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**ACTHA Inc. News**

**Aug - Sept '20**

*Newsletter of the  
ACT Herpetological  
Association Inc.*

**Diary date - Tuesday, 18 August '20  
ACTHA Zoom meeting**

Due to the current Covid19 physical distancing rules we shall bring you this month's Guest Speaker presentation via Zoom on-line technology, in the comfort of your own home!

The presentation will start at **7.30pm SHARP.**

Geoff Robertson is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom mtg  
Join Zoom Meeting, please insert the https below in your browser:

[https://us02web.zoom.us/j/3970005179?  
pwd=SjMwLzVLbWtKdmpxMUJlS0VSMFhUQT09](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/3970005179?pwd=SjMwLzVLbWtKdmpxMUJlS0VSMFhUQT09)

Meeting ID: 397 000 5179

Passcode: 5YrGWC

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**Herpetofauna Management and Snake Education in the Bush Capital: a Canberra Snake Rescue Perspective**  
**Luke Dunn and Emma Carlson**, 'Canberra Snake Rescue and Relocation' are our Guest Speakers for ACTHA's Tuesday, 18 August 2020 Meeting.

"Luke is a snake catcher and educator, qualified Zookeeper, and Outreach Officer with the Woodlands and Wetlands Trust. Emma is an ecologist with the ACT Government working on local threatened species, and snake catcher and educator. As co-owners/operators of Canberra Snake Rescue and Relocation, Emma and Luke have run Canberra's first private reptile catching business since obtaining their licence in 2015. Their business has organically evolved, moving into education services such as public displays, school incursions and birthday parties, educating through fun and interactive factual presentations. Whilst their main game is still removing snakes from potentially harmful situations, educating the public - particularly the next generation - to appreciate, if not love snakes and other reptiles, is their passion in life! They will be giving their talk on their reptile passion and strive for education in the ACT, highlighting some of the hard work and fun stuff that they are privileged enough to do in their work."

**Annual General Meeting**

Notice is hereby given of the 2020 AGM of the **ACT Herpetological Association Inc.** in previous years held at the Belconnen Soccer Club, Cnr Belconnen Way & Springvale Dr, Hawker, on **Tuesday 20 October '20**

**NB:** due to Covid19, advice as to where/how the AGM is to be held will follow by direct email contact to membership before the Meeting date.

[further information page 10.]

**ACTHA 2020 - 2021 Membership Renewal  
Now Over Due**

**\$20** family/individual    **\$10** students (incl uni.)

Membership year runs from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021.

Payment can be made by a direct debit to:

ACTHA BSB 112-908, A/c 486 822 880

**OR** by cheque to ACTHA, **PO BOX 440**, Jamison Centre, ACT 2614.

*Most importantly, please don't forget to note your name so we can identify you on the bank statement.*

# ACTHA Reptile Keepers Club - 21 July 2020 ZOOM meeting -

## Another night with Gerry Marantelli, ARC

Once again we had the privilege of listening to Gerry talk about his favourite subject, frogs. Specifically, '**Chytrid: the global pandemic: Q&A with Gerry Marantelli**'.

'A virtual fireside chat and Q&A (the fireside will be virtual, not me!). I was there when we discovered chytrid and during much of the early work that allowed us to understand how it worked and how we might combat it. Since then I've spent 25 years working on methods to save frogs in a chytrid world (the new normal). I'll try to share a bit of history, some interesting stories and I hope lots of information that will help you better understand how this pandemic worked and now works (not the same), and what impact it had and now continues to have on frogs (again not the same). Gerry kept the session informal to let ACTHA member questions drive the discussion.'



The **Amphibian Research Centre** was established in August 1994 as a centre dedicated to research and conservation of Australia's unique frogs. The ARC is self funding and provides for its valuable work through sales of amphibian supplies and sponsorships.

### Education

'With the move to the vastly bigger and better Amphibian Research Centre in Werribee, a "school visit" can now mean a visit by your school to the ARC rather than the other way around. Have a look at the educational tours section for full details.'

'Our tadpole kits allow you to turn your classroom into your very own amphibian research centre. These kits are available on their own or as an extension of some of the educational tours operated by the ARC.'

### Frog food

'The ARC operates an online and mail-order insect service to allow trouble free access to essential frog food. No need to drive miles to a pet store or spend hours chasing bugs in the garden. A range of different insects, supplements and advice are also available to ensure your frog receives the most appropriate diet.'

Head to <https://frogs.org.au/index.html> to read all about the ARC's history, current activities and projects as well as supplies for home froggies!



Shown on the following few pages are just some of the slides Gerry showed his ACTHA audience.



**Reintroduced  
Adults**



**Decline - all chytrid sites**



**Decline – only where other frogs present**

## **Who meets who?**

**Behavioral change – where other frogs present**



**No known decline**



**Systems to hurdle threats**

(Another night with Gerry Marantelli, cont'd...)

	<p><b>Chytrid wild:</b> 1-2 years <b>Old wild:</b> 3-5 years <b>Captivity:</b> 15+years</p>	
	<p><b>Chytrid wild:</b> 2-3 years <b>Old wild:</b> ? years <b>Captivity:</b> 25+years</p>	
	<p><b>Chytrid wild:</b> 4-5 years <b>Old wild:</b> 5-10 years <b>Captivity:</b> 25+years</p>	<p><b>Chytrid wild:</b> 1-2 years <b>Old wild:</b> 5-9 years <b>Captivity:</b> 24+years</p> 



## Working with and for snakes in the bush capital: some reflections from the field

This summary by Gavin Smith

The presenters and hosts of the 23 June '20 ACTHA Zoom meeting were **Gavin Smith** from ACT Snake Removals, and **Alex Borg** of Canberra Snake Catcher.

*During the warmer months, Gavin is a licensed snake catcher in the ACT and in NSW. Gavin got into snake catching mainly due to his love of 'wild' creatures, but also to complement his work as a volunteer for ACT Wildlife. He very quickly fell in love with the *Pseudonaja textilis* species, much to the displeasure of his family...In his other life, he is an Associate Professor in Sociology at the ANU where, among things, he studies socio-ecological and multi-species relations, and has a specific interest in researching human-snake encounters. In this way, he has recently brought two of his passions together: justice and reptiles.*

*Alex is a Forensic Scientist and Vice President of the Australian Federal Police Association (AFPA). He is the owner-operator of Canberra Snake Catcher and was heavily involved in the development of the ACT legislation which paved the way for professional snake catching services in the bush capital. He has been a licensed breeder and keeper since the 1990s working with both fish and reptiles for more than 25 years. Alex is currently the President of the Canberra & District Aquarium Society (CDAS).*

Between them, they have been engaged in snake catching activities in the capital - and surrounding NSW region - for approximately 7 years. Gavin and Alex shared with the group a number of personal observations and experiences derived from their snake work. They also acknowledged that many of the images appearing in the presentation were reproduced with the kind permission of Gerard Jenkins from Canberra Birds and Wildlife.

Gavin and Alex began by outlining some biographical details in terms of how and why they got into working with - and advocating for - herpetofauna, before discussing a pilot snake telemetry/tracking research program they are currently developing with ANU and other colleagues for better understanding the impacts and implications of translocation on the *pseudonaja textilis* species. This small scale study, it is envisaged, will be implemented in



the upcoming spring/summer period, with the two speakers indicating that they would be happy to give another talk to ACTHA members once they have had an opportunity to test the technology and, hopefully, collect and analyse some preliminary movement data.

Gavin then talked about his sociological background/expertise and how he was using this to conduct research on public understandings of snakes, with a special focus on why snake encounters (both unmediated and virtual) generate excessive levels of fear and disgust in many people. He located much of this sentiment in cultural and stereotypical representations of snakes, proprietary processes of domestication, as well as in the general biomechanics, physiology and physical traits of serpents. Gavin and Alex then proceeded to assert how, for a range of reasons, a colonial mentality - that incorporates various religious, imperial and anthropocentric convictions and an intolerance for certain forms of wildlife - has historically constructed snakes as problem creatures to be violently eliminated from the landscape. This mentality, which endures in the present day to a degree, helps explain the way in which snakes are routinely and purposefully injured or killed when they appear on/in properties. The two presenters showed and discussed various examples of snakes that had been rendered killable by this disposition.

Gavin and Alex then detailed some of the weird and mundane places where snakes have appeared (including, most notably, in a

*(Working with and for snakes in the bush capital: some reflections from the field, cont'd...)*

woman's work boot that had been left outside a house she was visiting!), as well as discussing the challenging, stimulating - and increasingly hyper-visible - work of snake rescuing. The duo then briefly talked about climate change and habitat loss/adaptation as key factors influencing the prevalence (or otherwise) of elapid snakes in areas of human habitation, before touching on the ideal of peaceful co-existence with snakes as the model they strive for in the education work they do. They concluded by highlighting the weird, intense and wonderful experiences this vocation can facilitate, and the need for the ACT Government to amend catch and release licensing restrictions so that venomous snakes can, in the future, be adequately and rightfully cared for by those suitably qualified.

### Why we do it?

- Snakes don't have an easy social life and they can't communicate verbally or politically for themselves
  - To give them a voice and to protect their rights to exist
  - Educate and lobby for respectful co-existence
- Primarily education and advocacy: for the love of the creatures
- But also to safely remove snake from situations where they are posing a potential hazard e.g. public spaces like university campuses, playgrounds and schools, private property and premises, or where they may come to harm
  - Share our homes and natural resources with snakes
  - Habitat loss
  - Habitat affordances
  - The politics of translocation...




### Working with and for snakes




### 'Australian Water Dragons' by Lisa Mitchell

- book launched 13 September 2019 at ANBG

ACTHA member Rosemary Blemings recently came across this little gem of a book, and has taken delivery of a number of them for distribution around the ACT.

The book provides a readable overview of the scientific background, history, identification, communication, lifecycle, predators and conservation of these reptiles. Well illustrated with colour photographs, it is aimed at 9+ years, but suitable for young and older readers alike.

The A5 book can be purchased for \$10 from Margaret at any ACTHA meeting, or \$12.50 if postage required.

Please contact Margaret Ning at [margaretning1@gmail.com](mailto:margaretning1@gmail.com) to secure your copy.



### ACTHA Committee for 2019 - 2020

President	Jason Spurr
Vice President	<b>Ric Longmore*</b>
Secretary	Dennis Dyer
Treasurer	Margaret Ning
Newsletter Editor	Mandy Conway
Webmaster	Angus Kennedy
Public Officer	<b>John Wombey*</b>
Excursion Officer	
Conservation Officer	Joe McAuliffe
Committee Members	Scott Keogh
	Iris Carter
	Greg Flowers
	Roy Chamberlain
	Peter Child
Youth Representatives	Liam Thornton
	Jake McAuliffe
	* Denotes Life Members

## The Australian & International Scene

### Australian lizards destined for Chinese black market found in rice cookers

By Holly Richardson, ABC News, 24 July 2020

Australian lizards destined for the international black market have been found by Australia Post workers, packed in rice cookers bound for China.

X-rays on the new cookers revealed unexplainable shadows, with postal workers quickly alerting authorities.

Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) officers arrived to dismantle the cookers.

They found live lizards, including an albino blue tongue, bearded dragons and shingleback lizards.

The animals were found bound, inside socks or cloth packaging and without access to food or water, which QPWS's wildlife southern operations coordinator Warren Christensen described as "extremely cruel".



Above: The lizards were bound, without food or water.

Image: Department of Environment and Science.

He said the lizards were highly sought after around the world due to their beauty and unique traits, fetching thousands of dollars on the black market.

"Thankfully these animals did not make it onto the black market, but they cannot be released into the wild because we don't know where they were captured or if they were exposed to disease," he said.



Above: Some of the reptiles seized from rice cookers in Australia.

Image: QLD Parks and Wildlife Service.

"They will spend the rest of their days in captivity, taking part in breeding programs and educating the public about the illegal trade of wildlife."

A 28-year-old Taiwanese man was arrested in Victoria and charged with 67 offences including aggravated cruelty to an animal and was sentenced to six-months in prison.

He has since been deported.

Wildlife trafficking is a major indictable offence and carries significant penalties, including up to 10 years imprisonment and a \$210,000 fine.

### Dogs more vulnerable to snake bite than cats, owing to fast-clotting blood, research finds

By Kemii Maguire, ABC News, 1 June 2020

New research by the University of Queensland has found snake venom is twice as likely to be fatal to dogs than to other household pets.

Through evolution, dogs' blood clots faster than many other animals, including cats, as they sustain more injuries and must recover quicker in the wild.

The UQ research that dogs' ability to clot blood faster made them more vulnerable to venom.

"A dog would reach that level of lethal pathophysiological state much sooner than say cats, so there's a huge difference in how quickly they go down," Associate Professor Bryan Fry from the university's Venom Evolution Lab said.

Dr Fry led the research with PhD student Christina Zdenek, using remaining canine and feline blood from routine vet surgeries.

They discovered that while 31 per cent of dogs survived a snakebite, 66 per cent of cats were able to survive.

"Dogs made the perfect storm for snake venom, with fast blood-clotting and snouts usually lower towards the ground," Dr Fry said.



*Above: While 31 per cent of dogs survived a snakebite, 66 percent of cats were able to survive. Image: Tasmanian Animal Hospital.*

"Compared to cats, which clot blood a lot slower and are likely to get bitten on their legs, they have a much better outcome."

The research was aimed at making pet owners aware of responsible ownership when it came to Australian snakes.

### **Snake catching 'not really exciting'**

Highly venomous snakes are so common in Mount Isa that catching them has become a mundane task for Rick Leeman.

"It's not really exciting, [though] sometimes it is for the people that call me," Mr Leeman said.

The outback snake-catcher moves one of Australia's most toxic snakes, the Eastern Brown, at least twice a week in the summer.

Over his career, he has seen snakes get the better of household pets — particularly, canines.

"I had a call from Cloncurry last week, where a dog had been killed by a snake, taken to the vets, but unfortunately a bit late," he said.

"We had a little Shitzu-Maltese cross that exhibited signs of a snake bite and went blind immediately."

He put the dogs' downfall to their behaviour, as dogs often wandered into the tall grass.

"I think dogs sniff a lot more to identify what they're dealing with, where cats are pretty wary and what I'd call street-smart," he said.

Mr Leeman urged people to keep an eye on the location of the snake when calling a catcher.

"They're natural, this is their environment, and if you do see one, don't touch it," he said.

### **Three billion animals killed or displaced in summer bushfires - study**

*By Michael Slezak, The NewDaily, 28 July 2020*

Almost 3 billion koalas, kangaroos and other animals are estimated to have been killed or displaced in Australia's 'Black Summer' bushfires, according to an updated study trebling the previous estimate of 1 billion.

It is the worst single event for wildlife in Australia, among the worst in the world and is likely to push some species into extinction, according to the study, funded by WWF Australia.

"It's almost inconceivable that so many animals would be lost and displaced," said University of Sydney professor Chris Dickman, who coordinated the study.

Professor Dickman's estimate of 1 billion animals lost or displaced made headlines around the world in January.

At the time, Professor Dickman said that figure – which included only animals lost in the NSW fires and was limited to certain species – was a conservative estimate.

The team has updated its earlier results to include fires outside NSW – including in East Gippsland, north-east Victoria and Kangaroo Island – and extended the analysis to a greater number of species, including bats and frogs.

Professor Dickman said the revised figure was still a conservative one, with animals including turtles and fish not included in the estimate, due to a lack of baseline data on their densities.

In addition, whenever there was a choice to make in the study, the scientists say they used conservative estimates of the animals included in the study.

"These are the lower bound estimates," Professor Dickman said. "We'll never know exactly what the number might have been."

### **Reptiles the worst hit**

The team of 10 scientists from several universities around the country examined the impact of the fires on mammals, reptiles, birds and frogs.

In each group, millions of animals were killed or displaced:

143 million mammals

2.46 billion reptiles

180 million birds

51 million frogs

To calculate the figures, the researchers estimated the density of animals in each place the fire went through, and multiplied that by the area burned.

The study didn't distinguish deaths from displacement, since estimating how many animals escaped was too difficult. But Professor Dickman said more than 90 per cent of the animals impacted could have died.

Professor Dickman said there weren't many studies that looked at the numbers of animals before and after a fire to determine how many died.

"It is difficult to get a real handle on it because you're looking at potentially longer-term effects," he said.

"It may well be perhaps weeks or even months before populations of particular species disappear because they've been found by predators such as feral cats or foxes, or their food resources dwindle."

And the fire can cause populations outside the actual burnt area to die too, something not considered in the study, said Lily van Eeden, lead author on the study from the University of Sydney.

"Even outside of the impact area, the burn may have caused mortality to animals that we'll never know the full magnitude of what that number is," Dr van Eeden said.

Professor Dickman said he had "no doubt" some species would have been pushed to extinction.

### **'A window into the future'**

"I don't know of any greater impact to wildlife in Australia," Dr van Eeden said.

Globally, she said she couldn't think of a worse fire for wildlife: "If we think about known mass mortalities of animals, I'm not aware of anything that compares."

Looking more broadly at other types of wildlife catastrophes, Professor Dickman said oil spills like the Exxon Valdez in 1989 or BP's Deepwater Horizon spill in 2010 might compare.

"We don't have a good handle on that at all. They would have been very big catastrophes, perhaps similar in magnitude in terms of numbers," he said.

Both scientists said that to properly understand the impact of events like these on the environment, better baseline surveys needed to be funded.

Professor Dickman said those surveys had been "systematically downgraded and defunded over the last 20 years to the point where we really don't have any decent long-term monitoring projects underway".

Dermot O'Gorman, CEO of WWF Australia, said with climate change making extreme fires more common, the findings would "give other countries a window into the future of mega fires and their devastating impact on wildlife".

Professor Dickman said it was, "quite likely that we're going to get more and more big fires of the kind that we saw over the last fire season".

"I think we've unleashed the demon in climate change," he said. "It's very hard to see how we're going to [be able] to scale things back."

The results were released as an interim report prior to peer review, partly to get input from other experts in the field.

"Are there tweaks in the methods that we could make to improve the estimates? Depending on what comes in [there] may well be some changes," Professor Dickman said.

"But overall, I think the major numbers, the really big numbers, are not likely to change very much."

## Struggling skink results highlight importance of the 'Swamped by Threats' project

Local Land Services, Central Tablelands, NSW Government news bulletin.

The endangered Blue Mountains Water Skink (*Eulamprus leuraensis*) is in serious trouble, according to the latest report by the 'Swamped by Threats' project.

The swamp-dependent skink is found only in the Blue Mountains region, and recorded numbers at a key habitat site have dropped to zero in the latest monitoring survey conducted between February and March this year.

"We have been monitoring swamps on the Newnes Plateau since 2012, and this is the first year where we have come back with a zero count at any of the sites," said Central Tablelands Local Land Services officer, Huw Evans.

Fortunately, the skinks at three of the six key monitoring sites are faring better, with numbers remaining relatively stable.

Fire, drought, and damage to groundwater aquifers, are listed as key threats to the swamp ecosystems that are the focus of the 'Swamped by Threats' project.

All of the six monitoring sites were impacted by fire and drought over the 2019-20 summer.

"However at the Carne West swamp, where we couldn't find a single skink in our survey traps this year, hydrological surveys have demonstrated a dramatic drop in groundwater levels," explained Huw.

Data shows cumulative rainfall was relatively consistent across all six monitoring sites, but the swamps with the lowest skink numbers have suffered significant groundwater depletion.



"The key issue has been the loss of water exacerbated by recent fires," said Huw.

While the recent findings of zero skinks at the Carne West site are concerning, the 'Swamped by Threats' team are doing their best to protect habitat where possible.

"We are working with Forestry Corporation to divert access tracks away from the most fragile habitat areas and we have removed invasive weeds that smother native species."

"We are also working on remediation of structures such as culverts and roadworks to reduce damaging sediment flows into the swamps."

Central Tablelands Local Lands Services is the lead agency in the 'Swamped by Threats' project working with stakeholders, community groups, and project partners including the Biodiversity and Conservation Division of the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment.

The 'Swamped by Threats' project has been funded by the New South Wales Government's Environmental Trust Saving Our Species Partnership Grants Program.

### Annual General Meeting

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### Agenda

Minutes of the AGM held October 2019,  
President's Report, Treasurer's Report.

Nominations are called for President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, Newsletter Editor, Webmaster, Public Officer, Excursion Officer, Conservation Officer and supporting Committee members. Nominations may be sent to ACTHA by email to [info@actha.org.au](mailto:info@actha.org.au) or post to: **PO Box 440 Jamison ACT 2614.**

Nominations will be accepted at the meeting.

## FrogWatch News - Winter 2020

From Anke Maria Hoefler

FrogWatch Coordinator (ACT & Region)

### FrogWatch ACT and Region has received funding for 2020-2021

Much appreciated core funding was provided by the ACT Government to keep FrogWatch ticking over!! Great news and the program is set to do what it does best: showcase its great community reach, successful involvement in citizen science activities and its effective communication of natural resource management issues to schools and the general public.

### Tadpole Kit for schools Program

This program is kindly funded by Icon Water and offers free Tadpole Kits to 120 school classes in Term 4 each year. The online booking system has just been opened and 90% of the kits are already claimed by happy teachers. Just in case you know interested teachers, or would like to give your children/grandchildren/nieces/nephews the opportunity to observe the wonderful transformation from tadpole into frog in their classroom check out the booking process here

This year is the last year this program receives funding so keep your fingers crossed.

### Have you been out and about after dark lately??

Now is a good time to get your ears tuned into frogs and to start building up your own frog call library. With only two frog species calling during the ACT winter, this is an easy task, which you can slowly extend as we are moving out of winter and into spring. Great preparation for this year's FrogCensus in October.

And as an extra bonus, you can now submit short audio recordings (of frogs, birds etc) from anywhere in the Capital region to the Canberra Nature Map. It is super easy with the NatureMapr app, which you can download to your phone for free through your app store (Please note: this app does not work for Frogwatch surveys yet, but is a great tool for incidental frog call observations).

The frogs you can hear in winter in our region

1. The tiny Common Eastern Froglets or *Crinia signifera* and
2. The whistling tree frog or *Litoria verreauxii*

### 2019 FrogCensus Report has just been published!

[https://ginninderralandcare.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Frogwatch-2019-report\\_final.pdf](https://ginninderralandcare.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Frogwatch-2019-report_final.pdf)

### Does the October FrogCensus seem too far away? How about doing Platypus surveys in the meantime?

August means Platypus Month because late winter is the ideal time for spotting platypus as they spend more time feeding and preparing for the breeding season. The Upper Murrumbidgee Waterwatch will be running surveys (for the 7<sup>th</sup> year in a row) throughout Platypus month to help learn more about these wonderful creatures.

**Franklin Grasslands Group**- this new group has formed a few months ago and meets regularly to maintain and improve the remaining patches of natural temperate grassland at the North Mitchell Grasslands site. The group is focusing on weeding in a high conservation value area to remove seed from weeds and remove larger herbaceous weeds. This is the perfect opportunity to upskill your weed plant identification skills and the knowledge to distinguishing them from native plants. Future working bees are planned for Thursdays (1.15-3.15pm) 3 & 17 Sept, and 1 & 15 Oct.

Please contact Margaret Ning ([margaret.ning@fog.org.au](mailto:margaret.ning@fog.org.au)/0427 788 304) if you would like to join the group.