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ACTHA INC. NEWS

FEB - MAR 2011

*Newsletter of the
ACT Herpetological
Association Inc.*

YOUR COMMITTEE FOR 2010 - 2011

President	Joe McAuliffe
Vice President	Ric Longmore
Secretary	Angus Kennedy
Treasurer	Margaret Ning
Newsletter Editor	Mandy Conway
Webmaster	Angus Kennedy
Public Officer	John Wombey *
Excursion Officer	Ric Longmore *
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Committee Members	Dennis Dyer
	Peter Child
	Iris Carter
	Greg Flowers
Student Representatives	Jake McAuliffe
	Angelique Harrison

** Denotes Life Members*

'their future is in our hands!'



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Looking for reptiles: a timely reminder of herping rules by our President, Joe McAuliffe, page 4.

ACTHA Members visit the Gosford Reptile Park: a summary of the day by Iris Carter starts on page 5.

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How are the Corroboree Frogs going?:

Carly Humphries keeps us informed, back page.

Photography workshop at Nimmitabel: invitation to go to the Nimmitabel region for the weekend, back page.

DIARY DATE

The *bi-monthly* meetings of the Association are held on the **third Tuesday of the month at 7.30pm**, Southern Cross Club, Catchpole Street, Macquarie, Belconnen.

UPCOMING MEETING

Tuesday, 15 February 2011

Informal Meeting

Come along to a gathering of like-minded reptile enthusiasts to relive *Snakes Alive!* moments, share latest herp keeping sagas (err stories...) and anything else that pops into conversation.

This will also be an opportunity for Members to express ideas and suggestions for ACTHA activities etc for 2011.



ACTHA DEC 2010 CHRISTMAS PARTY & A SLIDE SHOW

By Margaret Ning & Mandy Conway

ACTHA's Christmas party was held in the Nursery section of the Aust. National Botanic Gardens where 23 members shared awesome 'Crust' pizzas and beverages before planning for the upcoming *Snakes Alive! Exhibition 2011* took centre stage.

Our new ACTHA banners were revealed and thanks go to Angus Kennedy for their design and construction.

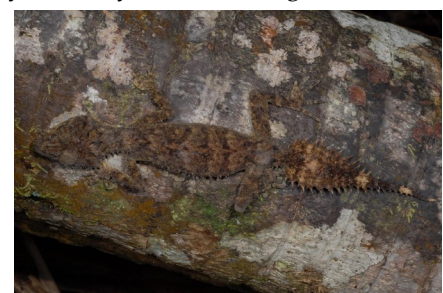


Locations such as Edith Falls provided a plethora of reptile sightings, including the flighty Orange-naped Snake (*Furina ornata*) below.

Travelling through Gregory River National Park (heading for WA border) scenic sights included the spectacular Baobab Trees and limestone country full of caves, where Dave's family treated themselves to a helicopter flight to view the Victoria River, renowned for crocodiles.

Eungella National Park 50kms west of Mackay, QLD, where rainforest abounds, produced no Boyd's Forest Dragons (*Hypsilurus boydii*). Dave kept looking for the Northern Gastric Brooding Frog, also known as the Platypus Frog. A very difficult search ensued in remote country which has been poorly surveyed to date: 15% of ENP is not yet surveyed for the frog yet there is still some hope it is persisting.

Beautiful reptiles such as the Northern Leaf-tail Gecko, (right)



Just on dusk, ACTHA Member Dave Hunter presented a slide show of his recent visit to the Eungella National Park and surrounds, northern QLD, where he was particularly looking for the elusive, presumed extinct, Gastric Brooding Frog (*Rheobatrachus vitellinus*).

We started at Katherine Gorge, where Dave surmised what it would have been like during pre Chytrid Fungus and Cane Toad era. Unfortunately, most Top End visitors can no longer experience the previously abundant fauna. Goannas have been heavily affected with the Cane Toad invasion and Dave was saddened to only see one medium sized Mertens' Water Monitor (*Varanus mertensi*) in the two and a half weeks he and his family were there.

The photos of herps he did find showed animals in stunning settings. A discussion of the landscape attributes somehow moved on to distinguishing reptiles within a species, specifically legless lizards and tree snakes.



Pythons and Carpet Pythons were noted just off river banks whilst looking for frogs. A rare shot of male Carpet Pythons in ritual combat (above) drew many ooohhhhs from the audience, “mud wrestling...” was one member’s comment.



A product from the Canadian company ‘Hennessy Hammocks’ is a piece of camping equipment that Dave highly recommended. “You can sleep on your side in them, in relatively flat position. Quite an ingenious design, insect and pouring rain proof.” he added.

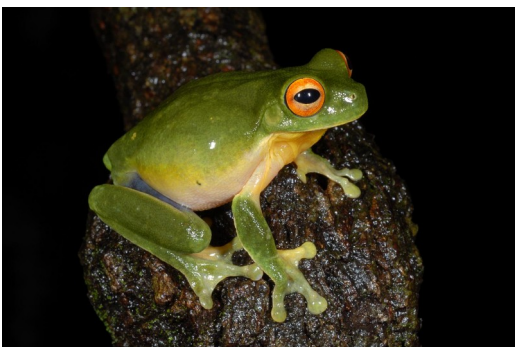
A slippery, treacherous and hard country led to a couple of nasty injuries in Dave’s party. Details of new methods of traversing rocks ensued: “you can’t just skip across the rocks...”

The Tinker Frog (*Taudactylus acutirostris*) is one species that was seriously affected by the Chytrid Fungus early on. The frog had disappeared from many different sites but was rediscovered in 1996. It appears to have developed a resistance to the Chytrid Fungus.

The triangulation method was used to detect a particular frog calling from the canopy, however the unidentified animal was 15 m above them, remaining elusive.



a



b



c



d



f



g



h

Are you able to identify Dave’s frog photos on this page? Have a go when the Newsletter is placed on the ACTHA Website in the near future where these amphibians will appear in full colour! Check your answers in the next Edition of the Newsletter.

'HERPING' IS LOOKING FOR REPTILES WITH LITTLE DISTURBANCE TO THEM OR THEIR ENVIRONMENT

As keen herpers, we have been waiting a long time for some good summer conditions to bring out our herpetofauna. Now we find ourselves in the grip of high temperatures and strangely enough, there is some rain that's been accompanying it. The general upshot of this is that there is some good herping to be done in our parks and reserves. It is therefore timely that we remind ourselves, our friends and particularly our children what the term 'herping' means and responsible and sustainable ways of doing it. Let me get straight to the point: Herping is the looking for reptiles. We go herping to appreciate them and their environment, perhaps take a photo or two.

Many of our reptiles like and need to hide or take refuge from the elements and predators. Therefore, there are times when we will be disappointed with the lack of sightings or variety. The temptation then is to roll rocks or lift logs to locate them. Many people do not realise that this can be quite destructive to the animals and the places they call homes. Unfortunately, I suspect that some people do not care about the results of their actions.

There is something else to consider here too - safety. There is no way I would let my child go rolling rocks or lifting logs. Canberra reserves are home to the Eastern Brown Snake (*Pseudonaja textiles*) and it is under rocks and logs where you are likely to find it, the second most venomous land snake in the world. It will defend itself with incredible speed!

On a recent walk on Mt. Tuggeranong I was saddened to see that some areas looked to have been turned over pretty well. By this I refer to repeated rock and log movements that have destroyed good reptile (and other wildlife) habitat.

All people that call themselves herpers or lovers of natural sciences must be appalled by this. On a local scale, our herpetofauna cannot sustain this pressure. Gone are the days when kids could collect reptiles or tadpoles from our reserves. We have learnt a lot about our herpetofauna since then and now we must all work toward a sustainable reserve system.

There are laws in every state and territory that aim to protect our native wildlife. These include heavy penalties for the illicit trade, capturing and/or trapping

of all reptiles. The keeping of reptiles is also regulated. Put simply, if you are keeping a reptile, exempt species or not, you must be able to prove that you acquired it through legal means.

I and the ACT Herpetological Association wish to make it perfectly clear that any person seen undertaking any illegal activity will be reported to the authorities. In addition to this, if any member of the ACT Herpetological Association is involved in any such activity their membership will be revoked.

Public assistance is required in the reporting of compliance matters regarding our nature reserves, national parks and the illegal keeping or trapping of fauna. These matters include taking, keeping and trading of our native animals.

How to Report Offences

To report any law enforcement issues concerning wildlife matters or nature reserves in the ACT please use one of the following contacts:

Wildlife or nature reserve matters

(02) 6207 1354

(02) 6207 2123

Plant and animal licencing

(02) 6207 6376

Below is an extract from the TAMS website.

'All species of reptiles are protected under the *Nature Conservation Act 1980* and except for a small list of EXEMPT species, are declared PROTECTED animal wildlife under section 17(1)(d) of the Act.

Those listed as exempt species include:

Eastern Long-necked Turtle

Eastern Blue-tongued Lizard

Blotched Blue-tongued Lizard.

Reptiles, whether exempt species or not may not be taken from the wild in the ACT without a licence.

Under the Nature Conservation Act, 1980, there are heavy fines for failing to obtain relevant licences for animals and associated activities, and for failing to complete or submit records. Fines of up to \$10,000 and/ or 12 months imprisonment can be incurred.

Joe McAuliffe

President

ACT Herpetological Association Inc.

January 2011

ACTHA MEMBERS VISIT THE GOSFORD REPTILE PARK, NSW

By Iris Carter

What an amazing surprise we were treated to when we arrived at the Australian Reptile Park near Gosford, NSW on the morning of Sunday, 21 November 2011.

We woke in the morning earlier than most of us would have preferred, but we were excited about going to the reptile park. After breakfast we hit the road and arrived at our destination as it opened (although three of our party, not staying at the "Taj Ma Backpackers" overslept and sleepily joined the rest of us later in the morning). We were aware that we may not get any privileged access as our hosts had advised that week-ends were not a good time to expect a tour but we thought we would announce ourselves anyway.

Well, we were introduced to "Wazza" who is the Senior Herp Keeper and whose particular area of expertise is in breeding king cobras. Wazza has been involved in the Reptile Park's king cobra breeding program since 2006, the first such breeding program in Australia. The Reptile Park also has a breeding program for king brown snakes and death adders, all of which are milked for venom. The venom is collected and shipped to the Commonwealth Serum Laboratories in Melbourne who then produce anti-venom. More about that later.

Wazza was joined by Ranger Mick who made it absolutely clear that he would **not** be showing us around as he had to prepare for the 11am public talk and animal presentation. However, Ranger Mick then introduced us to his tame cane toad. Of course, cane toads are a poisonous species who's toxic excretions are released from above their eyes when threatened or attacked. A couple of cane toads have been brought into the Reptile Park with the aim of milking them for their poison and as a result of regular handling, have become quite tame. Ranger Mick's comment at our stunned expressions at his obvious love for his pet was "Once a Prince, you can't go back!" Which, for all intents and purposes was true, because Ranger Mick did not turn into a toad when imitating a kiss.

We were then led through the narrow but fascinating corridor (lined with enclosures laden with scales, hisses and fangs) to our next surprise. We met "Buddy", a Tegu (see photo of Buddy taken in 2006 – he is much *bigger* now). The Tegu is a South American species of skink (even though he looks like a monitor – he is not). Tegus are now endangered due to habitat destruction and the fact

that the skin from just one fully grown Tegu can make a very attractive pair of golf shoes. Apart from their handbag appeal they have a few other interesting idiosyncrasies; they have a Jacobson's organ (however I repeat, not a monitor) and a forked tongue. Tegus are the only lizards apart from varanids that have a forked tongue. After much patting, oo'ing and aaaa'ing and general excitement about Buddy we reluctantly moved on.



Buddy – in 2006. Note the forked tongue!

We then met a ball python. The interesting thing about the ball python is that when threatened, it will curl up into a ball in order to protect its head, hence its name and from what I understand it is quite an impressive ball. However, it should be noted that the animal must feel threatened in order to do this - but that is the last thing you want to subject your ball python to. Therefore, there is little opportunity to see a ball python in a ball.

The morning was getting away so we had to move on to the next exciting animals. Among its many breeding programs, the Australian Reptile Park has a breeding program for the endangered Solomon Island Skink. This skink (*Corucia zebrata*) is an arboreal species of skink endemic to the Solomon Islands. It is the largest known extant species of skink and it has a prehensile tail so is often referred to as the monkey tailed skink. Ranger Mick referred to this skink as a prehistoric bluey because of its prehensile tail.

Logging is a serious threat to this species as is trapping for food by indigenous Solomon Islanders and excessive pet trade exports.





Solomon Island skink (*Corucia zebrata*)

So far we had seen a skink with a forked tongue, another skink with a prehensile tail, and a ball python that would prefer not to be. What next? Not to be outdone, Ranger Mick then introduced our group to the giant New Caledonian Gecko. This giant gecko (*Rhacodactylus leachianus*), is a large species of gecko is the largest of the *Rhacodactylus* geckos. At 14 inches total length, it is the largest extant gecko in the world. This gecko is a nocturnal arboreal species of gecko. It makes its home in the highest treetops on the island of New Caledonia. It is a heavy bodied gecko. Its skin appears too loose for its body and it has small, stumpy tail. Many of the locals in New Caledonia call this gecko "the devil in the trees" because of the growling noises it makes. As we were lucky enough to observe these critters walking up the glass, Ranger Mick was able to point out that they have no suction pads on their feet.



Giant New Caledonian Gecko (*Rhacodactylus leachianus*)

After being dazzled by the fabulous collection of exotic reptiles we moved into the venom collection area. Now, our reluctant (*not*) host Ranger Mick handed us back to Wazza who was in his element. It was fascinating! The park has an extremely large collection of rattlesnakes

that they breed and milk for venom. (Obviously CSL also produces antivenin for export.) All the enclosures had an opaque curtain over the viewing window which, it was explained) prevented the snakes from becoming accustomed to people. One of the difficulties with collecting venom from all kinds of snakes is that they become quite used to being handled. This may sound like a good thing but, as the production of venom is quite expensive for the animal, and they can regulate the amount of venom they inject, they only inject the venom if they are bringing down prey or defending themselves. Therefore, it is important for maximum production that the snake does not feel too comfortable about being in the presence of people and being handled. Another important purpose of the opaque curtain specific to the rattle snake is the preservation of its rattle. Again, in the early days, a rattle snake shakes it's rattle as a warning to predators, but if the snake becomes complacent about the comings and goings around its enclosure, it stops rattling. Why this is important, I have no idea. However, it is important enough to warrant opaque curtains on the enclosures.

While a few of us were still puzzling over the curtain thing, Wazza had brought us to the king cobras. Again, the park has a breeding program and the animals we were looking at were born at the park in 2006. As his available time was running short, Wazza moved us into the venom collection and storage area. There was no venom milking happening (it was Sunday) but Wazza showed us the plastic vials of frozen venom from various snakes. The venom is collected from a number of snakes over a number of weeks then sent off to CSL for processing. Although the venom does not need to be refrigerated, the risk of loss due to evaporation is high, hence the collected venom is frozen or freeze dried.

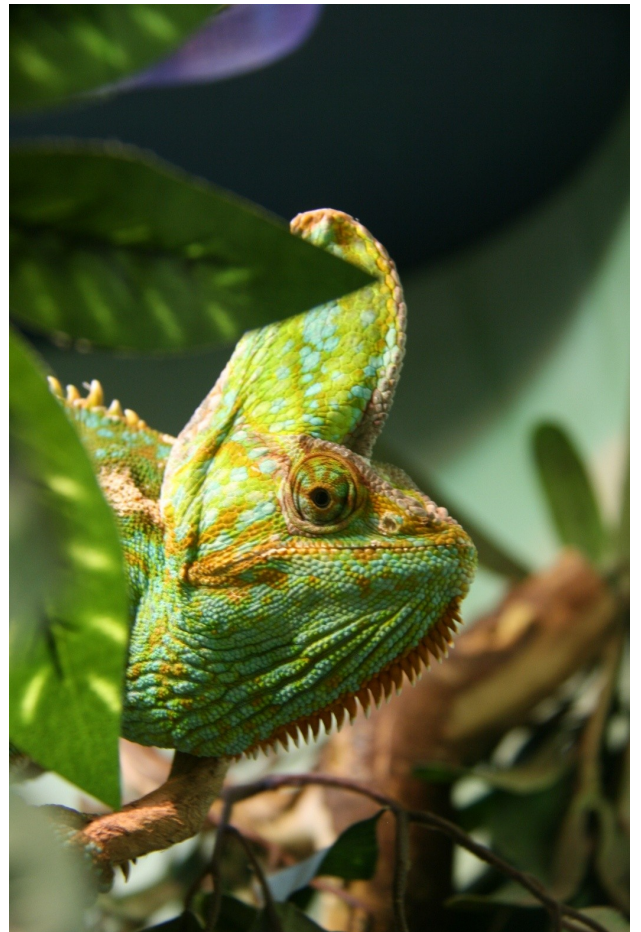
Well, our private tour had now come to an end. Wazza had to join Ranger Mick at the outside reptile show. Our "awe" levels were high and we were buzzing from the exiting animals we had seen and all the facts (and incredibly bad jokes) we had heard. We walked out into the bright sunlight and ran into our three sleepy companions who had arrived an hour or so after we had started the behind the scenes tour and so had missed out on this fabulous adventure. What a shame.

The rest of the park was there to be explored, and so we all headed out to see what other fabulous animals we could find (the native ones were outside!). The rest of the day was spent wandering the park – which is another story.

We had agreed that, in order to get back to Canberra at a reasonable hour we would leave Gosford at about 2pm. Two o'clock came around all too soon and we all headed back to our cars and headed for home. That night, we dreamed of Buddy, the cane toad and Ranger Mick. (*only Iris I believe... Ed.*)



Ranger Mick and one of his pals (from www.reptilepark.com.au)



*Other photos this page: Jake McAuliffe.
Left: furry... Right: feathery...*





SNAKES ALIVE! EXHIBITION 17 TO 23 JANUARY 2011

From Joe McAuliffe...

Peter Child from Reptiles Inc. took the reins of setting up the enclosures for this year's exhibition.



Aside from pushing all of this work to Peter, which many Members were thankful for, it created a change in the appearance of the Exhibition. We have been very proud of the professional looking display for some years now and Peter continued his valuable contribution with an amazing arrangement of large enclosures this time around.

This year, two large perenties were displayed which for me were the highlight of the Exhibition. The Canberra Times captured an amazing photo of a perentie eating his lunch and printed it, along with an article, early in the week. WIN News (*right*) also broadcasted a segment in the 6 o'clock News, the first time we were given a segment, not just a filler at the end of the weather report.

We managed to bring together a large variety of animals from turtles, a crocodile, geckos, skinks,



Photos this page: Lucinda Royston

dragons, monitors, pythons, venomous land snakes and some local flap-footed lizards, blind snakes and frogs.

Frog's took the main theme this year with the catchcry 'Frog's in our backyard'. It was very successful with many of the local frogs represented as well as the endangered Corroboree Frog from Tidbinbilla's breeding facility. It's always exciting to display these animals and we are very appreciative for their inclusion at *Snakes Alive!*, where ACTHA continues to build a strong collaboration with the ACT Government that focuses on the conservation of herpetofauna. The proceeds from our *Snakes Alive!* raffle is donated to the Corroboree Frog Program.

Once again the ANBG provided a great facility for the Exhibition. ANBG staff such as Jennifer Blake were also instrumental in the promotion leading up to and during the week - thanks Jennifer!

Last but not least, thanks to everyone who volunteered and made the Exhibition the great success that it was.



From Margaret Ning...

I think the consensus is that this year's *Snakes Alive!* was better than in past years. For starters, Peter Child of Reptiles Inc, and long-time ACTHA Member, was responsible for the very professional set up, with some additional help from ACTHA volunteers. Also, because there were fewer visitors this year the rooms were less crowded and the visitors stayed longer. One visitor told me that she enjoyed it more this year, but she couldn't put her finger on why!

Having Peter set up the enclosures meant that the layout was different. Specifically, the entrance



contained a very large model crocodile, quickly followed by two huge

enclosures each containing a goanna species, viz. lace monitors and perenties. They exhibit very well and I know that the ACTHA volunteers at the front desk really appreciated having such a prime vantage point.

Further into the room, instead of a tub on the floor containing blueys, beardies and others that could be handled by our visitors, Peter introduced a special enclosure which was sufficiently high enough to prevent very young children from attempting to handle animals. This worked very



well and was also useful at some feeding times, which continues to be popular with both children and adults alike.

We had a general theme of 'Frogs in our backyard', in response to the wet season Canberra



Photos this page: Lucinda Royston.

Above: Angelique Harrison & Sophie Sloane

has had. Once again we applied for and were issued with a permit which enabled ACTHA to collect some local frog and reptile species. These displayed ok, but some more thought needs to go into improving their presentation. Any suggestions? Different substrate perhaps? Peter constructed some lovely little enclosures for the frogs and several species of tadpoles were also successfully displayed.

Some of the frog and skink species redefined 'cryptic', but not the legless lizard we caught while looking for frogs – it was a star.

Needless to say, our Corroboree Frog exhibit was very popular once again and sufficient frogs



stayed visible for most visitors to catch a reasonable glimpse. Some really lucky visitors received a close up view of the frogs when their enclosure was checked daily by Environment ACT personnel. Many thanks also go to Environment ACT and the Ginninderra Catchment Group (which are both ACTHA members) for their contributions to our display. Also special thanks go to David Hunter for his amazing expertise in catching frogs a couple of days before we opened, and Tim

McGrath for helping with reptile collecting the day before we opened.

At one stage we were worried that we would be

shorthanded for manning the display, but our membership rallied wonderfully and our fearless leader even became available. One of our members even took some leave from his job in Alice Springs, and volunteered for three days! So, while we didn't have a surplus of volunteers, things worked out fine and everyone had time to catch up with friends they may only see at our displays. There was relief at lunch time and coffees were regularly brought in from ANBG's 'Hudson's Café'. Once again, Hudson's gave us a discount on Cafe purchases, which is always appreciated.



Our Wednesday and Sunday evening get togethers also went well, although they were a little more low key than in previous years. It was extremely gratifying to see our young ones growing up a little more each year. The 'older' young ones have become confident young adults, versatile whether on "tub duty" or helping on the merchandise desk.

There are always quotable quotes from every *Snakes Alive!*. A couple for 2011 were:

"Can I hold them.." referring to the tadpoles;
 "Can you eat them.." when looking at the Corroboree Frogs!

One little girl asked Lucinda on the front desk if she could pat the turtles and after repeated exchanges of "no, because they bite.." and very deliberate

responses from the child of "I don't think so..".

Lucinda was later told by the carer of the child that the child **did** touch one of the turtles and it **did** bite her thinking it was feed time!

A couple of our snakes shed during the week of the exhibition, one of which, in particular, provided a rare opportunity for ACTHA members. The Death Adder delighted everyone at the Wednesday evening get together by beginning and completing its long anticipated shed. 'Fingers' the Carpet Python, our largest exhibit, also shed overnight on the Saturday so her skin was displayed to the Sunday visitors.

Most things went smoothly, although, when we still couldn't get the front door open by 9.40 to let the first visitors in on the Monday morning, things became a little strained! However there were no breakages or casualties, so that is always good.

The normal attendance pattern continued whereby there was a rush in the morning between ten o'clock and twelve thirty, followed by a relatively quiet afternoon. If anyone can come up with any ideas of how we can spread visitor 'load' over all the hours we are open, we're all ears.

Huge thanks go to Peter Child for making our set up so special, for opening the display on the Monday morning, and for providing so many of his animals for the display. We would also like to thank Peter for once again providing and subsidising the first prize in the raffle. Thanks to our highly proficient raffle ticket sellers, once again ACTHA is in a position to donate a significant sum to Corroboree Frog research. Thanks also go to the Botanical Bookshop at the ANBG for the second and third prizes they donated this year for the raffle.

We would like to thank Lois for stocking the shop and all our other ACTHA volunteers for their efforts. There are so many on-going jobs like cleaning enclosures, talking at feeding time, admissions, counting/banking the money, media appearances, working the microphone, purchase of tucker for our evening celebrations, etc. – everyone shared these very well. And Mandy did a wonderful job on our new labels for the exhibits – very professional.

We would also like to thank ACTHA members who volunteered for the first time at this year's *Snakes Alive!* We hope that it was a positive experience and that they will be happy to do it again next year. We also signed up four new members during the week.



Mark Robertson with a Bearded Dragon



Iris Carter with a Children's Python



Greg Cover with 'Fingers', a Carpet Python

For the number crunchers, we had 13 ACTHA full-time volunteers and a surprising 22 part-time volunteers. We exhibited around 45 reptile/frog species, plus tadpoles - around 80 animals in total. Just over 3,800 visitors came through our doors, which was down from around 4,100 last year. Our takings were also down by a bit over \$1,000, however these drops resulted from the changed timing of the end of the school holidays, of which we shall be aware next year. The ANBG publicity was very enthusiastically done, and without it, our numbers would have dropped even further.

From Mandy Conway

Whilst *Snakes Alive!* enthusiastically ran along for the week with much chatter and playful bantering amongst Members, there was an element of sadness.

The absence of **Christian Robertson**, who passed away from a motorcycle accident in the latter half of 2010, was strongly felt. Setting up and the monumental clean-up took much longer without him. Young visitors also missed the chance to listen to his vivid reptile story telling during the week. Some of our young Members were overheard to say "I miss Christian... I wish he was here... it's not the same without him...". You'll always be there in spirit young man!



We also lost young **Millissa Gillard**, whose life tragically ended, age 15, on 5 January 2011. This made the week really hard for me because she was a big part of my life and I miss her terribly.

Millissa was also a regular at *Snakes Alive!* over the years, her love of reptiles almost equalling that of Christian. Shingle-backs were her favourite.

Many of her young ACTHA friends quietly spoke of their memories with their friend during the Exhibition. Young visitors this year missed out on having her guide their hands so that they would hold the lizards properly. You will be sorely missed young lady!



THE INTERNATIONAL SCENE

ACTHA Member Tony Lawson keeps us posted on developments in the international science arena

<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases>

ScienceDaily (Sep. 7, 2010)

Using a moving 3-D computer model based on the skull and teeth of a New Zealand reptile called tuatara, a Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council funded team from the University of Hull, University College London and the Hull York Medical School has revealed how damage to dental implants and jaw joints may be prevented by sophisticated interplay between our jaws, muscles and brain.

Journal Reference:

N. Curtis, M.E.H. Jones, S.E. Evans, P. O'Higgins, M.J. Fagan. **Feedback control from the jaw joints during biting: An investigation of the reptile *Sphenodon* using multibody modelling.** *Journal of Biomechanics*, 2010; DOI: [10.1016/j.jbiomech.2010.08.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbiomech.2010.08.001)

ScienceDaily (Sep. 2, 2010)

Lizards are an important indicator species for understanding the condition of specific ecosystems. Their body weight is a crucial index for evaluating species health, but lizards are seldom weighed, perhaps due in part to the recurring problem of spontaneous tail loss when lizards are in stress.

Now ecological researchers have a better way of evaluating these lizards. Dr. Shai Meiri of Tel Aviv University's Department of Zoology has **developed an improved tool for translating lizard body lengths to weights**. Dr. Meiri's new equations calculate this valuable morphological feature to estimate the weight of a lizard species in a variety of different ecosystems.

Journal Reference:

S. Meiri. **Length-weight allometries in lizards.** *Journal of Zoology*, 2010; DOI: [10.1111/j.1469-7998.2010.00696.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7998.2010.00696.x)



<http://www.sciencealert.com.au/news>

A new study on venomous lizards has revealed the existence of novel venoms that could potentially be used to treat high blood pressure.

The University of Melbourne, 7 December 2010

Dr Bryan Fry of the University of Melbourne led a team of researchers from across the world, including Belgium, the Netherlands, Ireland, Switzerland, Israel and the US, to examine the unexplored group of venomous lizards called anguimorphs – a group that includes monitor, alligator and legless lizards.

“We only recently discovered that venom in lizards was not restricted to the gila monster and beaded lizard, but it is in fact much more widespread – so we set out to examine this unique group, and sure enough we discovered completely novel toxins,” Dr Fry said.

“We showed a great diversity of toxins in anguimorph venoms. The drug design potential of these novel venoms is highlighted by the fact that

three of these new toxins act to lower blood pressure.”

The huge-scale study took four years to complete and involved collecting venom from lizards all over the world, followed by complex laboratory studies to analyse the properties of the venom.

“It was a huge undertaking but the result is well worth the effort – we have discovered completely novel venoms, as well as shed light on the evolution of venom systems in animals,” Dr Fry said.

“The results obtained highlight the importance of utilizing evolution-based search strategies for biodiscovery and emphasize the largely untapped drug design and development potential of lizard venoms,” Dr Fry said.

Dr Fry will now focus on transforming the valuable lizard venom into a pharmaceutical product that could ultimately help sufferers of heart disease.

The study was published in the latest edition of the *Journal of Molecular and Cellular Proteomics*.

<http://www.sciencealert.com.au/news>



A note from the Editor

The views expressed by contributors and authors and any links to Websites provided in this Newsletter are not necessarily those of ACTHA.

FROGWATCH 2010 UPDATE

By Emma Keightley,

ACT and Region Frogwatch Co-ordinator

The following is taken from the

'ACT & Region Frogwatch 2010 Newsletter'

Training seminars

The first Frogwatch introductory training seminar was held at Queanbeyan Public School, where close to 40 volunteers gathered to listen to Dr David Hunter talk about our local frogs. David gave a terrific presentation generously sharing his frog knowledge along with some insight gained in his work as threatened species officer with NSW Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water.

The second seminar was held at the Aust. National Botanic Gardens with about 60 volunteers. On this evening we were privileged to have Dr Will Osborne share his knowledge and anecdotes about our local frogs and how best to monitor them. The walk outside to the ponds was a little more fruitful with three species heard – *Limnodynastes dumerelii* (Pobblebonk), *Crinia signifera* (Common eastern froglet) and *Limnodynastes tasmaniensis* (Spotted grass frog).

Field trips

Three field trips were held this year – each one was a great opportunity for volunteers to practice their frogwatching with an expert.

The **first field trip** saw twenty keen Frogwatchers meet with Dave Hunter at Barracks Flat along the Queanbeyan River. As a group we walked along the river stopping at a number of places to listen for frogs. We then drove to the entry gates of the Weetalabah Estate where there is a large shallow dam – this was a great spot where we heard five species and also got to see a *Litoria peronii* (Perons tree frog) up close.

Second field trip: At Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, Dr Murray Evans from the ACT Government as well as ranger John McRae accompanied a group of seventeen volunteers around the reserve. We fuelled up with some sandwiches and biscuits next to the dam at the Visitor Centre. On a quick walk around this dam we were able to spot a number of egg masses – most likely *Limnodynastes tasmaniensis* (Spotted grass frog). We then drove in convoy to a river site where over the sound of the flowing water we identified two species. Our final destination was a great dam site where six species were heard.

Our **third field trip** to Mulligans Flat Nature Reserve was postponed a week due to heavy rain (still a novelty!). Twenty volunteers were eventually able to meet with Dr Murray Evans to share a lovely evening in the reserve. There we so many *Uperoleia laevis* in the grass, we had to be careful not to step on them! It was an interesting night with five species heard. The *Crinia signifera* and *Limnodynastes tasmaniensis* were heard when we arrived but later in the evening they were seemingly silenced by the numerous *Litoria peronii*, *Uperoleia laevis* and *Crinia parinsignifera*.

Neobatrachus sudelli – Spotted burrowing frogs were calling early in the season after heavy rains.

Litoria latopalmata – Broad palmed frogs were heard calling towards the end of October '10. This species is not usually picked up in the Census. It is uncommon and occurs mainly along parts of the Murrumbidgee River.

Litoria aurea – Green and golden bell frogs have yet to be heard at the site they were located at last year. As the water level drops and the temperatures rise they may begin to call. Stay tuned!

Litoria verreauxii – volunteers have commented they did not hear this species at sites where they were heard last year, analysis of the Census results in coming months will identify whether this is localised or the species is declining across the ACT region.

Cooma, NSW, Frogwatching

This year Antia Brademann, the Cooma Region Waterwatch Coordinator, has made an effort to generate interest in Frogwatching in the Cooma region. On all accounts she has been very successful! We welcome all the new volunteers from that region and look forward to learning more about the frog populations of the area.

ACT and Region Frogwatch

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TIDBINBILLA CORROBOREE FROG UPDATE

By Carly Humphries, Wildlife Office, Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve

I've just finished adding up our little tadders from the 2010 breeding season.

Getting everything back on track after the captive population decline from a refrigeration unit mishap:

We have 114 metamorph froglets that came from eggs collected in the wild at Mt Gininni and Hanging Flat.

And 285 Captive breed froglets breed in last years breeding season. This brings our total captive insurance frog population to just over 1000 frogs. Providing a good captive breeding this season we have the intentions to release some frogs this upcoming spring.

The sexually mature breeding frogs are geared up ready to breed again soon in the next few months. They have a big appetite in preparation for their breeding. The males are establishing their nests and are just starting to call.

The middle of last year Tidbinbilla sent some Northern Corroboree Frogs to Taronga Zoo (NSW) and Healseville Scantuary (VIC), to assist with breeding and so Northern Corroboree Frogs are not in one area in case there is a disease outbreak or technical errors.

Quarantine facilities at Tidbinbilla have alarm systems in place for the refrigeration unit.

Things are looking good so far for this years upcoming breeding season.

PHOTOGRAPHY WORKSHOP: 12 TO 13 FEBRUARY 2011 AT GARUWANGA, NIMMITABEL NSW

A photographic workshop is planned for 12 to 13 February 2011 at Garuwanga, a property near Nimmitabel. The workshop will cover zoom to macro photography with Geoffrey Dabb and Graham Stephinson imparting their considerable photography skills to attendees.

Numbers will be limited to 20 people so first in best chances. There is plenty of accommodation (indoors on mattresses, or BYO tent outside) is available on site, but it will be BYO catering for meals. On the Saturday evening, however, ACTHA will provide a BBQ meal.

Expressions of interest are invited to margaretning@iprimus.com.au.



ACTHA News

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