

Electronic publication of the Victorian Herpetological Society

# ODATRIA

Issue 8 November 2010



Countdown to Expo

# Odatria

## Newsletter of the Victorian Herpetological Society No. 8, November 2010

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President: Phil Elliott  
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### Chief of Support Services

Brian Barnett

### Odatria Editors/Producers

Andrew Owen  
Kevin Welsh

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### Correspondence:

PO Box 4208, RINGWOOD VIC 3134  
vhs@optusnet.com.au

[www.vhs.com.au](http://www.vhs.com.au)

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### 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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Gippsland Water Dragon

*Physignathus lesueurii howittii*

by Steph McKenzie - Animal Tracks

# EDITORIAL

by Phil Elliott

Here's hoping this edition's editorial finds you all and your families well. A lot has happened since the last edition and our expo is on track to be one of the finest yet. Your support is always welcome so thinking caps on to see how you can help it be the success we are looking for.

On another, personal note, I was lucky enough to attend the recent Australian Herpetological Symposium up in Cairns and can tell you all it was a fantastic couple of days with some fine speakers in attendance, I can't wait for next year! Below is a brief rundown of the first day at the Symposium, next edition I'll tell you all about the rest.

But for now, take care and Happy Herping,

*Phil*

## AUSTRALIAN HERPETOLOGICAL SYMPOSIUM

Registration took place on Friday October 1st with the talks on 2nd & 3rd October 2010. Both American and Australian speakers were in attendance.

The speakers were as follows:- Philippe de Vosjoli, Rico Walder, Allen Rapashy, Justin Julander, David Northcott, Rob Roy McInnes, Dr Mark Simpson, Greg Miles, Michael Cermack, Peter Johnson.

Philippe de Vosjoli opened the event on Saturday morning and acted as MC throughout. Apart from this opening address he also gave the first of the talks which was on the subject of "The Evolution of Herpetoculture". This was a fascinating talk in which Philippe gave us the history of Herpetoculture in the United States closely followed with his own opinions on how he sees it progressing from this point in time.

Philippe was followed by Dr Mark Simpson of Sugarloaf Animal Hospital. Mark gave the delegates a presentation about the Hospital facility and the work that they carry out there with the emphasis of his talk being on herp.

Rico Walder was next to take the stage and treated us to a talk titled "GTP Farming in Indonesia" and I, for one, was blown away by the variety of Chondros coming out of this region.

Following the lunch break, a rather splendid lunch was provided; Allen Rapashy took to the stage to give us his take on "The Transition from Hobby to Business". Allens talk was a very interesting one as he provided some fascinating statistics on the American businesses and compared this population wise to what he thought Australia could sustain in the various arms of the business of Herpetoculture. This certainly gave a lot of people food for thought!

Michael Cermack was next up with a very entertaining talk on Australian GTP's.

Greg Miles then gave us a fascinating insight into the building and operation of his Pig Nose Turtle breeding facility. He experienced some very interesting trials and tribulations in getting this facility up and running but now has, probably, the best private swimming pool in the Darwin area! Greg's talk was followed by one of Peter Johnson's on the tax implications between the hobby and a business. I can't tell you more about this one as the tax man scares me and I scuttled out the door at this point to return later for the very splendid Gala Dinner!





# Expos And The Future

## by Brian Barnett

Once again we have another expo on the way. Each year I say 'never again' but somehow continue to be involved. It wouldn't be so bad if everything rolled along nicely but I don't think expos are supposed to happen that way.

Everyone has the perfect answer and everything we do is incorrect, 'surely you ( we ) can see that'. The most popular one is that a two day expo would be better, maybe down the track we could accommodate that but let's get the one day event right first.

It costs ( in round figures ) \$30,000 to put the one day event on. We do attempt to recover this amount through sponsors and vendors. We don't have a huge list to choose from especially in the higher bracket, and the available list is certainly not growing. We do thank those that have supported us in the past and without them the past events would not have been a success, but we need continuing support now and in the future.

When we had group discussions in the past, we all agreed that the herp scene needed expos to promote the hobby and to have it grow. I think that all sponsors agreed that they may have to run it at a loss for a while but the future growth of the hobby/industry was more important. Wow, some of them do have short memories.

Several years ago, reptile breeding was in its infancy and whatever you bred you would be able to sell without any problems. I can remember the Sundays, not so long ago, when I had customers lined up in my driveway waiting to choose their preferred Children's Python. We didn't breed too much in those days, the occasional carpet or Water Python but nothing extra special to speak of. The Womas, Black-headed etc. were to come later.



The 2009 Expo Venue

As the hobby became greater, through societies, publications and general publicity, the number of people keeping

reptiles started to grow. The internet introduced 'where to buy' reptiles and before long we had a stable number of herpetoculturists. With advanced knowledge, and sometimes a little bit of luck, most keepers were breeding their animals. It's funny when a new keeper phones up and says that they have some round white things in their cage "what are they?" We weren't that lucky in the old days.

As everyone has noticed, we have now come to a point where it's becoming more difficult to sell one's surplus offspring. The price on most species has plummeted and maybe to a more sensible level. No objection to anyone recouping their sometimes high outlays but in the hobbyist section, a moderate income from breeding would more than likely be adequate, pay the bills such as the electricity, food, new cages and some left over to purchase new species or stock. Those that are in it for commercial reasons would be taking a different look at the situation but you are not going to move your stock and maintain whatever price you aim at unless you can dramatically grow the number of potential keepers in this country.

What was perhaps a rare species in captivity a few years ago is quite often very common in captivity today. Remember that we are talking about animals in the wild that may have a survival rate of only a few percent to the same animals in captivity that can have an almost 100% survival rate up to breeding adults. We are literally flooded with some/most of those species. Most of our wildlife authorities still have the gall to suggest that taking from the wild is still their main concern. It just shows how out of touch they are.



Let the Expo Begin!

An expo is a great way of introducing the field of herpetoculture to the local/interstate world. We have failed in the past, probably through lack of publicity, to get these 'outsiders' through the doors and show them the insides of the herpetocultural world. We have been having the same

faces through each year and although we are pleased to see you all (especially the paying ones) we have so far failed to attract many of the new interested parties that we need to increase our 'numbers' within the hobby.

The reason we need more money in the form of sponsorships etc. is to be able to have the funds to advertise/promote the expo to the hilt. The VHS is not in it for the money, if we can break even we will be satisfied but we want to heavily promote the herpetocultural scene as much as we can. Whatever would be going to the VHS is going to be put in advertising the event. At this point we are looking at tv, radio, press, through the scout movement and also the education department. All of these discussions are still under way so please take us as serious. Any suggestions along this line will be appreciated but it has to work in with the finances, as well as the plans that we already have running.

I personally booked the showgrounds venue just on twelve months ago to give us a smoother than normal run into the next venue. Hasn't worked out that way. We decided to advertise, for the first time, for coordinators to submit documentation on how they could run and promote the lead up to an expo in a professional way. We received three nominations of which all three presentations were quite acceptable. The first, which was a professional organisation and seemed 100%, was let go after they requested to be paid for tasks/work that we were going to be doing ourselves. They really were after the big bucks. The second application, once again it read well but we were only being conned. As part of the contract we paid \$2,000 upfront but we got nothing for our money. Lack of

communication was the main downfall and the coordinator was terminated after a frustrating period of no progress or communication. He will be named once the decision from VCAT is made public. The third group of coordinators have been operating on our behalf for some time now. Unfortunately, due to a change in work requirements this party has had to withdraw its commitment. The VHS is now back to running the show.

One of the downfalls of any Victorian expo is that interstate licence holders cannot bring their animals to Victoria to sell off due to the antiquity of the laws involving the movement of animals from interstate. At this stage individuals could request a 'selling table' and display photos of their animals that they can supply from interstate. Hopefully this situation may be fixed up in the near future but don't hold your breath too long as we are all aware that the relative departments hate any change as it may create extra workload or take power from a system that is totally over regulated now. Notice how more activity has been observed lately, maybe there is an election in the wind.

We need you to keep supporting the expos, for everyone's sake, we need sponsors, paying vendors, non pay vendors and individuals to promote the event that is coming up.

The below is what I have been attaching to all my outgoing emails and included here for the people who are not customers of the Herp Shop.

Regards, good herping and see you at the 2011 Expo.

**Brian Barnett**

**Events such as the Expo are held in the interest of all reptile keepers. We need to increase the popularity of the hobby and thus increase the number of new people becoming involved. Having problems selling the reptiles you breed each year ? More reptiles are being bred each year but the number of keepers need to be increased. You can play a part in this:**

**Interested in being a sponsor/vendor at the upcoming Expo.**

**Interested in having a non-commercial stand to sell your reptiles at (no cost).**

**Contact the VHS at [vhs@optusnet.com.au](mailto:vhs@optusnet.com.au)  
or Brian Barnett @ 03-9363-6841 (leave a message)**





# My First Snake

by Stephen Ness

For as long as I can remember I have wanted to own a snake, but until just last year was not able to convince my parents to let me.

I finally convinced Dad that they are awesome and not that scary, so at that point he helped me convince Mum, which wasn't as easy (if you can say that) because she is petrified of snakes.

While Dad was working on convincing Mum we did some research and, whilst I had my favourites, the Water Python, the Black-headed Python and the Diamond Python, I settled on the Spotted Python as they are smaller and hopefully this would help win Mum over. Dad did such a good job convincing Mum that she agreed that the size was not an issue because a snake is a snake. Either way I didn't care, I finally got agreement that I could get one.



Zeus in his first home - a click clack

Then came the difficult bit of deciding what to get and from where. We did get a good piece of advice from a pet shop which was to get the snake from a breeder not a shop. We eventually contacted the VHS and were put in touch with a breeder. We visited the breeder to see his collection and to ask heaps of questions. I was in heaven. I was able to handle many of his snakes (Mum made sure she was well on the other side of the room).

Once I saw and handled his Jungle Pythons I was in love with them and decided that's what I had to get. We visited a number of times in the following weeks and learnt heaps while we waited for the hatchlings to hatch.

When they finally hatched Mum was pretty freaked out watching me get bitten a bunch of times, but Dad, eventually, was game enough to handle one despite knowing a bite was inevitable. Not that getting bitten by hatchling is anything to be scared about.

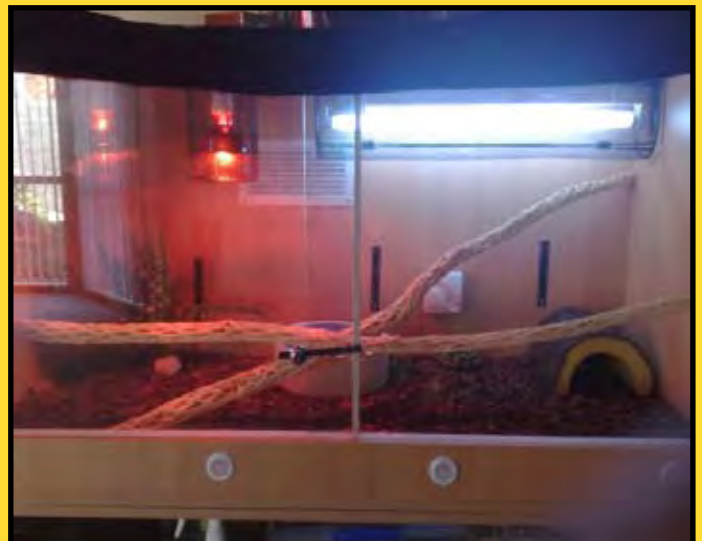
Then came the hard part of choosing which hatchling I wanted. It was so hard to choose as I liked them all.



Preparing for the big move!

Before I got to bring Zeus home I had the problem of sorting out his enclosure, which is awesome if I do say so myself, and Zeus is pretty happy with it too.

Zeus is about 10 months old now and Mum is still pretty freaked and won't come near him if he is out, but Dad is getting more and more comfortable with handling him. Even to the point of wanting to get his own. He wants to get a Diamond but I'm trying to convince him to get a Jungle so I can start breeding in a few years.



Big boy at last - can you see me?

# Bringing Home Zeus

by Greg Ness

My gosh, who would have thought there could be so much conflicting information about snakes available on the internet. Even something as simple as the average length of a particular breed seemed to be a contentious issue. If we were going to have a snake in the house I wanted to be sure I knew what I was getting into.

Let me go back a few steps. My young bloke Stephen has always been fascinated by snakes and has been asking for one since he was about 13 – 14 (he's just turned 18). Finally, with a great deal of reluctance we came around to the idea and agreed.

Having decided we would let this happen I started to do some research of my own. This is when it started to get confusing. Maybe it was just the way I was reading it, but it just seemed that everyone had a different opinion. Then there were the pet shops. Of course, everyone wanted to sell us a snake so their advice was always tainted with what they thought we wanted to hear. Finally, someone told us about the VHS and suggested we start there. What a great piece of advice that was. It is worth mentioning that this pearl of wisdom came from a pet shop.

The VHS were great. I sent them an email explaining our situation and basically asking for help. Lots of help. We got a prompt response and an offer to sit and discuss our concerns. Wow, how novel was that! Someone willing to help us out without us having to commit to buying anything.

We were put in touch with a breeder who kept a variety of snakes, with a promise that if he doesn't have what we want then we'll be directed to other breeders. We learnt a lot and Stephen got to handle lots of different snakes. Finally he decided that he wanted a Jungle Python. They are a beautiful creature (behind glass), but does he really need to get one that's going to grow that big!



Meet Zeus

While we waited for Zeus to hatch Stephen and I started to read everything we could about Jungle Pythons and met with the breeder at least once a fortnight. Stephen took every opportunity to handle as many snakes as he could and was even allowed to feed some of them. The more I learnt, the more comfortable I felt. By the time Zeus had hatched, I had decided that if I was going to have a snake in the house I better get over my fears and handle one or two. With much trepidation I held a hatchling first. Stephen even got a photo as it was about to bite me for the third time. Yep, Stephen was right, I didn't feel a thing. Then I held his mother which, for some reason, I found to be less daunting. What an experience, I couldn't believe that I had spent so much time being afraid of these awesome creatures.

Housing Zeus was going to be a challenge. For a variety of reasons he was going to have to live in a 'click clack', inside an enclosure. After purchasing what we hoped was the right enclosure, we then set about making a 'click clack'. As you can see from the photos, I reckon we did a pretty good job.



Getting to know you! (from both sides)

Zeus has been home for about 10 months now and is now as much a part of the family as the dog and cat. What an amazing learning experience this has been for all of us. From my perspective, I've gone from being afraid, to handling a snake, to wanting my own in less than a year.

Now comes the biggest challenge. How do I tell my wife that I want one of my own?





## New Imaging Technology Shows Animal Insides - Python Digesting a Rat

Science is inherently cool, but gross science is even better.

Using a combination of computer tomography (CT) and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), scientists Kasper Hansen and Henrik Lauridsen of Aarhus University in Denmark were able to visualize the entire internal organ structures and vascular systems (aka "guts") of a Burmese Python digesting a rat.

By choosing the right settings for contrast and light intensity during the scanning process, the scientists were able to highlight specific organs and make them appear in different colors. The non-invasive CT and MRI scans could let scientists look at animal anatomy without the need for other invasive methods such as dissections.

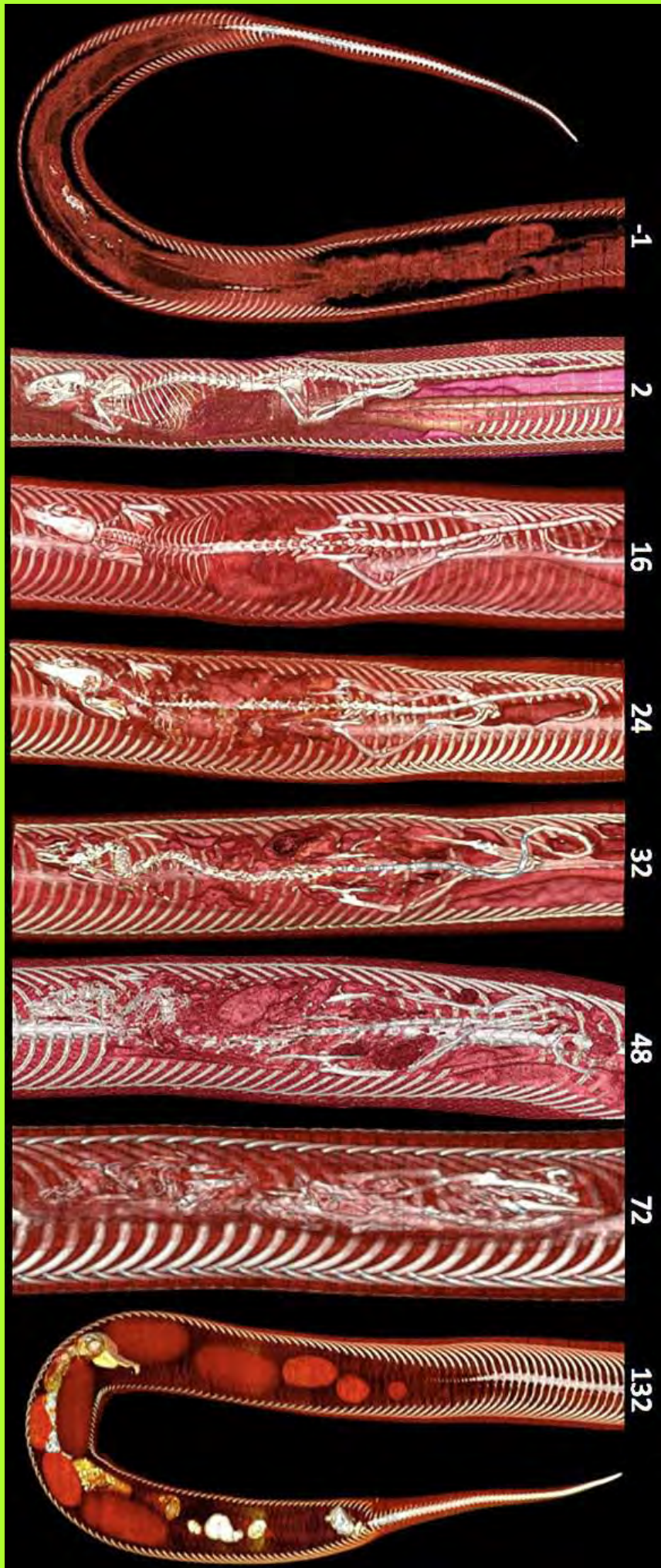
We had the scientists send us some exclusive step-by-step images of the process. While some might call them gruesome, we remind you that knifing your way through frog guts during high school anatomy wasn't exactly pretty either. Keep reading to see the gradual, 132-hour disappearance of one rat from the python stomach.

This is a Burmese Python scanned before ingesting a rat and then at two, 16, 24, 32, 48, 72 and 132 hours after dinner. The succession of images reveals a gradual disappearance of the rat's body, accompanied by an overall expansion of the snake's intestine, shrinking of the gallbladder and a 25 percent increase in heart volume.

**BONNIE BIESS**  
**Asylum.com**  
**July 2010**









# VHS MEETING REVIEW

October 6<sup>th</sup> 2010

## Roy Pails

The third meeting for 2010 seemed to be on us in no time at all. We were all waiting with bated breath to hear the second installment of Roy Pails regaling us with his history of herp and the witty interaction with Brian Barnett.

The evening commenced with a brief introduction by stand in President/MC Brian Barnett (Phil Elliott was swanning around in FNQ at the Australian Herpetological Symposium) who outlined the happenings of the previous few months and the way ahead as we steam towards the 2011 Victorian Reptile and Amphibian Expo to be held on the 19th February next year.

Then on to the usual auction. Items for auction were a bit sparse this time with the major ones being various amounts of speckled feeder roaches and a Reptipets reptile incubator. There was a pair of coastal carpet pythons "passed in" to be held over for the massive auction we are planning as part of the Expo next year.

Most of the items for auction were donated by the usual culprits - Brian Barnett/Herp Shop, Reptapets and committee members. Special thanks go to Joe Cooper and the Carmody family. Remember we are all members of the society - a non profit organisation. How about having a look around at home and see if you have any useful items at home that you are willing to donate to the auctions at either the AGM (8th December 2009) or the Expo. Please contact the VHS by email at [vhs@optusnet.com.au](mailto:vhs@optusnet.com.au) beforehand. It would be a great help to your society.

Prior to Roy's talk, patrons present were given a brief rundown by Andrew McKenzie of Animal Tracks on an activity the VHS participated in at the recent Royal Melbourne Show.



Animal Tracks/VHS at the Royal Melbourne Show

Animal Tracks represented the VHS and was allocated a site of 13mx3m in the Garden & Pets Pavilion where they had their display running from 9.30am to 6.00pm each day. The organisers had positioned the Animal Nursery at the end of the animal displays and hoped that people would look into the pavilions that didn't attract large crowds. In this pavilion display tanks were set up exhibiting turtle, lizards, snakes & crocodile. The banner for the VHS and the Reptile Expo were clearly visible to everybody who entered the pavilion.

Animal Tracks staff highlighted the VHS by wearing specially designed t-shirts to advertise the Reptile Expo. Other items linked to the VHS were flyers specific to the Expo, bumper stickers, and membership forms. Use was made of the PA system to advertising becoming a VHS member, and the Reptile Expo and the society in general. This practice ensured that a more selective audience was targeted so flyers and stickers weren't handed out unnecessarily. Along with the PA system, we had several staff there every-day promoting the Reptile Expo & VHS memberships whilst they were holding a reptile which prompted conversation.



A truly "hands on" experience

People who showed interest in reptiles in general or those who were thinking of purchasing a reptile were our prime candidates for the flyers and stickers. Several science students doing animal studies were targeted for memberships as their course encouraged them to join societies.

Along with the VHS site demonstrations were performed on stage each day. We were presented as the VHS. The timetable/events board and the website also advertised the VHS. Each of these shows had a full grandstand turn out and overflowed on the sides.



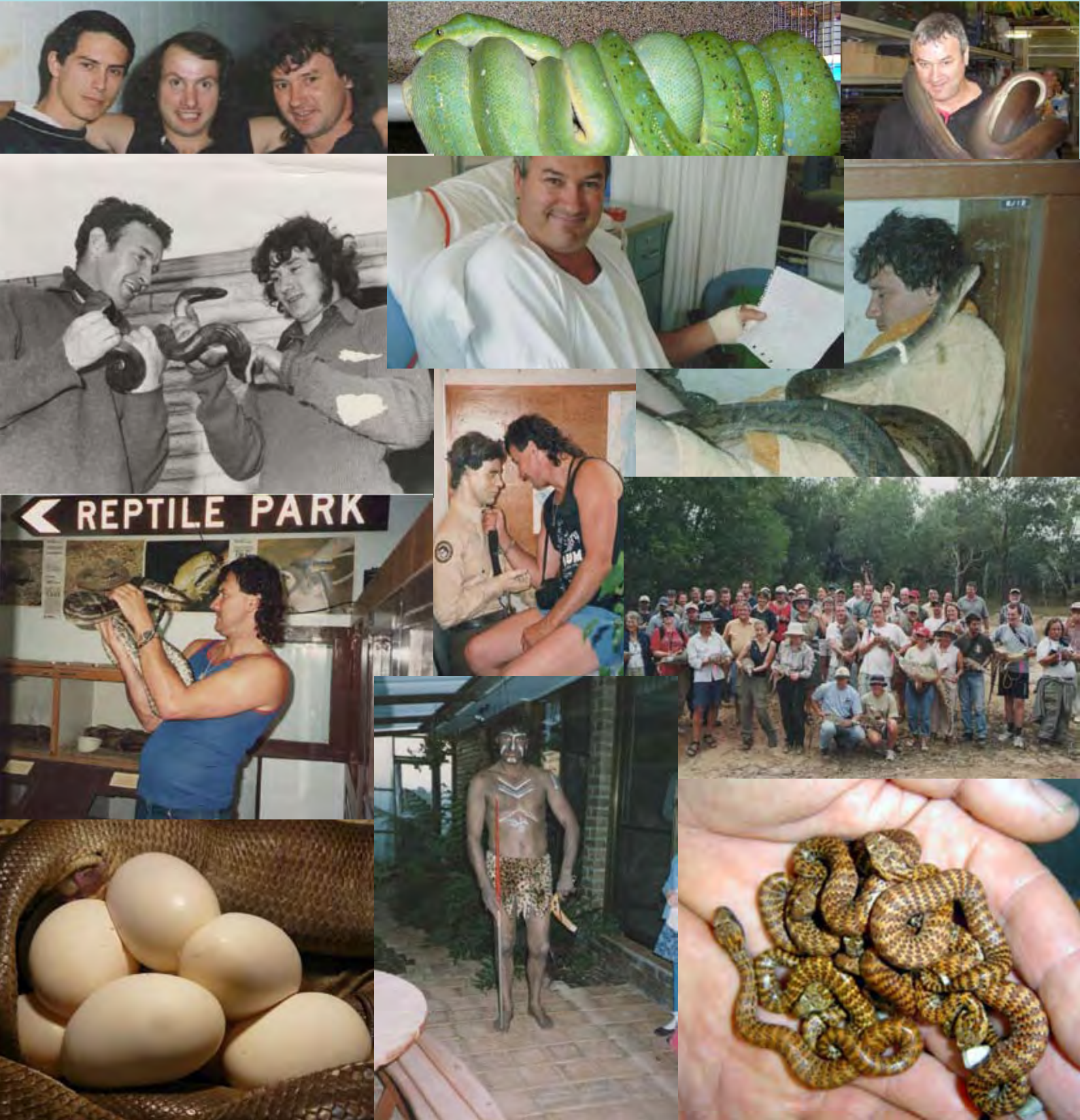
Immediately after the demonstrations, patrons in the audience were invited to view our site.

The VHS would like to take this opportunity to thank Animal Tracks for acting on our behalf. It was a worthwhile experience and the style of demonstrations and hands on experience will be repeated at the Expo in February next year.

It was now time for our guest speaker Roy Pails to take centre stage (or centre audience to be precise.) With microphone in hand he regaled us with stories of his

many years in herp. From time to time he was joined in his reminiscing by his mate Brian Barnett. A truly wonderful night from a couple of the true pioneers of our hobby/interest. The night was capped off with the usual pizzas, a few drinks and much social interaction and banter by all present. We look forward to seeing you all at our AGM on 8th December 2010.

We're going to do something a bit different here by reproducing some of Roy's slides to give you some idea of the wide ranging subjects discussed on the night.





# 10 Most Beautiful Snakes on Earth

**SNAKE** - The word makes some shudder and others cringe while yet others think in wonder of the huge world of reptiles and their marvels. Whether you hate them or love them, one thing cannot be denied: their beauty. Count the top 10 down with Michelle Collet of [environmentalgraffiti.com](http://environmentalgraffiti.com)!



Photo: Doug Mong

**10. Honduran Milk Snake** (*Lampropeltis triangulum hondurensis*) is found in Honduras and Nicaragua. While at first glance not one of the most beautiful snakes, take a look at its scales above - they are bright (which is what the 'lampro' in the binomial name stands for) and a brilliant red and black. They are constrictors, but look a lot like coral snakes which herpetologists believe is an example of Batesian Mimicry - when a harmless animal takes on the appearance of a venomous one to protect themselves.



Photo: Doug Mong

**9. Leucistic Texas Rat Snake** (*Elaphe obsoleta lindheimeri*) This Leucistic Texas Rat Snake is a lovely lady in white. She gets her coloring and the "leucistic" element of her name from a condition that results in a lack of all pigmentation, rather than just melanin which appears in albinism. This is why her eyes are of normal color. Texas Rat Snakes are (obviously) found in Texas as well as in Arizona and Louisiana. They are non venomous so a bite will give you little more than a sore leg.



Photo: Ameng Wu

**8. Indigo Eastern Rat Snake** (*Drymarchon corais couperi*) The Eastern Indigo snake is unofficially the longest in America, reaching lengths of 9.2ft. Carnivorous in habits, he has been known to beat his prey against other objects in a frenzied fashion to kill it. He will even eat other snakes such as the Texas Rattlesnake, and is immune to its venom. That aside, he deserves number 8 in our countdown for his brilliant black beauty that can look almost blue in the light.



Photo: Derek Ramsey

**7. The Emerald Tree Boa** (*Corallus caninus*) One of the most vivid and unforgettable snakes is the Emerald Tree Boa. These are found in South America and the Amazon. Even though it looks like it is closely related to the Green Tree Python and sleeps the same way, they are only distant relatives. One thing that the Emerald has, is very large front teeth. They way she catches her prey is to stay coiled on the branch, head down, ready to strike. She then catches small mammals with her front teeth and pulls them in to their doom.





Photo: Sandilya Theuerkauf

**6. The Iridescent Shieldtail (*Melanophididium bilineatum*)**

The only reason this lovely is not in the top 3 is that it is hard to see exactly how beautiful she is from this photograph, but she is actually even more gorgeous than she appears here. She has to be one of the most beautiful snakes in the world. The Iridescent Shieldtail, is not well known. Only three specimens are thought to have ever been caught and little is known of how it behaves in the wild. Recently some more have been seen but all that can be said for certain is that it's beautiful and rare.



Photo: Dan Leo

**5. Amelanistic Burmese Python (*Python molurus bivittatus*)**

This head turner is an amelanistic Burmese Python - a species which retains their yellow, carotenoid-derived pigments. Mammals only produce pigments with melanins while birds and reptiles can also produce them by other means including carotenoids as we see here. Effectively though, she can be considered an albino snake in that amelanistic is classified under albinism



Photo: Doug Mong

**4. Brazilian Rainbow Boa (*Epicrates cenchria*)**

This beauty is the Brazilian Rainbow Boa, named for the iridescent color of its scales. The underlying color is either brown, orange as we see here or a mix of the two. It is found in Central and South America and all the way through the Amazon basin. It is medium sized compared to other snakes and it likes the rivers and drainage areas, living for up to 20 years.



Photo: Norman Benton

**3. Eastern Coral Snake (*Micrurus fulvius*)**

This is one of the most beautiful of all snakes. Unfortunately it is also very venomous, as are all coral snakes. On the good side, there are only about 15 to 20 recorded bites a year but on the bad side they are deadly and soon there will be no more antivenin for it. Pfizer, has said that with such low demand, it is not worth the cost and research spent on it, and current stock is due to expire at the end of this year. The snakes are forest animals, living in leaf litter and brush. They flee before biting, but if you do get bitten it is imperative you go to a doctor. Respiratory failure occurs within hours.





Photo: Jon Fife

**2. Blue Racer Snake** (*Coluber constrictor*) This beauty is a pretty rare photograph of a Blue Racer snake. I say rare because its not often you get such a brilliant blue reflecting from the scales, as often they seem more gray in color. Despite its formal name Blue Racer's normally simply pin their prey to the ground and swallow them alive. They are known mostly east of the Rockies but have been seen as far south as Mexico.




Photo: Micha L. Rieser

**1. Green Tree Python** (*Morelia viridis*) The Green Tree Python is a stunner that is found in New Guinea, Indonesia and parts of Australia. It, along with the Emerald Tree Boa, has a unique way of sleeping. They loop one or two coils along a branch, saddle style and place their head in the middle. Remember if it is in Indonesia, it is a python, if it is in South America, a boa. They are often mixed up because they are the only two that sleep this way. Sadly it is threatened due to the destruction of its habitat by logging. For her grace, her beauty and her threatened status, she easily deserves the number one spot in our countdown.

As I said earlier, whether you shudder at snakes or you like them, their beauty cannot be denied. There are others some feel more beautiful but I think this gives a good cross section of their amazing diversity in appearance. Several are threatened by loss of habitat, thereby threatening other species. However, hopefully we can remember that they are needed in this world to keep the food chain balanced. If for no reason but their beauty I hope you will think twice when you hear of new logging in the Amazon or other areas.

The Victorian Herpetological Society  
proudly presents

# 2011 REPTILE & AMPHIBIAN EXPO



**Saturday  
19th February 2011**

**Royal Melbourne  
Showgrounds**

**9am - 5.00pm**

Adults: \$10.00  
Children: \$5.00  
Family: \$25.00  
VHS Members: **FREE**  
Join Today

Reptile sales & purchases can be conducted on the day!

Apply for tables through  
Craig Pender: 0428 027559  
Benjamin Smith: 0449 950041  
Brian Barnett: 9363 6841

For further information contact  
[vhs@optusnet.com.au](mailto:vhs@optusnet.com.au)

VICTORIAN HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY  
[www.vhs.com.au](http://www.vhs.com.au)



# MY EXPERIENCES OF RAISING SOUTHERN ANGLE-HEADED DRAGON HATCHLINGS IN CAPTIVITY

Text and photos by Ollie Sherlock

## INTRODUCTION

The Southern Angle-headed Dragon (*Hypsilurus spinipes*) lives on the east coast of Australia in subtropical rainforests and adjacent margins of wet sclerophyll forest, from Gosford NSW to near Gympie Queensland (Wilson and Swan 2003). Many early attempts at keeping this species successfully in captivity failed due to a lack of understanding of the unique thermoregulatory system of the animal. They were typically kept too hot and without sufficient humidity and 'failed to thrive' in captivity. More recent understanding of how to successfully maintain the species has led to hatchlings now being readily available to hobbyists in reasonable numbers.

When obtained, my dragons were juveniles of 8 weeks of age and roughly 40 - 50 mm from snout to tail tip in length. They had been housed in open-topped plastic storage containers with a few branches and some fake foliage since hatching. A UV reptile light was provided to assist with calcium absorption. The juveniles were kept in the breeder's reptile room at 'room temperature' and were fed on pinhead crickets. Four hatchlings were selected out of two clutches from different parents. My hope was to end up with one male and three females as males will fight viciously with each other once they reach sexual maturity.



Young Female Angle-headed Dragon

## HOUSING

The dragons were set up in an Exoterra® terrarium 600mm high by 450mm wide by 450mm deep. This is quite a suitable size for them at the moment, although eventually they will require a much larger enclosure. The advantage in keeping juveniles in smaller enclosures is that they find their food more readily and will therefore grow more rapidly to maturity. Glass is the preferred material for housing Angle-headed Dragons as the high humidity and moisture levels required will rot traditional melamine and plywood enclosures. Old fish tanks are fine but keep in mind that being an arboreal species the dragons prefer height over width when it comes to enclosure dimensions. I would recommend an enclosure with either hinged or sliding doors at the front as they make general cleaning and maintenance so much easier and enjoyable.



The Dragons Indoor Terrarium

## FURNISHINGS

The terrarium is fitted out with a styrene foam background and 2 vertical pieces of timber positioned on a 45° angle.

The dragons love to perch on the branches sometimes remaining motionless for hours at a time waiting to ambush passing crickets. I have two small containers which I fill with water and use as vases to hold fresh foliage in the enclosure. Small branches of New Zealand Mirror Bush (*Coprosma repens*) are harvested and used in dense thickets. The lush green foliage provides opportunities for the young dragons to hide, helps keep the enclosure humid through evapotranspiration and provides an attractive rainforest like background. Jon Birkett of the Melbourne Zoo Herpetological Department put me on to this plant, which he has been using for many years in herp exhibits with great success. It is readily available around suburbia (I collect mine along a local train line) and remains fresh for up to 2 weeks in a vase.

I provide a water bowl deep enough for the lizards to immerse themselves in whilst still keeping their head above the surface. They often enjoy soaking in the bowl in the warmer months and it helps assist them with shedding. I have chosen not to provide any substrate up until now as I have read that they are prone to bacterial infections of the mouth and gut at a young age. However I intend to provide moist palm peat or coir as a substrate over this coming summer to help maintain higher humidity through the dryer months. This substrate is also important when it comes time for them to lay their eggs.



**Three Female Angle-headed Dragons**

## **LIGHTING**

Southern Angle-headed Dragons are particularly prone to metabolic bone disease in captivity, so preventative measures need to be taken to avoid the development of this condition. I provide mine with a compact fluorescent tube of UV 5% rating, which is suspended in the middle of the enclosure. This location ensures that the animals are always within 30 cm of the UV source and therefore receiving the maximum dosage. This light is on a timer which is set at 12 hours on/ 12 hours off. They also receive natural dappled ambient light from a nearby window and recently during the darker months of winter I have installed a reflector with a normal household white compact fluorescent tube to lighten up the enclosure a little and show off the dragons.

**NOTE:** As with all reptile UV light sources, they should be replaced every 6 – 12 months as the UV output decreases

over time. A number of other keepers have suggested I put the Angle-headed Dragons out in natural dappled sunlight in a vivarium or similar for a few hours a weeks to expose them to natural UV light. I have constructed such an enclosure with shade cloth on three sides for use this spring/ summer.



**The Dragons Outdoor Enclosure**

## **HEATING**

Having adapted to a life under the rainforest canopy, Angle-headed Dragons preferred body temperature is in the range of 16–28° C. A number of articles suggest that they don't require any heating in captivity. This is fine if you live in northern states of Australia but in my house in Melbourne temperatures get down as low as 8° C at night during winter, so I have chosen to provide a little additional heat by way of an under floor heat mat on a probe thermostat set at 25° C during the cooler months of the year. This has allowed the dragons to remain active and feeding throughout the winter months. The downside of providing this heat under the enclosure has been that it dries out the enclosure very quickly, so I have had to provide daily misting to keep the humidity levels up. Over the hot summer months I will shift the enclosure to a cooler room on the southern side of my house to ensure they don't get too hot.

**NOTE:** Temperatures above 35° C for any length of time can be fatal to this species

## **FEEDING**

I have fed the dragons almost exclusively on commercially sourced Brown House Crickets (*Acheta domesticus*) starting with pinheads and gradually increasing the size as the dragons grow. The crickets are gut loaded with a variety of fresh vegetables and dry dog food, then dusted with a good calcium and Vitamin D powder before feeding out and any uneaten crickets are removed after a few hours. I have found that their feeding response is very much driven by movement and have had no luck at all in convincing the dragons to feed on non-live foods. I have noticed that often when the dragons are hungry, they will move down to the floor of the enclosure awaiting food to be introduced. Other times they will wait motionless on branches waiting for the insects to wander past and be devoured. I initially



fed them daily but have decreased this to once every two to three days. They have also accepted live maggots, slaters and other invertebrates collected from the garden. I'm told they are quite fond of garden snails and my aim is to ultimately wean the colony onto wood cockroaches which I am able to breed in large numbers at minimal cost.

## MAINTENANCE

The walls of the enclosure, logs, foliage and dragons are misted daily with a pressure sprayer. These are readily available from gardening and hardware stores and the one I have is a pump pack style. The dragons will often drink the water as it runs down the logs or glass and will also drink water as it runs down their heads towards the snout. I imagine this is how they naturally hydrate in the rainforest and means that they can avoid spending too much time on the forest floor where they would be vulnerable to predation. Once a week I thoroughly clean the enclosure out and wipe down the glass with a bleach solution followed by a rinse. The furnishings are also cleaned in a similar fashion and replaced.

## OBSERVATIONS

The dragons are now roughly 180 mm snout to tail tip in length and have quite differing personalities. It is looking like I have a male and three females which will make for a nice little breeding colony. The suspect male has developed a chunkier heavier head shape and remained rather plain in color (shown mid shed in the images). He is by far the boldest of the four and will readily accept crickets from forceps and likes to perch as high up in the enclosure as possible. The other three have developed beautiful patterns as they have grown and are beginning to show female traits.

## CONCLUSION

I have thoroughly enjoyed keeping this species thus far and intend to attempt to breed them once they reach sexual maturity (which I'm told can be as early as 12 months). Stay tuned for further updates in future editions of Odatria. One of the lovely things about keeping Angle-headed Dragons is that they provide an attractive feature in your living room and many hours of entertainment watching them feeding and going about their daily antics. My 2 year old son is captivated by the Angle-headed and loves nothing more than to place them on his t-shirt and watch them climb up onto his shoulder. What more fascinating hobby is there to introduce young children to than the wonders of herpetology! I would encourage others to consider the addition of this amazing species to their collection, whether you are new to the hobby or an experienced keeper. I would like to thank Mark and Jane Carmody and Janet Johns for giving advice and passing on their knowledge and experience gained over many years of keeping and breeding this species.

**For a detailed care sheet on keeping and breeding this species please refer to Reptiles Australia volume 5 Issue 4 – Angle-headed Dragons by Janet Johns.**

## REFERENCE

A Complete Guide to Reptiles of Australia, Steve Wilson and Gerry Swan, New Holland Publishers, Australia 2003.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ollie Sherlock grew up in the bayside suburb of Sandringham where his father ran a small veterinary practice. He grew up around animals and has memories of his father bringing home injured Blue-tongued Lizards and Long-necked Tortoises which were often rehabilitated in a large outdoor pit in the suburban back garden and ultimately released back into the wild. He has been keeping reptiles for as long as he can remember and currently maintains a small collection of dragons, monitors, skinks and geckoes. Ollie works as a Land Management Technician at the Royal Botanic Gardens Cranbourne and runs a private snake relocation service in the South east Melbourne Suburbs and the Mornington Peninsula.



**The author with pet Lace Monitor 'Bodie'**

# HERP HAPPENINGS

## Floods Awake Snakes

Floods have brought snakes out of hibernation six weeks earlier than usual, with one of the slithering reptiles found in the backyard of a home in central Wangaratta.



Snake catcher Rhys Gloury, who provides services to councils across the North East, including Alpine, Indigo and Wangaratta, said the deluge of water on the first weekend in September had unsettled tiger, black and brown snakes which are normally not seen until mid-October.

"Because the floods have flooded the river areas they've woken the snakes that have been hibernating in the logs and other areas and given them no option but to come out earlier and now they've woken they're moving around," Mr Gloury said.

"Before the floods I didn't receive a single call, since the floods I've had 10 to 15 calls.



"I had one lady who called me and she had a big tiger snake in her backyard and she lives in the centre of Wangaratta near the Pinsent Hotel."

Mr Gloury said the combination of the floods, maximum temperatures under 30 degrees and spring breeding hab-

its ensured that tiger and black snakes in particular will be visible.

Brown snakes, which normally occupy drier farmland rather than riversides, are also on the move but are unlikely to be as abundant as their reptilian colleagues.

"In the townships that experienced floods, the snakes will be more inclined to be in town for the next month or so, until their habitat dries up," Mr Gloury said.

"In the floods, they move into town and they might lay low but they emerge with the sun and like to return and are roaming around."



Rhys Gloury with a tiger snake, one of the varieties which have been forced out of their slumber by floods

Mr Gloury warned penalties, including fines of up to \$10,000, applied for killing snakes and urged those concerned about sightings to call a catcher, although he stressed that was not always necessary.

"Unless the snake's in your house or car and has been cornered it's not worth a snake catcher coming around, because the snakes are generally moving through," he said.



"Usually you see them once and then they move on.

Mr Gloury is hoping to show some of his snakes at Wang-aratta's Relay for Life on October 2-3. He is also happy to answer any queries at the event.

**ANTHONY BUNN**  
**Border Mail**  
**September 2010**

## **Dog Rescues Texas Toddler From Snake Attack**

A family's foster dog saved a one-year-old child from a rattlesnake attack by taking a bite to the face.

Darryl McArthur of Austin, Texas, fosters up to eight boxers at a time, feeding them and taking care of them before the dogs are rehomed.

Last week, he was grilling dinner in his backyard, when he noticed his one-year-old son Dillon and the dogs playing near a rattlesnake, myFOXaustin.com reported.

Vandy, a female boxer who had been living with the family for a month, jumped between Dillon and the poisonous snake.



Mr McArthur killed the creature with a shovel, but noticed that Vandy did not escape unscathed.



"My wife saw Vandy's eye swell up a little bit, and then her jowl started swelling up. Then we contacted Austin Boxer Rescue," Mr McArthur said.

Fortunately, Vandy made it to help just in time for her bite to be treated, and went home soon after with the family.

"We're a foster family, we typically take any dog that needs a home and feed it," Mr McArthur said, adding that he was glad they took in Vandy but hoped someone would adopt her soon.

**NewsCore**  
**September 2010**

## **Croc, Cash And Stash Found In Sydney Drug Raid**

A crocodile has been found during drug raids in Sydney's west, police say.

The raids by drug squad detectives at Londonderry, Pemulwuy and Horsley Park yesterday also led to the seizure of 5.7 kilograms of methylamphetamine with an estimated street value of \$2.85 million, \$300,000 in cash, a Taser and a firearm.



The infant crocodile was found at a Londonderry property and taken to the Featherdale Wildlife Park in Doonside, police said.

The crocodile has since been taken from the park and is

now under the care of the NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change.



Two men, aged 26 and 27, were arrested at a Horsley Park car park, police said. A third man, aged 30, was arrested at a Horsley Park building site.

All three were charged with supplying commercial quantities of prohibited drug and of supplying large commercial quantities of prohibited drugs.



The 26-year-old man was also charged with possessing protected fauna.

The men were refused bail and are due to appear at Fairfield Local Court today.

**GLENDIA KWEK**  
**Sydney Morning Herald**  
**September 2010**

## **Hundreds Of Crocs Escape Breeding Facility**

Some 280 crocodiles escaped a breeding facility in the Mexican state of Veracruz officials said overnight, after weekend flooding following torrential rains from Hurricane Karl.

Veracruz's governor Fidel Herrera said that the crocodiles were kept in an outdoor facility next to the port of Veracruz which bred the endangered reptiles in captivity.

The enclosure became submerged after the hurricane car-

ried torrential rains, allowing the animals to escape.

Karl passed through Mexico over the weekend, leaving at least 12 people dead and forcing 40,000 into shelters as it pummeled a country already reeling from one of its wettest rainy seasons on record.

Residents of Veracruz were urged to be vigilant and to report any crocodile sightings to local authorities.

**AFP Correspondents**  
**Adelaide Now**  
**September 2010**

## **Irish Lizards Threatened By Agriculture**

A new ecological network is urgently needed in Northern Ireland to ensure the continued survival of its precious lizard population, according to researchers at Queen's University Belfast.

Lizards are found in coastal areas, heath and boglands around Northern Ireland, but a Queen's study, published in international journal *Amphibia-Reptilia*, has found their natural habitats may have been replaced through agricultural intensification.

"The fact that Northern Ireland has a lizard population will be news to many people. But most people are surprised and delighted when they spot them," according to Dr Neil Reid, Manager of Quercus, Queen's centre for biodiversity and conservation science.

"Unless we act quickly to establish a new ecological network that will preserve the connectivity of remaining heath and boglands, these reptiles could disappear from our landscape altogether."



A Common Lizard (*Zootoca vivipara*)

Photo: Aodan Farren

Often associated with hotter countries, lizards in Northern Ireland can be seen in upland places such as the Sperrins, the Mourne Mountains, Antrim Plateau, Slieve Beagh (Fivemiletown) and West Fermanagh, and in lowland sites such as Peatlands Park in County Armagh. They can also



be seen in coastal habitats such as sand dunes at Murlough National Nature Reserve in County Down or the Magilligan-Umbra-Downhill complex in County Londonderry.

Aodan Farren, the PhD student who led the study added: "We must now move to increase awareness of the lizard population in Northern Ireland and protect their habitats, which are continuing to be altered by conversion to agriculture, planting of forests (afforestation), development of links golf courses, invasive species and infrastructure development."

Explaining what to look for when trying to spot a lizard, Dr Reid said: "The lizards which are found in Northern Ireland are usually 12 centimetres (5 in) long, excluding the tail, which can be almost twice as long as the body. The colour and patterning of this species is remarkably variable with the main colour being typically mid-brown, but it can be also grey, olive brown or black.

The study also pointed to the need for a Northern Ireland Lizard Survey to help gather more information on the reptiles.

**Science Daily**  
**September 2010**

## **"Dumb" Pair Wrestle Python At Fast Food Restaurant**

Stunned customers watched on as two men wrestled with a python in a McDonald's restaurant car park in Melbourne's north last night.

Police say a pair of thieves stole the one-and-a-half metre black-headed python from a pet shop at Rosanna on Wednesday morning.

They also stole a monitor lizard and put it in a pillow case.



The stolen python is now back with its owner

One of the thieves dropped the squirming snake as they fled the pet shop but picked it up before it got away.

They took the snake to the car park of the fast food restau-

rant in Preston at about 10:00pm (AEST) and took it out of a box and started wrestling with it as puzzled customers looked on.

Police were called and a 22-year-old West Heidelberg man and a 24-year-old Reservoir man were arrested and charged with burglary and theft.

Police say the python was "really cranky" as it was put back into the container to be taken back to the police station.

It has been returned to its owner but the lizard is still missing.

Detective Sergeant Andrew Beams says it was a dumb thing to do.

"In all honesty, it's just a case of dumb and dumber," he said.

"Anyone who gets out there with a one-and-a-half metre python in a McDonald's car park, they're pretty dumb."

**ABC News**  
**September 2010**

## **50 Million Year Old Snake Gets a CT Scan**

Even some of the most advanced technology in medicine couldn't get Clarisse to give up all of her secrets. After all, she's protected them for more than 50 million years.

Clarisse is a snake, found in the Fossil Butte region of Wyoming, perfectly fossilized in limestone and the only one of her kind known to be in existence. Paleontologist Hussan Zaher came to Houston at the behest of the Museum of Natural Science to study her.

He brought the precious find to The Methodist Hospital and subjected her to a detailed CT (computerized tomography) scan in hopes of finding where Clarisse fits along the timeline of evolution.

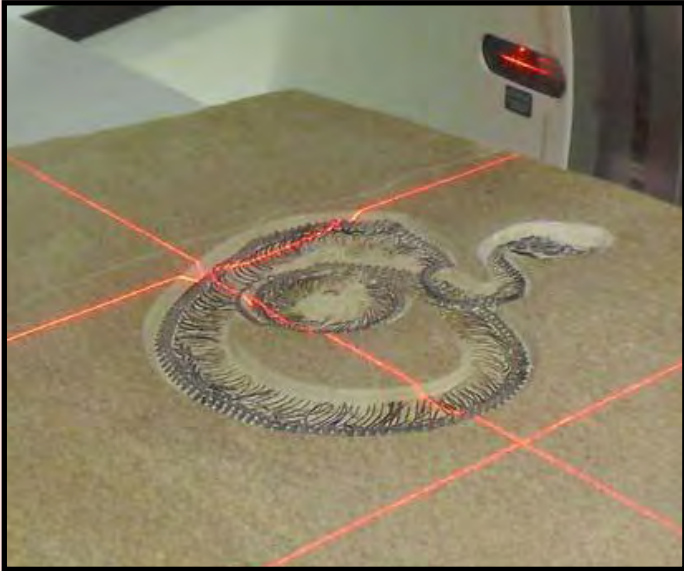
"Most fossilized remains of snakes are individual pieces of bone," said Zaher. "This is unique because it's a complete snake, which gives us an opportunity to study her makeup and hopefully learn more about her."

CT scan technician Pam Mager conducted the scan on a 64-slice scanner that is capable of sending laser-guided X-rays through a target. "We can take almost 3,000 images in less than a minute," she explained, "and then we can use those images to construct a three-dimensional picture of the snake's bone structure."

Zaher, professor and curator of the collections of herpetology and paleontology at the Museu de Zoologia of the Universidade de São Paulo in Brazil, worked with the Museum of Natural Science in Houston to get Clarisse to Methodist

for the scan. He believes Clarisse could be an evolutionary link between snakes who take a lot of small bites to eat their prey and snakes who swallow their prey whole.

The snake fossil was preserved in what is now limestone, and the entire chunk of rock was placed on the bed of the CT scanner. In less than a minute, the images were taken and assembled by computer into a three-dimensional image that could be rotated 360 degrees.



Lasers lock X-ray beams onto the remains of Clarisse, a 50-million-year-old snake. The fossil was scanned on a 64-slice CT scanner at The Methodist Hospital in Houston, and the resulting images were analyzed by Brazilian paleontologist Hussan Zaher. The snake is part of the collection at the Houston Museum of Natural Science and will go on display in 2012. (Credit: Photo by Denny Angelle/The Methodist Hospital System)

Taking a preliminary look at the images, Zaher said he saw no traces of limbs. "That places it higher up the evolutionary scale, but the snake is still very old," he said. For more than an hour, he and technician Mager studied the images, looking at tiny details of the snake's skull to find clues to how it may have eaten its prey.

Clarisse is the best preserved Caenozoic snake known in a U.S. scientific collection. According to preliminary analysis, this snake is believed to be closely related to *Boavus indelmani*, a booid snake described in the late 1930's. Zaher and the Houston museum hoped that getting a look at the underside of this unique fossil, as well as the inside of bones like the skull would shed some light on the evolutionary history of the species, and its relationship to booid snakes (like pythons and boas).

"This is a very important step in studying this specimen ... I will be able to take away copies of the images for further investigation and I believe this will help us learn about this snake," Zaher said. "I cannot express my gratitude enough to (The Methodist Hospital) and the radiology services department here."

The snake is part of the collection at the Houston Museum of Natural Science.

**Science Daily**  
**September 2010**

## **Cane toad takes over Australia — and then doesn't**

The cane toad is native to central and South America, but in the 1930s it was brought to Australia to eradicate a beetle decimating sugar cane crops. Instead, the poisonous toad proliferated across the continent, killing every predator that ate it. In turn, marsupials, snakes, and northern quolls began dying off en masse. Experts feared the toad explosion would eclipse competing birds and reptiles. Biologists declared defeat and Down Under braced for the mass elimination of species.

Except it never happened. As New Scientist reports, the toads are being absorbed into the environment without the devastating effects originally predicted. Richard Shine is an invasive species researcher at the University of Sydney who has studied the cane toads. As he told New Scientist, "People saw these ugly creatures moving across tropical Australia and common sense said there was going to be a huge disaster. But it just hasn't happened at the scale that we feared." Other experts agree that "the system seems to be absorbing the toads" and the impact is much less severe than originally thought.



**Cane Toad (*Bufo marinus*)**

How is this happening? Biologists point out that when a cane toad arrives new to an area, predators will eat them. Both predator and toad will die off, having eaten and been eaten. But who remains is a bit more judicious in the next round of sampling. Also, young cane toads are less toxic than adult cane toads. So while a predator might get a nasty digestive issue from eating a young cane toad, they won't necessarily die.

The cane toad, also called the "Giant Toad" and the "Marine Toad," is as voracious as the cane beetle it is named after. It consumes the crop-decimating beetles, as well as small reptiles, rodents, birds, and even dog food. Their glands secrete a white toxin that is poisonous to any animal, including humans, that eats it. Even licking the toad can result in serious illness or death.

**KATHERINE BUTLER**  
**Mother Nature Network**  
**September 2010**





## **What Can a New Zealand Reptile Tell Us About False Teeth?**

Using a moving 3-D computer model based on the skull and teeth of a New Zealand reptile called tuatara, a BBSRC-funded team from the University of Hull, University College London and the Hull York Medical School has revealed how damage to dental implants and jaw joints may be prevented by sophisticated interplay between our jaws, muscles and brain.

This research is being published in the Journal of Biomechanics.

The tuatara is a lizard-like reptile that has iconic status in its homeland of New Zealand because its ancestors were widespread at the time of the dinosaurs. Unlike mammals and crocodiles which have teeth held in sockets by a flexible ligament, tuatara have teeth that are fused to their jaw bone -- they have no ligament, much like modern dental implants."

BBSRC postdoctoral fellow Dr Neil Curtis from the University of Hull said "Humans and many other animals prevent damage to their teeth and jaws when eating because the ligament that holds each tooth in place also feeds back to the brain to warn against biting too hard."

Dr Marc Jones from University College London, also a BBSRC postdoctoral fellow, added "In the sugar-rich western world many people end up losing their teeth and have to live with dentures or dental implants instead. They've also lost the periodontal ligament that would attach their teeth so we wanted to know how their brains can tell what's going on when they are eating."



A lizard-like tuatara, whose ancestors were widespread at the time of the dinosaurs. (Photo: Brian Gratwicke)

The team has created a 3-D computer model of the skull of the tuatara to investigate the feedback that occurs between the jaw joints and muscles in a creature that lacks periodontal ligaments.

"Tuatara live happily for over 60 years in the wild without replacing their teeth because they have the ability to unconsciously measure the forces in their jaw joint and adjust the strength of the jaw muscle contractions accordingly," said Dr Curtis.

Although this explains why tuatara and people with false teeth manage not to break their teeth and don't end up with jaw joint disorders, it is still clear that having a periodontal ligament is very useful, in particular for fine tuning chewing movements. This may explain why it has evolved independently in the ancestors of mammals, crocodiles, dinosaurs, and even some fish.

There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that people with implants and dentures may make food choices related to their lack of periodontal ligament. However, the tuatara pursues a broad diet on the islands where they live including beetles, spiders, snails, frogs and occasionally young seabirds.

Professor Douglas Kell, BBSRC Chief Executive said "To support the extension of health and wellbeing into old age, it is vital that we appreciate how we as human beings have developed our extraordinary ability to adapt to adverse situations. This work allows us to understand some of the complexities of the feedback and responses occurring in healthy human bodies and brains.. It is impossible in evolution to predict future innovations such as dental implants and yet this research indicates a level of redundancy in our biology that opens opportunities to support long term health and wellbeing."

**Science Daily**  
**September 2010**

## **WA Adventurer And Conservationist Malcolm Douglas Dies**

Renowned WA adventurer and conservationist Malcolm Douglas has died in a car crash at his Broome wildlife park overnight.



Police said a man was killed after his four-wheel-drive vehicle crashed into a tree at about 8.30am (AEST) in an area near the Douglas' Wilderness Wildlife Park in Broome.

They would not confirm the man's identity, saying next of kin were yet to be informed.

Douglas, 69, became a household name as he toured northern Australia during the 1960s, capturing his adventures in more than 50 documentaries.

He established Broome Crocodile Park in 1983 and also the wildlife park on Great Northern Highway, 16km from the town.

His work earned him the tag "crocodile hunter" long before the rise of Steve Irwin.

Mr Douglas' shocked personal assistant Joanne McCardle said she was unable to confirm her boss had been killed in the accident.

"There is no confirmation (of his death) at this stage," Joanne McCardle said.

"I am on my way out there now to see what's going on."

"I have tried to ring everyone out at the farm and the Crocodile Park office, which deals with both parks, and not one person is responding to my phone calls.

"I am on my way out there now to try to find something out.

She said she had tried to contact Mr Douglas direct on his mobile phone without success.

"He very rarely answers his mobile phone anyway," she said.

"He is not at home or his office. He would have been at the farm but it is not confirmed it is him, I don't know any more than that at this stage."



Douglas, who was also known as the barefoot bushman, forged a reputation as the man who set the mould for adventurers to come.

"What you see is what you get," he told Fairfax in 2009.

"I'm not fake and I don't pre-plan takes, it's all real. There's no helicopter on standby if something goes wrong. In places like the Kimberley one mistake and you're dead."

He was virtually an overnight success after his first wildlife show, *Across The Top*, was screened in 1976.

"I was filming Aboriginal people killing kangaroos and drinking the blood because there wasn't any water," he said.

"No-one had seen anything like it and they loved it."

Douglas was diagnosed with prostate cancer in 2004 and told he had 18 months to live.

But just as he overcame the merciless terrain of the Australian outback and its venomous snakes and volatile crocs, Douglas beat his predatory disease.

"It changes your attitude too," he told the ABC while battling his illness.

"You try and remain calmer. You try and appreciate life. You appreciate every day, you know? Because, from now on, I could have been dead, and I'm, you know ... I'm still kickin'."

Douglas is survived by his wife Valerie and two adult children, Amanda and Lachlan

**Perth Now**  
**September 2010**

## **Getting A Tail Up On Conservation? New Method For Measuring Lizard Weight From Size**

Lizards are an important indicator species for understanding the condition of specific ecosystems. Their body weight is a crucial index for evaluating species health, but lizards are seldom weighed, perhaps due in part to the recurring problem of spontaneous tail loss when lizards are in stress.

Now ecological researchers have a better way of evaluating these lizards. Dr. Shai Meiri of Tel Aviv University's Department of Zoology has developed an improved tool for translating lizard body lengths to weights. Dr. Meiri's new equations calculate this valuable morphological feature to estimate the weight of a lizard species in a variety of different ecosystems.

"Body shape and body size are hugely important for the understanding of multiple ecological phenomena, but there is a need for a common metric to compare a multitude of different species," he says.

### **BUILDING A LIZARD DATA BANK**

In a study published recently in the *Journal of Zoology*, Dr. Meiri evaluated hundreds of lizard species: long-bodied, legless species as well as stout, long-legged species; some that sit and wait for prey, others that are active foragers. Based on empirical evidence, such as well-established behavioral traits, he built a statistical model that could predict weights of lizards in a reliable, standardized manner, for use in the field or at the lab.



For the study, Dr. Meiri looked at a large sample of lizards -- 900 species in 28 different families -- and generated a dataset of lizard weights, using this dataset to develop formulae that derive body weights from the most commonly used size index for lizards (the length of the head and body, or "snout-vent length"). He then applied a species-level evolutionary hypothesis to examine the ecological factors that affect variation in weight-length relationships between different species.



Chameleon

Photo: iStockphoto/Yevgen Antonov

### Predicting Post-disaster Damage To The Environment

How can this standardized metric protect our environment? "It can help answer how lizard species may react if there were major shifts in the availability of food due to climactic changes," he says.

In the future, zoologists will be able to use Dr. Meiri's method to better predict which communities of animals will shrink, grow or adapt to changing conditions, even after massive environmental disasters like the recent Gulf of Mexico oil spill.

**Science Daily**  
**September 2010**

### Snakes Alive: Cobra Count Starts To Mount At Games Village

DELHI: The cobra sightings are mounting. Delhi wildlife officers were called in the early hours of yesterday to remove a snake from the athletes' village, taking to three the number of cobras captured in the Commonwealth Games precinct this week.

Police spotted the snake at an entrance used by athletes and officials to access their lodgings. Kartick Satyanarayan, who runs the Wildlife SOS group in Delhi, said no athletes were in danger while the cobra was removed.

"We have had quite a lot of calls in the last few days, including a few birds and a monkey found inside Commonwealth Games venues, and now we have this cobra," Sa-

tyanarayan said. "We have removed quite a lot of snakes near Games venues in the last few days."

Cobras have been removed from the room of a South African athlete and the tennis complex this week. Delhi organisers have in recent days arranged Games accreditation for snake wranglers from the Wildlife SOS group.

"We are expecting a lot of calls over the next few weeks," Satyanarayan said.



Police spotted the snake at an entrance used by athletes and officials to access their lodgings



Caught ... wildlife officers remove the offending reptile from the athletes' village

**ALEX BROWN**  
**Sydney Morning Herald**  
**October 2010**

### Big Wet To Spark Snake Population Boom

After one of the wettest years on record, a Central Australian reptile handler is expecting a boom in the venomous snake population.

Rex Neindorf catches snakes and releases them back into the wild.

He says recent breaks between the rainy periods have seen fat snakes appearing in prime breeding condition.

"We still expect probably a strong breeding season, which means there should be heaps of babies getting about late January, February, March," he said.

"If it does keep raining through summer, next year would be a huge snake season."

**ABC News**  
**October 2010**

## **Sexy Snakes Tumble For Love**

Swept away in throes of passion the infatuated couple managed to roll off a roof, fall 10 metres and continue their public display of lovemaking for an hour after hitting the ground.

It was slippery and it was twisty.

It was sex, snake style.

On Saturday, 17-year-old Georgia Lindley was lazing by the pool of her Buderim home with her mates when two unwelcome, and exceptionally amorous, visitors dropped in.

The girls noticed a long, large mass drop from the roof followed by a long thud.

Upon investigation they discovered two coastal pythons getting sexy – and nothing was going to stop them.

"We all ran upstairs screaming because we're terrified of snakes," Georgia said.

"They stayed there and kept doing it for an hour.

"When they stopped, one climbed back on to the roof and another tried to escape down the driveway."



Georgia Lindley, Grace Frawley and Courtney Kerr take a close look at one of the snakes

While the snakes were getting intimate, Georgia's dad, Matthew Lindley, called local snake catcher William Pledger and grabbed a pool net in a bid to keep the snakes from leaving the yard.

"We were all stressing out until the snake catcher arrived, but he managed to catch them both," Georgia said.

"We weren't sure what they were and thought they could be venomous, until the snake catcher told us they were pythons.

"I just hope they haven't mated already, because he said they could lay up to 54 eggs. I don't want little snakes slithering around everywhere."

Mr Pledger, who has been catching snakes for more than a decade, said it was the time of year for serpents to wake from their winter slumber and get ready to mate.

He said increased activity meant it was more likely the paths of humans and snakes would cross.

"The most important thing to remember is not to approach a snake. Just walk away," Mr Pledger said.

"It's not uncommon to see snakes mating and males fighting for dominance at this time of year.

"Just employ commonsense and leave the snakes be, or if you're really worried call a snake catcher."



According to the Department of Environment and Resource Management, snakes are attracted to yards and houses where food and shelter are unknowingly provided by humans.

Many snakes, including venomous taipans and eastern browns, eat rodents and are attracted to garden or farm sheds to hunt rats and mice.

Pythons regularly enter chicken pens and aviaries to prey on birds and are also found in roof cavities, hunting for rats and possums.

Brown tree snakes are specialists at invading aviaries, often becoming trapped inside after they have eaten a bird.

These snakes can also be found at night hunting for geckos.



Common tree snakes hunt frogs during the day and are often seen around the house and garden where frogs live.

To deter snakes, maintain a tidy yard with shrubs and gardens kept away from the house.

**ANNE-LOUISE BROWN**  
**Sunshine Coast Daily**  
**October 2010**

## Lizards Have Family Values

Lizards get a bad rap when it comes to their families: They lay their eggs and never look back.

But that's not the case for desert night lizards, which have been found investing time and energy in their young and forming families -- a strategy that was thought exclusive to mammals and birds.

"Birds, mammals and reptiles are so different in so many ways," said Alison Davis, a postdoctoral researcher at the University of California at Berkeley. Reptiles aren't even warm-blooded, she notes, yet here they are forming families just like their warmer cousins.

It's a seismic shift for the way we think of reptiles, and evidence of how a survival strategy -- like parental care and social groups -- evolves over and over, in very divergent groups. "It's basically the same rules of the game," Davis said.

The discovery of the desert night lizard family groups comes as a result of a five-year genetic study of more than 2,100 adults and juvenile lizards from the Mojave Desert of California. Davis, who conducted the research as a graduate student at the University of California at Santa Cruz, is the lead author of a paper describing the desert night lizard discovery in the latest issue of *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*.



An adult female desert night lizard with her 3-day-old offspring

Davis started the work on the desert night lizards after reading a decades-old scientific paper which, in passing, mentioned that these lizards collected in groups.

"So we went out and looked for these fabled groups," she said. And she found them under the spiny trunks of fallen Joshua trees. By carefully tracking the individuals for five years and checking how groups that huddle under logs in the winter were genetically related, she discovered the family structures.

"One of the coolest parts was doing the DNA analysis," said Davis. "It's like you are revealing the secret lives of lizards."

The existence of family groups in lizards seems to coincide with species of lizards that give birth to their offspring (called viviparity), as do the desert night lizards, rather than lay eggs, as do about 85 percent of lizards, Davis said.

Viviparity typically means fewer offspring and longer-lived individuals. And since she estimates some of the desert night lizards she has studied are up to 20 years old, this matches the pattern and contrasts with some egg-laying lizards that live just one year, she said.

"Viviparity has evolved about a hundred times in reptiles," said herpetologist Rick Shine of the University of Sydney in Australia. And it's not surprising that this less prolific, more troublesome way of reproducing usually results in reptiles that show more parental care and the evolution of social groups, like those found by Davis, he said.

For example, said Shine, in Australia there are reptiles that find and mate with the same individual monogamously for 20 years. And there are siblings that seem to recognize each other as such, he said.

"We have this very simplistic view of reptiles," said Shine. And it is very often wrong. The ongoing discoveries of social structures among reptiles, such as the desert night lizards, is such a major theoretical shift for herpetologists that it has caused Shine to stop collecting lizards.

"If you go and pick up a lizard from the field you could be disrupting a sophisticated social order," Shine told *Discovery News*. "There may be somebody at home waiting for that individual."

**LARRY O'HANLON**  
**Discovery News**  
**October 2010**

## Boy Donates Pet Turtle To Zoo, Watches It Be Eaten Alive By Alligator

A Florida boy remained distraught after watching an alligator feast on his pet turtle when he donated the reptile to a local aquarium park.

Crunches from the turtle's shell were heard by Brenda Guthrie and her eight-year-old son Colton as the alligator devoured the family's pet last Thursday, the *Pensacola News Journal* reported overnight.

A distraught Colton begged the alligator to release the turtle, called Tomalina, with no success.

"He was shouting, 'Oh no alligator, let it go,'" Ms Guthrie told the paper.

The family donated the pet to the Gulfarium in Fort Walton Beach, Florida, when the turtle grew too large for her home aquarium, the report said.

Officials at the water park said it was uncommon for the gators there to be interested in turtles.

Colton's mother told the Northwest Florida Daily News yesterday that the family saw workers place Tomalina in an exhibit on Friday with other red-eared sliders and an alligator.

Although the alligator had long ignored the other turtles, Brenda Guthrie said it ate Tomalina.

The Gulfarium has apologised to the Guthries and gave them a special meet-and-greet with the dolphins.

**Associated Press Staff Writers  
News Core  
October 2010**

## **Python Rescued From Dog Attack**

Monty the monster python really landed on his feet – medically speaking – after being rescued from a dog attack on Wednesday.

The 7.4kg, two-metre-plus carpet snake was whisked to safety by Wildlife Carers' reptile specialist Julie Curtis and rushed to the Central Veterinary Hospital in Lismore.

Shocked, cranky and sporting some deep puncture wounds and bruising after his encounter with two pet dogs near Bungawalbin, Monty was soothed and swabbed, injected with painkillers and antibiotics, X-rayed for possible spinal damage, anaesthetised and stitched up on the operating table.

He (staff at the hospital were reluctant to 'probe' the powerful reptile to determine its gender, but referred to Monty as 'he' throughout) spent the night at Ms Curtis' New Italy home, curled up on heat pads to aid his convalescence. Monty, thought to be between 20 and 25 years old, will remain there until his wounds heal.

The python had gone on to the dogs' patch when he slithered across their fenced-off pool area.

The dogs went for him and he apparently gave a good fight, drawing blood with his hundreds of pin-sharp teeth, before escaping up a pole.

The dogs' owner called the Northern Rivers Wildlife Carers and Ms Curtis came to the rescue, climbing a ladder to grab him.



Veterinarian Jodie Hendry, of the Lismore Central Veterinary Hospital, administers local anaesthetic before suturing a large gash on the python brought in after being attacked by dogs

Wildlife Carers have seen quite a few snakes emerging in poor condition this spring.

"A lot of them are coming out really thin. We think they must have been injured when they went into hibernation," said Ms Curtis, who has been with the wildlife carers for 15 years.

Weakness wasn't Monty's problem, however. "He's very strong, all muscle," she said.

However, while he may have come out of the scrap bloodied but unbowed, Monty now faces the fight of his life.

The X-rays showed he had a number of broken ribs – not good for a snake, even one as healthy as Monty.

Yesterday, Ms Curtis was going to take him back to the hospital for further examination.

If Monty survives, he will be returned to the property he was found on, surely wiser for the experience.

**DIGBY HILDRETH  
The Northern Star  
October 2010**



## **Baby Crocodile Brutally Attacked By Group In The Northern Territory**

Crocodile experts are outraged after a group of residents attacked a crocodile in the Northern Territory.

Up to 15 people attacked the crocodile as it swam in the Sanctuary Lakes at Gunn, Palmerston.

Darwin crocodile lover Craig West said he rushed to the croc's aid after hearing reports of the attack, the Northern Territory News reports.

"When I arrived at the lake there was a group of 10 to 15 people standing at the water's edge, throwing rocks at the crocodile," he said.

"It was quite close to the bank and didn't seem to be really scared at first - or maybe it was just really stressed out."

The reptile - believed to be a baby freshie - was yesterday waiting to be rescued by rangers after the attack.



Wildlife rangers are attempting to rescue a baby crocodile that has had rocks thrown at it

Mr West said he believed the crocodile was either a released pet or had been washed into the lake during the latest rain.

"Freshies breed in the dry season and, judging by the size, this one is only a few months old," he said.

"It was only tiny."

The crocodile lover said that he was "really p----- off" with the people's behaviour.

"They weren't even kids who didn't know better. They were adults, trying to injure or kill the little thing.

"I don't know what they thought. The croc wasn't a threat. And it's not only illegal to interfere with wildlife, it's just plain cruel to try to injure the crocodile."

Parks and Wildlife rangers yesterday morning placed a crocodile trap in the lake to rescue the reptile from its human predators.

According to the Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation

Act, people interfering with protected wildlife face penalties of up to \$55,000 in fines or five years in prison.

**ANNIE SANSON**  
**Northern Territory News**  
**October 2010**

## **Rangers Trap 4m Saltwater Crocodile**

Residents are relieved a "cheeky" crocodile that was stalking campers in Cape York has been caught.

Rangers trapped a 4.1m saltwater crocodile at the Normanby River near Kalpowar Station, north of Laura, on Cape York Peninsula, on Friday.

It was listed as a "crocodile of concern" after the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service received a report of it behaving aggressively towards campers at Pandanus Park.



The luckless 4 metre saltie

Park secretary Mark Fielding said the about 300 Vietnam veterans who visit the private retreat through June to August to camp and fish would be relieved the predator had been caught. "The crocs are in the water and they've been there for centuries but unfortunately crocodiles and people don't mix," he said.

Mr Fielding said he did not know whether the captured saltie was "Patch", the name given to a croc with a white scar by its left eye that had been stalking campers for months.

"If it's that one, that's great because he was eyeing off a few camps and he had a go at a guy earlier this year," he said. "We haven't had anyone taken thankfully." Lakefield National Park regular John Shay said visitors to Lakefield were also concerned about the aggressive animal.

"It's a potential threat to campers. He was getting very cheeky," he said.

The crocodile was caught in a floating trap and taken to a parks facility at Cardwell over the weekend, QPWS's Anthony Contarino said.

**STEPHANIE HARRINGTON**  
**The Cairns Post**  
**October 2010**