

Electronic publication of the Victorian Herpetological Society

ODATRIA

Issue 7 September 2010



Preparing for Expo

Odatria

Newsletter of the Victorian Herpetological Society No. 7, September 2010

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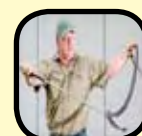
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The VHS would like to thank the following individuals for their help & support:

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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Frill-necked Lizard *Chlamydosaurus kingii*
by Steph McKenzie - Animal Tracks

EDITORIAL

by Phil Elliott

Hello again fellow herps. There have been a lot of happenings since I last wrote to you all out there in herp-land!

Probably the most important of these happenings is the problem we have had with our expo coordinator. Unfortunately we had to sack him due to nothing getting done and failure to contact us for over a month. We did try to work around this problem at first but it became obvious that this was not going to be possible and we decided to "let him go". At this stage I cannot say any more than this as we have legal proceedings underway in order to recover the retainer that was paid to him up front. Watch this space and also the V.H.S. website for further details on this as they come to hand.

Fear not, however, that the expo may suffer because of this as we have appointed two new coordinators to the role and they are going full steam ahead to ensure we have a successful event in February of next year. The new coordinators are Craig Pender and Ben Smith. Craig is based down here in Melbourne and Ben is located up in Queensland. I am sure you will all join me in wishing Craig and Ben all the very best with their undertaking to provide us with yet another successful event.

We will also be running the Expo Auction again so any members with any herp related items that they would like to donate for the auction on the day please let us know via email so we can begin putting the list together now. These items can be anything from animals to herp equipment. Also anyone who would like to be involved on the day whether it be having a table to sell your animals or simply volunteering to help out on the day contact us at the V.H.S. and we will pass on your details to the coordinators.

While on the subject of auctions I would also like to remind you all that we are always in need of items for the regular meeting auctions so any donations you may have please let us know via email and bring them along on the night. I can assure you they will be gratefully received.

Happy Herping,

Phil

NEXT VHS MEETING

Wednesday 6th October 2010
7:15pm - 10:30pm

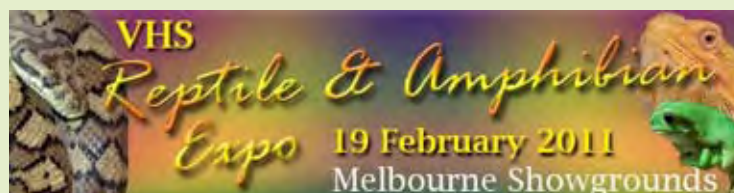
PRAHRAN RSL - 301 HIGH STREET - PRAHRAN

Guest speakers will be Roy Pails and Brian Barnett

For latest meeting information go to <http://www.vhs.com.au>

FREE ENTRY - please join the VHS

ANY DONATIONS FOR THE AUCTION WELCOME



Mixing Classes

by Peter Comber

No, I'm not talking about the marriage of Wallis Simpson to Edward VIII, or the amalgamation of different age groups to facilitate the delivery of our state curriculum in a small school. The mixing of different animal classes in exhibits is something that a number of zoological institutions aim to achieve in the ever increasing demand to maximise the use of available 'floor area', increase their holding capacity of individuals or species while at the same time attempting to placate the paying visitors and meet the goals of various conservation oriented programs they may be involved in.

The following is a simple overview of some examples with which I have had personal experience, all of them have 'worked', so to speak, more or less.....

At Alice Springs Desert Park in the Northern Territory we displayed a number of birds, invertebrates, reptiles and mammals in a large nocturnal house. The entry and exit 'wings' of this building allowed for the presentation of diurnal exhibits before visitors enter the central part where all of the nocturnal exhibits are displayed.

Some of the simplest examples were birds and mammals displayed together indoors and birds mixed with reptiles, outdoors. We had a Common Brush-tailed Possum (*Trichosurus vulpecula*) displayed with a Tawny Frogmouth (*Podargus strigoides*), these animals' activity patterns coincide so there was little to no chance of either disturbing the other during rest periods. An adventurous, overfriendly or amorous possum could easily be avoided by a more mobile frogmouth if need be. We also housed Bush Stone Curlews (*Burhinus grallarius*) with Ghost Bats (*Macroderma gigas*) and Echidna (*Tachyglossus aculeatus*), and in an exhibit right next door we showcased Owlet Nightjars (*Aegotheles cristatus*) in with Red-tailed Phascogale (*Phascogale calura*). Each of the aforementioned worked well in each of the intended combinations. One must keep extra vigilant attention however, on the inquisitive nature of phascogales, as one of ours learned the hard way that large carnivorous bats will eat you if you 'pop in next door' for a visit. Probably our simplest example involving herpetofauna of any kind was a small exhibit that showed a local Curl Snake(s) (*Suta suta*) and a large predatory katydid(s), (*Alectoria*, *Chlorobalius* and *Hemisaga* sp.). With their shorter life spans a few katydids lived in this exhibit over time. The snake(s) would only move about after dark (after park hours), the katydids tended to move around occasionally during day time and no doubt at night as well, though being arboreal they certainly spent most of their time up above where the snakes ever ventured.

The focus of *Odatria* is, clearly, on reptiles and so a little more detail for the next three cases as they are great examples of either mixing classes or mixing predator and prey or both and of course all involve reptiles and one of them, amphibians.

Desert Rainbow Skinks and Blistered Pyrgomorphs: (Classes Reptilia and Hexapoda)

Desert Rainbow Skinks (*Carlia triacantha*) are small, diurnal, terrestrial, insectivorous skinks of Australia's arid regions. Blistered Pyrgomorphs (*Monistria pustulifera*) are small brightly coloured grasshoppers also widely distributed over the drier inland parts of Australia. The enclosure was set up in a typical manner as one would for small desert dwelling, diurnal, (primarily) terrestrial skinks, with a choice of basking sites available, over head full spectrum lighting and under floor heating. These conditions also provided the pyrgomorphs with their needs. The adult grasshoppers are too large to be even remotely appealing as a food source for the lizards. The skinks were fed mostly on small Speckled Feeder Roaches *Nauphoeta cinerea* and the larval form of the Lesser Mealworm (*Alphitobius* sp.).



Blistered Pyrgomorph (*Monistria pustulifera*) photo: Jo Comber

The pyrgomorph numbers were maintained at around 6-8 in the display with an approximate even mix of both sexes, they were fed a variety of *Eremophila*, *Prostanthera* and *Goodenia* cuttings, with most of the hoppers' feeding attention being given to the leaves. The hoppers were regularly observed mating and the females often observed with their abdomens sunk into the sandy substrate depositing

their egg pods (or egg cases). Nymphs would appear year round, and being small and fitting the basic criteria for *Carlia* food they were initially 'preyed upon'. These hoppers are brightly coloured and quite obvious, almost advertising their presence, a sure sign of danger for the more 'bush wise' among us. However in the case of this particular species they are not toxic (at least in small numbers – I usually couldn't get past the second spoonful!), though not toxic they are quite distasteful and the lizards were very quick to drop the small hoppers and were seen to wipe their faces and jaw lines in the sand and on enclosure furniture as if attempting to wipe the taste from their mouth. After only a couple of tries the lizards learned their lesson and lost interest in the nymphs allowing the continued and harmonious display of insectivorous lizards alongside an appropriate sized insect meal.

Centralian Earless Dragons, Fire-tailed Skinks and Toad Hoppers:
(Classes Reptilia and Hexapoda)

Centralian Earless Dragons (*Tympanocryptis centralis*) are small, terrestrial, diurnal insectivores widely spread over the central part of Australia. Fire-tailed Skinks (*Morethia ruficauda*) are similar in that the aforementioned description of the dragons also fits these lizards, but to the skinks we can add foraging. The dragons are more prone to a 'I'll just sit and wait for my lunch to appear' strategy, relying heavily on their camouflage for avoiding predator detection, as do the toad hoppers. The Toad Hopper (*Bufo-
rnia crassa*) is a charismatic little grass hopper found over various parts of inland Australia, often appearing in places after an absence of many years – a testament to the resilience of their underground egg pods and a clear example of an adaptation to the climate this island provides to its inland inhabitants. The dragons and the hoppers share a physical appearance akin to the small rounded red coloured stones that litter the ground where these animals can be found and thus their behaviour lends to their protection. The display was set up in the same way as previously described for the rainbow skinks and pyrgomorphs, meeting all of the physiological requirements for the lizards and invertebrates. The lizards were fed on the same diet as previously mentioned. These hoppers were fed on the flowers of 'native daisies' – being most attracted to the yellow colouring of a number of species found on site.



Toad Hopper (*Bufo-
rnia crassa*)

photo: Jo Comber

The Toad Hoppers were not as reliable in their 'indoor breeding' as were the pyrgomorphs and as a result the numbers displayed were not as stable, but 4-6 were displayed at times when these animals were 'on hand' or in the collection. Once again, nymphs of the hopper species in question fit well within the size range of the two lizard species' diet, and in this case the hoppers were not brightly coloured, thus relying on their camouflage and cryptic behaviour to avoid being eaten. This works well in the 'open' world but in a small closed environment such as a display, a number of nymphs were seen to be eaten each time emergence from the substrate was noted. Because of this it was necessary to remove the youngsters as quickly as possible, a task made difficult by their camouflage and the fact that at that size they are easily injured by forceps of fingers. Small battery operated, household vacuum cleaner to the rescue. The haste at which the new hoppers were 'saved' was dependant on whether or not a reptile keeper or an invertebrate keeper was first on the scene.

Brown Tree Snakes and tree frogs:
(Classes Reptilia and Amphibia)

At Healesville Sanctuary, a Zoos Victoria campus east of Melbourne, we currently house and display Brown Tree Snakes (*Boiga irregularis*) with Giant (White-lipped) Tree Frogs (*Litoria infrafrenata*) and Splendid (Magnificent) Tree Frogs (*Litoria splendida*) in a 'cave like' exhibit. Brown Trees Snakes will and do include frogs in their diet in the wild, a note that is certainly made mention of in the interps at the front of their exhibit. What it does not say is that birds, mammals and lizards are much preferred and consumed in much greater quantities. The tree snake(s) at Healesville Sanctuary are well fed on a diet of pre-killed rodents, the adult tree frogs are fairly large (from a prospective meal point of view) and in the past (almost) eight years there has been no frogs eaten, known attempts or noted interest. There has and continues to be plenty of occasions where the frogs will sit on the snake(s).

The three 'more detailed' accounts above are examples of relatively successful class mixing, not all such attempts can be regarded as so successful. No doubt animal collections the world over have their own successes and failures relating to mixing species (not necessarily classes) in exhibits, and as a result I can confidently attest to the supposition that indeed Short-tailed Goannas (*Varanus brevicauda*) will eat adult Cane Grass Dragons (*Diporiphora winnecke*), snakes of the genus *Boiga* will eat lizards thought to be too large a meal by their keepers, Saltwater Crocodiles (*Crocodylus porosus*) will catch and eat Gouldian Finches (*Erythrura gouldiae*)...and no doubt many more.



Bufo marinus

- THE CANE TOAD

by **Steph McKenzie**

The cane toad is scientifically known as *Bufo marinus*. "*Bufo*" refers to the species being a true toad, "*marinus*" translates to the ability to tolerate marine conditions such as saltwater. However, this was a mistake by early naturalists as cane toads cannot tolerate saltwater at all. In Australia, we don't have true toads except for the introduced cane toad.

The cane toad has successfully invaded Australia and many other countries. They are native to Central America and South America. DNA studies suggest that the Australian cane toad descended from a group of toads that originated from South America.



Cane Toad (*Bufo marinus*)

photo: Gavin Bedford

In 1935, one hundred and five *Bufo marinus*, commonly known as the cane toad, was introduced in Gladstone, Queensland. The aim was for controlling the frenchi and greyback beetles which were damaging the cane fields. These toads were introduced following a cane growers conference where it was reported that in Hawaii, it had been proven an effective method of controlling the bugs. Reginald Mungomery organised the import of these toads.

The difference was, the grubs ate at different times to the toads in Australia and due to the higher variety of food available to the cane toad, they ate everything else but the grub. Because of their faster reproductive capacity compared to native frogs, they multiplied and adapted to the Australian environment with great ease.

It wasn't long before it was evident that the cane toads were going to invade and become an introduced pest. As there were no natural predators, their numbers escalated rapidly.

In the early years up to 1960s, the toad invasion was fairly slow (about 10km each year). Since then it has accelerated

and is now moving at about 40 to 60km per year which is an incredible rate. More recent developments show that the cane toad invasion is now spreading into the very dry parts of western Queensland and one population is all the way into the desert around Windorah. Toads are also moving into desert regions along the Victoria River in Northern Territory.

The initial release of the cane toad was in north eastern Queensland, however since then, the toads have made their way around the country, many by stowaway. They are able to squeeze into tight holes and often end up in equipment that is transported. They can tolerate extreme temperature and moisture conditions during transport. Studies have indicated that these toads have made their way down to Sydney by stowing away in woodchip and landscaping materials from northern New South Wales and southern Queensland. There has been evidence of toads arriving from Fiji in shipping containers.

BIOLOGY

Adult female cane toads grow to an average size of 12cm long. The males are generally a bit smaller and look a bit different to their female counterparts. However, it is not uncommon that there are many records recording larger sized toads some as large as 20.5cm and weighing 861grams. The largest recorded specimen was 2.5kg and 38cm from snout to vent.



The white Bufotoxin can be seen exuding from the Parotoid Glands
photo: Mike Alexander

The cane toad has poison glands and toxins exuded through the skin kills many native animals when ingested. Adult toads have enlarged parotoid glands behind the eyes and other glands across their back. When the toads are threatened, these glands release a milky white fluid called bufotoxin which is toxic to many animals.

The cane toad's diet consists of small rodents, reptiles, other amphibians, birds and a range of invertebrates. They also eat plants, dog food and household waste. Cane toads are cannibalistic. About two thirds of the larger juvenile toad's diet consists of smaller toads. The big toads mostly eat insects.

The female cane toad has a smoother brown skin compared to the males who have a rough yellow skin. There are also differences in their habits. Males will tend to hang around the breeding ponds calling out to attract females whereas females tend to spend much of their time wandering around and feeding so that they can accumulate the energy needed to produce a clutch of eggs.



Cane Toad (*Bufo marinus*)

photo: Mike Alexander

As with most frog species, the males are the vocal ones as females don't have the correct vocal cords to make any call and are therefore silent.

When a female has amassed enough energy for a clutch of eggs and is ready to spawn, they approach a waterbody where there are males. The male seizes the female with his forelegs under her armpits, clinging tightly on to her while she moves around. Bigger males will push smaller males away from the female. Fertilisation of the eggs is external, therefore both egg and sperm are released into the water where the joining process can take place.

Eggs are laid in a double strand within a long thin string of gelatinous jelly and are attached to grass and twigs in shallow water. A single clutch can have more than 30,000 eggs which is more than any native Australian frogs, hence why they over populate so easily.

Cane toad eggs only take a couple of days to hatch into tadpoles. From tadpoles to toadlets, the process can take anything from a couple of weeks to a couple of months depending on various factors such as temperature and food supply.

Half the toads produced are male and half are female. Males have two copies of the same sex chromosome i.e. ZZ and females have one copy of the Z and one of the W i.e. ZW. Researchers at the University of Queensland are now studying these chromosomes to see if they can

change it so that the toads only produce males so that no offspring can be produced.

Unlike frogs, male cane toads not only have two testicles inside their body but they also have two organs just above the testicles called "Bidder's Organs". This organ is almost as big or in some cases, bigger than the testicles and they are ovaries which produce sex hormones just like the female ovaries do. These ovaries contain tiny little egg cells. Normally, these egg cells don't develop further, however, if a male toad is surgically castrated, the Bidder's Organ will grow larger and turn into a functional ovary which will start producing eggs. Researchers do not understand why all toad species have this unusual system which is not found in frogs.

BABY TOADS

Baby toads measure approximately 1cm in length. They can only survive close to the water's edge as they lose water quickly. Studies have shown that the newly laid toad eggs are very poisonous but the danger to predators then decreases as the tadpoles get older. Newly transformed baby toads are the least poisonous and therefore are more vulnerable, but once they begin to grow a bit bigger, the baby toad starts to make its own poison.

In the next article, the aim is to determine the impact of the cane toad on biodiversity.



Cane Toad (*Bufo marinus*)

photo: Peter Krauss



NEXT VHS MEETING

Wednesday 6th October 2010
7:15pm - 10:30pm

PRAHRAN RSL - 301 HIGH STREET - PRAHRAN

2011 VHS Reptile & Amphibian Expo

Royal Melbourne Showgrounds
19 February 2011



Herp Shop™

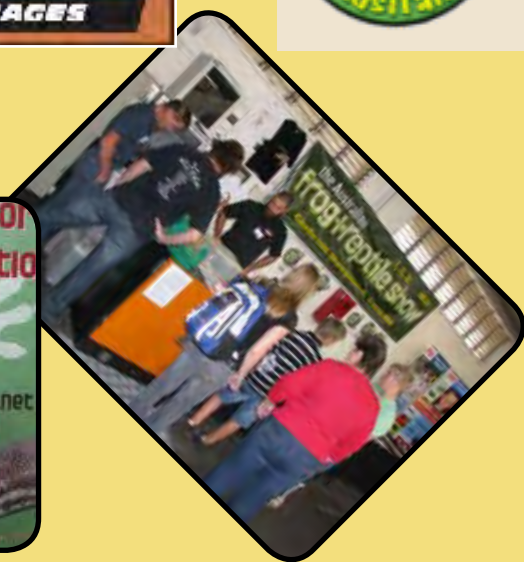
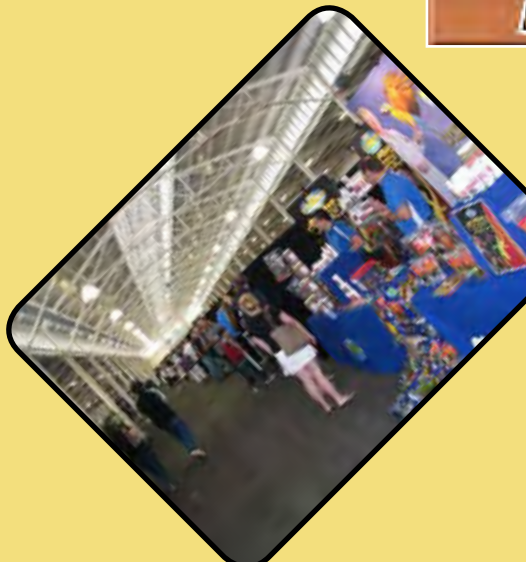


SCALES & TAILS



Reptiles
Australia

Hosted by the Victorian Herpetological Society we invite you and your family and friends to the 2011 Reptile and Amphibian Expo to be held at the Melbourne Showgrounds on the 19th February 2011. We've upgraded to the Town Square Hoecker Building which is bigger and better and has climate control! There will be fun for everyone with shows, displays, breeders and lots lots more even some little surprises!!! Look out in further editions of Odatria for more details and updates on what will be Australia's best reptile expo!!!



Odatria so far

an editor's note

Well before we have had a chance to stop and think, we have half a dozen online newsletter magazines behind us. For me, it has been a range of emotions from feeling proud of what we have achieved to, at times, wondering why we bother. I hope that each edition has been enjoyable for everyone who has downloaded them, as each one has taken quite some time and effort to produce. Being a free online magazine, we have no idea how many people are actually reading our publication nor what they think of it. It can leave one at times wondering, is anyone reading this at all? I personally love the opportunity of bringing our author's works to life in this magazine and I am happy to stay up all hours of the night trying to get each issue done, if our members (and readers) are reading and enjoying each issue.

Like many Victorian Herpetological Society members, I was sad to hear *Monitor* magazine would no longer be produced. This is when I came on board to co-produce *Odatria* and get it off the ground. I won't lie, my aim was to attempt to keep *Odatria* at a similar size to *Monitor* with the only differences being that it was now online and it would be less of a scientific type journal and more of a newsletter. Brian Barnett, with his extensive experience in this area, warned me to not aim too high as it would be difficult to maintain large editions. But my enthusiasm at the time couldn't be contained. I was sure with the new format it would be easy, all we would need is a note from the President of what's happening in the society, a review of the past meeting, a simple care sheet in the form of a beginner's guide, a classic article, a WPTAC update if there had been a meeting, news clippings from any reptile related stories in the media and perhaps one traditional article.

At first it seemed so simple and we have managed to keep the editions at a similar size, but the lack of writers willing to contribute articles has been disappointing. The Beginner's Guide articles have fallen by the wayside after I wrote the first (a very simple guide, hoping to give confidence to others to put their hand up and help out). After sending numerous email requests to various people, I got only two responses and these were both published. All my efforts since at finding anyone willing to have a go at writing a simple guide have failed, even with commonly kept reptiles such as Bearded Dragons, skinks or geckos.

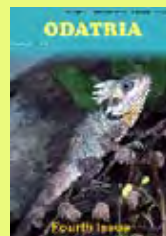
For new people interested in keeping reptiles, the information available (from the internet and pet shops etc.) can vary greatly in quality and can be quite inconsistent. I feel as the Herp society for Victoria, we should be at the forefront for giving correct advice to people interested in the hobby and this information should be easily accessible. With the vast amount of experience within the VHS, it would be great if there were more members willing to share and pass on their knowledge to the next generation of herp keepers.

We have had several articles from a few people that have particularly helped this publication. Apart from those that are on the VHS committee, a big thank you must go to Kerrie Still, Greg Maxwell, Rob Sullivan and Barry Goldsmith and a particular thank you to our youngest author, Micah Bonnici, for numerous articles. I hope in the future we can get more members to be part of this publication and volunteer to email us in an article. Articles do not need to be long or written scientifically - just sharing experiences is what we are after. I agree with Brian Barnett that if you are working on a lengthy article that you would like to be wide spread, then one of the major magazines (*Reptiles Australia* or *Scales & Tails*) may be a better option. However, writing something for *Odatria* could be a stepping stone for some authors with bigger plans and it sure would be giving something back to a society that has been here for the herp people of Victoria (and Australia) for over 30 years.

Lastly, it would be great to know how many people read each new edition of *Odatria* and what they think of the publication. I have set up a short and simple survey to help me understand our reader demographic better in an aim to ensure we make *Odatria* as relevant to VHS members as possible. If you could take the time to visit the following link it would be a great help to me as editor of your society's magazine. The survey has been set up by myself and has nothing to do with the VHS committee, it is simply intended to help the editors of this publication meet your needs better.

<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/VCS52DH>

Andrew Owen



VHS MEETING REVIEW

June 23rd, 2010

Roy Pails

You little beauty! It was time for another Victorian Herpetological Society meeting, the second of the year and the second time at our new venue – Prahran RSL. It was the first time this particular reviewer was able to make it to the new venue and what a great experience it was. It has to be said that the new venue gives a warmer, more easy going feel to the night compared to the previous 'theatre' type venues. Hopefully this gives a more welcoming feel to new people coming along for the first time. Throw in the bar and a few drinks and I reckon most Herp lovers felt right at home! Some people had mentioned to me that parking could be an issue, however, I arrived a little late due to work commitments, but had no problems finding a park.

As has become the custom, the evening formally kicked off with an auction. The auction was once again a great success with a number of animals being offered for auction. Among them was a jungle python, a water python, Proserpine carpet python, a turtle, a gecko and a couple of frogs. There was also a number of batches of mice in cages, some books and a pet carrier.



Guest speaker - Roy Pails

Early on we heard of Roy's passion for not just reptiles, but all native wildlife. He still has Bennett's and swamp wallabies at home to, as Roy says, "mow the lawn for me". He talked of his wish that more people would keep wallabies or possums as pets as opposed to dogs and cats. Roy's enthusiasm made his love of his animals evident, but Roy's salt water crocodile seemed his absolute pride and joy. Sadly telling everyone of the fact that she had passed away in the previous year and how heartbreaking it is to go into her room, Roy also quipped, "she was the only female to stick with me for 35 years". Roy purchased her as a baby for \$25



Roy Pails & Brian Barnett sharing a few stories

It was then time for our guest speaker, Roy Pails, to be handed a microphone – with his Bon Scott t-shirt on, I thought he may have taken the opportunity to belt out a few bars of 'Dirty Deeds' but he held out. Brian Barnett and Roy actually both had a microphone for the evening so the other 70 odd people in the room had the chance to feel like a fly on the wall of a herp room while these two old mates shared stories and memories. The two have known each other for years, and they told how in the early days they would work together to breed animals - Roy would have the adult animals but once eggs had been laid Brian would take care of their incubation.



Roy talking while everyone watches the slide show

It didn't take long for Roy to start talking about Green Pythons, another animal he has had success with. Roy and Brian said the first pair sold into Victoria from Joe Bredl went for \$35,000! Four years ago an animal would cost approximately \$10,000, this year Roy thinks



Everyone in the audience was glued to Roy's photographs

some will be under \$1000. Roy spoke of his trials and tribulations in trying to get the first Green Python babies he hatched to feed. One particularly stubborn feeder he had decided needed to be 'force fed'. Fiddling around with this tiny neonate after a while he thought the job was done when he noticed the snake was quite limp. It seemed the animal wasn't breathing. Roy began attempting to give mouth to mouth to this tiny animal, getting pinky gizzards all over his mouth in the process! After a few minutes there was still no response. Realising he had just killed his baby, Roy grabbed a VB to drown his sorrows. After he finished the beer he went back and tried again to work on the lifeless animal ... nothing. He went inside and said to his missus, "I can't believe it, I've just killed a Green". After a while he decided to go back and try to feed some other babies and he almost fell over when he saw the Green he thought he'd killed happily perched in its enclosure!



Some of the punters having a chat during the break

Before we knew it, it was time for a break and with frothies in hand, introducing yourself to people seemed a much easier task! There was an area for kids to play and a table for colouring-in books. The break was longer than usual as the conversations flowed between the punters.

Roy continued to show us photos of his brilliant collection. Pythons featured heavily. Black-Headed Pythons were one animal Roy was very successful with, being one of the first people to have many successful breedings. Roy also successfully bred plenty of variations of Carpet Pythons, including Jungles, Albino Darwins, Vics and his well-known Hypo *bredli*.



Some of the punters having a chat during the break

Roy also has a soft spot for Elapids. Death Adders, particularly the Dajarra type, are an animal Roy seems to love working with. Plenty of Collett's Snakes and Chappell Island Tiger Snakes were bred in the 'old days' but Roy said he 'couldn't give them away' after a while so stopped breeding and eventually keeping them. Now people are desperate to find Collett's and Chappells and their price is on the rise! In contrast Roy 'invested' in Womas, buying his first from Joe Bredl and becoming hooked. He seemed disappointed their price had fallen so much and it didn't make it worthwhile for him to continue with as many 'Woma projects'.

As we were listening to the second part of Roy's talk we were treated like royalty with a plate of pizza delivered to us each individually. So there we all were, devouring our pizzas with our favourite poison in hand listening to some of the tales of one of the most experienced people in Herp... it doesn't get much better!



The bar area of Prahran RSL





The Little Whips of Craigieburn

by Micah Bonnici

In Autumn this year I made several visits to the Craigieburn Grasslands Flora and Fauna Reserve. The weather was getting cooler so I wasn't hopeful of finding snakes. But to my surprise, and after a lot searching, I found that the area has a good population of Little Whip Snakes (*Parasuta flagellum*).

The Grasslands Reserve has Merri Creek running through it and it features a number of rocky outcrops. This is one of the ideal habitats for Little Whip Snakes. Those outcrops are also home to other reptile species such as Cunningham's Skinks (*Egernia cunninghami*). The area has a lot of man made debris such as timber, sheets of tin and rotting tyres, which Little Whip Snakes seem to like.

Although called the Little Whip Snake, it actually does not belong to the whip snake Genus *Demansia* (like the Yellow-faced Whip Snake (*Demansia psammophis*)), but is more closely related to species like Dwyer's Snake (*Parasuta dwyeri*) or the Mitchell's Short-tailed Snake (*Parasuta nigriceps*) and other snakes of the Genus *Parasuta* known as Hooded snakes.

The Little Whip Snake is a small snake species. Larger individuals can get to a length of 50cm, although there have been some reports of longer specimens. It has a black-like thumb print on its head and black colouring on its snout. It has an overall light brown colouration and a plain whitish belly (although each dorsal scale has a black edging on one side of the scale). It has 17 (and on rare occasions 15) mid-body scale rows, 125-150 ventral scales and 15-40 single undivided subcaudal scales.



Little Whip Snake

At first glance the Little Whip Snake looks like a juvenile Eastern Brown Snake (*Pseudonaja textilis*) and that's why there is probably some misidentification between the two species. The Little Whip has what looks like a black thumbprint on its head and black colouring on the snout whereas the Eastern Brown Snake has a black colour all over the top part and a black coloured collar. The Eastern Brown Snake also has orange/reddish brown spots along its belly. Some juvenile specimens actually have banding right down the body.

If you look more closely there are other differences as well. The Little Whip Snake has an undivided anal scale and undivided subcaudal scales whereas the Eastern Brown Snake has a divided anal scale and subcaudal scales but they have a few undivided scales towards the upper part of the tail.



Little Whip Snake

You can also tell them apart from their general behaviour. Usually when a Little Whip Snake is disturbed it will curl in a coil and sometimes do a bit of a knot with its body and may throw a few bluff strikes. The Eastern Brown Snake will raise its fore body off the ground and get into an s-shape position where it bluff strikes and sometimes it will bite in a defensive manner.

Little Whip Snakes occur in south-eastern New South Wales, through most of Victoria and south-eastern South Australia. In the Melbourne area they are most commonly found in the Basalt Plains west of the city, but they are fairly common in the northern areas of Melbourne as well.

It is a small usually nocturnal Elapid snake that shelters beneath rocks, logs, fallen timber and earth cracks by day. At night it hunts for small skinks such as Delicate and Garden Skinks and it eats frogs as well. Gravid females, though, are known to bask during the day to help with the development of their embryos. These snakes are live-bearers (viviparous) giving birth to up to seven live young in late spring.

Little Whip Snakes are a mildly venomous species. Usually their bite has localised effects, although someone apparently died from being bitten by this snake in 2007. This was probably caused by a bad reaction to the snakebite.

I have taken a lot of photos and a few videos of this species. They are cute and interesting snakes and I really enjoyed photographing them and observing their behaviour.

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 with your questions. You never know - you may even find your question and answer published here!

Hi Victorian Herpetological Society

I'm hoping you might be able to help me I'm looking for more information about protective clothing, fabrics or materials that is suitable protection from Australia's venomous snakes

The reason why I ask is I've just moved to a new house located in Kyneton, VIC and I have ponies, we've been told by our neighbours that there is usually a few sightings every summer of venomous snakes so just be aware around your ponies.

Obviously we are a little concerned, especially as we have a pregnant mare due to foal this summer – After doing some research online I found that the Australia's venomous snakes have shorter fangs but could you clarify if this is correct. I'm wondering if there is any fabrics or materials you could suggest that could offer some protection from these sort of snake bites – I hope to perhaps make some protective boots for my ponies to wear in the paddock – and I guess if I can offer them any higher percentage of protection its better then not having any protection at all.

Thank you for your time while reading this email, I really hope you might be able to help me out or point me in the right direction

Kind Regards

Robert

Hi Rob.,

My name is Peter Comber, I am a member of the Victorian Herpetological Society and am hoping to satisfy your query below regarding snake bite and ponies.

To answer your first query - yes, by and large most of Australia's venomous snakes have fangs that are shorter than alot of the snakes overseas. This claim relates to vipers and the like (rattlesnakes included), this group of snakes do have long fangs that achieve a deep tissue penetration in the prey that they intend to feed on, by comparison Australian snake venoms are delivered quite shallow and transported in the lymph before mixing with the blood in the heart.

Of course I am sure you are well aware this doesn't make a great deal of difference to the mouse/person/pony/dog bitten, and all snakes should be treated with caution. Unfortunately there is very little (if anything) that can be done to be 100% sure you may have 'snake proofed' a pony. I would suggest that some heavy denim or leather arrangement that may be fitted over the lower leg of the animals would certainly go a long way to minimising envenomation should the unlikely occurrence of a snake bite take place.

To be honest though I am not a pony person and I wonder if perhaps some local advice from people who live where your animals are (and have experience with ponies) would also be worthwhile. I feel I should also point out though that all over Australia where there are horses there are usually snakes, not because one attracts the other but because people tend to keep horses in the rural areas, often away from built up suburbia, and of course the further one travels from the cities the greater the prevalence of wildlife.

Snakes that live among horses generally do not bother them and most horse/pony individuals recognise that the snake(s) is something to steer clear of. I would be surprised if the snakes around there pose any real problem other than a perceived threat taken by human observers.

I would think that the warning given to you by your neighbours was one for your benefit rather than the ponies, it certainly always pays to be vigilant in Victoria's warmer months.

Hopefully some of what I have suggested is of some value, good luck and regards,

Peter Comber, Victorian Herpetological Society.

NEXT VHS MEETING

Wednesday 6th October 2010
7:15pm - 10:30pm

PRAHRAN RSL - 301 HIGH STREET - PRAHRAN

HERP HAPPENINGS

Discovery in the Foja Mountains

A biological expedition to a remote New Guinea rain forest explores a world of bizarre and beautiful creatures.

Belinda Brother Henk is remaining remarkably calm about the loss of his clothes. Only hours ago a helicopter dropped him into an opening in the rain forest a mile high in the Foja Mountains on the island of New Guinea, one of the remotest and most difficult to reach places on Earth. The sound of the chopper blades had barely faded when he discovered that his duffel bag was nowhere to be found and what he was wearing—a bucket hat; pink, short-sleeved shirt; jeans; and rubber boots—composed his entire wardrobe for the next three weeks.

Yet Henk van Mastrigt is very happy. Holding his red net, he stalks across a muddy bog, lunging at and occasionally catching one of the jewel-bright butterflies that dart by. "Come down, come close, don't be afraid," he calls to them in his Dutch accent. He stops to urinate on the mud, knowing butterflies will be attracted to minerals in the puddle.

Brother Henk catches a medium-size butterfly. With blunt-ended tweezers he spreads its wings, which are deep black with J-shaped markings in gleaming white. "Oh, this is great, great, great!" he says, a huge smile on his white-bearded face. "Surely a new species to science."

Though he is a Franciscan lay brother and not a formally trained biologist, he's spent decades studying the butterflies of western New Guinea and knows them as well as anyone. If Brother Henk has never seen this bug before, no one has. It's like being present at the creation—or, in one sense, even before the creation, since by the rules of science this species won't exist until it's deposited in a museum and Brother Henk publishes its description in a journal.



"Look, there is the new honeyeater," Brother Henk says, pointing toward the green wall of vegetation at the edge of

the bog. A medium-size bird with blackish feathers and brilliant orange flaps of bare facial skin hops through a shrub, picking fruit with its beak. It is a wattled smoky honeyeater, a species found only in the Foja Mountains. Perhaps a dozen scientists have ever seen it alive.

The world's second largest island, New Guinea has for centuries intrigued and challenged even the most adventurous and experienced scientists. In the mid-1800s legendary explorer-scientist Alfred Russel Wallace, who had seen more than a few wild places, wrote that the rugged and densely forested New Guinea landscape presented "an almost impassable barrier to the unknown interior"—a statement that remained true throughout much of the 20th century. As scientists gradually explored other ranges, the Foja's deep valleys, sheer cliffs, knife-edge ridges, and unbroken forest canopy resisted exploration until biologist Jared Diamond conducted surveys in 1979 and 1981.

In 2004 ornithologist Bruce Beehler flew over the Foja and spotted a small clearing in the forest, a bog where annual flooding restricts plant growth to shrubs and grasses—and, more important, where a helicopter could land. In late 2005 Beehler led the first intensive scientific expedition to the Foja, a 25-day trip conducted by Conservation International's Rapid Assessment Program (RAP), designed to provide biological information to facilitate environmental protection for areas of important biodiversity. During the expedition, members discovered the wattled smoky honeyeater (the first new bird species found in New Guinea since 1950), more than a dozen new frogs, and several mammal and plant species. Henk van Mastrigt collected more than two dozen types of butterflies and moths, now under study as possible new species.



A new species of Gecko discovered by Paul Oliver

Brother Henk was back for the second RAP expedition to the Foja in November 2008, and thanks to donations from team members, he did not spend the entire three weeks in a single set of clothes. It was a good thing too, because the torrential rain meant that even those with plenty of clothing spent much of their time with sodden shirts, damp

pants, and squishy socks.

The rain, of course, fuels the forest's rich life, manifested in part by lush mosses, ferns, and other epiphytes—plants that grow on other plants—covering tree trunks and limbs. High enough in elevation to be above malarial mosquitoes and known poisonous snakes, residents of the aptly named Bog Camp saw their major threat in falling branches, as epiphytic vegetation soaked up water and stressed limbs, which cracked with the staccato of artillery fire.

Among the dozen or so tents at Bog Camp was a large yellow one that served as a makeshift laboratory, where expedition biologists preserved skins, skeletons, whole animals, and bits of tissue to be taken away for later study and DNA analysis. Here, Kristofer Helgen and Christopher Milensky of the Smithsonian Institution prepared, respectively, mammal and bird specimens, and Australian Paul Oliver worked on frogs and lizards. Ornithologist Ed Scholes of the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology carried video and audio recorders along forest paths, documenting rare birds of paradise. Botanist Asep Sadili of the Indonesian Institute of Sciences, which cosponsored the expedition, collected plants from a study site near camp.

Team members captured animals in various traps and nets and, in some instances, by hand (especially in the case of frogs found by headlamp light on night walks). Many of the larger birds and mammals were brought in by men from a village in the Foja foothills who guided biologists, helped with camp chores, and demonstrated time and again their near-magical knowledge of the ways of the forest.

On the second day of the expedition, three of the hunters returned from a walk carrying a dwarf cassowary, freshly shot with bow and arrow. Though Milensky coveted the three-foot-tall bird, the local men had other ideas, and soon the air was filled with the smell of roasted cassowary. Milensky salvaged the bones. As he laboriously cleaned a femur, he declared, "This may be the first wild-caught specimen for any museum in the past hundred years."



A new species of long-nosed tree frog discovered by Australia's Paul Oliver with funding from the National Geographic Society

Hunters presented Kris Helgen with other treasures: a tiny wallaby—"It could be the world's smallest true kangaroo," he said of the cottontail-size animal—and a rare, bizarre, long-beaked echidna. This monotreme, an egg-laying

mammal related to the platypus, possesses a snout with electroreceptors that help it locate earthworms, which it spears with a harpoon-like, barbed tongue and slurps into its toothless mouth like strands of spaghetti. "This thing is the weirdest mammal in the world," Helgen said, acknowledging, among other attributes, the echidna's muscular body, its sharp spines formed from modified hairs, the female's production of milk through mammary patches (there are no nipples), and the male's four-pronged penis. "It's my favorite mammal," he added—a fact surely not unrelated to the animal's surpassing strangeness and to the challenge of studying it. No one—no scientist, no known New Guinea tribesperson—has ever seen a baby long-beaked echidna.

Daily life in camp came with costs beyond the work of collecting and preparing specimens. Leeches left bloody welts on everyone's legs; nettles caused painful rashes. One night, figuratively at least, it rained maggots inside Helgen's tent. Flies had laid hundreds of eggs on the mesh tent top, and the larvae had hatched, wriggling and hungry. Another night one of the local men ruined the team's entire supply of kerosene when he mistook it for water, poured it into a pot, and added rice to cook dinner. Still, no one stayed discouraged for long at Bog Camp.

Daylight began with birdsong—especially that of the loud and ubiquitous lesser ground-robin, whose notes recall the first two bars of Scott Joplin's "The Entertainer." The daily routine was punctuated by the harsh screeching of flocks of small parrots called lorikeets, which zoomed overhead like red-and-green bullets; the constant hooting of white-breasted fruit-doves, which magically stayed hidden in the treetops despite brilliant green-and-yellow plumage; and the literally end-less drip of water on tent tops. At day's end came the deafening calls of cicadas—the 5:30 type sounding like car alarms, the 6:00 type resembling police sirens. Then night fell, and frogs chimed in, peeping and beeping like a forest full of 1950s sci-fi robots gone insane.

Each day brought discovery and surprise, from the rare, indeed near-mythic, golden-mantled tree kangaroo (its scientific name is *Dendrolagus pulcherrimus*, which means "most beautiful tree hare") to the bounty of moths that Brother Henk collected every night, seeming to comprise every possible combination of shape and color.

But science isn't all eureka moments, and some of the scientists' prey proved maddeningly elusive. Near the end of the trip, ornithologist Ed Scholes returned from a day in the forest and sat, frowning, under the blue tarp that served as the dining room. He had hoped to record behavior proving that the parotia (a type of bird of paradise) found in the Fojas was a species that may be distinct from those elsewhere in New Guinea.

"I'm up to a ratio of 400 to one," Scholes grumbled. "Four hundred minutes of sitting in that mosquito-infested pigsty of a blind to one minute of seeing the bird."

When three weeks were up, the list of discoveries had grown from Brother Henk's first-day butterfly to include an appealingly beady-eyed rat, a long-nosed frog caught while

it rested on a sack of rice, a huge dragonfly with glittering yellow eyes, a gecko spotted by its fiery orange eyeshine, and many more butterflies and moths. The expedition's biologists found several new species and—even in the tiny fraction of the Fojas' expanse explored—greatly expanded knowledge of the ranges and abundance of New Guinea fauna and flora.

As the helicopter rose from the bog, team members looked out the windows to see flocks of huge white cockatoos, startled by the roaring engine, flying over dark green forest stretching to the horizon. The noise died away, the birds settled back into the treetops, and life in the Foja Mountains returned to centuries-old rhythms, its mysteries scarcely breached.

MEL WHITE
Photos by TIM LAMAN
National Geographic
June 2010

Man Dies After Being Strangled By Pet Snake

A suburban Omaha man has died after being strangled by his 2.7m, 11.3kg pet boa constrictor, authorities said today.

Cory Byrne, 34, of Papillion died last night at a local hospital, just hours after police and paramedics pried the snake from around his neck, police said.

Mr Byrne had been showing the snake to a friend when it wrapped around his shoulders and neck and squeezed, Sarpy County Attorney Lee Polikov said.

An officer was called to Mr Byrne's flat near downtown Papillion at around 5.40pm (local time). The officer found Mr Byrne on the ground with the snake still around his neck.

Paramedics soon arrived and helped get the snake off Mr Byrne and into a cage.

The Nebraska Humane Society in Omaha has taken custody of the male red-tailed boa constrictor, said spokesman Mark Langan.

The snake appears to have been well-fed, said Mr Langan, who added he did not know what might have led the snake to strangle its owner.

"The sad reality is, whether its a dog or a cat or snake, no matter how much you trust an animal, they react unpredictably in certain situations," Mr Langan said. "Once a snake clamps down like that, they're extremely strong. It would have been very difficult for one person to remove that snake."

Mr Langan said he believes it was Nebraska's first fatality from a pet snake.

The Humane Society of the US says at least 13 people have been killed in the US by pet pythons - which are also constrictors - since 1980.

"But as far as I know, this is the first time someone has been killed by a pet boa constrictor," said Beth Preiss, the society's captive wildlife regulation specialist.



The Nebraska Humane Society has taken the red-tailed boa constrictor that injured - and ultimately killed - Cory Byrne

Mr Polikov, who also serves as the county's coroner, said strangulation has been ruled as the cause of death. No citations or charges are planned, Mr Polikov said, as it appears no laws were broken.

"There's already discussion about looking at the law," he said. "Omaha has an ordinance against such animals; Papillion doesn't. There's no state controlling law."

Mr Polikov said authorities were now trying to determine what to do with the snake, but were leaning toward placing it with a zoo or sanctuary.

MARGERY A BECK
Omaha World Herald
June 2010

Rats Drive Island Lizard To Extinction

The Selmunett lizard (*Podarcis filfolensis ssp. kieselbachi*) is very likely extinct, according to Maltese naturalist Arnold Sciberras. One of four subspecies of the Maltese wall lizard, the Selmunett lizard was last seen in 2005. Although the lizard's home—Selmunett Island—has long been uninhabited by people, that fact did not help save the lizard. Over-predation by introduced rats is thought to be the primary cause of lizard's extinction.

A number of surveys have failed to turn up the lizard and its extinction published, yet the Malta Environment and Planning Authority (MEPA) still considers the subspecies as surviving, according to MaltaToday.

"MEPA doesn't want to acknowledge that its conservation

attempts have failed in some cases," Sciberras told the local news organization.



A male Selmunett lizard

The Selmunett lizard is a member of the wall lizard family, known as Lacertidae, which are present in Europe, Africa, and Asia. Other subspecies of the Maltese wall lizard survive on islands off of Malta and Italy.

JEREMY HANCE
mongabay.com
June 2010

Dangerous Snakes On Move In Far North

It is not just southern tourists who love our warm winters - so do snakes.

A Cairns snake handler has warned the reptiles continue to be active and has urged residents to not get complacent.



A venomous red-bellied black measuring 2m was removed from a garden shed at a Redlynch home yesterday morning, the ninth snake caught by handler Rohan Pithie in the past two weeks.

The family, which has two young children, found the snake curled up in their shed at Chirio Drive.

"I was expecting the next months to be really quiet," said Mr Pithie, owner of Hiss Off Reptile Removal.

"Because it's cold, snakes need the warmth to create energy and they get that from the sun.

"When the sun is not out they hide under rocks and houses. Because Cairns never gets cold, snakes are always moving."

Mr Pithie has removed red-bellied blacks, scrub pythons and green and brown tree snakes from houses in Cairns and at the northern beaches over the past 14 days.

People who come across red-bellied black snakes, should stay completely still and let the animal pass

BEN BLOMFIELD
The Cairns Post
June 2010

Snake Venom Studies Yield Insights For Development Of Therapies For Heart Disease And Cancer

Researchers seeking to learn more about stroke by studying how the body responds to toxins in snake venom are releasing new findings that they hope will aid in the development of therapies for heart disease and, surprisingly, cancer.

The Japanese team is reporting in a Journal of Biological Chemistry "Paper of the Week" that they are optimistic that inhibiting a protein found on the surface of blood cells known as platelets may combat both irregular blood clotting and the spread of certain cancers throughout the body.

"The finding that platelets not only play a role in blood clotting but also in the development of vessels that allow tumors to flourish was quite unexpected and paves the way for new research on the role or roles of platelets," says Katsue Suzuki-Inoue, the associate professor at the University of Yamanashi who oversaw the 13-person team's work in professor Yukio Ozaki's laboratory.

About Platelets, Blood Clots And Stroke

Under normal conditions, platelets are activated to become sticky when blood vessels are injured, and their clumping together (aggregation or clotting) naturally stops bleeding. But, irregular platelet aggregation caused by disease can lead to dangerous clots or even stroke if a clot clogs or bursts in a vessel that carries oxygen and nutrients to the brain.

"When a blood clot, or thrombus, forms during the body's normal repair process, it's doing its job," says Suzuki-Inoue. "But, thrombotic diseases, such as heart attack and stroke, are leading causes of death in developed countries. Understanding and manipulating the underlying chemical

reactions could help us save many lives."

But what does this have to do with snake venom? It's sort of a long story.

How Venom Can Prevent Or Cause Clotting

"Snake venom contains a vast number of toxins that target proteins in platelets," says Yonchol Shin, an associate professor at Kogakuin University who specializes in snake toxins. "Some of those toxins prevent platelets from clotting, which can lead to profuse bleeding in snake bite victims. Others, like the one we've focused this research on, potentially activate platelets, which results in blood clots. Identification of the molecular targets of many of these toxins has made an enormous contribution to our understanding of platelet activation and related diseases."



By studying how the body responds to toxins in snake venom, researchers have discovered new clues that they hope will aid in the development of therapies for heart disease and cancer

Intrigued by the then-recent discovery that elements in snake venom can promote irregular aggregation of platelets -- the kind that leads to clots and stroke -- Inoue's and Ozaki's team set out in 1997 to understand better the molecular underpinnings of those chemical reactions. They hoped that whatever they learned could be applied to the search for new therapies for irregular blood clotting caused by disease.

In 2000, another set of investigators came across a protein on the surface of platelets and dubbed it C-type lectin-like receptor 2, or CLEC-2. At the time, it remained unclear how CLEC-2 was produced or what its job was, but the team suspected it was worth further study.

After six years of research and collaborations with British investigators, the team in 2006 discovered how rhodocytin -- a molecule purified from the venom of the Southeast Asia pit viper *Calloselasma rhodastoma* -- binds to the CLEC-2 receptor protein on the platelet surface, spurring the platelet to clot with others like it.

Then, in another JBC "Paper of the Week" in 2007, Suzuki-Inoue and her colleagues reported how a separate molecule, called podoplanin, binds to the CLEC-2 platelet

receptor protein very much like the venom molecule does. Discovered in 1990, podoplanin is a protein expressed on the surface of cancer cells, and, when bound to the CLEC-2 receptor on platelets, it spurs blood clotting, too.

"To shield themselves from the immune system, cancer cells send out a chemical, podoplanin, which binds to the CLEC-2 receptor protein on platelets, telling the platelets to get together and form a protective barrier around the cancer cells. Once enveloped, the cancer cells are not detected by the immune system and are able to bind to blood vessels' inner linings and spread, or metastasize, throughout the body," she explained.

From Snake Venom To Platelets To Tumors

The recent investigations by the team, published in the JBC online July 4, hinged on the generation and study of genetically engineered mouse embryos that lacked the platelet receptor protein CLEC-2. In the end, the experiments showed that CLEC-2 is not only necessary for blood clotting but also necessary for the development of a different type of vessel, specifically lymphatic vessels that carry fluid away from tissues and prevent swelling, or edema.

"During fetal development, the CLEC-2 deficiency disturbed the normal process of blood clotting and, in fact, the normal development and differentiation of blood and lymphatic vessels," says Masanori Hirashima, an associate professor at Kobe University. "They had disorganized and blood-filled lymphatic vessels and severe swelling."

Podoplanin, Hirashima explains, is also expressed on the surface of certain types of lymphatic cells and is known to play a role in the development of lymphatic vessels: "These findings suggest that the interaction between CLEC-2 and podoplanin in lymphatic vessels is necessary for the separation between blood vessels and lymphatic vessels."

It has been known that tumors generate blood vessels to promote their growth, and it's possible that the formation of lymphatic vessels also may contribute to the spread of cancer throughout the body, says Osamu Inoue, an assistant professor at the University of Yamanashi.

"We speculate that the interaction between the platelet's CLEC-2 protein and the podoplanin molecule in lymphatic cells plays an essential role in the creation of lymphatic vessels, thereby facilitating tumor growth. If this is the case, a drug that blocks that interaction would prevent the spread of tumors through lymphatic vessels," Inoue said.

By being deemed a "Paper of the Week," the team's work is categorized in the top 1 percent of papers reviewed by the JBC editorial board in terms of significance and overall importance. Other contributors included Guo Ding, Satoshi Nishimura, Kazuya Hokamura, Koji Eto, Hirokazu Kashiwagi, Yoshiaki Tomiyama, Yutaka Yatomi and Kazuo Umemura.

Science Daily
July 2010

Man Shocked To Find Half A Lizard In Can Of Baked Beans From Dubai Store

Authorities act after man finds lizard in can of beans from a store in Bur Dubai.

For Sandeep Sequeira that nightmare was all too true. He had bought a can of Kimball baked beans from a grocery store in Bur Dubai on Wednesday morning.

"When I got home I opened the can and I spotted something weird. So I took a spoon, placed the spoon under what was bothering me and lifted the spoon. It was half a lizard."

"I was lucky enough that it was right on top of the can. I was going to eat half the can only. I can only imagine if it was [right] at the bottom of the can."
He adds that the can didn't seem damaged in any way.

Sequeira contacted the municipality and a food inspector was sent to investigate the matter.

"The inspector met with me and took the can and the lizard so that they can test it," Sequeira said.

"We have already pulled all Kimball baked bean cans with the same manufacture date and lot number as the one found to be contaminated," Ahmad Al Ali, head of the Food Inspection Section at Dubai Municipality, told Gulf News on Sunday.

"We were very surprised to see this kind of contamination in food products. It was fortunate that this was a contaminant that could be seen with the naked eye. However, such contaminants are very difficult to detect through port inspections," Al Ali said.

He said the municipality takes samples of imported food products to test before releasing the shipment.

"To detect something like this you'd have to open every can."



Nothing can put you off your meal more than opening a can of beans and finding something staring back at you!

Al Ali went on to say that they have contacted the regional supplier of Kimball foods to explain how the lizard ended

up in the can.

"We have also asked that we be supplied with a report of a full health and safety inspection of the Kimball factory in Malaysia, as well as evidence of improvement to ensure that there is no repeat of this kind of contamination."

Choithrams is the regional supplier for Kimball foods. Attempts by Gulf News to contact them went unanswered.

"I'm just letting people know about this. It's your job to tell your friends about this, because the other half of the lizard might be in their can," Sequeira said.

"The baked beans were cooked and canned in Malaysia, so the bottom half of the lizard might be anywhere in the world right now," he added.

The contaminated can was produced on January 13, 2010 and expires on July 13, 2011.

Eating food with a dead lizard is not poisonous and you do not die consuming such contaminated food, doctors said. "Canned food is usually cooked in high temperature and will kill off any toxins," said Dr Lalit Uchil, specialist family physician at the Welcare Ambulatory Care Centre. "The stories you hear about people dying after eating food with a dead lizard is only anecdotal," he said. The lizard found in the can is apparently the common house lizard variety. While these are not poisonous, the live lizards are likely to carry certain bacteria which can cause salmonella, which results in vomiting, diarrhoea and stomach cramps. That is why it is necessary to wash hands when you touch a house lizard.

MOHAMMED N. AL KHAN
Gulf news Dubai
July 2010

Python found in empty locker at US High School

Ed Reardon, a custodian for the Newton School Department, was clearing out lockers at the old North High School last Friday after Principal Jen Price had asked him to retrieve any abandoned textbooks, left by former students, to donate to charities.

But when Reardon reached into the top shelf of a locker to retrieve trash that was left behind, he didn't find books behind the clutter.

"When I pulled [the notebook] out, a snake just fell to my feet," said Reardon.

A 3-foot python, to be exact.

At first, Reardon didn't know what the object was that landed just inches from his toes.

"It flopped right on the ground. I just thought it was a change purse or something," he laughed, comparing the

pattern of the snake's skin to a leopard print cloth.

After a few seconds, Reardon thought it was a fake snake.

"I bent down, because I wasn't sure if it was real, and I realized it was the real thing," he said.

Reardon said the snake, later identified as a ball python, coiled up in an attack stance in the hallway of the high school.

Unafraid of the two-inch-thick reptile, Reardon corralled the snake with a notebook and grabbed it by the back of its neck, as he had seen it done on nature shows on television.

"It can't bite you if you grab it by the back of the neck," he said.



This baby Ball Python was found in one of the school lockers.

Reardon brought the snake downstairs to show co-workers, who he said were all shocked at the sight of the snake, before giving the reptile water.

According to Reardon, the snake had been in the locker for quite some time because it had shed its skin while sitting at the top of the locker shelf.

After he got off work, Reardon brought the python to Newtonville Pet to hand it over to the owners.

"The women [at the store] identified it as a python, and I asked if she could take it off of my hands, and she called her boss, who accepted it," said Reardon.

Nikki Eccles, the manager at Newtonville Pet, said the snake was a ball python, a species sometimes kept as a pet. It's not found in the wild in Massachusetts, though.

"It's not indigenous to here, especially to Newton North," Eccles said.

Now that the snake is in safe keeping, Reardon said he is looking to find the culprit who may have ditched the python in the locker.

"I'm more concerned about the cruelty of it," he said. "This is not a way of leaving school for the summer by leaving a defenseless animal in a locker without food or water."

Reardon said he had the notebook with the name of a student on it, and would report it to the principal, Price.

"That's a painful way to go, dehydrating to death," said Reardon. "It just boggles my mind [that they would do this.]"

Reardon said in the 10 years he has worked for the school district, this was "the strangest finding by far."

Although he thought about it, he couldn't take it home as a pet of his own.

"I have a Jack Russell terrier, so they wouldn't get along," said Reardon. "I have seen him attack garter snakes."

STEVE ANNEAR
Wicked Local Newton
July 2010

Python Joins Traffic Jam

Russians stuck in a traffic jam watched in astonishment as a two-metre-long python slithered into a neighbouring car.

The snake had apparently escaped from the home of its owner in Samara, a southern city on the Volga, when it joined the traffic yesterday, the Russian news agency Interfax said overnight, citing zoo officials.

"During a traffic jam on Novo-Sadovaya street a python slipped into the engine of a foreign-made car. The passengers of neighbouring vehicles saw this and alerted the driver," the zoo management was quoted as saying.



Wandering Russian Reticulated Python

The zoo sent specialists to retrieve the heavy-set reptile - a rare breed of reticulated python - but the provenance of the animal had them baffled until his owner came to claim the pet a day later.

"The python was in bad shape. Lucky that there was traffic, or he would have been killed," a zoo employee told the agency.

Zoo keepers were able to confirm the identity of the python's owner as he could name missing patches of scales on his beloved pet, it said.

The reticulated python are native to Southeast Asia and can grow to be over nine metres long as adults.

**MOSCOW CORRESPONDENT
Herald Sun
July 2010**

Global Warming Could Make It Tough For Crocs

Rising temperatures may make it harder for crocodiles to dive for food, say researchers.

Dr Hamish Campbell from the University of Queensland has been studying crocodiles at Lakefield National Park in Queensland's Cape York.

He says he has noticed crocodiles find it more difficult to dive when temperatures increase in the warmer months. He says climate change could have a big impact on crocs.

"Crocodiles will dive to feed, but also for small crocodiles it's particularly important for evading predators," he said.

"Birds of prey or large fish that would take them off the surface.

"So they would dive down to the bottom of the waterholes and hide in amongst the crevices and stuff there."

Dr Campbell says if water temperatures increase by a just a few degrees, crocodiles are not able to spend as much time underwater while diving.

He says global warming could eventually have an impact on the reptiles.

"If you increase the temperature, the metabolism of an animal increases," he said.

"This increases the amount of oxygen they consume and this reduces the amount of time they can stay underwater during their dive.

"But what was significant about this research was that these animals were free-ranging, so we weren't exposing them to experimental conditions, this was long-term seasonal changes over 12 months."

**KRISTY SEXTON-MCGRATH
ABC News
July 2010**

Rangers Remove Crocodile In Cairns

Ms Palaszczuk said the estuarine crocodile was caught at the end of the Fearnley Street drain canal near the Trinity Inlet this morning.

She said the crocodile is now being kept by the Department of Environment and Resource Management in Cairns and will be sent to a crocodile farm or zoo.

It will not be released back into the wild.

"DERM staff set a trap in the Fearnley Street drain last Friday (2/7/2010) after an intensive search," Ms Palaszczuk said.

"DERM was responding to a sighting from a member of the public who reported that it had grabbed a bait net.

"Immediately after being notified, DERM officers did a spotlight inspection of the area but did not see a crocodile.

"But rangers identified a crocodile in the area last Thursday (1 July) basking on the embankment.

"Because of its behaviour and the location within the urban mapped area, this animal was targeted for removal by rangers.

"They caught the crocodile today using a floating trap.

"The crocodile will go to a farm or zoo. As public safety is paramount, crocodiles targeted for removal are not returned to the wild.

"Rangers put up recent sighting signs at the site to complement the permanent metal crocodile warning sign there.

"The Fearnley Street drain feeds directly into Trinity Inlet which has a resident population of crocodiles.

"We strongly encourage the public to report crocodile sightings to DERM on 1300 130 372."

**KRISTY SEXTON-MCGRATH
ABC News
July 2010**

Deadly Taipan Caught In City Home

A Caravonica woman says she is still shaking after her run in with a taipan, one of world's deadliest snakes.

Sales assistant Monique Harris was greeted by the 1.8m coastal taipan as she stepped out of the bathroom in her home about 3.30pm yesterday.

"I was getting out of the shower and this big bloody thing was hissing at me," she said.

"Then I just jumped onto the bed and waited for it to move from the doorway.

"It eventually went into another room and I raced to my neighbour's to call for help. It was very scary."



Snake catcher David Walton with the 1.8m taipan he caught at Caravonica

The venom from the killer snake attacks the central nervous system, with bite victims facing death within minutes if a pressure bandage is not applied to the bite straight away.

Even if a pressure bandage is applied, victims need to have antivenom within an hour of being bitten to survive.

It's believed no one bitten by a coastal taipan has survived without receiving antivenom.

Cairns Snake Removals owner David Walton, who was called to retrieve the reptile, said it was the second coastal taipan he's removed in eight years.

"If it bites me, I'm in a wheelchair for a very long time," he said.

"To be quite honest, if I had to shift a taipan every day, I would retire.

"They're extremely aggressive and extremely accurate."

In 2007, Tom Parkin – a then wildlife handler at Hartley's Creek Crocodile Farm – lapsed into a coma after being bitten by a 2m taipan on an expedition in remote Cape York.

BEN BLOMFIELD
The Cairns Post
August 2010

Monster Croc Stalks Settlement

This monster 6.5m croc had to be killed by locals in a remote Northern Territory community because it was killing their cattle.

Jeida Francis, 23, said it was caught in Manangoora, an

Northern Territory News reports.



The 6.5m saltwater crocodile caught near Borroloola

The animal, pictured, was caught in the mid 1990s, and another like it has also since been killed. However, locals believe there is at least one more still on the loose.

"It was massive. There were three huge ones out there. One of them is still out there at the moment," Mr Francis said.

"It is pretty well fed," he said of the dead saltie. "It took two LandCruisers to pull it out. They have one croc that is still out there. He should be getting to this size by now."

Mr Francis said he spent his childhood growing up with the predators.

"We used to get dugong bones to feed them, to keep them from feeding on our goats ... this one was getting too nasty and too close. It was attacking our cattle."

STAFF WRITERS
Northern Territory News
August 2010

Blue-tongue Lizards Banished From Backyard To City Outskirts

Blue-tongue lizards were once the lords of Sydney's backyards, but high-density development is banishing them to the city's fringe.

Wildlife groups are reporting that blue-tongues and other natives, such as the tawny frogmouth, are being pushed to the edge of the city by more intense development and higher human population density.

"Even 10 years ago so many backyards had a blue-tongue but nowadays, due to snail baits and dogs and cats, you hardly see them any more - it's a highlight if you do see one," the general manager of the Australian Reptile Park, Mary Rayner, said.

"Some day people are just going to turn around and realise they haven't seen one for five years and they will wonder where they've gone."

The reptile park, in Gosford, is running an "endangered species month", with daily exhibitions featuring native animals that are under threat.

Blue-tongues are not yet classified as endangered but observers agree populations are thinning out.



An increasingly rare sight in suburbia ... a blue-tongue lizard at the Australian Reptile Park near Gosford. Photo: Nick Moir

The WIRES native animal rescue service said its reports in the past two decades showed that native animals had been attacked by cats 34,363 times and by dogs 16,885 times since 1991 in NSW.

The NSW Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water said healthy blue-tongue populations survived in pockets of bushland.

"[Yet] urbanisation, loss of backyard habitat and predation from family pets continue to have an impact on blue-tongue lizards and other animals across the greater metropolitan area," James Dawson, of the department's biodiversity conservation section, said.

"While there is increasing pressure on these animals and numbers are difficult to ascertain, there are things people can do to encourage wildlife in their backyards."

The department recommends leaving at least part of a garden in a relatively natural state, with logs and rocks resting on the ground and bushy shrubs to provide cover for small animals.

Instead of snail baits, which are toxic to many other animals too, people can use slug traps or physical barriers made up of sawdust, grit or eggshells.

BEN CUBBY
Sydney Morning Herald
July 2010

Python Found In Sri Lankan House With 32 Eggs

Much to the horror of the residents of a house in Sri Lanka's south western Galle city, an over 11 feet long python was found camping in their garden along with 32 ready-to-hatch eggs. The 11.5 feet long creature was caught by Galle's wildlife conservation society, following an alarm raised by the people. The wildlife officials also discovered 32 eggs the mother python was protecting.

While the python was taken away to a safe location subsequently, its eggs were successfully hatched at a biodiversity centre.

Officials working at the centre said as many as 19 hatchlings were born and the wildlife officials released them at a safe location.

Television clips released by the private 'Newsfirst' Channel showed the hatchlings being let off in the forests. According to the president of the Wildlife Society, Madura De Silva, the python is a harmless snake and the largest snake living in Sri Lanka.

The shrub jungles of the south are teeming with pythons, he said, adding many of them could also be found in the Galle area.

In a similar incident earlier, a 14-feet-long python that crept into a goat pen at Panadura, about 22 kms from Colombo was captured.

The python had killed a goat and was caught by the residents of the area.

The owner of the goat pen said he informed the Dehiwala Zoo about the catch and asked them to take the reptile away.

Sri Lanka boasts of one of the highest species densities of snakes in the world.

Over 90 species from nine families are represented within the diverse habitats found within the borders of Sri Lanka. Many of these species are found nowhere else in the world.

STAFF WRITERS
Press Trust of India
July 2010

Stress Hormones Help Lizards Escape From Fire Ants

Much New research shows that when some fence lizards are attacked by fire ants they "stress out"-- a response that actually helps the species to survive by heightening the animal's awareness of imminent danger. Tracy Langkilde, assistant professor of biology at Penn State Univer-

sity, found that lizards living in areas of the southeastern United States, where large numbers of fire ants also live, have elevated levels of stress hormones, called glucocorticoids.

The stress-hormone study comes on the heels of Langkilde's earlier studies of lizard behavior. In 2009, she showed that native fence lizards responded to their scary new invaders -- fire ants -- in one of two ways. Some lizards relied on camouflage and stayed perfectly still -- the traditional response of their ancestors to threats by other animals. Other lizards, however, took a novel approach when faced with fire ants. They twitched and ran away. While the traditional, "stay still" response worked in the past, and continues to work for lizards threatened by other sorts of predators, it does not work for lizards facing an onslaught of vicious fire ants. "Non-responsive lizards get stung more and are less likely to survive to reach reproductive age, when they would be capable of passing their non-reacting genes on to offspring," Langkilde said. On the other hand, those lizards who have the "twitch and flee" response get stung less because they manage to flick the insects away. Such lizards also tend to stay alive long enough to reproduce and to pass on their "twitch and flee" genes.



New research shows that when some fence lizards are attacked by fire ants they "stress out" with elevated levels of stress hormones -- a response that helps the species to flee quickly and survive. In contrast, the response to danger of fence-lizard populations that never have been attacked by fire ants is to freeze in place. The stress-hormone research, which is helping scientists to understand the impact of invasive species on native populations, was announced at the 2010 annual meeting of the Ecological Society of America by Tracy Langkilde, assistant professor of biology at Penn State University. This photo shows Dr. Langkilde holding a female fence lizard.

Now, Langkilde's more recent study -- measuring stress-hormone levels in lizards -- adds an important piece of information to adaptive-behavior research. In "twitch and flee" lizards, stress hormones appear to mobilize the animal's energy, fueling its response and encouraging appropriate escape behavior. "The negative impacts of stress on health have received much research attention," Langkilde said. "However, stress may play a vital role in facilitating adaptive responses to threatening situations." Langkilde's research provides clues to the survival benefits of stress

and suggests that the absence of an appropriate stress response may reduce an animal's ability to survive invasion. "Rather than just being a cause for concern," Langkilde said, "elevated levels of physiological stress within invaded lizard populations may be playing an important role in driving adaptations to novel threats."



In the United States, eastern fence lizards have a huge geographical range from New York and Pennsylvania to Florida and westward to Texas, but the range of fire ants currently is limited to states with warmer climates. One of the many modern-day challenges confronting scientists is to understand the impact of invasive species on natural habitats and native populations. In the southern United States, for example, non-native imported fire ants spread rapidly, destroy crops, and sting humans and animals alike. "The interaction between invasive fire ants and native lizards provides an excellent opportunity to understand the role stress plays in facilitating adaptive behavioral responses to new threats," Langkilde said.

Langkilde will present this research in a session titled "Stress and Invasion: factors influencing the escape behavior of native fence lizards in response to introduced fire ants" on August 2, 2010, at the Ecological Society of America's (ESA) 95th Annual Meeting in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

This research was supported by the U. S. National Science Foundation and the Penn State Social Science Research Institute.

Science Daily
August 2010

Reptiles Were The First Vertebrates To Venture Inland

Fossilized footprints over 300 million years old prove reptiles were the earliest vertebrates -- animals with backbones -- to move up from coastlines and into the interior of a continent, according to a new study.

Mike Benton, a researcher at the University of Bristol, and colleagues stumbled upon ancient slabs of bedrock covered in nearly 8 inch-long reptilian prints at the sea cliffs on the Bay of Fundy, located in New Brunswick, Canada.

The findings, published in the journal *Palaeogeography, Palaeoclimatology, Palaeoecology*, confirm long-held suspicions that reptiles blazed the first trails away from the coast.

"The footprints date from the Carboniferous Period when a single supercontinent (Pangea) dominated the world. At first life was restricted to coastal swamps where lush rain-forest existed, full of giant ferns and dragonflies. However, when reptiles came on the scene they pushed back the frontiers, conquering the dry continental interiors," Benton said.



Around 400 million years ago, amphibians -- animals that have gills and lungs -- were the first vertebrates to leave the sea and explore land.

But they needed to return to the water for breeding, preventing them from roaming far beyond the shore.

Unlike their amphibian ancestors, reptiles could live completely on land. This allowed them to exploit previously unknown environments, such as an ancient dry riverbed 300 miles from the nearest coast where scientists discovered the tracks.

Benton thinks the footprints most likely belong to a gecko-like creature called *Hylonomus*. Fossils of this reptile were previously discovered in the neighboring region of Nova Scotia.

ZAHRA HIRJI
Discovery News
August 2010

Crocodile Crazy: The Man Who Enjoys Giving His Dangerous 'Companion' Kisses And Cuddles

Rather than trying to tame wild stallions, fearless Costa Rican fisherman, Chito, prefers a playful wrestle in the water with his best pal Pocho - a deadly 17ft crocodile. The 52-year-old daredevil draws gasps of amazement from onlookers by wading chest-deep into the water, then whistling for his 980lb buddy - and giving him an affectionate hug.



Chito made friends with the croc after finding him with a gunshot wound on the banks of the Central American state's Parismina River 20 years ago. He had been shot in the left eye by a cattle farmer and was close to death. But Chito enlisted the help of several pals to load the massive reptile into his boat.



He says: "When I found Pocho in the river he was dying, so I brought him into my house. "He was very skinny, weighing only around 150 lb I gave him chicken and fish

and medicine for six months to help him recover. I stayed by Pocho's side while he was ill, sleeping next to him at night. I just wanted him to feel that somebody loved him, that not all humans are bad. It meant a lot of sacrifice. I had to be there every day. I love all animals - especially ones that have suffered.



It took years before Chito felt that Pocho had bonded with him enough to get closer to the animal. He says: "After a decade I started to work with him. At first it was slow, slow. I played with him a bit, slowly doing more. Then I found out that when I called his name he would come over to me.

This odd couple have now become a major tourist attraction, with several tour operators, including Crocodile Adventures, taking visitors on touring cruises to see the pair. On the Crocodile Adventures website it describes the spectacle as: "One of the most amazing things that no cruise ship passenger will want to miss, the adventure show between the man and the crocodile.



At one point during his recovery, Chito left the croc in a lake near his house. But as he turned to walk away, to his amazement Pocho got out of the water and began to follow him home. Chito recalls: "That convinced me the crocodile could be tamed." When he first fearlessly waded into the water with the giant reptile his family was so horrified they couldn't bear to watch. So instead, he took to splashing around with Pocho when they were asleep. Four years ago Chito showed some of his tricks to friends, including getting the animal to close his eyes on command, and they convinced him to go public with a show. Now he swims and plays with Pocho as well as feeding him at the lake near his home in the lowland tropical town of Sarapiquí.

STAFF REPORTER
UK Daily Mail
August 2009

Expo Shows Illegal Pet Trade Rampant In Indonesia

The most threatened tortoise in the world is being sold openly at a plant and animal exposition in the heart of Indonesia's capital, highlighting concerns about the rampant - and growing - illegal pet trade.

The country has become a major trading hub for endangered tortoises and freshwater turtles, including species from Africa, South America and Asia, said Chris Shepherd of TRAFFIC, a British-based international wildlife monitoring network



Critically endangered tortoise are being sold openly at a plant and animal exposition in the heart of Indonesia's capital, highlighting concerns about the rampant - and growing - illegal pet trade

Those found Friday at Jakarta's annual flora and fauna expo - held from July 2 until Aug. 2 - included the world's most threatened ploughshare tortoise and the critically endangered radiated tortoises, both from Madagascar. They were priced up to \$1,700.

Cages also were filled with rare Indian star tortoises, which are protected under the Convention on International Trade on Endangered Species, known as CITES, and the endangered pig-nose tortoise, from Indonesia's easternmost province of Papua, both selling for up to \$500.

Vendors told The Associated Press other threatened tortoises and turtles not found on display could easily be obtained for a price.

"Recent surveys, and this expo, have shown that the trade continues and, in fact, now involves more illegally imported species than ever," said Shepherd. "Dealers know full well that it is illegal and are taking advantage of the enforcement agencies' lack of action."

Indonesia, one of the most biologically diverse nations in the world, has for years sold everything from eagles and leopard cats to gibbons as pets in the capital. Shady transactions continue to take place at the popular Pramuka and Jati Negara markets.

NINIEK KARMINI
Scranton Times Tribune
August 2010