaced today - a day after the Northern Territory News published a picture on the front page of two male tourists tempting fate by doing a similar act at Jim Jim Falls in Kakadu National Park.

The hooligans were laughing and joking as they posed as cowboys riding atop the trap designed to catch man-eating reptiles. Park ranger and crocodile expert Garry Lindner said the behaviour of the men was absurd. "Crocs are attracted to the bait in the traps, so it is extremely dangerous to fool around like this," he said.

Readers from across the nation were outraged over Tuesday's story.

One reader suggested the photo caption should have read: "Dinner is served! Tonight's menu features two courses of stupid."

And another browser said: "I don't know about a croc trap but it certainly works as a moron trap."

Other comments included "The Darwin Awards were invented because of people like this!" and "What dopes! And people wonder why they get eaten alive? Then we have the animal Nazi out saying kill all the crocs".

Another reader posted: "Darn, they escaped again. Who is responsible for not securing the bait correctly?"

And an Alice Springs man said: "I would have expected that nearly all people would have the brains not to climb on a croc trap. I know this area, and although there's only a small chance of actually having crocs in there at this time of year, it's not unheard of."

But not all agreed it was a dangerous act and some actually praised the women. "Way to go! I'd do it if I was there too," a reader posted online. "Great fun it looks like. Should be more of it."

**REBEKAH CAVANAGH**  
Northern Territory News  
November 2009

## Tiger snake seized at Rosebud

Rosebud snake catcher Terry Cook has caught his first reptile for the season.

The 1m tiger snake was sunbaking on the golf course at the Village Glen retirement centre, within metres of the restaurant.



Terry Cook with the tiger snake he caught in Rosebud

Mr Cook, who has been handling venomous snakes for more than 30 years, catches on average 20 to 25 snakes a year.

Among his more unusual catches have been a snake in a bathtub in a second-floor apartment, in swimming pool



skimmer boxes, under fridges and washing machines, and under cars and caravans.

Mr Cook releases the reptiles back into the wild within 5km of the capture site.

The most commonly encountered snakes on the peninsula are the highly venomous tiger snakes and copperheads.

Mr Cook's contact details are 5986 6177, 0417 690 607 or 0450 186 449.

**Mornington Peninsula Leader**  
**November 2009**

## **Man Who Strapped Lizards To Chest Faces 20 Years' Jail**

A Californian man accused of smuggling 15 Australian lizards into the US by strapping them to his chest is owner of a reptile business who has made eight trips to Australia in the past six years, court documents allege.

Michael Plank, 40, owner of US-based Big Game Reptiles, allegedly told US authorities he collected the lizards from the wild while in Australia.

On November 17 he was stopped by US Customs officers at Los Angeles International Airport after arriving on a flight from Australia.

A search revealed Plank had two money belts strapped to his chest and inside were the 15 protected Australian lizards - 11 skinks, two geckos and two monitors, authorities allege.

The lizards were estimated to be worth \$US8500 (\$9220).

"He said that he smuggled them on his person because in Australia it is illegal to export reptiles without a permit," US Fish and Wildlife Service special agent Mona Iannelli wrote in an affidavit filed in the US District Court.

"Plank admitted that he placed the lizards into money belts which were strapped on his body to board his departing flight from Australia to Los Angeles."

Plank also allegedly admitted to smuggling lizards into the US from Europe in 2004 and 2007 and being owner of Big Game Reptiles.

The Big Game Reptiles website, Ms Iannelli noted, stated it was "a world leader in the breeding of Australian geckos" and its "collection consists of the most diverse bloodlines available".

The site offers an adult pair of soft spiny-tailed geckos, common in south-west West Australia, for \$US1000 and babies for \$US350 each.

Centralian knob-tailed geckos, found in the Northern Territory, are offered for \$US500 each.

Plank is charged with fraudulently and knowingly importing lizards into the US and faces a maximum 20-year jail sentence and \$US250,000 fine.

He was released on a \$US10,000 bond and will be arraigned in a Los Angeles court December 21.

**AAP Los Angeles**  
**November 2009**

## **Cane toad evades Kiwi airport biosecurity**

Queensland's infamous warty invader almost claimed a new border after hitch-hiking its way into New Zealand.

The curious cane toad jumped the ditch from Australia to Queenstown last week and managed to evade detection by hiding in a Cairns woman's hiking boot.

It wasn't until the woman was getting her pre-walk briefing in a hiking store that the pest jumped out of her bag, shocking her Kiwi counterparts.

"People around her said, 'that's a cane toad', and our staff ran round and captured it," Noel Saxon, general manager of Ultimate Hikes, told The Southland Times.



**The good news for Kiwis is that an invasion of cane toads is unlikely as the creatures prefer warmer climates, say experts**

The country's Ministry of Agriculture (MAF) was immediately contacted, with shop staff urged to identify it and kill it as soon as possible.

"It was quite an event really," Mr Saxon said. The noxious critter met a grisly end in a freezer, but that was just the beginning.

Its adventures are to be detailed in an official internal briefing going as far up the ranks as the Kiwi Biosecurity Minister David Carter.

The creature has been sent to a lab for dissection and airport staff are expected to have to explain just how it escaped their attention.

A MAF biosecurity spokeswoman confirmed the toad arrived last Tuesday but was not spotted, even though the unwitting woman declared her boots on her arrival card and had them cleaned with detergent.

"The boots had socks stuffed in them, the toad was possibly inside the boots," the spokeswoman said.

"We've tipped the boots, looked at them, cleaned them and returned them to the passenger."

The good news for Kiwis is that an invasion of cane toads was unlikely in any event.

The pest apparently doesn't like New Zealand's colder climate and would probably not have survived the South Island chill even if it had escaped into the wild.

**TAMARA MCLEAN**  
**AAP Auckland**  
**November 2009**

## Singapore Zoo Welcomes Baby Dragon

The Singapore Zoo has a new addition to the Komodo dragon family, it announced on Tuesday.

Singapore's first komodo dragon in 34 years was born to Bima and Yoko on Nov 15. The birth comes after one and a half years of courtship by father Bima, as female komodo dragons have been known to be hostile during the early phases of courtship.



Singapore Zoo welcomed its newest addition to the Komodo dragon family on Tuesday

Said Mr Biswajit Guha, Assistant Director Zoology, Singapore Zoo: 'The hatching of the Komodo dragon is one of the most significant moments for us at the Singapore Zoo.'

'We have been planning for this momentous day over the last seven months... all the planning in the world cannot really prepare us for the tremendous sense of elation and wonder at seeing this 40-cm long baby resting beside its empty egg-shell in the incubator.'

The Singapore Zoo is the first zoo in Asia, out of the Komodo Dragon's native home of Indonesia, that has successfully managed to breed this reptile.

Considered as one of Indonesia's national treasures, komodo dragons can only be given away by the President. Currently there are three Komodo dragons, including the hatchling, at the Singapore Zoo's Reptile Garden.

**Singapore Straits Times**  
**December 2009**

## ABOUT KOMODO DRAGONS

*KOMODO Dragon, the world's largest lizard, inhabits the rugged terrain of the Indonesian island of Komodo, Rinca and Flores.*

*They are among the most intelligent lizards with a keen sense of smell, which enables them to detect dead animals 8.5km away upwind.*

*In the wild, Komodo dragons prey on animals as large as deer, feral ponies and buffalo and are also known to be cannibalistic as adult dragons may prey on young, old and sickly dragons.*

*With a very efficient digestive system, komodo dragons excrete only 8-13 per cent of the amount they eat and this means they do not need to eat often.*

*Cooperative efforts between zoos and wildlife parks have helped boost the number of komodo dragons.*

*According to the IUCN Red List, komodo dragons are vulnerable to extinction.*

## Cane Toads Are Coming: Pest Makes Way To Melbourne In Pot Plant

A Melbourne shopping centre has received a nasty early Christmas present with the discovery of a cane toad lurking in a pot plant.

The cane toad, one of northern Australia's biggest pests, is believed to have hitched a ride on one of 7000 assorted palm species delivered to Kmart stores from a Queensland wholesaler.

The toad was found by Kmart staff in a pot plant supplied to its store at Southland shopping centre last week.

The discovery sparked a biosecurity alert in Victoria but searches by Kmart staff and Victoria's Department of Pri-



mary Industries found no trace of other cane toads.

However, about 2500 palms have been sold by Kmart and Victorians who may have bought any were urged to check for cane toads



Kmart has sold 2500 Queensland palms like the one a cane toad hitched a ride in

DPI manager of landscape protection, Brendan Roughead said there was still a low chance that cane toads could establish in Victoria.

"Biologically speaking, Victoria is not a cane toad friendly environment because the climate is too cold," Mr Roughead said in a statement.

"Kmart have responded quickly to this report and should be commended on their efforts to prevent any problems.

"About 2500 palms have been sold to the public and, although it is unlikely there are more cane toads, we would like people who have bought one of the palms from Kmart to check.

"Many species of native frogs are often wrongly identified as cane toads so we are urging people who suspect they have found a cane toad not to hurt it."

People who suspect they have found a cane toad are asked to photograph it and report it to the DPI.

Mr Roughead said people should not handle frogs or toads as they were susceptible to disease after being touched.

The DPI can be contacted on on 136 186 and images can be emailed to [highrisk.invasiveanimalsdpi.vic.gov.au](mailto:highrisk.invasiveanimalsdpi.vic.gov.au)

**Melbourne Age**  
**December 2009**

## Rare frogs die in breeding mishap

The ACT's northern corroboree frog breeding program at Tidbinbilla has been put back at least a year after the failure of a refrigeration unit resulted in the death of 700 tad-

poles and 300 juvenile frogs.

The program was due next year to release frogs bred in captivity into the wild for the first time but that milestone would now not be achieved for at least a further 12 months.

The northern corroboree frog is considered an endangered species, with most of its habitats in the ACT destroyed in the January 2003 bushfires. By 2008 the frog had become all but extinct in the ACT.

Tidbinbilla was the only place in Australia to successfully breed the frogs in captivity.



Hundreds of northern corroboree frogs have been found dead

The Department of Territory and Municipal Services announced late yesterday that the 1000 tadpoles and frogs died last weekend because of a combination of the refrigeration unit in a breeding facility failing and the heat from fluorescent lights.

A department spokesman said a staff member had turned the refrigeration unit off, which was not unusual, but they thought they had turned it back on when they left.

The spokesman said it had not yet been determined if the deaths were due to human error or the fridge failing.

The dead amphibians had been bred over the past two years.

Research and planning manager Sharon Lane said the staff had put a lot of time and effort into the program.

"Naturally, all staff involved in the breeding program are shattered by this news," she said.

Extra precautions would now be taken including a back-to-base alarm system to provide a 24-hour warning of high or low temperatures, a power cut-off to the interior fluorescent lights and increasing daily checks by rangers.

An external review of the facility would also occur.

**MEGAN DOHERTY**  
**The Canberra Times**  
**December 2009**

## Quoll Quite A Mouthful For Snake

A BLACK-HEADED python got a bit more than it could chew after it swallowed a Northern Quoll that was wearing a radio collar.

Pert, Perry and Evans Veterinary Surgeons veterinarian Rowan Pert performed some tricky yet impressive surgery on the reptile who was brought into the clinic after it chomped on the quoll in the Crediton State Forest late last week.

Mr Pert said when the snake arrived at the surgery the collar was lodged in its abdomen.

"We took an X-ray, which assisted the case, and that is when we found out that the snake would have trouble passing the collar," he said.

"That was when we had to put the necessary procedure in place."

Mr Pert said they had to find the exact position and that the X-ray showed where the collar was and from there they put the snake under anaesthetic.

He said they then placed a tube down the snake's windpipe to perform abdominal surgery in which they removed the collar.

"I was able to ring a few of my colleagues in the state and got some advice on preparing for the surgery," he said.

"It took the snake two days to recover before we put it back into its environment."



The vet prepares the snake for surgery

The procedure lasted about an hour and Mr Pert said it was amazing to see how incredibly developed the muscle wall of the snake's stomach was.

According to the Department of Environment and Resource Management (DERM) conservation officer John Augusteyn DERM is trapping Northern Quolls in small cages within Crediton State Forest, about 100km west of Mackay.

Northern Quolls are listed as endangered under the En-

vironment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999.

"The Mackay Highlands population is one of the few remaining in Australia that does not appear to have been decimated by cane toads, toxic baiting, predation and habitat modification.

"The aim of the survey is to compare the movements and mortality rates of Northern Quolls living in areas that have been exposed to fire to those that haven't.

"The quolls will be trapped then measured, tagged, and female quolls will be fitted with a radio collar."

To the best of DERM's knowledge no snake had ever been operated on before to remove a quoll, Mr Augusteyn said. Any fauna that becomes injured as a result of DERM's work that cannot be treated in the field is taken to a veterinarian for treatment.

Studies conducted in the Northern Territory found that quolls were more vulnerable to predation once the ground cover (vegetation) had been removed due to fire or overgrazing.

"Traps will be put out following a fire event to determine the health of marked quolls and to determine if other quolls have moved into any vacant territories."

Mr Augusteyn said marked animals would be used to estimate population size. The information gained from this study would be used to recommend appropriate fire regimes to conserve quolls in the area.

The survey is a conservation initiative project that started in June 2009.

**FALLON HUDSON**  
**Mackay Daily Mercury**  
**December 2009**

## St Lucia's Endemic Reptile Population On The Verge Of Extinction

A nationwide scientific study of St Lucia's reptiles and amphibians, completed this month, has uncovered that the island's endemic reptile populations are approaching critically low levels. The study, under the National Forest Demarcation and Bio-Physical Resource Inventory Project, also reports that these species face extinction if measures are not taken to conserve St Lucia's unique forest biodiversity.

Head herpetologist Dr Jenny Daltry, a two-time National Geographic grantee and 2005 Emerging Explorer, states that among the 28 species of lizards, snakes and frogs there is a high number of species endemic to St Lucia. "In total there are seven endemic species and five subspecies which have been recorded," states Daltry. However, the findings show that the forests habitats with the highest di-



versity and abundance of these species are found largely outside of the protected forests areas.

"Drawing on historical records and comparisons with other West Indian islands, this study found most of St Lucia's native forest species have declined significantly in population size with some at critically low levels," states Daltry. "By applying the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) categories of threat, at least six reptiles native to St Lucia are now qualified as globally threatened with extinction."

These critically endangered species include the St Lucia Racer and the St Lucia Iguana, with the St Lucia Whiptail Lizard falling into the endangered category. Other vulnerable species on the list are the St Lucia Pygmy Gecko, the St Lucia Thread Snake and St Lucia Viper.

The St Lucia Viper, commonly known as the Fer-de-lance, is one of the endemic species of particular concern. Project team leader Dr Bob Tennent acknowledged the significance and value of Dr Daltry's work noting that the report contained important findings. "It will be contentious that she has found the St Lucia Fer-de-lance is now classified as a species vulnerable to extinction, but this is an important snake as it is found only in St Lucia."



**Fer-de-lance**

The study shows that in 1900, the geographical location of the snake extended from the Choc River in the north to the Cannells River in the south of the island. The report now reveals the Fer-de-lance is limited to two fragmented areas between Fond D'or and Grand Anse on the northeast coast, and between Dennery and Praslin on the east coast extending across the interior of the island to Canaries and Anse La Raye on the west coast. The Fer-de-lance and other reptilian species are at risk due habitat destruction as a result of continuous deforestation that is prevalent on private lands, especially along the island's coastal zones.

Other root causes for the declines includes, alien invasive animals such as the opossum (manicou), rats, dogs, cats, feral pigs, the mongoose and other alien invasive reptiles and amphibians. Hunting and agrochemical pollution are also significantly associated with the decrease in num-

bers.

Adams Toussaint from the Forestry Department states that the rapid decrease in the Fer-de-lance population represent a fast-growing trend leading to extinction if timely conservation measures and management intervention is not developed and implemented. "The St Lucia Wildlife Protection Act of 1980 has classified the Fer-de-lance as an unprotected reptile. There is therefore an urgent call for a further review of some aspects of the Act," said Toussaint. "Increased public interest in and awareness of St Lucia's reptiles and amphibians as well as heightened public understanding of the impact of alien invasive animals is also paramount to the conservation of these reptile species."

The study represents a comprehensive effort to catalogue and understand the reptile and amphibian biodiversity of St Lucia's ecosystems. The findings will be used for development and implementation of conservation and management plans and to create greater awareness of the local flora and fauna, especially their importance and vulnerability.

The reptile and amphibian report is one of fifteen reports which will be released before the end of the year. The project is funded by the EU under the SFA 2003 'Environment Management Fund' and is implemented by the Banana Industry Trust.

**Carribean Net News**  
**December 2009**

## **Snake makes slippery customer**

When Trish Kelly said she wanted to attract customers to her store, this isn't what she had in mind.

Safe City cameras spotted a snake slithering into her Mixed Spice on Brisbane store in the early hours of the morning. For someone who "absolutely can't stand snakes", Ms Kelly said she had the fright of her life when she later opened the store.

"There was a note on my door that said 'don't open your shop before ringing the police'," she said. "When I turned it over it said 'there's a snake in your shop' - I nearly died," she said.

A Queensland Museum spokesman said their snake experts couldn't clearly identify the offending snake, but said it could be a brown snake or a range of non-venomous snakes.

Ms Kelly said while local snake catchers couldn't find the offending intruder when the incident occurred last Wednesday, she wasn't too concerned that the snake was still in her Brisbane Street store.

But just to be sure she said she always double checks the lay-bys and before going to the toilet by stamping on the ground saying "I'm here, I'm here".

"My biggest fear in life is snakes, I wouldn't look at a picture of them if I had the chance – I'd turn the page as soon as I could," she said.

"It wasn't a good way to start the day. While the snake catcher was in the store I was as far away as I could be. "But now I'm sure it's gone away, I wouldn't be here if I didn't think otherwise."



Trish Kelly had an unwanted visitor in her store Mixed Spice when a snake (inset) found its way inside, with the whole incident caught on CCTV cameras

Ipswich Mayor Paul Pisasale said the clear footage – which allowed Safe City operators to notify police of the snake danger – was a testament to the security system's effectiveness.

"Safe City is an excellent system and a real asset to the community.

"This is a good example of how effective Safe City can be," Cr Pisasale said.

"Police were notified of the snake sighting and were able to warn the shop owner, which could have saved her from a dangerous situation."

**ROB WILLIAMS**  
Gold Coast Mail  
January 2010

## Lizards' Camouflage Reveals Evolution in Action

In White Sands, New Mexico, two species of traditionally brown lizards have evolved white scales in order to blend in with their environment.

By studying the genetic mechanisms at work in this adaptation, scientists are able to observe evolution as it happens. The study illuminates the mechanics of not only adaptation, but also speciation, or how species form.

Erica Bree Rosenblum of the University of Idaho led the study, published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, in which her team analyzed the gene responsible for producing the skin pigment melanin.

"(In this study), we have an opportunity to showcase 'evolution in action,'" Rosenblum told Discovery News. "The evolution at White Sands has occurred remarkably quickly and with dramatic results."

In two of the species studied by Rosenblum and her team, the fence lizard and the whiptail lizard, the researchers found that pigment-producing genes in each species had mutated. However, each lizard evolved this mutation differently on a molecular level.

In other words, when presented with the challenges of desert life in White Sands, each lizard species arrived at the same solution in a slightly different way.



Brown lizards in New Mexico's White Sands have evolved bleached skin to adapt to their environment

Rosenblum estimates that the white fence and whiptail lizards adapted to their pallid surroundings between 2,000 and 5,000 years ago, a blink of the eye in evolutionary terms.

What's more, they're in the process of evolving into two separate species from their brown counterparts -- a fact the researchers find particularly exciting.

While scientists often disagree about what constitutes a new species, Rosenblum added that several of the "road stops" on the path to speciation have been met. For instance, some of the animals already exhibit mating preferences for like-colored lizards.

According to Dr. Kevin J. McGraw, the study stands as one of the more impressive evolution in action events observed by scientists. McGraw, an associate professor at Arizona State University, explores pigment changes in birds.

As with Rosenblum's lizards, his work provides insight into the evolved diversity of exaggerated features in the animal kingdom.

"Because body pigments can play such diverse physiological and morphological roles, pigment-based color patterns represent ideal systems in which to evaluate fine-scale evolutionary pressures, changes and trade-offs," McGraw



told Discovery News

**ROBERT LAMB**  
**Discovery Chanel News**  
**January 2010**

## **Snake, battled 'n rolled**

He's never had a nose for trouble before but black labrador Bronson sure knows how to turn heads with his retrieving tricks.

The champion obedience dog stunned his owners when he recently returned to them to proudly show off his latest find.

Locked firmly in his jaws and coiled around his snout was a long, live snake, believed to be a deadly copperhead.

"He's normally an excellent duck dog but he'll pick up absolutely anything and return it to us, hanging on to it until we say 'give'," Deborah Allen said.

"My husband Peter didn't know he'd lost his mobile phone out in a paddock recently until Bronson returned with it in his mouth."

The couple were lucky to be at home together at their property at Yarragon on January 4 when Mr Allen called out to his wife: "Hey, come and look at this."

"There was Bronson with the snake hanging out of his mouth and the snake's body wrapped around his nose," Ms Allen said.

"We weren't sure if it was alive or not and we touched its head which was down at ground level and it moved - it appeared slightly stunned."

As they grappled with a plan to deal with the snake, Mr Allen told his wife to quickly take a photo first.

"He didn't reckon anyone would believe it," she said.

With a camera always by her side, Ms Allen captured the stunning sight as perfectly obedient Bronson, 11, remained totally rigid, trained not to move his head while carrying anything he had retrieved.

"But he had a real forlorn look on his face like he was saying 'Hurry up and take this thing'," Ms Allen said.

Ms Allen said their second labrador, Madeline, 8, usually tried to steal anything Bronson was carrying.

"But this is the first time ever she wouldn't have a bar of him. She kept well away."

Ms Allen found a chaff bag and lowered it to the ground, pulling the bag up and over the snake while at the same time releasing its body which remained wrapped around

Bronson's snout.

"And as soon I said 'Give' he dropped it right into the bag and we sealed up the ends."



**Bronson, a 12-year-old labrador, looks a bit worried after he retrieved a deadly copperhead snake from his Yarragon backyard**

With the snake safely stored, the pair rushed Bronson to the West Gippsland Veterinary Centre where a coagulation blood test confirmed Bronson had copped a bite.

Four days in hospital followed on a drip, but Bronson is now happily at home.

Australian Veterinary Association president Peter Gibbs said an alarming number of pets had been brought to clinics this summer for treatment of snake bites.

"Snakes tend to be at their most active towards the end of day, with snake bites usually happening in late afternoon or early evening," Dr Gibbs said.

"Dog owners should avoid snake-prone areas."

Symptoms of snakebite include seizures, vomiting, bleeding around the bite, weakness in the limb and paralysis. The animal will collapse with laboured breathing.

Urgent treatment is needed but call ahead so they have antivenene on standby.

**KELLY RYAN**  
**Melbourne Herald Sun**  
**January 2010**

Common sense prevails in the U.S with the drive and determination of the Herp community. Whilst some amongst us used this as an expanded 'scare tactic' we can also see that we really do live in a predominately balanced world. - VHS Committee



## **REPTILE NATION PREVAILS ON GA S303**

Today (9th February) the final hearing was held in the Georgia Senate Committee on Natural Resources & the Environment on S303. The bill as written would have made owning any of the Big 5 constrictors prohibitive while failing to address the stated intent of the bill. Jobs would have been lost and Georgia families and businesses would have been hurt. USARK provided a well thought out alternative in the form of our Model State Legislation which addressed issues of secure containment along with public and environmental safety measures. Committee staff drew up a Committee Substitute based on the USARK proposal.

During the hearing the bill's sponsor rejected this proposed Committee Substitute. Vice Chairman Bulloch questioned the decision to reject this proposed alternative. Other Senators commented in favor of the USARK proposal. Several Senators also commented on the number of emails generated to their offices by the USARK grass roots campaign. One Senator said, "I didn't know how many people were interested in snakes. I had hundreds of emails saying 'No on S303' in my mailbox". Subsequently Senator Bulloch motioned for a 'No Pass' rating for S303. The Committee then voted and S303 received a majority 'No Pass' designation. S303 is now officially dead in Committee. USARK appreciates the fair treatment and sincere efforts of the Committee Staff, Chairman Tolleson, Vice Chairman Bulloch and Committee Members who worked to improve S303.

Thank you to BW Smith of Animal South in Atlanta who attended the hearing on behalf of USARK. Also a special thanks to all those members of the Reptile Nation who participated in the grass roots campaign on S303!

\*\*\*Please go to:- <http://usark.org/donate.php> and contribute \$10 to USARK \*\*\*

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