

## ACTHA Inc. News

Dec '20 – Jan '21

Newsletter of the  
ACT Herpetological  
Association Inc.



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[www.actha.org.au](http://www.actha.org.au)

#### ACTHA contact details:

PO Box 440 Jamison ACT 2614

E-mail: [info@actha.org.au](mailto:info@actha.org.au)

#### ACTHA Committee for 2019 - 2020

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Youth Representatives: Liam Thornton,

Jake McAuliffe

\* Denotes Life Members

### Diary date - Next Meeting & Christmas Party

#### Friday, 11 December 2020

The *bi-monthly* meetings of the Association are usually held on the third Tuesday of the month, but being our Christmas party, **it will be held on the second Friday.**

The old venue of the Belconnen Soccer Club at Hawker is **no** longer available, as it has closed its doors. We gather at **The Canberra Reptile Zoo** for the time being. We hope you can join us for the Christmas party. **the Party will start at 6pm.**

Please contact Margaret ([@margaretning1@gmail.com](mailto:@margaretning1@gmail.com)) to RSVP, so we can cater properly.

As always, we would like to thank Peter and the Reptile Zoo for allowing us to use their facilities.

## Arid Recovery Pitfall Trap Survey 2020

For our first meeting in person after an ease in COVID restrictions, we had the pleasure of hearing from ACTHA member, Angus Cleary about his week volunteering at a predator proof wildlife reserve in remote South Australia. Angus spent 5 days checking in-ground pitfall traps to help collect data for the sanctuary's monitoring program.

Angus started his adventure by driving from Canberra to the Arid Recovery Sanctuary near Roxby Downs, South Australia, approximately 550km north of Adelaide. It is run by an independent, not for profit organisation, aimed at reintroducing and preserving native flora and fauna. It encompasses 123 square kilometres of land, with two main habitat types: dune and swale in the aeolian sandhills.

On the way, Angus briefly stopped over in the Victorian mallee, which is habitat to a host of endemic reptiles. He was fortunate to see a clawed *Ctenotus* (*Ctenotus brachyonyx*), endemic to the mallee, plus many Nobbi Dragons (*Diporiphora nobbi*) and an Eastern Brown Snake (*Pseudonaja textilis*). Angus continued through Adelaide, north to the final destination of Roxby Downs.

On the first day, Angus and the team set up pitfall traps. These consist of a deep bucket dug into the ground in line with roughly 3 metres between each bucket. The top of the bucket is set flush with the ground surface. A small fence, called a drift net placed across the transect of pitfalls redirects passing animals into the traps. When small animals meet the fence, they follow the fence line so fall into the buckets. Each year the Sanctuary alternates which habitat type they check; dune or swale. This year Angus was involved in checking the dune habitat, which consists low density small shrubs on aeolian dune rises. Angus was very fortunate to volunteering a "dune" year as they normally yield more herps than the "swale" years. To participate in a "dune" year following heavy rain is even luckier!

Each morning at the crack of dawn, the volunteers would check the pitfall traps. The reason for checking so early in the morning is to prevent any animal overheating in the sun. Any animals caught in the traps were placed in a cool, dark space and taken to the lab for processing. The animal's

length, weight and sex are recorded. Data are collected and logged to monitor the reptile population and its health at the sanctuary. Individuals were marked with a small dot with a fine permanent marker pen to be able to identify them again if recaptured.

Arid Recovery Sanctuary has extremely high biodiversity, especially in reptiles. Rain typically brings out most desert dwelling species especially those that go dormant for dry periods. After many years' drought at the Sanctuary the rain was welcomed, and helped to increase reptile activity.

Some highlight species of the trip included:

- Orange-Tailed *Ctenotus* (*Ctenotus leae*)
- Central Desert Slider (*Lerista desertorum*)
- Tessellated Gecko (*Diplodactylus tessellatus*)
- Narrow-Banded Shovel-Nosed Snake (*Brachyuophis fasciolatus*)
- Broad-Banded Sand-Swimmer (*Eremiascincus richarsonii*)
- Suddell's Frog (*Neobatrachus sudellae*)
- Prong-Snouted Blind Snake (*Aniliobutuberculatus*)

Sanctuaries like that of Arid Recovery are becoming more and more important as feral predators take a foothold in Australia's ecosystems. Arid Recovery's intention is to conserve a whole ecosystem as opposed to focussing on a particular species. Monitoring the herpetological biodiversity in a closed off sanctuary is vital in determining the impacts of natural predators and the absence of feral predators on reptiles. Angus aims to stay involved with the sanctuary to help monitor its herpetofauna into the future. After an outstanding trip like that – who wouldn't want to continue the relationship!



1. Tessellated Gecko (*Diplodactylus tessellatus*)
2. Eyrean Beaked Gecko (*Rhynchoedura eyrensis*)
3. Inland snake eyed skink (*Cryptoblepharus australis*)
4. Sudell's Frog (*Neobatrachus sudellae*)
5. Narrow-Banded Shovel-Nosed Snake (*Brachyurops fasciolatus*)
6. Jans Banded Snake (*Simoselaps bertholdi*)

(Photo credits: Angus Cleary)



## The Australian & International Scene

### **Bobtail lizards are coming out in warmer weather, and there are things we can do to care for them**

ABC Radio Perth

By Emma Wyne,

Posted Monday 9 November 2020 at 11:32am



Bobtails are a "sign of a healthy garden".  
(ABC Great Southern: Ellie Honeybone)

With the weather beginning to warm up, you may notice the odd reptile in your neighbourhood, including bobtail lizards, according to gardening expert Sabrina Hahn.

She says there are things you can do to help them. And good reasons to try.

"You will quite often see bobtails and snakes in the same area," Ms Hahn told Gillian O'Shaughnessy on ABC Radio Perth.

"Although it's pretty unlucky if you have bobtails and snakes in your backyard if you live in the urban environment, I think you're pretty safe.

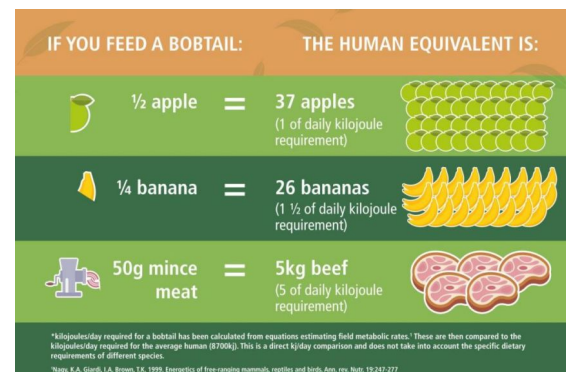
"Most bobtails you will see are usually solitary, the only time they come together is September and October [to breed]."

## **Give them water but try to let them find their own food**

"If you have bobtails in your garden, always leave out a flat tray of water because in summer they do drink a little bit of water," Ms Hahn said.

Healthy Wildlife, Healthy Lives – a website that advises the public on living near native animals – advises against feeding them,

But Healthy Wildlife, Healthy Lives – a website that advises the public on living near native animals – advises against feeding them, because it can risk them becoming over-dependent or eating way more than they can handle.



This chart from Healthy Wildlife, Healthy Lives advises not giving bobtails too much food, if any. (*Healthy Wildlife, Healthy Lives*)

Feeding a bobtail just half an apple is the equivalent to a human eating 37 apples.

Instead, avoid pesticides and let them feast on the cockroaches, beetles and snails in your garden.

"They are not the fastest machines on four legs, which is why snails are so good," Ms Hahn said.

"They don't attack the vegie garden," she added, but will feast on strawberries if they can find them.

"If they have a nice big fat tail when you see them it means they are well fed," she said.

"If their tail is flat and quite shrunken, they actually haven't eaten in a long time, so go and get a little snail for them."



Bobtails make great pets, and even better gardeners

## Create a safe space

Ms Hahn said the biggest predators of bobtails were cats and dogs, so she advised keeping them in at night and creating a pet-free area in your garden.

Bobtails also needed plenty of shelter.

"[Leave an area with] at least 10 centimetres of leaf litter, some logs and some rocks they can hide in," she said.

"Kookaburras, butcher birds and other birds of prey do knock them off. They are too big for magpies, but crows will have a crack, so they need those hidey hole areas."



Bobtail lizards mate for life and only breed a few times a year. (*ABC News: Chris Lewis*)

## Bobtails mate for life

Healthy Wildlife advises against transporting bobtails from your garden to nearby bushland, as the evidence shows they rarely survive long after such a move.

Ms Hahn advised grabbing a bobtail by the back of the head if you do need to pick one up to move it out of harm's way.

And do try to avoid accidentally killing one, because they mate for life.

"If you run over one on the road, you've just taken out someone's lifetime partner," she said.

"They only have two babies a year, and if their mate dies, they don't breed again."

And if sharing your home with a reptile freaks you out, take heart. Ms Hahn says: "They are the sign of a healthy garden"

# Far North Queensland man searches for pet 'dinosaur' missing in Cairns

ABC Far north

By Mark Rigby, Kier Shorey and Phil Staley  
Posted Tue Tuesday 3 Nov November 2020  
at 11:17am



Oscar the lace monitor went missing from Shane Coleman's home after escaping his enclosure on Friday. *(Supplied: Shane Coleman)*

As far as missing pets go, Oscar the lace monitor is not a run-of-the-mill case.

## Key points:

- Shane Coleman has raised Oscar the lace monitor from a hatchling to an almost full-sized adult
- Oscar escaped from his cage sometime on Friday, sparking a search across the southern suburbs of Cairns
- Mr Coleman says Oscar poses little threat to more conventional suburban pets like cats and dogs

Far north Queensland man Shane Coleman has spent the last four days and most of the

nights between them searching for his beloved "small dinosaur".

"He's about as big as they get, he's nearly a full-grown adult male," Mr Coleman said.

"He's nearly 1.8 metres long head-to-tail, so he really is a small dinosaur.

"I've had him for about 15 years, from a hatchling.

"He's spent a lot of time with me — he used to go to TAFE with me in my schoolbag."



Mr Coleman says Oscar is exceptionally tame. *(Supplied: Shane Coleman)*

## Long-range lizard?

Mr Coleman said he had recently moved to Cairns and that Oscar's cage was "in a limbo stage of being fully put together" when he escaped sometime on Friday.

"He's pushed out of the wire and gone walkabout," he said.

"They can walk up to five kilometres a day [and] it's hard to say what he'd actually do, but I don't think he'd walk that far.

"He's likely to be up a tree or looking around next to bins because he's always hungry, despite looking kind of fat."



Despite being almost two metres long, Mr Coleman says Oscar might have a tough time in the wild. (Photo: Shane Coleman)

In the wild lace monitors eat other reptiles, birds, and eggs, and are known to hunt mammals.

But Mr Coleman said Oscar was fed on a diet of dead chickens and rats bred specifically for feeding reptiles and posed little to no threat to more conventional suburban pets.

"He doesn't have a live food diet — there's been chickens in the yard and he's been around cats and dogs and he doesn't show any interest in them," he said.

"He's very well domesticated so I think the real risk is the other way around, with dogs or cats having a go at him if he wanders into their yard.

"He's never really [hunted], he's only ever been fed dead foods so I don't know how he's going to go in the wild and I don't really want him out there."

## **An agreeable companion**

Mr Coleman said despite Oscar's size and fearsome appearance he was quite an approachable reptile.

"He's one of the most domesticated monitors I've come across," he said.

"I often get comments from breeders and reptile keepers who say, 'How have you got that thing so tame?'"

"But it's just down to the time that I've spent with him."

Mr Coleman asked anyone who thinks they've found Oscar to be cautious and to contact ABC Far North to get in touch with him.

"I wouldn't attempt to handle him, even though I would say he's friendly," Mr Coleman said.

"I don't clip his claws so he's capable of deep scratches, but I'd say he's very unlikely to bite anyone or anything."



## Two Videos by Matthew Higgins:

### Go Goanna

An informative look at Rosenberg's monitors (*Varanus rosenbergi*) and Lace Monitors (*V. varius*) (7 minutes)

Video available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Go9Vm2j-5lA&feature=youtu.be>

Australia is well endowed with reptiles, especially Goannas (or Monitors). This video looks at two species, Rosenberg's Monitor and the Lace Monitor. The most southerly Goannas in the world, both species lay their eggs in termite mounds which act as incubation chambers during the cool months of winter. Filmed near Canberra and Bega, Go Goanna creates an intimate portrait of these beautiful lizards as they go about their daily lives, capturing behaviours in the wild witnessed by very few people. The soundtrack includes narration and natural sounds of the great Australian bush. (Some viewers might prefer to know in advance that, being a nature video, there is a short sequence of graphic footage of predation by Goannas.)

*All credit and copyright for the footage and description to Matthew Higgins*

### Doin' the Dragon

"Doin' the Dragon" shows the natural behaviour of a Jacky Dragon (*Amphibolurus muricatus*) (2 minutes)

Video available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1UTqfGI5TTs&feature=youtu.be>

Jacky Lizards are a common Australian dragon lizard. Filmed by Matthew Higgins in a bush garden near Bega, Doin' the Dragon captures these beautiful little reptiles as they quickly go about their daily lives. A particularly engaging aspect is the lizards' territorial behaviour, consisting of head-bobbing, hand-waving, throat-inflation and tail-flicking. The music is 'Get Up' by Coyote Hearing (rap comes naturally to these reptiles!). There's also a nice range of local bird calls on the soundtrack as usual.

*All credit and copyright for the footage and description to Matthew Higgins*



## **“What’s under the hood? Phylogeny and taxonomy of the snake genera *Parasuta* Worrell and *Suta* Worrell (Squamata: Elapidae), with a description of a new species from the Pilbara, Western Australia”**

Brad Maryan, Ian Brennan *et al*, (2020)  
*Zootaxa* 4778 (1): 001–047

### **A summary of the research paper by Angus Cleary and Brian La Rance**

The genus *Parasuta* has been used to refer to Australia’s “hooded snakes” - small nocturnal elapids with characteristic black head markings that specialise in eating reptiles and frogs. *Parasuta* was considered closely related to the genus *Suta*, which shares these habits but differs slightly in morphology. This paper uses molecular phylogenetic analysis techniques and morphological data, attempts to resolve the relationship and phylogeny between *Parasuta* and *Suta* in a taxonomically complete and robust way.

The major find proposed by this paper is that there is little evidence to support monophyly (separation) of *Parasuta* or *Suta*, and supports previous evidence that they should be combined into the same genus (which in this case is *Suta*). This places the species *P. spectabilis*, *P. gouldii*, *P. monachus*, *P. nigriceps*, *P. flagellum* and *P. dwyeri* into the genus *Suta*, along with the existing members *S. suta*, *S. fasciata*, *S. punctata* and *S. ordensis*. This would render the *Parasuta* genus obsolete.

In addition to this, the paper found the Pilbara population of *P. monachus* to be distinct from other *P. monachus* populations. Through genetic and morphological sampling, a conclusion was drawn to split the Pilbara population into its own species, *Suta gaikhorstorum*. *S. gaikhorstorum* is similar in appearance to *S. monachus* with the main external difference being that *S. gaikhorstorum* is slightly larger. However, genetically the two species are extremely distinct. *S. gaikhorstorum* has 15 midbody scale rows and attains an average size of 460mm.



*Suta suta*, Narrabri (Photo: Wes Read)



*Suta dwyeri*, Canberra (Photo: Brian La Rance)

A full version of the paper is available from:

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341356149\\_What's\\_under\\_the\\_hood\\_Phylogeny\\_and\\_taxonomy\\_of\\_the\\_snake\\_genera\\_Parasuta\\_Worrell\\_and\\_Suta\\_Worrell\\_Squamata\\_Elapidae\\_with\\_a\\_description\\_of\\_a\\_new\\_species\\_from\\_the\\_Pilbara\\_Western\\_Australia](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341356149_What's_under_the_hood_Phylogeny_and_taxonomy_of_the_snake_genera_Parasuta_Worrell_and_Suta_Worrell_Squamata_Elapidae_with_a_description_of_a_new_species_from_the_Pilbara_Western_Australia)

## Illawarra Herp Trip, Spring 2020

Brian La Rance

The year 2020 had been full of changing plans and travel restrictions. Thanks to a little virus, I had cancelled and rearranged many well-planned herp trips. However, the weather was warming up and a two-week holiday was fast approaching, so a herpetological adventure beckoned. The southern heath frog (*Litoria watsoni*), has recently been described, so a friend from the ANU, Wes and I decided that could be the main incentive for a trip, along with a few other amphibian goodies from around the southern end of the Sydney Basin and the Illawarra escarpment.

Our first target was Robertson, a small town in the southern highlands. We had our sights set on finding a small skink there, McCoy's Skink (*Anepischetosia maccoyi*). Despite being quite a common species and one that both Wes and I have seen in the ACT, we were both very keen to see the supposedly distinct population in the Southern Highlands. After a drive that seemed to last forever, we arrived in Robertson and found a beautiful patch of rainforest on the edge of town. It was not long into exploring this small patch that Wes shouted from behind a tree, the two best words any herper can hear: "Got one!". After a quick photoshoot, we continued our search to see what else we could turn up. Within 15 minutes of checking this small rainforest patch we had racked up well over 10 McCoy's Skinks.

Leaving Robertson on a high note after seeing so many little brown skinks, we headed north and slowly

down the Illawarra escarpment. Continuing up the coast and once again onto the escarpments of Dharawal National Park. We had our sights set on marsh snakes (*Hemiapsis signata*) and mainland she oak skinks (*Cyclodomorphus michaeli*). Less than 5 minutes' searching revealed a marsh snake. After a brief photoshoot we left him alone. Despite our efforts in the following several hours we were unable to find she oak skinks, so we settled on photographing a few orchids.

After a quick pitstop at the nearest servo for spare batteries, we made our way to our first frogging spot. Our target was the Blue Mountains Tree Frog (*Litoria citropa*). After a thorough explore of Dharawal creek and seeing many tadpoles in the creek, we looked forward to seeing the adults come nightfall. As Wes went back to photograph some orchids we had seen earlier, I stayed at the car to make us dinner. After fuelling up on two-minute noodles and impatiently and eagerly waiting for the sun to set the time had finally come. We headed out of the car armed with our cameras and head torches, before we even got to the creek, we had found a big girl of a Blue Mountains Tree Frog (*L. citropa*) sitting on the path, Success! We journeyed down to the rocky creek to find large numbers of Blue Mountains Tree Frog (*L. citropa*), Stony Creek frog (*L. lesueuri*), Southern Green Stream Frog (*L. phyllocroa*) and Common Froglet (*C. signifera*). After spending some time photographing the frogs we walked back to the car, grins spreading across our faces.

We continued our journey to the opposite end of the escarpment in search of the trip's main target, *L. watsoni*. In Budderoo National Park we walked down to the first creek in search of our target frog. at The creek was overgrown and cut through the heath. We were slightly disappointed by the lack of frogs, but as we began to search we heard the call we were seeking. *L. watsoni* was hiding there! Whilst we couldn't locate them at first, we knew they were around, so we returned to the car and decided to try the next spot. After walking 4km down to the rocky creek, excitement was in the air. As we arrived, we were greeted by the call of plenty of *L. watsoni* and after a quick poke around we found three individuals, Success!

After returning to the car, we decided to test our luck one last time for the evening. We drove to another spot in the national park, this time in search for the Southern Stream Frog (*L. nudidigitus*). After arriving at the next creek, we were welcomed with the sweet, high pitched croak of *L. nudidigitus*. After a while searching the coral fern- covered edges of the creek, we found and photographed several examples. Eventually returning to the car at around 11:30pm we were both incredibly happy and incredibly tired from the night's adventures. After a quick maccas stop around midnight we drove to our campsite, rolled out our swags and slept, a very well-deserved sleep.



McCoy's Skink  
(*Anepischetosia maccoyi*)  
Photo: B. La Rance



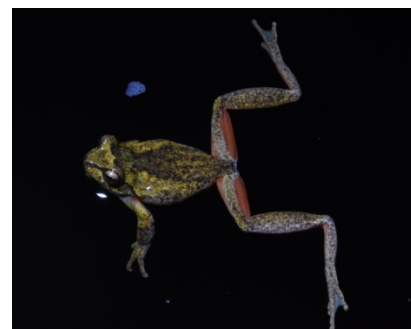
Swamp snake  
(*Hemiapsis signata*)  
Photo: B. La Rance



Blue Mountains Tree Frog  
(*Litoria citropa*)  
Photo: B. La Rance



Stony Creek Frog  
(*Litoria lesueuri*)  
Photo: B. La Rance



Southern Heath Frog  
(*Litoria littlejohni*)  
Photo: B. La Rance

# Wally the puppy rescued from two-metre carpet python's jaws on Sunshine Coast

ABC Sunshine Coast

By Tara Cassidy



Wally the puppy is lucky to be alive after his ordeal last night. (Photo: Sunshine Coast Snake Catchers 24/7)

A 10-week-old puppy is lucky to be alive after its owners helped it escape a python's jaws last night, after finding it in a pool of blood.

## Key points:

- A snake catcher removed the python and said it was rare for pythons to attack dogs and cats
- Sunshine Coast woman Kelly Morris said she and her partner heard their puppy Wally, a wolfhound cross, yelping in pain and found him in what they described as a "crime scene".
- "We heard a horrible sound and we thought he might have fallen or got stuck so we ran downstairs, and it was like something from a horror movie," she said.
- "There was fluid everywhere, he'd weed and pooped himself and there was blood everywhere.
- "This snake was wrapped around Wally's stomach and neck and was latched onto Wally's face."
- The couple quickly tried to uncoil the two-metre carpet python and release Wally's head from its fangs.
- "He appeared to be OK, but his little eyes were starting to roll back in his eyelids," Ms Morris said.
- "There was a lot of noise and the girls [our daughters] were getting upset, the commotion woke them up.
- "We managed to get it off and into a pillowcase and put the snake in a rubbish bin so it couldn't get anywhere.
- "We took [Wally] to the emergency vet in Tanawha and they did an X-ray on his little rib cage and everything to make sure he was OK.
- Wally, a young wolfhound cross, was found by his owners being constricted by the python
- The puppy escaped with a bruised lung and punctures to his face and is now recovering



"They gave him some heavy painkillers and antibiotics; he got a bit of a bruised lung on one side and they said to keep an eye on him."



Wally's owners say they walked into a room full of blood and their puppy yelping in pain. (Photo: Sunshine Coast Snake Catchers 24/7)

## **'There was blood everywhere'**

Ms Morris said Wally had only been living at the family's Caloundra West property for a fortnight and turned 10 weeks' old on Wednesday.

She said he was recovering well.

"We are so relieved and especially the kids are happy to see he's OK," Ms Morris said.

"It was just like something from TV or a movie, honestly.

"You see things on Facebook and go, 'That would never happen to me.'"

Ms Morris said the python had to slither inside their home to find Wally.

"And it was a real shock because the python had to go past four chickens — the whole chicken coop — before it

came inside to poor Wally on the couch," she said.

"He was obviously looking for something warm.

"And there was just this lovely snack [Wally] sitting on the couch."

## **A hunting snake 'extremely powerful'**

The crew from Sunshine Coast Snake Catchers 24/7 attended the property to collect and relocate the snake and said it was a startling sight.

"Brendan went out after receiving the panicked call and when he got there it was just blood everywhere, all over the lady," said snake catcher Stuart McKenzie.

He said Wally was lucky to be alive thanks to his owners finding him in the nick of time.

"When a snake's in hunting mode they're extremely powerful and extremely strong ... it doesn't take long for the snake to constrict," he said.

"Luckily, they managed to get the snake off before we got there so the hard work was done.

"If they had have waited for us to get there the dog would have been dead.

"But luckily everybody was fine."



Charlotte, 3, and Summer, 6, are happy Wally is safe and sound. (Photo: Kelly Morris)

## **Rare event for snakes to target dogs, cats**

Mr McKenzie said it was very rare for snakes to attack and attempt to eat a dog or cat.

"It happens all the time with chickens, guinea pigs, birds, that sort of thing, but dogs and cats it's pretty rare," he said.

"We get maybe one, two or three for the year with a dog or a cat, but generally they're too big in size.

"But when you get a really, really small puppy, then it can work because if you get a big carpet python coming through and it's looking for food, they can easily swallow possums and some dogs are the same size as a possum.

"But generally, we get called weekly, nearly daily for chicken coops where a python's gone in and eaten the chicken eggs or snuck into a birdcage and eaten a couple of birds — that's very common."

According to Mr McKenzie, snakes are not always to blame for pet deaths as often cats and dogs target the snake first.

"Cats and dogs are very curious, so they'll actually go up to snakes and try and fight with them and then the snake will actually defend itself and then hurt the pet," he said.

"So it's not always the snake trying to seek out and hunt dogs or cats, it can actually go the other way — it's more likely to go the other way actually."

Mr McKenzie recommended keeping cats indoors at night and keeping a watchful eye on small pets, particularly during snake season.