



In cold blood: nature red in fang and claw

By MICHAEL INMAN

A CASUAL mid-week stroll through the Australian National Botanic Gardens resulted in Iain Cole witnessing a life and death struggle of the animal kingdom.

Mr Cole was leaving the gardens on Wednesday when he heard a splash in the water, a common occurrence when startled water dragons head for safety.

But the splash was followed by a thrashing and Mr Cole decided to investigate.

He discovered a large brown snake gripping a desperately fighting water dragon by the throat.

Fortunately, the avid amateur photographer had his camera at the ready and documented the conflict that ended with the water dragon as the snake's lunch.

"I'm semi-retired, so I like going up to the gardens to photograph whatever takes my fancy," Mr Cole said.

"I very rarely see snakes, but there's lots and lots of water dragons. But this one was obviously out hunting.

"They rolled around in the water for maybe about five minutes at the most, the dragon put up a good fight."

ACT Herpetological Association president and avid botanic gardens user Joe McAuliffe said Mr Cole witnessed a rare event.

"The more time you spend in the snakes' habitat, especially in a place like the gardens, where you've got a large supply of top-quality tucker, your chances will increase dramatically," Mr McAuliffe said. "But for most people, the chances of seeing something like that are very remote, a one-in-a-



The brown snake with the water dragon pinned against the drain.

million type thing." He said the encounter displayed the quality of the gardens ecosystem.

"The fact that we've got a series of major predators, that includes the brown snake, is an indication of the quality of habitat, so we're pleased to have them in the gardens and try to manage all animals collectively.

While Mr McAuliffe admitted Australia's fear of snakes was well founded, he said education was the best way to avoid casualties.

The association will partner with the gardens to

present the *Snakes Alive!* show at the Crosbie Morrison Building from tomorrow to January 24. The shows – featuring Australian snakes, lizards, frogs and turtles – run from 10am until 4pm weekdays and 10am to 4pm on weekends.

People taking part can hold the animals in a safe environment. The cost is \$5 for adults, \$4 concession and \$2 for children.

"All money raised from *Snakes Alive!* goes back into herpetological research and gardens," Mr McAuliffe said.





A large brown snake tries to drown the water dragon at the Australian National Botanical Gardens. Photos: IAIN COLE