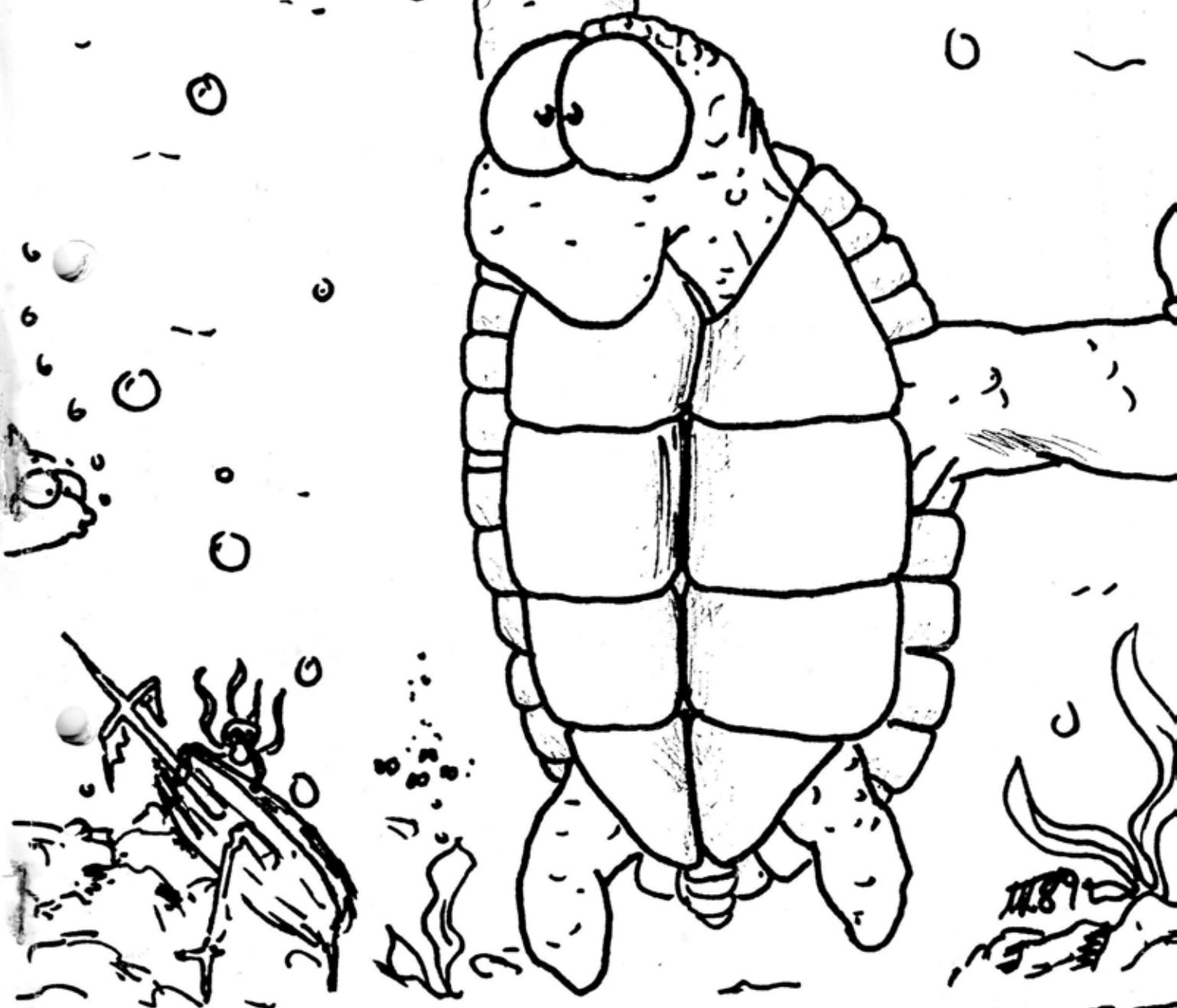


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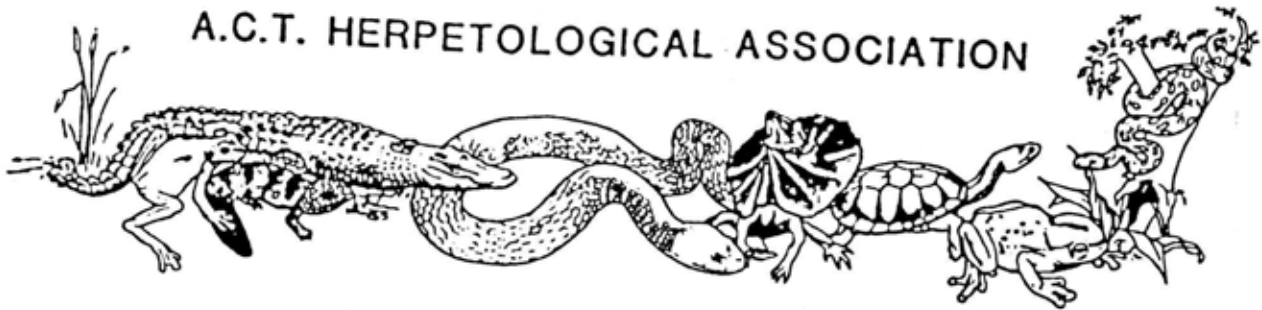


NEWSLETTER
A.C.T. HERPETOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION



COVER DESIGN &
ILLUSTRATIONS THIS MONTH BY
MICHAEL THOMPSON.

A.C.T. HERPETOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION



APRIL MEETING: " TURTLES & TORTOISES -
 Telling the Difference."

A WORKSHOP at the C.C.A.E. with DR ARTHUR GEORGES.
MONDAY APRIL 17

This will be our second workshop, following on from the very successful 'Getting to know your ACT Herpetofauna' conducted in December by Richard Longmore and John Wombey. It promises to be very exciting. It will take the form of :

7.30 - 8.30 pm : Illustrated Lecture
8.30 - 10 pm : Hands-on Workshop

There will be several species of live turtles and tortoises as well as preserved specimens, a collection of skulls and shells, relevant articles and equipment, some of which will be demonstrated and its use in research explained.

STARTING TIME :

PLEASE NOTE THAT THE SPEAKER WILL BEGIN AT 7:30 PM
We shall not have the usual half hour of informal members news so it is very important to arrive on time.

VENUE :

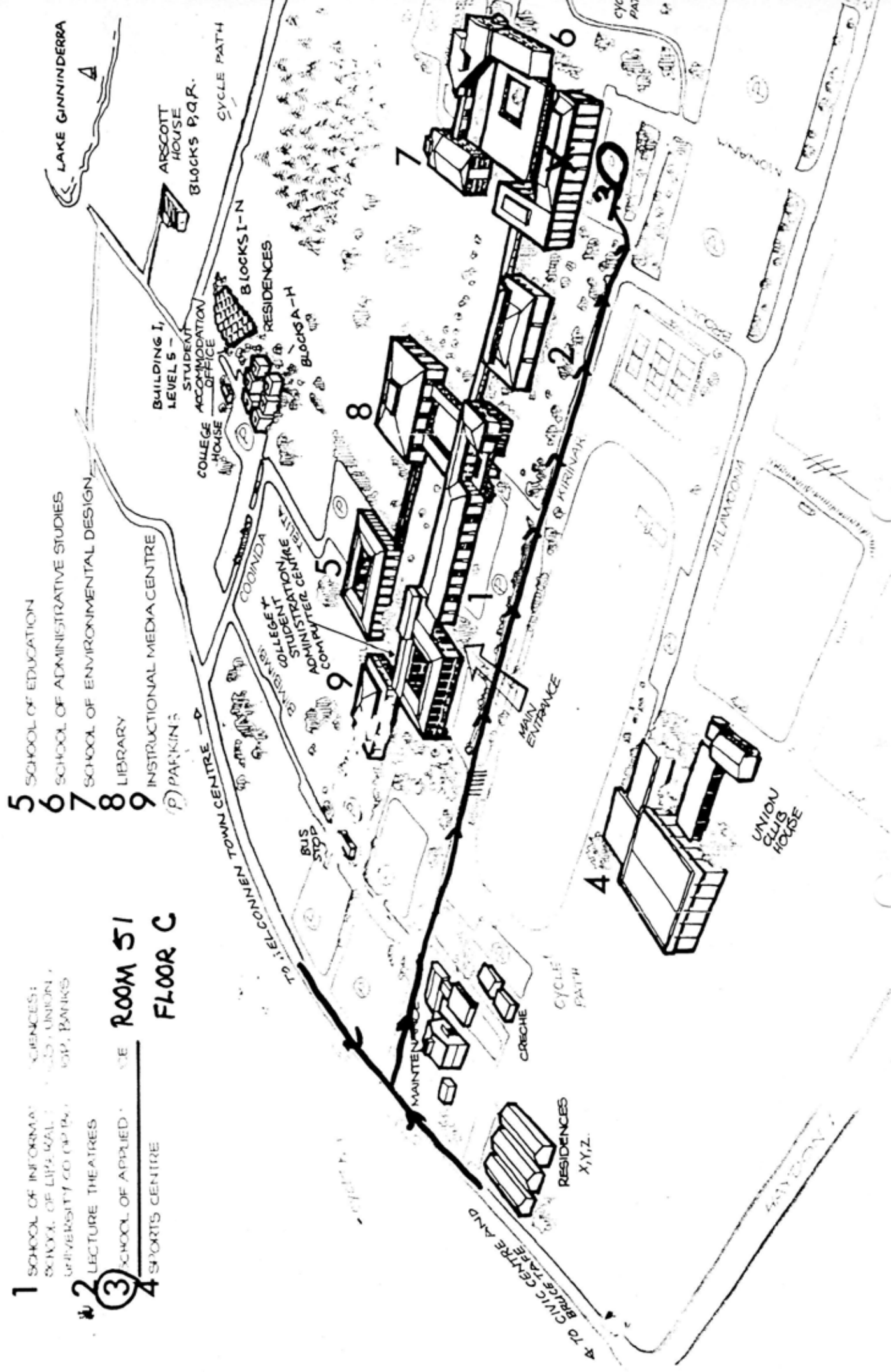
CCAEE NOT ANU! BUILDING 3. FLOOR C. ROOM 51
The May meeting will return to ANU Zoology

(map over page)

DR ARTHUR GEORGES, a member of the Applied Ecology Research Group at the Canberra College of Advanced Education, is a graduate of the University of Queensland. His interest in turtles and tortoises is long standing. After an Honours Year studying Blue Tongued Lizards he gained his PhD with a study of Freshwater Tortoises on Fraser Island. Subsequent to his graduation, Arthur was unemployed for a full 10 days before taking up a position with the CCAEE to undertake an ecological study of the Long-Necked Turtles of the ACT and Jervis Bay. From 1986-88, he was commissioned by the CCNT and the ANPWS to study the extraordinary Pig Nosed Turtle and is currently engaged in research into the biochemical systematics of Freshwater Turtles.



- 1 SCHOOL OF INFORMATION SCIENCES
 - 2 SCHOOL OF LIFESCIENCES
 - 3 UNIVERSITY CO-OP
 - 4 LECTURE THEATRES
 - 5 SCHOOL OF APPLIED SCIENCES
 - 6 SPORTS CENTRE
- ROOM 51
FLOOR C



LAKE GINNINDERRA

ARCOTT HOUSE
BLOCKS P, Q, R.

BUILDING I,
LEVEL 5 -
STUDENT
ACCOMMODATION
OFFICE

COLLEGE HOUSE

BLOCKS I-N
RESIDENCES

BLOCKS A-H

CYCLE PATH

5 SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

6 SCHOOL OF ADMINISTRATIVE STUDIES

7 SCHOOL OF ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN

8 LIBRARY

9 INSTRUCTIONAL MEDIA CENTRE

(P) PARKING

TO TELCONNIEN TOWN CENTRE

COIN-OP

COLLEGE Y

COLLEGE STUDENT CENTRE

ADMINISTRATIVE CENTRE

COMPUTER CENTRE

BUS STOP

MAIN ENTRANCE

MAINTENANCE

TO CIVIC CENTRE AND
TO BRIDGE TAFE

RESIDENCES
X, Y, Z.

4

UNION CLUB HOUSE

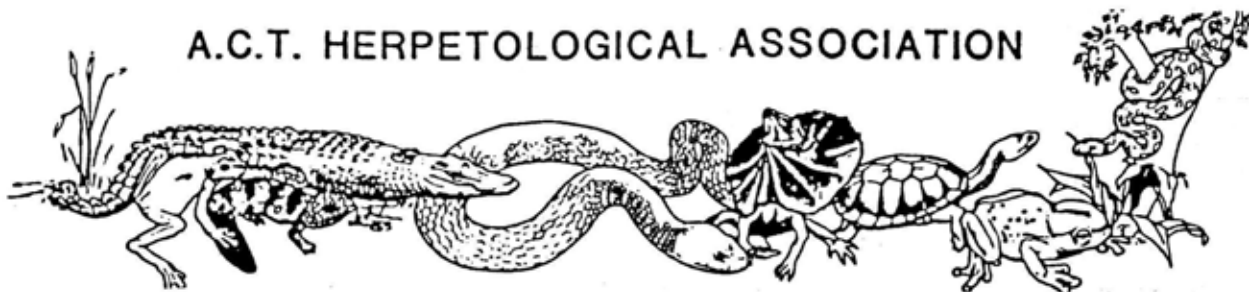
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CYCLE PATH

CYCLE PATH

CRISCHE

A.C.T. HERPETOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION



BACKGROUND NOTES

It appears from flipping back through the files, that the ACT Herpetological Association began in 1985 as the ACT Herpetofauna Working Group. Initiated by Will Osborne and Klaus Henle, the inaugural meeting was held on the 13th of June and was attended by fourteen people. Unfortunately the current attendance book did not come into use until April 1987 and the names of the fourteen foundation members do not appear to be recorded.

Rather appropriately for this newsletter, the very first speaker was none other than ARTHUR GEORGES who gave a talk on the tortoises of Fraser Island!

The first project of the group was an ambitious herpetofauna survey of Jervis Bay. The specific objectives of the group at this stage were listed as:

- 1 Establish a pro-forma for collecting observations of reptiles and amphibians in the field.
- 2 Surveying the distribution, abundance, habitat preferences etc of the uncommon and rare species occurring in the ACT.
- 3 Carrying out herpetofaunal surveys of the Jervis Bay - Beecroft Peninsular region and the Mulligan's Flat area near Hall.
- 4 Compiling historical and recent historical records of the ACT herpetofauna.

Other speakers in the inaugural year were ROB (HANK) JENKINS on MOVEMENT AND DISPERSAL OF CROCODILES IN KAKADU NT - THE PROCESS OF RECOVERY; KLAUS HENLE on the HERPETOFAUNA OF YUGOSLAVIA; and RIC LONGMORE speaking about THE BLACK TIGER SNAKE OF THE FRANKLIN ISLANDS.

KLAUS, who is now working overseas, was presented with the first and to date the only life membership of the ACT Herpetological Association for his contribution. ROB JENKINS is working with the CCNT and is based in Darwin but still a member. Fortunately RICK LONGMORE is still an active member of the group and a valuable resource person for the committee.

WILL OSBORNE, whose enthusiasm and hard work have contributed so much to the continued functioning of the group, despite fluctuations in membership and support, is still an active participant despite the increasing demands of fatherhood and finishing his PhD thesis on the corroboree frog.

Three members of the group, RICK, HANK and JOHN WOMBEY, grew up in Canberra and together were enthusiastic young herpetologists back in the days of the earless dragon. JOHN, who not only organised the December workshop with RIC, providing specimens from the Australian National Wildlife

Collection of which he is Manager, showed his excellent slides of Western Australian herpetofauna in February and typed up the March Newsletter, deserves an award for having been the most prolific speaker in the history of the herp group to date!

The Speakers and topics over the last three years have been:

1986

APRIL :	WILL OSBORNE	Microhabitat occupancy and bushfire survival strategies of reptiles in moist tall open forest in the ACT
MAY :	KEN THOMAS	Amphibians of Kakadu National Park
JULY :	MICHAEL LAU	Herpetofauna of Hong Kong
JULY :	JOHN WOMBEY	Reptiles and frogs of the Northern Territory
AUGUST:	RICKLONGMORE	A Long Awaited Tale : The Elapid Atlas of Australian Reptiles Reaches Completion
OCTOBER:	DAVID CARTER	The Sea Turtles of Bramble Cay
OCTOBER:	JUDY CAUGHLEY	Mallee Reptiles and Fire Ecology at Round Hill

1987

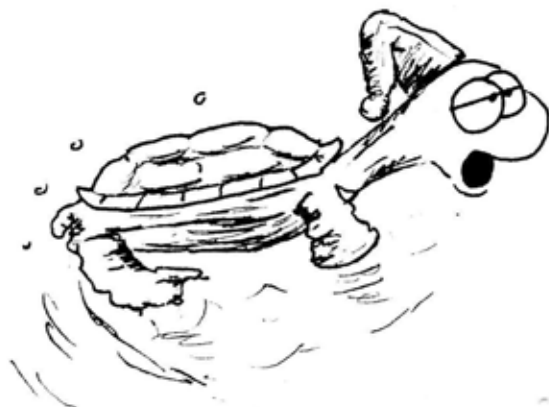
FEBRUARY:	KLAUS HENLE	A Herpetological Survey at Yathong Nature Reserve
MARCH :	ARTHUR GEORGES	The Warradjan - Australias Most Unusual Turtle
APRIL :	ROB JENKINS	Relocating Crocodiles in the Northern Territory
MAY :	JOHN WOMBEY	Reptiles of Kakadu
JUNE :	PAUL SCANLAN	Breeding Blue Tongued Lizards
JULY :	ROSS BENNETT	Chappell Island Tigers
AUGUST :	MARK SCHUSTER	Rain Forest Reptiles
SEPTEMBER :	DAVE CARTER	The Nullabor Reptiles and Other Wildlife
OCTOBER :	JOHN WOMBEY	Reptiles of Western Australia
DECEMBER:	ROSS BENNETT	Herpetofauna of Queensland

1988

JANUARY	: DEAN WARD	Herpetofauna of Thailand
FEBRUARY	: RON DENCIO	Captive Maintenance of Reptiles
APRIL	: PAUL COOPER	Desert Dwellings of Lizards of the Namid
MAY	: STEVE SARRE	Herpetofauna of South Australia
JUNE	: WILL OSBORNE	Corroboree Frogs - Their Ecology and Conservation
JULY	: ROSS BENNETT	Colour Confusion - Variations Within Some Species of Reptiles
AUGUST	: GAVIN WATERS	Reptiles of the Bathurst Region
OCTOBER	: WILL OSBORNE	Frogs of the ACT

Currently there are between fifty and sixty financial members of the ACT Herpetological Association, including thirteen student members. It is hoped that the next stage of development will be the adoption of a constitution at the AGM in June, preferably with incorporation, enabling the Association to join the ^{Australian} Affiliation of Herpetological Societies. Meanwhile, in anticipation of increased field activities, application has been made to the ACT Parks and Conservation Service for permits to cover local herpetological activities. Negotiations with the Queanbeyan TAFE college for the proffering of Harry Ehmann's Herpetological Techniques Course this Spring continue.

JO VANDERMARK



Members' News.



PAUL SCANLAN : reports a singular lack of breeding activity among his blue-tongued lizards this year, although one appears to be pregnant. However all are active and healthy.

RON DENCIO : reports that the six carpet-diamond pythons he successfully hatched are all thriving and now are over one metre long. They are still feeding, mainly baby rats up to two weeks old but they can also take a full size mouse. They will probably cease feeding soon. Ron retains four, Dave Carter and Russell Cameron being the lucky owners of the other two.

Meanwhile the female had Ron fooled for quite a while, gaining his hopeful attention for her own purposes, namely securing the largest allocation of food. It is now evident that there will be no eggs this year - just one python in excellent condition, having grown in thickness and in length!

DEAN WARD : Has a new address and telephone number

19 IPIMA STREET
BRADDON ACT 2601
phone 479306

HOLIDAYING AND HERPING : Ric Longmore and Will Osborne
(Reports expected!)

ANY REPORTS ON THE PROGRESS OF THE BABY BLUE TONGUES ADOPTED AT THE FEBRUARY MEETING?

Special thanks to **PAUL BLAIR** of 35 Calder Street Holder, who has no particular interest in herpetology but who has relieved us of the burden of hand addressing envelopes each month by putting our membership list on a computer disc which will punch out sticky labels once a month.

A spin off from this technological advance is the efficient and accessible membership information which is now stored. For this reason we are seeking your cooperation in updating records by completing the enclosed form and returning it to:

JO VANDERMARK
248 DRYANDRA STREET
O'CONNOR ACT 2601 (PRESIDENT)

or

DOMINIC POOK
54 RUSSEL STREET
HACKETT ACT 2602 (TREASURER)

or

just bring it along to the April workshop.



Bindy is a long-necked tortoise. I have had her for seven years, as I was given her in grade two. During that time, she has grown somewhat, but her size is limited by her tank. In winter, she is kept inside in an aquarium and does not hibernate. During summer, she is kept outside in a wire enclosure which is padlocked to keep cats, etc. out. She has an opportunity to climb out, but normally prefers to stay in the water.

Her shell often becomes covered in algae, which does not seem to hurt her - it may even camouflage her. When she leaves the water, she always runs towards the nearest shade or cover (tortoises can run fairly quickly.) She seems to feel threatened by birds or other predators and dislikes being suddenly picked up.

She seems to be used to at least some humans. She understands that people near her for some time mean food. When she is feeding, as we drop the meat into her tank, she continues to gaze up at us hungrily. Meanwhile the food drops to the bottom of the tank and the only way to get her to pay it any attention is to go away for a while.

GEOFFREY BRENT.



photographs by
Heidi Smith.

HELP!

REQUIRED URGENTLY

VOLUNTEERS TO LEAD FIELD TRIPS!

We have some very enthusiastic new members, but are in desperate need of experienced herpetologists who are prepared to lead excursions, local or not so local, two hours, half day, full day or overnight trips. If some of the "old herpos" could see their way clear to lead one field trip per year it would be very much appreciated



NO GO FOR GOANNAS!

But

The excursion down the Deua to see some of the goannas and termite mounds Dave spoke of and illustrated with such outounding slides last meeting has had to be postponed because the weather was so uncooperative. The trip is now planned for MAY 6-7. A new list for those interested in participating will be circulated at the April meeting.



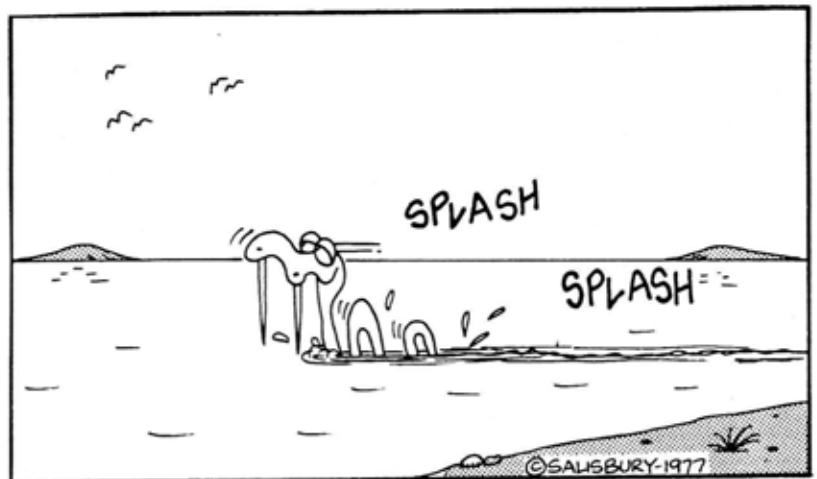
WINTER WEEKEND HERPING IN SYDNEY?

Dean Ward would like to hear from anyone who would be interested in travelling to Sydney to spend one day behind the scenes at the Australian Museum (where he used to work) and one day visiting the reptile section of Taronga Park Zoo, for an inside look at their breeding programs, captivity strategies and general operations.

At this stage it has not been decided whether travel would be by private cars, mini bus or public transport. Details will be determined by those who decide to participate in the group.

Accommodation and cost also up for discussion. Any ideas?
Contact Dean on 479306

ARE YOU SICK AND TIRED OF THIS COLD,
MISERABLE, ROTTEN, RECORD RAINY WEATHER?
THEN SPARE A THOUGHT
FOR THE REPTILES....
OR MAYBE THEY DON'T NEED SYMPATHY?



DICK BARWICK suggests that although there may be some suppression activity affecting build up of condition for hibernation, temperatures have been maintained at a reasonable level and the flush of growth with resultant booming insect population would be providing good food supplies for juveniles born in February and March.

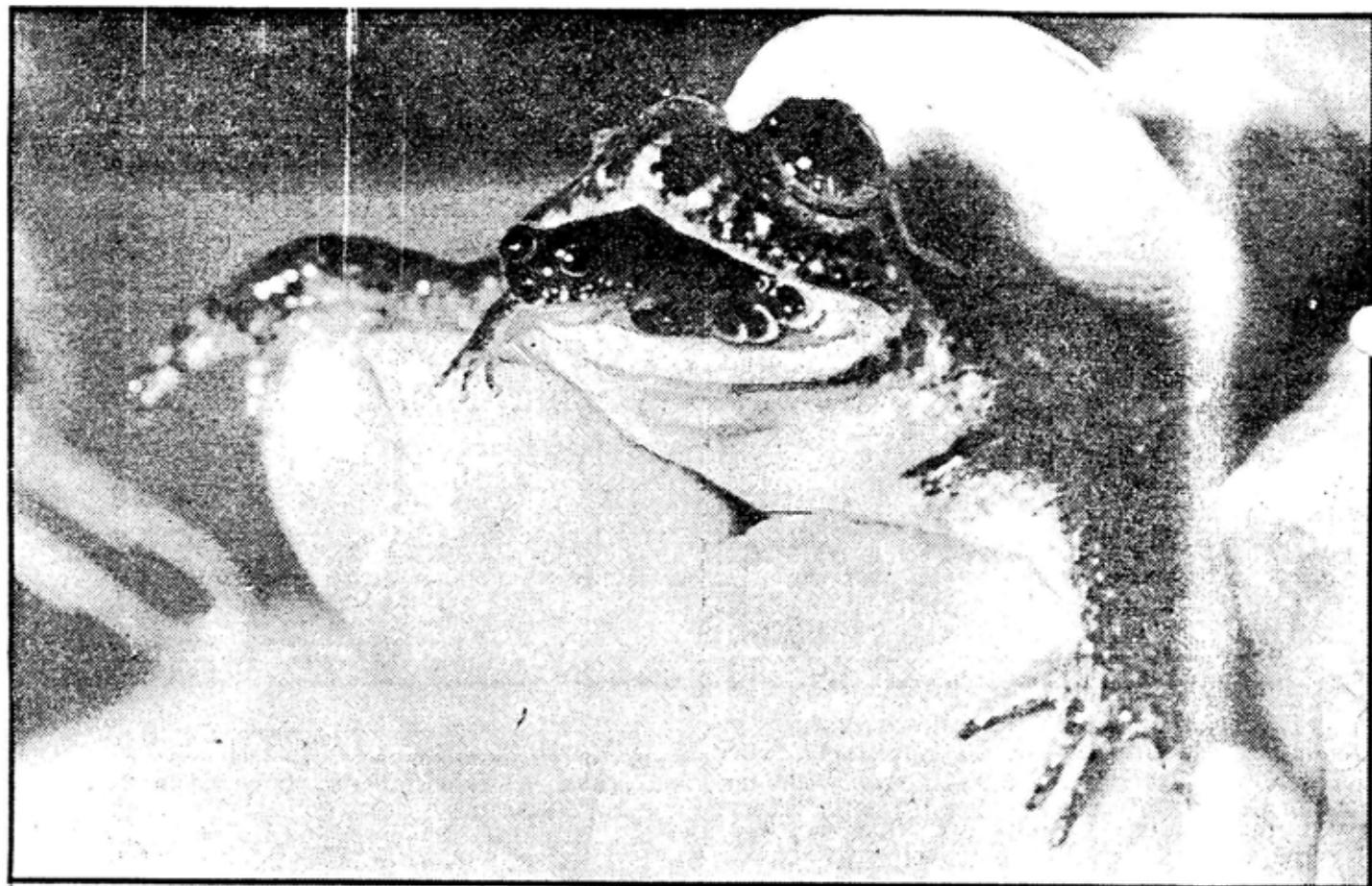
DROUGHT IS ACTUALLY MUCH HARSHER THAN WET WITH ITS ENHANCED FOOD SUPPLIES.

Do you have any observations on the effects of the extended rain periods on your local herpetofauna?



During the past decade, 10 species of frogs have disappeared from Queensland and NSW rainforests. GREG ROBERTS investigates.

Weird weather has the north's nature on the hop



The platypus frog gives birth through the mouth ... it hasn't been seen since 1979

IT'S not every day that snow falls in a subtropical rainforest, or that one of the world's most bizarre creatures disappears from the face of the earth without explanation.

These kinds of phenomena have been happening in Queensland — and to a lesser extent in NSW — coinciding with drastic changes in the regular weather pattern over much of northern and eastern Australia since the mid- to late-1970s.

Nobody knows why the weather has been so unusual. It may be nothing more than a passing phase or we may be experiencing part of a normal long-term weather cycle. Some scientists believe the El Nino current in the Pacific is responsible. On the other hand, the greenhouse effect could be wreaking havoc much earlier than we expected.

Whatever the cause, strange things are happening.

Brisbane residents have almost forgotten the rolling clouds of thunder and spectacular evening storms that were once a regular feature of warm evenings in October and November. They don't happen any more. In southern Queensland and northern NSW, the once regular spring and early summer rains have been patchy and unpredictable.

Not too long ago, travellers wouldn't dream of driving through the sparse savanna woodlands of Cape York Peninsula in December because they were sure to be entrapped by the onset of "the wet". In recent years it has been easy to do this comfortably even as late as February. The wet has arrived months late in the northern tropics and, in some years, is almost nonexistent.

Scientists regard frogs to be one of the animals most sensitive to weather changes. As many as 10 species that used to inhabit the rainforests stretching from North Queensland south to Sydney have not been seen or heard since the summers of the late-1970s. They have, quite simply, vanished.

The platypus frog is one of our strangest creatures. It is the only vertebrate in Australia that rears its young entirely in the stomach. The female apparently swallows the eggs and a special chemical suppresses the normally hostile gastric juices. After a short period of metamorphosis, the female vomits up her brood of baby frogs. Other frogs leave the land to breed in the water; the aquatic platypus frog leaves the water to breed on the land.

The platypus frog was found only in a small area of rainforest in the hinterland of the Sunshine Coast, north of Brisbane.

Dr Glen Ingram, curator of amphibians at the Queensland Museum, had to abandon a four-year research project into the frogs' life cycle when they disappeared in 1979. "I was devastated," Dr Ingram said. "I suddenly realised that such a unique animal as this could possibly be extinct, and I watched it happen." An exhaustive study since then by the Department of

Forestry has failed to turn up even a hint that the platypus frog is still around.

A year earlier, in 1978, the tiny day frog vanished. It used to be one of the most abundant animals along rainforest streams in southern Queensland. Mr Greg Czechura, a museum research officer, has documented the disappearance of several other frogs from northern, central and southern Queensland, and from north-eastern NSW.

In NSW the green-and-gold bell frog, formerly the State's most abundant amphibian, has similarly vanished. The beautiful corroboree frog, a hitherto common denizen of the high mountain peat bogs of the Snowy Mountains, has become scarce. The green-thighed rocket frog, once the most common frog at Ourimbah, north of Sydney, has not been seen since 1978.

Professor Gordon Grigg, a leading herpetologist, says: "The number of species of frog which have disappeared or declined in recent years is alarming."

Frogs are not the only animals to feel the change. The populations of several species of rainforest lizards in Queensland have dwindled dramatically.

Mr Czechura said: "You once had massive densities of some of these reptiles and today you would be lucky to see one."

Locals say the number of saltwater crocodiles breeding along northern rivers in Queensland has also dropped significantly over the past 10 years.

All the wildlife experts who spoke to the *Herald* believe weather changes are primarily responsible for the declines.

But not all the news is negative. The galah and the crested (topknot) pigeon, two traditionally inland birds, were rare in coastal eastern Australia in the early 1970s. The early explorers certainly never recorded them there. Today they are abundant along the coast from Townsville south to Sydney. The same thing has happened with several kinds of inland ducks and other waterbirds.

The black booyong tree had not seeded in the rainforests of the Dorrigo Plateau in NSW and the Border Ranges further north for many years until recently when, as Queensland botanist Mr Michael Olsen describes it, "all of a sudden there was a massive flush of seeds all over the place ... it was extraordinary".

The ancient antarctic beech tree was believed to be dying out in the tiny pockets in which it survived on the uppermost slopes of Queensland's Lamington National Park. In 1983, a freak storm ripped through the forests and, for the first time in human memory, seedlings from the trees sprouted. Dr Jiro Kikkawa, head of the University of Queensland's zoology department, says: "For years we had taught our students how these trees were the last of their kind, then overnight we found this was no longer the case."

Two years later, heavy snow fell over the lush subtropical rainforests of Green Mountains, on the NSW-Queensland border. Five centimetres of snow lay on the rainforest floor for up to three days in a spectacle never seen before.

So what, if anything, is happening?

Rainfall figures from the Bureau of Meteorology for southern and North Queensland over the past 10 years do not show much variation in mean annual rainfalls, although there are huge fluctuations from year to year. The Brisbane long-range weather forecaster, Mr Lennox Walker, says this is not surprising because of the "highly patchy and unpredictable" nature of the rain in recent years.

Mr Walker bases his predictions on how the planets line up with the sun and how this affects the amount of solar radiation reaching the earth's surface. He believes this summer will see a return to average conditions. "A lot of people who've moved up from Sydney and Melbourne to live here haven't yet experienced a normal summer but they soon will," he said.

Dr Graham Harrington, head of the CSIRO tropical research station at Atherton, in North Queensland, believes the changes could be part of a 30- to 40-year cycle. "Any animals that are around today have in the past survived enormous changes in climate during such cycles," he said. "The possible danger is a coupling of these fluctuations with man's degradation of the environment. That's something we don't know enough about yet."

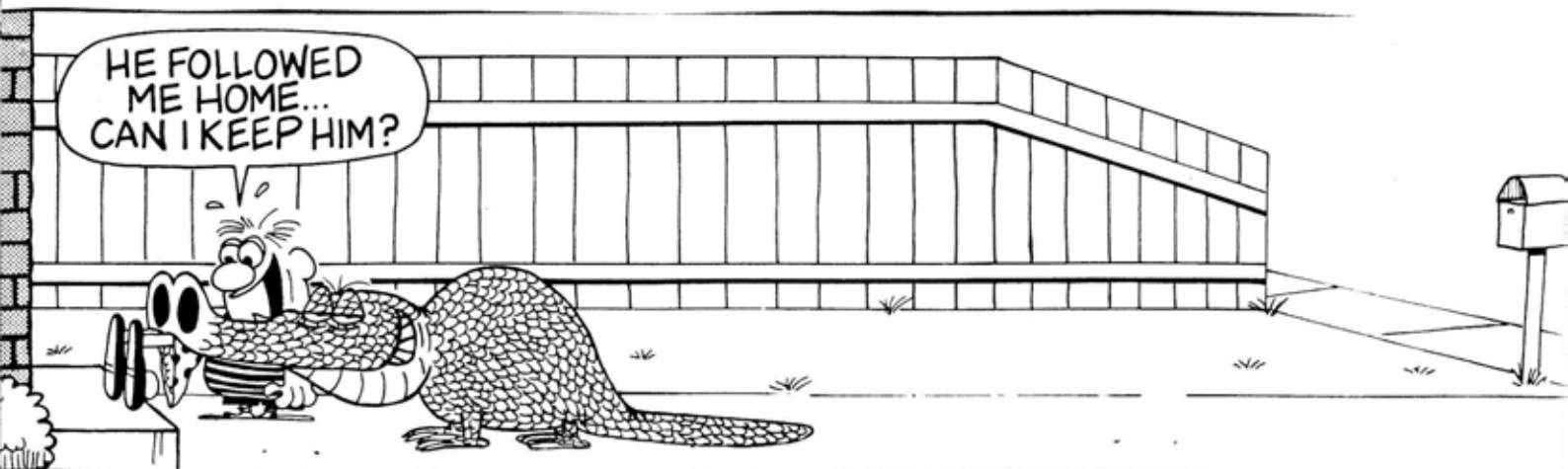
Professor Andres Aulicicans, head of the University of Queensland's applied climate research unit, says the El Nino phenomena could provide many of the answers. El Nino is a warm current in the central Pacific which, depending on its position, can cause dramatic reversals in atmospheric circulation and weather patterns. Professor Aulicicans said the current began affecting Queensland's weather in 1977, as it always had at irregular intervals. El Nino has "more or less hung around" since that year, particularly in 1982 and 1983 when much of eastern Australia suffered a severe drought. "However," he said, "we are emerging from El Nino and we can now expect normal conditions again."

Is it possible that some of the changes are related to the greenhouse effect? Scientists are warning us daily of how the earth will warm up to intolerable levels because of the ever-increasing emissions of carbon dioxide waste spewing into the atmosphere from burning fossil fuels, particularly oil and coal.

Experts agree it is too early to tell if we are experiencing the greenhouse effect to any discernible degree today. Dr Iraphne Childs, lecturer in geography at the University of Queensland, says: "We may well be feeling the effects but we can't say that changes we experience are not just part of a normal cycle. It is also impossible to say with any degree of certainty what is going to happen on a regional basis. All we do know is that it certainly will happen."

Perhaps, if the platypus frog again raises its bulbous eyes above the water in the dank rainforest pools that were its home, we can all breathe a sigh of relief for another few decades.

HE FOLLOWED
ME HOME...
CAN I KEEP HIM?



Toadbusters aim to wipe out new film stars

Bufo Marinus, on the verge of winning international film fame, has been banned by Brisbane City Council.

Better known as the Ugly Queenslander or cane toad, it is the subject of a film, *Cane Toads: An Unnatural History*, which is in line for a prestigious British short-film award.

But he'll be little more than a memory in Brisbane in five years, according to Alderman Greg Stegman, who is fed up with fishing the loathsome amphibians out of his two-hectare property's dam.

"I haven't seen a green frog in the past 18 months on my property," Mr Stegman said yesterday.

"They pollute everything, and



Cane toads that face being rubbed out in a tub.

I'm fed up. The toads are a growing problem that must be solved. Not just for Brisbane's sake but for the entire country.

"They've spread from the cane-fields in the north into NSW and

pose a threat to places such as Kakadu National Park in the Northern Territory."

With the full backing of Brisbane's Lord Mayor, Alderman Sallyanne Atkinson, Mr Stegman

has established a "toadbusters" committee to wipe out the vermin.

They have a secret weapon — based on the tub of an old washing machine. One of the committee members, Mr Rick Nattrass, who is a National Parks and Wildlife Service ranger, developed the "tub trap" which cleared his eight-hectare property of toads in five years.

"Rick simply half filled it with water and left it out overnight," Mr Stegman said. "In the morning it would be full of toads which he would remove and put to sleep."

"We're not advocating people knocking the toads' heads off or anything like that. We want this to be done humanely, by gassing or freezing them."

SYDNEY M. H. 4 March 84^{AP}

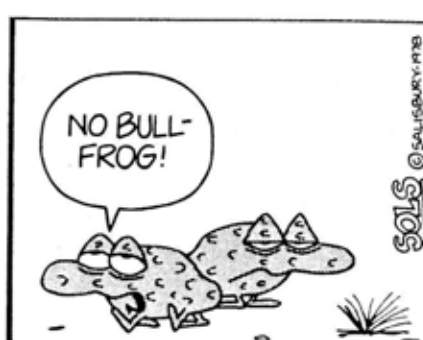
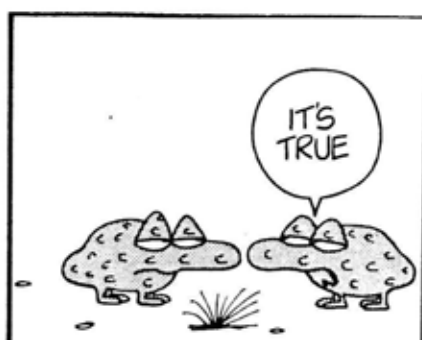
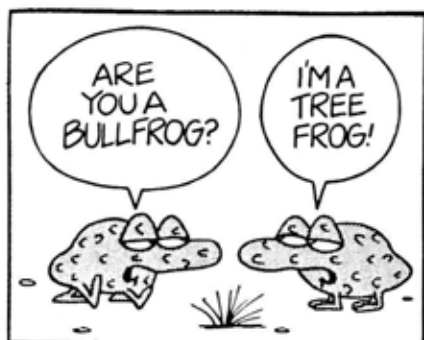
Mr Stegman chaired the committee's first meeting yesterday and now plans to launch a public-awareness campaign.

"We want to educate people about the dangers presented by cane toads, particularly to the environment," he said.

"What the cane toads would do in Kakadu would be more harmful than logging."

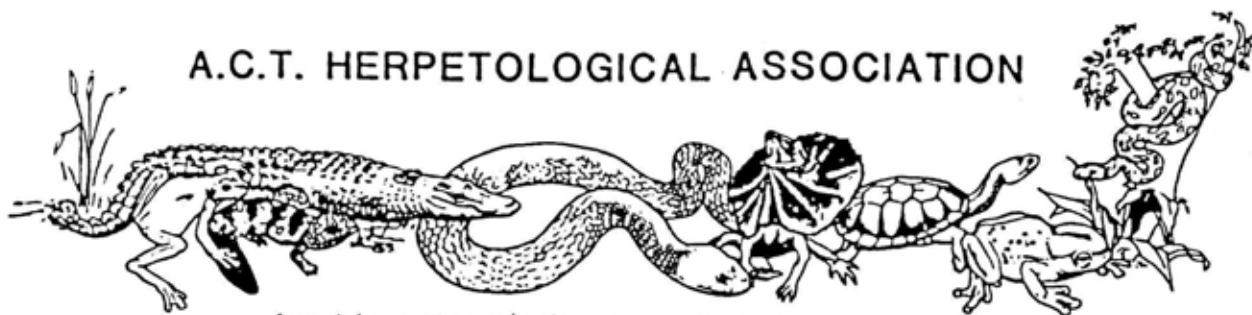
The campaign will also teach people to distinguish between frog and toad tadpoles.

"Ultimately, we hope to set up a role model so all the other local authorities afflicted with cane toads can see how to solve the problem," he said.



SOLD © SALISBURY 1983

A.C.T. HERPETOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION



MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

SURNAME:

FIRST NAME:

MS
MRS
MR
DR

ADDRESS:

TELEPHONE: HOME:

WORK:

MEMBERSHIP: ADULT

STUDENT

FAMILY

DATE OF SUBSCRIPTION:

SPECIAL INTERESTS:

CONTRIBUTION TO THE A.C.T. HERPETOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

I am able to assist in the following area/areas:-

☒ COMMITTEE

PUBLICITY/POSTERS

SPEAKER

SUPPER

FIELD TRIP LEADER

NEWSLETTER articles art-work editing collating

TYPING

ACCESS TO WORD PROCESSOR

ACCESS TO PHOTOCOPIER