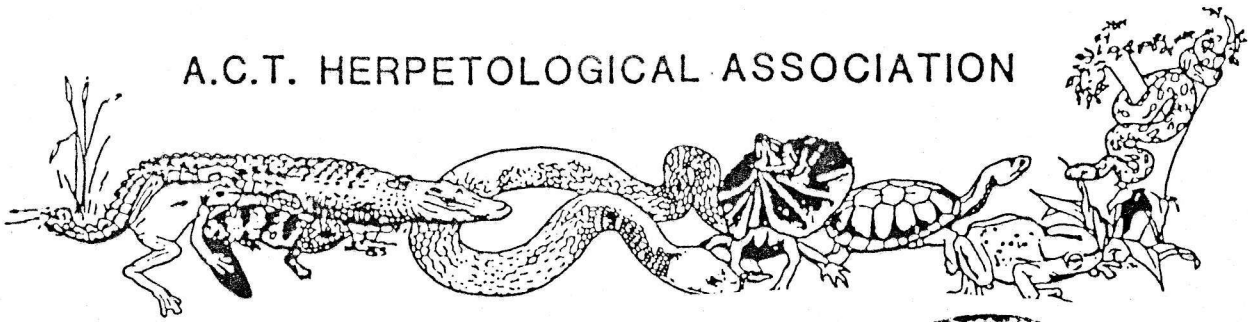


A.C.T. HERPETOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION



NEWSLETTER NO. 7 AUGUST 1988



Morelia spilota
Coen, Qld

Last meeting

At the last meeting Ross Bennett gave us a most interesting talk on colour variation in reptiles. Ross has poked into nooks, crannies and crevices from the Warby Ranges in Victoria to the sultry vine-thickets of the Cairns region in order to satisfy one of his passions - the search for the elusive colour prototype of Morelia, the Carpet Python come Diamond Python come? (Morelia spilota spilota and M. spilota variegata).

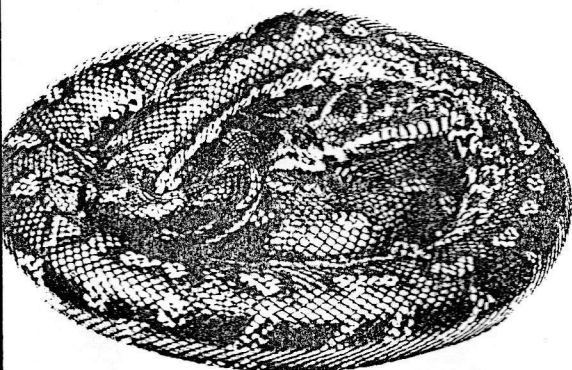
After many confusing, but colourful, slides of these superb reptiles we were left the feeling that there is no limit to the pattern and colour these snakes can assume. Fortunately they are not like chameleons, which would add insult to injury.

Following the pythons we were treated to some of the variation present in the elapids - black tiger snakes, brown tiger snakes orange tiger snakes, some banded others not. Then a few different coloured death adders (so much for camping in red sandy areas and hoping to avoid these 'wait and grab' predators).

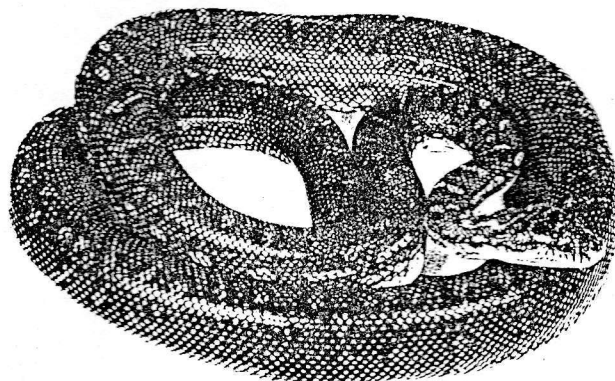
With some relief on my behalf Ross finally moved onto ground that I was more familiar with: colour pattern variation in Blotched Bluetongue lizards. Now I maintain of course that there are two species or races of Blotched Bluetongues (nigrolutea and gippslandii). But this was not to be as Ross took a deliberate pleasure in dispelling any myths about a simple explanation for colour variation in this species.

Many thanks Ross for one of the more colourful and confusing talks that we have^{had} of late.

W.O.



Morelia spilota
Bellingier River,
NSW



Morelia spilota
Outimbah, NSW

MEETING TIMES AND DATES

At the last meeting it was generally agreed that the current Thursday night meeting time slot is not suitable because a number of people cannot make it to the meeting on this night.

After a vote of the members present at the meeting we decided to change the meeting night to the first Monday of the month. Unfortunately this night conflicts with a Zoology class held in the tea room where we meet. So we need to think again. Some of us feel that the venue should be changed to the CCAE where a meeting room is available. Anyway we will keep you informed.

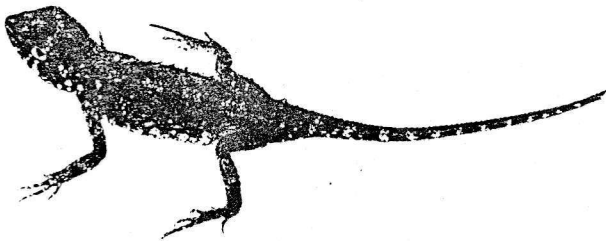
NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be on a Friday night. This is to enable a guest speaker from Bathurst to address the group.

Friday 2nd September at 7.30 (talk starting at 8pm) at Department of Zoology in the tea room:

Gavin Waters "Reptiles of the Bathurst region"

This should be an interesting talk as Gavin has had first hand experience with some animals such as Tympanocryptis (earless dragons), Delma plebiea and lots of other exciting herps from the Bathurst area



-Law without teeth can't keep the alligators out-

By KAREN HARBUTT

BIRDS are stuffed into lengths of piping. Wriggling reptiles are bundled into knotted socks.

Yes, when Australian Customs and quarantine officers come into contact with wildlife, it is often an awkward encounter.

For the birds that could soon change, since the Federal Government looks set to relax its import ban.

Quarantine officers say two stations are being built to cater for the Avian Import Project which they have been working on for the past eight years in an attempt to combat increasing numbers of birds being smuggled both into the country and out.

While the Federal Government will only say it is looking at lifting the ban, the two stations — one in Adelaide to handle fertile eggs and the other in Melbourne for live birds — are expected to be ready for operations by the end of the year.

The move may put a sizeable dent in the blackmarket bird trade, but officers say they will still have problems combating a less lucrative, but similarly consistent business in reptiles.

Sydney's Taronga Park Zoo is holding two exotic reptiles in quarantine, several months after Customs officials began examining the possibility that they were smuggled in.

The American alligators, which are on the endangered species list, were found in Sydney's western suburbs, one in a shed, another in a cage in a park.

The alligators have been lucky; they are still alive. Eleven birds being smuggled into the country and 38

being smuggled out last month were all destroyed by quarantine veterinarians.

A Canadian convicted over that racket will be sentenced in Sydney's Central Local Court later this month.

The maximum penalty for each offence is five years jail or a \$100,000 fine.

Only 22 people have been brought before the courts since the Wildlife Protection Act was proclaimed in 1984. Combined, they were responsible for the illegal passage of 89 birds and 279 reptiles.

According to Customs and Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service (ANPWS) employees, light sentences have done little to discourage smuggling.

A list of court appearances provided by the ANPWS shows the biggest jail term has been just six months (for exportation of 135 reptiles).

Most sentences have been suspended, and there have been good behaviour bonds. The maximum fine to date was \$5000.

The United States is the most common destination of smuggled Australian wildlife.

An Australian Major Mitchell cockatoo had a price tag of \$US8,500 (\$10,550) in March; Woma snakes could fetch \$5000 each; frill neck lizards were worth up to \$1000 each last year.

One frustrated officer remarked: "It's very serious; it's virtually theft of our own heritage, yet you can get someone who can walk into your house and steal your stereo and get a heavier penalty than if they knocked off native birds".



Taronga Park Zoo reptile keeper, Mr Tim Hawkes, with a smuggled American alligator — Picture: COLIN MURTY