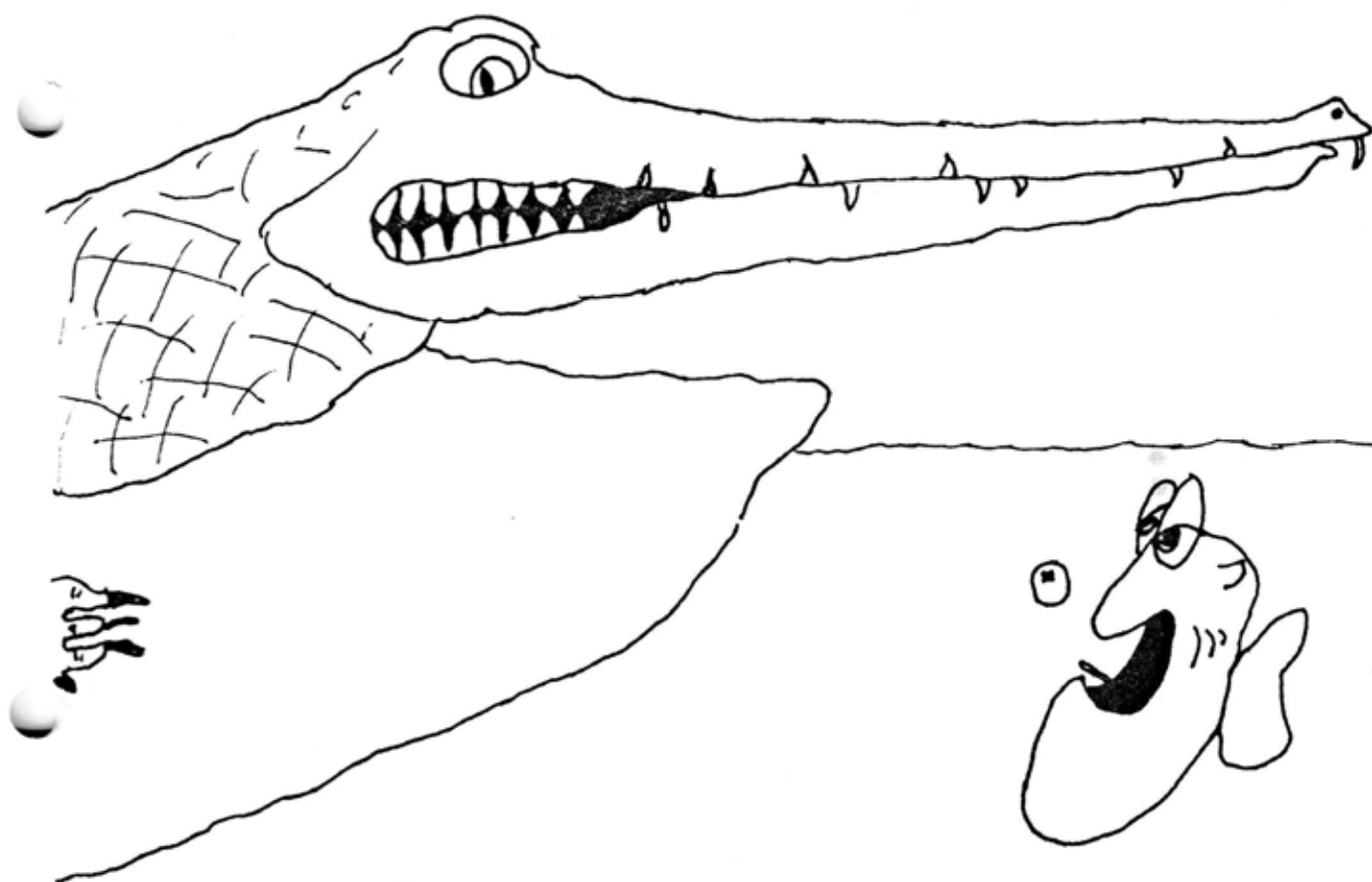


A.C.T. HERPETOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION .  
1989.



June

Newsletter

**Wanted:** Super 8 movie film cameras with intervalometer (time lapse) capability. David Carter wants to buy 2 of these cameras for his goanna research. Phone 587378h or 494268w if you have one for sale.

INCIDENTAL ILLUSTRATIONS

MIKE THOMPSON.

COVER DESIGN

MILES YEATES.

# JUNE MEETING

MONDAY JUNE 19  
7.30 PM - A.N.U. ZOOLOGY  
Downstairs meeting room.

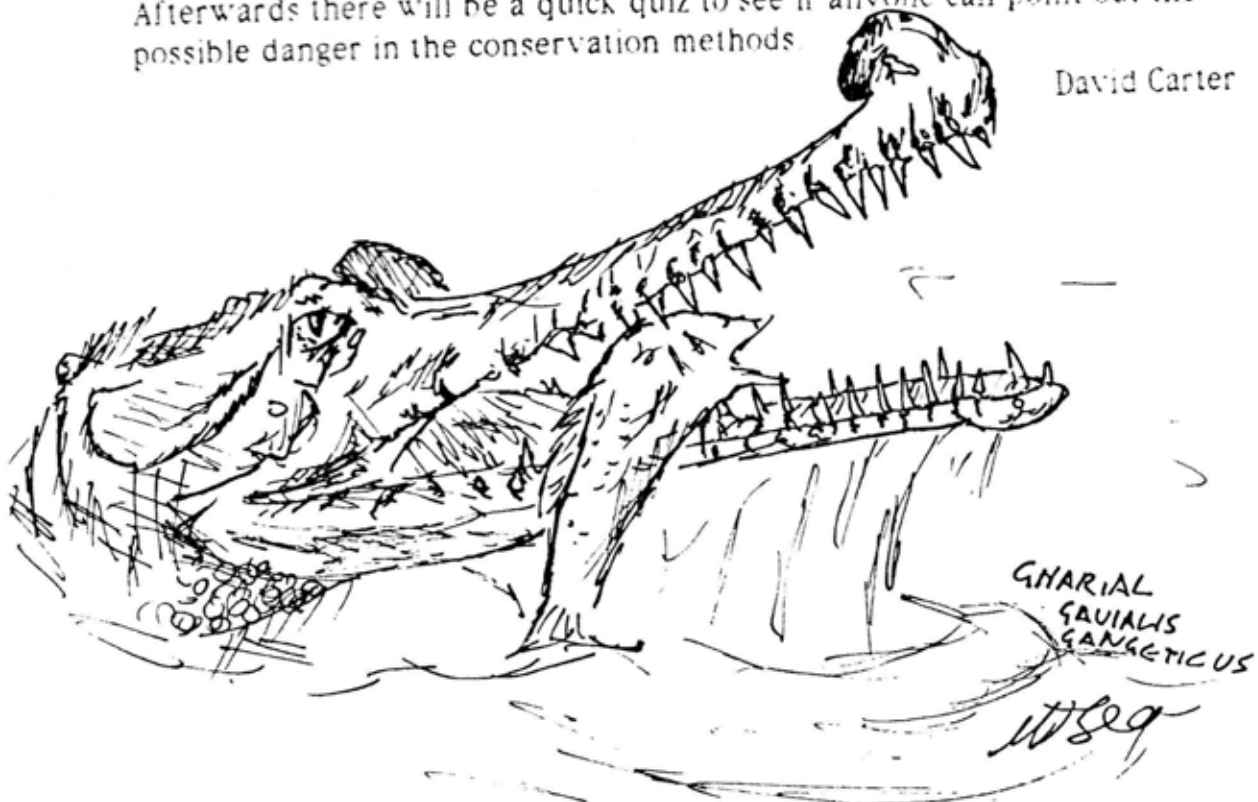
## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

PROGRAMME: 7.30 to 8.00 pm  
- Informal members exchange of news.  
8.00 pm - Presentation of Constitution  
Recommendation of Incorporation  
Election of Executive Committee 1988-89  
8.30 ish - VIDEO ON THE GHARIAL

I have videos of a number of outstanding wildlife films from Germany, some of which feature reptiles or amphibians, and I think they will be an interesting alternative from time to time at meetings where we do not have a speaker. The only drawback is that the narrative is in German. However, I had the foresight to marry a wife who speaks fluent German so, with Margrit's help, I hope to be able to give you a commentary, paraphrasing the German. Most of the films are made by Heinz Sielman who has been making wildlife films for about 50 years and, as you will see, is certainly a grandmaster of his craft.

The video (about 40 mins long) I will show at the next meeting features the Gharial *Gavialis gangeticus*, an extraordinary looking fish-eating crocodile from India. It has an extremely elongate, slender snout and many long, finely pointed teeth making it an efficient fish catcher. It was headed for extinction in the 1970s and it is still very rare but the Indian government with help from the United Nations has taken steps to conserve it and the small wild populations in the Ganges River seem to be increasing. The film includes footage of feeding and some excellent shots of reproduction and parental care. It also covers the conservation measures being undertaken. Afterwards there will be a quick quiz to see if anyone can point out the possible danger in the conservation methods.

David Carter





#### AND ANOTHER COUP.....

Not only has Australia's foremost herpetologist, DR. HAL COGGER accepted an invitation to speak to our group but now the eminent frog man

DR MIKE TYLER

Australia's most knowledgeable frog researcher, author of the new volume "Frogs of Australia", reviewed in the May Newsletter and "There's a Frog in My Stomach", reviewed this month, most entertaining and informative contributor to "The Science Show", has indicated that he would be delighted to talk to us, in OCTOBER most likely.

This should tie in very well with our proposed third workshop which had been suggested to be a spring workshop on FROGS. Perhaps our three local frog experts WILL OSBORNE, KEN THOMAS and JOHN WOMBEY can collaborate with Mike concerning a suitable format.

The CONSTITUTION to be presented to the A.G.M. was approved by the committee with a minimum perturbation and pain at their recent meeting on MAY 29. The amendments suggested by the committee have been made, and the final document to be presented is available from 248 Dryandra St. O'Connor (Tel: 47 7963) if anyone wishes to peruse a copy before June 19.

The final result is, it is hoped, a reasonable compromise between trying to keep the constitution simple and flexible, yet including all the necessary provisions. Thanks are particularly in order to Gerry Hill, who contributed a great deal of hard work comparing the constitution of the Victoria South Australian Herpetological groups and the two national bodies and preparing the draft.

INCORPORATION of the Association is unanimously recommended by the Committee to limit the liability of individual members.

... and the news is all good

concerning \* FUTURE MEETINGS  
              \* EXCURSIONS  
and          \* THE HERPETOLOGICAL TECHNIQUES COURSE

Beginning with the latter.....

Despite the N.S.W. government's, severe tightening of finances and restriction of TAFE courses to vocational courses for the disadvantaged, plus a change of principal at Queanbeyan TAFE, the prospects for a Herpetological Techniques Course spring intensive (over four alternate weekends?) are looking very bright indeed.

Of course there is a slight catch.....!!!

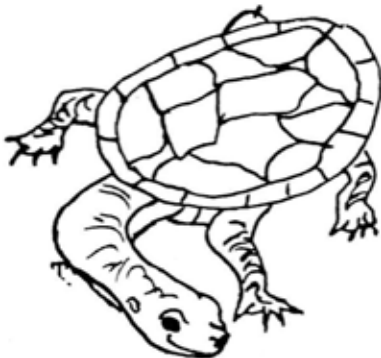
The course will cost each participant only \$50 (very reasonable compared with ANU CCE courses) BUT we shall have to cover Harry's transport costs, so we may have to indulge in some fund-raising activities (any suggestions?).

I have offered to provide the required accommodation which just leaves TAFE with the salary costs and provision of laboratory space, possibly in a Queanbeyan High School.

Special thanks are due to IRIS HOOPER, who was the co-operative acting principal of Queanbeyan TAFE when we first suggested the possibility of the course, to SHEILA EDWARDS, the Regional Education

Officer in Cooma, whose enthusiasm and effort have been pushing it along through the bureaucratic layers, and most recently, to JOHN WATSON the newly appointed principal at Queanbeyan, who has also supported our submission, not to mention HARRY EHMANN himself for being prepared to come to Canberra to conduct the course for us.

Just keep your fingers crossed until it actually is approved in writing.....



#### ELECTIONS

Nominations have been received for President, Vice-president, Secretary, Treasurer. Student Representatives and two General Committee members. That still leaves room for a Newsletter Editor and another General Committee Member. If you wish to nominate or be nominated there is still time—phone 47 7963.

# MARVELLOUS MEETINGS

in months ahead!



JULY:

"FRESHWATER CROCODILES" by DAVE CARTER

It never ceases to amaze-the number of areas in which Dave has worked-not only has his research on goannas warranted an invitation to speak to the first World Congress of Herpetology, but he has worked with Mike Tyler on the gastric brooding frog (see book review this issue), with Col Limpus on turtles (refer previous talk on Bramble Cay) and next month will share his experiences and knowledge gained from working with freshwater crocodiles. It is confidently recommended as another excellent night.

"SNAKES OF THE A.C.T." Speaker RICHARD LONGMORE

A considerable number of members have indicated, on their computer update forms, that snakes are a special interest. Richard, who as the Editor of the "ATLAS OF ELAPID SNAKES OF AUSTRALIA" is also presenting a paper at the World Congress has agreed to address a monthly meeting on our local snakes, gearing his talk particularly to younger and more inexperienced members of the group. And yes, there will be live specimens as well as slides.





AUGUST:



### "DINOSAURS" Speaker RUSSELL MORAN

Thanks to PAUL SCANLON who suggested that we have a meeting on the most successful reptiles of all time, the dinosaurs. By chance we are lucky enough to have in Canberra, at ANU, a dinosaur enthusiast and expert who has just returned from a two months tour of U.S.A. dinosaur museums and fossil sites. A most interesting and stimulating speaker, Russell promises to swing us right into the centre of the current controversial dinosaur theories. More details of this exciting night later.



### APOLOGY:

The advertised speaker for the June meeting, Sylvia Spring, of the Australian National Parkes and Wildlife Service, is unable to show her slides of "Marine Turtles of Papua-New Guinea" at this stage. However it is hoped this talk can be rescheduled for next year.



**THERE'S A  
FROG  
IN MY ~~THROAT~~  
STOMACH**



**MICHAEL J. TYLER**



## BOOK REVIEW

*THERE'S A FROG IN MY ~~THROAT~~ STOMACH* by Michael J Tyler

As small children, the first thing we learn about reproduction is that babies grow in mummy's tummy - a little confusing perhaps because also we are told that the tummy is where food goes. Later, of course, we learn that the reproductive and digestive systems have totally separate functions and the stomach, with its acidic digestive secretions, is the last place you could expect a baby to grow. This applied throughout the animal kingdom until 1974 when a dull little frog from south-eastern Queensland *Rheobatrachus silus* rocked the scientific world by giving birth to baby frogs through its mouth! Females actually brood their young in their stomachs

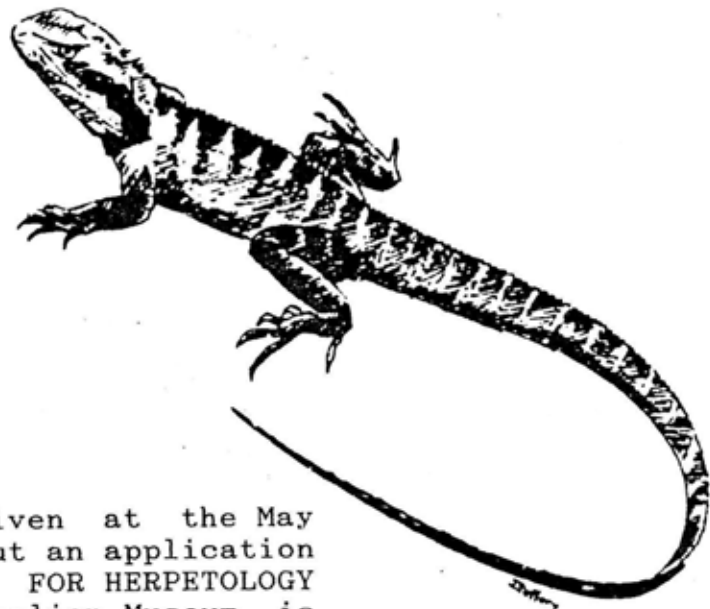
This frog has been the centre of Mike Tyler's research at the University of Adelaide since that bizarre discovery. It was exciting to be a student in his lab in 1978 and I was lucky enough to spend some time collecting these frogs in the field and observing the oral birth of the young. Sadly, the animal has not been seen in the wild since 1981 and the last of Mike's captive animals died in 1983. A second species was discovered near Mackay in 1984 but it too is now rarely seen.

Mike has written two books on the gastric brooding frog as well as several scientific papers about it. *There's a Frog in my ~~Throat~~ Stomach* is a little book (52 pages) which gives a thorough overview of our present knowledge of this species, written in every-day language. The first chapter introduces frogs for those who don't know much about them and the second chapter summarises the numerous and unusual forms of parental care exhibited by frogs throughout the world. Mike then goes on to describe *Rheobatrachus* and the excitement of those early discoveries. The core of the book is the detailed descriptions of how the young live inside the female's stomach, their birth through the mouth as fully formed frogs, and the anatomical and chemical changes to the female's stomach to create a brooding chamber. He finishes with a chapter on the medical research which this frog stimulated - related to possible treatment of human stomach diseases.

The book is ridiculously cheap (\$3 from Jo Vandermark) and if I haven't convinced you to buy one yet then look at the colour photographs and consider: this frog is probably extinct, its mode of reproduction is unique in the animal kingdom, and these are the only photos in existence showing the oral birth. Will you be able to face your grandchildren and tell them that you passed up an opportunity to get a copy?

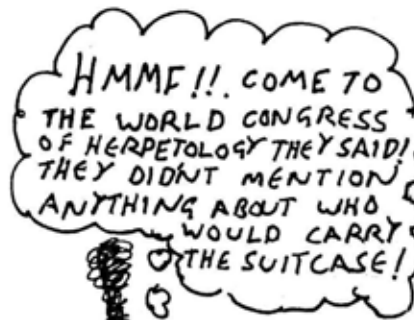
David Carter

# Members' News.



Following up the information given at the May meeting JOSHUA DORROUGH has put an application into the PETER RANKIN TRUST FUND FOR HERPETOLOGY which, administered by the Australian Museum, is an Australia-wide fund which seeks to provide small grants-in-aid to young Australian herpetologists. As the proposed project submitted by Joshua is to further his study of the ACT Herpetological Association's emblem, *Physignathus lesueurii howittii*, the water dragon, we have a double reason to wish him success!

## First World Congress of Herpetology



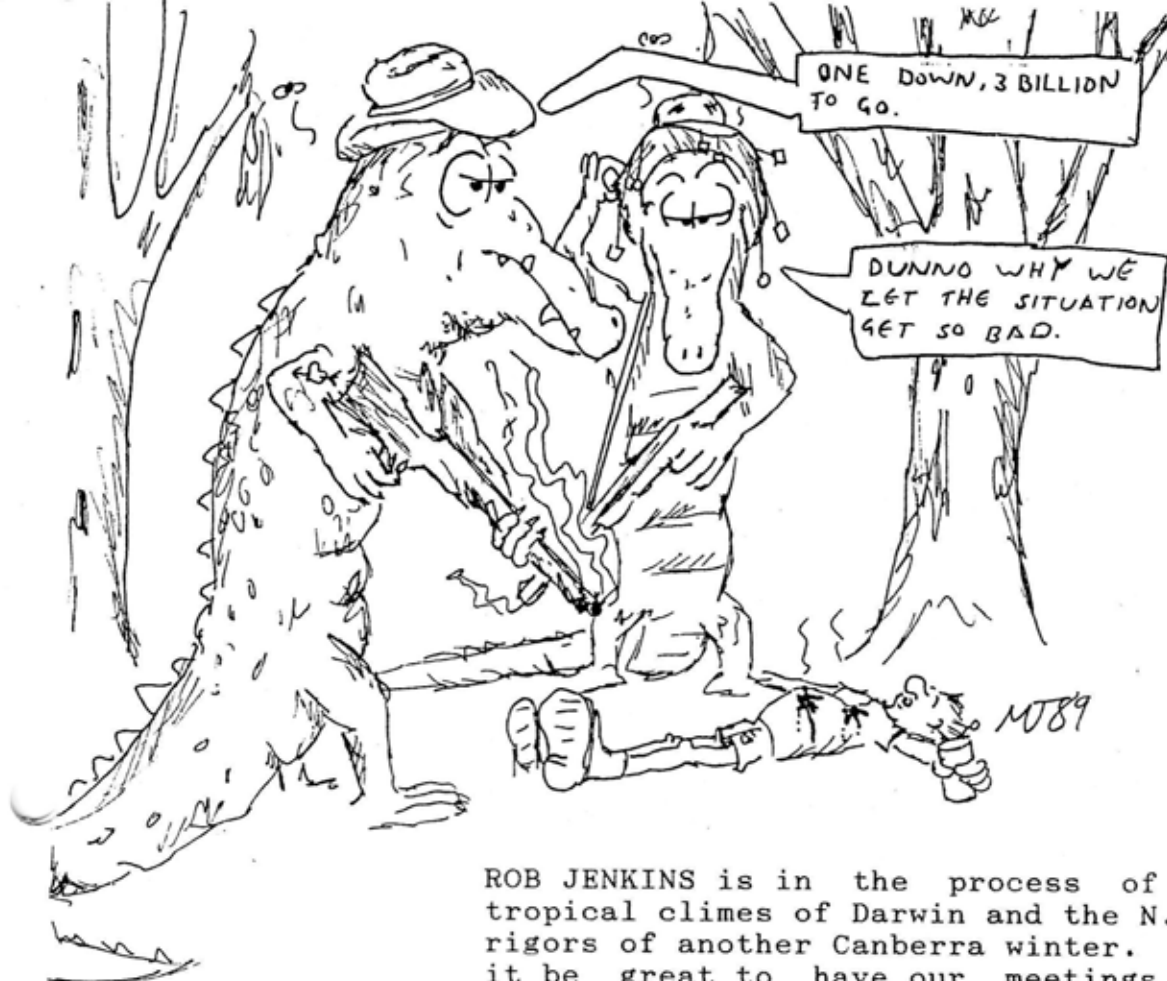
This historic event, the first time such a meeting has been contemplated, will take place at the University of Kent in Canterbury, U.K. from 11-19 September, 1989. With over 1000 delegates and associates from all over the world attending, the Congress promises to be a landmark for world herpetology.

Congress sessions covering almost every facet of herpetological interests are scheduled for these hectic 8 days, set in the beautiful and ancient grounds of a very fine old university.

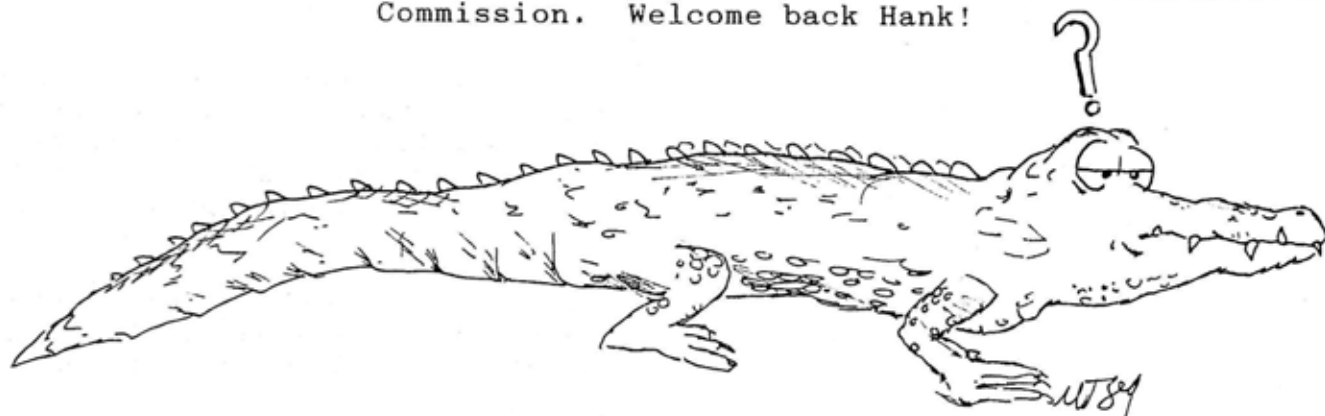
Australia will be well represented at the Congress, with Harold Cogger being a member of the Executive Committee, and Harold Heatuisle, Murray Littlejohn and Michael Tyler members of the Congress Committee.

Canberra too will be well represented at the Congress, with well known local herpetologists Richard Longmore presenting a paper on snake distributions, Arthur Georges on turtles, Brian Green on goannas and David Carter on goannas.

To be opened by H.R.H. Prince Phillip, the Duke of Edinburgh, this Congress should set the scene for the planning and development of many more future international herpetological congresses, and make the world more aware of the planet's intriguing herpetofauna. Richard will present a talk on the Congress on his return to Australia.



ROB JENKINS is in the process of deserting the tropical climes of Darwin and the N.T. to face the rigors of another Canberra winter. Not only will it be great to have our meetings enlivened once again by the Jenkins presence, but we look forward to hearing the latest news of crocodile management and research, as well as dew herpetological news from the Northern Territory Conservation Commission. Welcome back Hank!



RICHARD LONGMORE turned up a number of *Hemiergis maccoyi* specimens in the Brindabella Ranges last weekend, which again raises the question how an egg laying skink manages to survive, obviously quite successfully, above the snow line?



ROSS BENNETT has just returned from the land of taipans, scrub pythons, spotted snakes, frilled dragons, forest dragons and many many more in central and northern Queensland. We look forward to sharing his discoveries when his slides arrive.

# TRIP

DEAN WARD is happy to report that the winter excursion to Sydney,

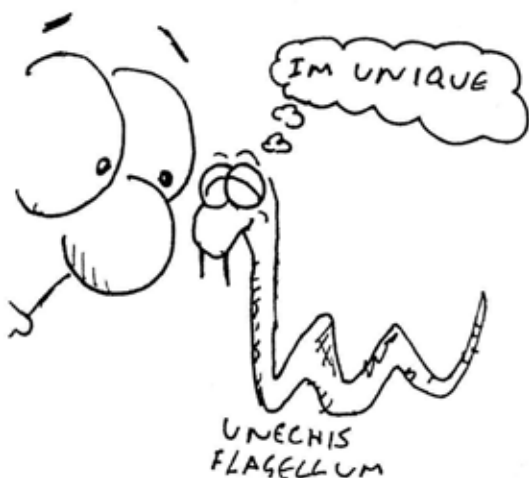
"BEHIND THE SCENES AT THE AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM & TARONGA ZOO"

is definitely a goer. The suggested date is the final weekend of the school holidays, with FRIDAY JULY 8 being the day at the Museum. Twenty two people have indicated interest in this trip. Details and arrangements at June meeting.

## WINTER WEEKEND AT ROSEDALE

Will the diamond pythons at the coast be indulging in winter basking or not? Well there is only one way to find out, and in any case, it is a good time of the year to flee the Canberra cold for the more temperate coastal regions.

Accommodation will be in two holiday houses in Miller Street - total number of beds 16. The suggested dates are, 4-6 August.



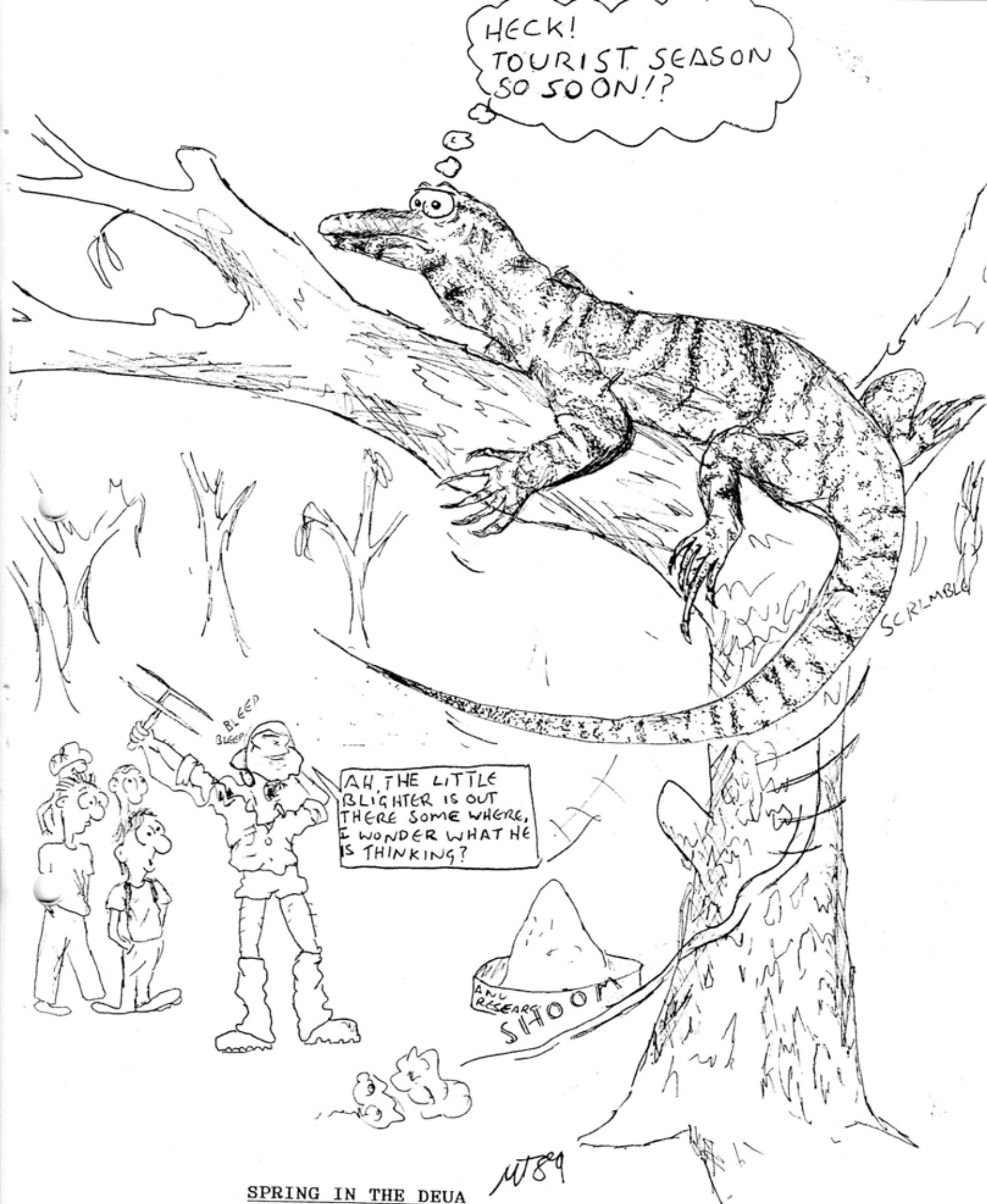
## SEARCH FOR UNECHIS FLAGELLUM

RICHARD LONGMORE has volunteered to lead a small group into adjoining New South Wales, probably in late spring, to try to locate more specimens of Unechis flagellum, a snake which Richard and JOHN WOMBEY found in the area some years ago.

## SUNDAY AT BALLABA

The excursion to the Gregory's property on the Shoalhaven to investigate the presence of diamond pythons and other herps has been delayed by the excessive rainfall and unusual height of the river.

A date will be set when access and conditions are more favorable.



#### SPRING IN THE DEUA

DAVE CARTER has generously succumbed to pressure from those who enjoyed their last trip to the Deua so much that they would like to return in the spring when the goannas are more active. Numbers will be limited so it is advisable to book early for this popular weekend.



## MY TRIP TO ARALUEN WITH THE HERPETOLOGY ASSOCIATION

I drove to Araluen in my car, which took me around 2 hours. Once I had arrived I found the pub, where there was only one person waiting. We introduced ourselves and talked in Charles' car while we waited for the other members to arrive and for Dave, who was in charge of the excursion.

Dave told us that the spot where we would be camping at was 20 km. down the road. As we made our way down the dirt road we came to a small creek. At first I was worried that my little car wouldn't make it through the water but surprisingly it did, but the worst was yet to come. We had to go through a few deeper creeks this was when I started to have second thoughts about what Jo had said about not needing a 4 wheel drive!

Surprisingly my little car made the trip to the camping spot. At this point I was pleased that I had made it, but then it hit me, I had to make it back, but I thought "I'll overcome that problem when it arises".

Because the weather did not look too good we decided to put our tents up while it was fairly dry. Dave went off, returning just as we were all ready to go for our walk. Dave got his things ready and we started to go into the bush. He was carrying a "H" shaped thing which looked like a television aerial, but I didn't ask what it was for. He was also carrying two long poles with a loop on the end of each one, this was obviously for catching the lizards when they were up trees. Dave took us to a place where he thought we might see a goanna but unfortunately we didn't. He then took us to a termites nest where he had seen goannas hide and lay eggs.

We continued our walk to another spot where Dave knew a goanna was in the vicinity but we couldn't spot it so we used the transmitting equipment, I was the first person to try to find which tree the goanna was hiding in. Every-one had a go and a lot of people thought that the goanna was in the same tree as I thought it was in. But of course Dave had to prove us all wrong which he did!

After we had finished with the transmitting equipment we thought we should get back to camp before it got dark. When we got back Dave returned to his hut to get some meat for the b.b.q which Charles kindly let us use. Unfortunately I thought that the day had been a bit unsuccessful and was hoping that the night would be a lot better.

Just as I had finished my "T" bone steak Dave said that he saw a possum, so I got out my great spot lighting torch and found him (the possum) up the tree, I thought this was really good because it was the first time that I had been so close to a possum. (little did I know that they would come down the tree for food) Anyway I sat back down, and about 10 minutes later the possums were walking around next to us eating the scraps. Jo said that they might feed out of my hand so I grabbed my remainders of my steak and gave it to the possum, I was really surprised when the possum came up to me and took the meat out of my hand and stayed in the same spot and ate it. Then I was even more surprised when it let me pat it with out even moving.

Once everyone had finished eating we set out into the dark spot-lighting. Just as we were all leaving the camp site Dave saw a sugar glider so we watched that, this was also the first time I had seen a sugar glider. As we continued walking we saw a few more possums and a few frogs but that was all.

When we got to camp all the scraps of food had gone and the possums were up the trees. After a while the possums came down again and I was patting them. I couldn't keep away from them because they were so soft and cuddly they made me want to pick them up and cuddle them.

At about 11.15p.m. I went to bed.

When I woke up (after everyone else) Charles had kindly prepared me some sausages and bacon for breakfast.

After breakfast Jo suggested that we have a look under some rocks for some reptiles, which I thought was a good idea since we hadn't been seeing much just walking along. We made our way towards the rocks and began our search. Within minutes I had caught a copper tailed skink. A few minutes later looking under rocks one of the other members had discovered an eastern small eyed snake which he managed to catch. At this point I was thinking that this camp was the best camp I had been on, I thought this because the people around me were interested in exactly what I was interested in. There seemed to be a sense of freedom of what I could catch no matter what it was, there was no-one to tell me wrong things like "keep away from that, it's deadly." Everyone saw it from my point of view, that is that even though they may be deadly they are the best and most fascinating creatures.

After we had found the Eastern small eyed snake we continued our search, as I went over to some rocks Jo and the other members continued looking around. As I looked under a rock crevice I thought I saw a tail of the Eastern Water dragon. As I looked closer it began to look more and more like a twig which had been stuck in the crack, but something made me grab hold. As I did and began to pull, the lizard began to pull also, after a couple of minutes I managed to get him out, he was only a small one but everyone back at camp liked him.

Once we had put the snake and lizards back Dave had prepared a walk down along the river, (which is where I do most of my searching for lizards and snakes). Dave said that we might see a few Red-bellied black snakes basking in the sun but we didn't see any signs of a Red-bellied black snake or any other snake.

We continued our walk along the river. Because we hadn't seen much just by walking along I decided to look under a few rocks, We did see a few skinks but no snakes yet. A few minutes later I happened to look down and try to lift this rock but just as I was going to put my hands under the rock to lift it I thought that I saw something black so I told Dave and he moved to rock and there it was, the smallest most beautifully marked Red-bellied black snake I had ever seen, I now know why they call the Red-bellied black snake the most colorful snake of Australia.

We got back to camp, had lunch and then packed our tents away. I was the second person to leave, and as I said before, I think that was the best camp I have ever been on and I hope to go on even better ones in the near future.

Andrew Hill.

A.C.T. HERPETOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

