



# Fingers proves to be one cool customer

By Daniel Bishton

A spectrum stretching from concern to delight played across the young faces. Small arms either recoiled or embraced as Fingers, a 10-year-old carpet python, coiled and manoeuvred among his new playmates.

The children were at the opening of *Snakes Alive!*, an annual reptile exhibition at the Australian National Botanic Gardens.

The event gives the public a chance to meet 100 species of reptiles and amphibians, including the endangered Corroboree frog.

ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment Dr Maxine Cooper opened the event by professing her love of reptiles – singling out an Earless Dragon.

“They actually keep down our insects, and they keep away vermin,” she said.

“Just because they don’t have big brown eyes or aren’t furry doesn’t mean we don’t love them – we should love them.”

Her words were music to the ears of ACT Herpetological Association veteran Ric Longmore, who founded the event in 1987 to raise the profile of often-maligned reptiles. “Most people hate snakes, like spiders,” he said.

“We’re trying to swing that across, and we’re doing it with education.”

But the event is not just about cuddling up to cold-blooded creatures.

The ACT population of the northern Corroboree frog has been almost eradicated by the introduced

chytrid fungus and drought, and 1000 young northern frogs and tadpoles were wiped out in an accident at the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve breeding facility last month. *Snakes Alive!* is the ACTHA’s main revenue raiser, helping to fund research and contributing to the Corroboree Frog Conservation Trust Fund, a national body coordinating the frog’s breeding program.

Mr Longmore knows that many people won’t be as enamoured with his exhibition’s charges as himself, but wants the public to remain aware of their role in the ecosystem.

“We don’t expect everybody in the world to love reptiles – but we want them to respect them.”

*Snakes Alive!* is open until January 24 at the Australian National Botanic Gardens.



**WINNING FRIENDS:** Fingers, the carpet python, stretches out with Oliver Powrie, 5, Tristan Moore, 4, Mikaleigh Moore, 6, and Noah McAuliffe, 7