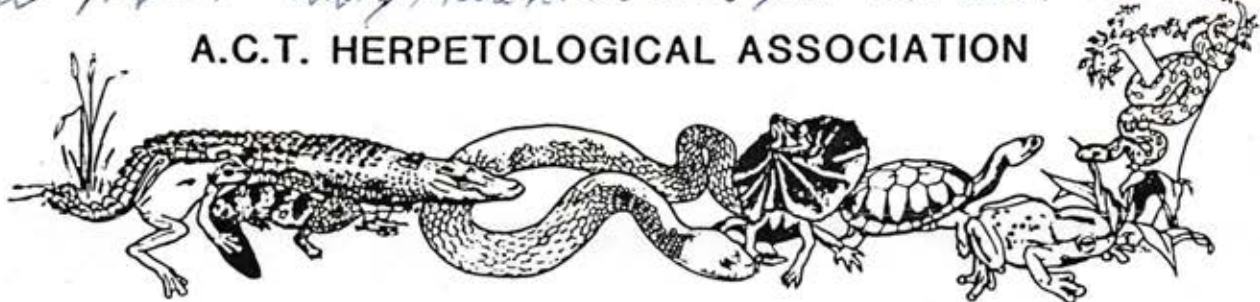


Rick your talk could be either August 21 or 28, whichever ever June '86  
you prefer. Will. Please let me know your best date. 494268 (a.u)

## A.C.T. HERPETOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION



The last meeting of the ACT Herpetological Association was attended by 12 members. The talk for the evening was given by Michael Lau. Michael provided a very comprehensive introduction to almost all of the herpetofauna of Hong Kong. The slides of reptiles and amphibians were spectacular, and to some of us untravelling members, the slides of habitats, countryside and market gardens were equally of interest. Thanks to Michael for presenting his talk.

We welcome two new members, Sue Tudor of Braidwood and Paul Scanlon of Red Hill. The Association now has 28 members who regularly attend its meetings and talks.

### Next meeting and talk

The next meeting of the Herpetological Association will be held on Thursday 24 July in the meetings room of the Department of Zoology, ANU, at 7.30 pm. There will not be a business meeting. If people have urgent business matters to discuss, a few minutes could be devoted to this before the evenings talk commences.

The talk/slides will be by John Wombey (CSIRO Wildlife and Rangelands Research). The topic is:

### REPTILES AND FROGS OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY AND HOW NOT TO PHOTOGRAPH THEM

John will show slides of this herpetofaunally rich area (including Kakadu National Park) and will give some tips on how to go about photographing frogs and reptiles. He will be bringing along some of his personal photographic equipment to demonstrate its use.

### Forthcoming seminar

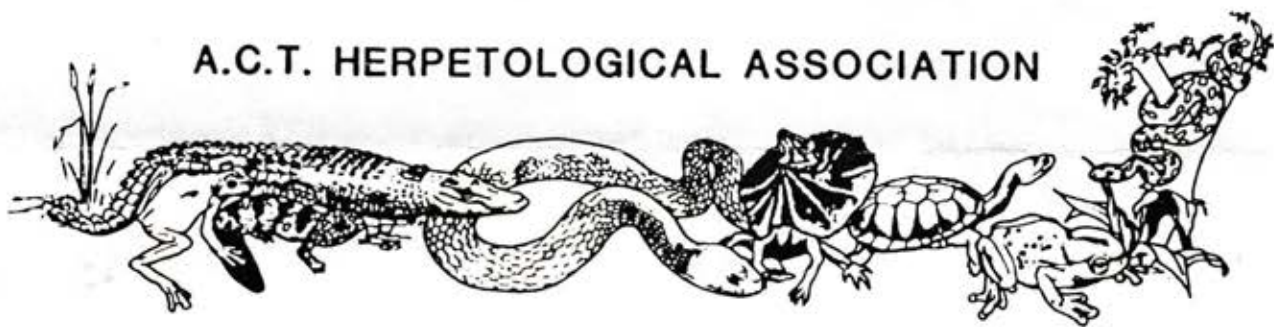
At our August meeting Rick Longmore of the Bureau of Flora and Fauna will give an update on the now almost finalised Atlas of Australian Elapid Snakes. Rick's talk is called "A long awaited tail: the Elapid Atlas of Australia reaches completion".

### 1988 Herp Conference

Rick Longmore has informed us of a proposal by Queensland Museum Herpetologists, Jeanette Covacevich and Glen Ingram, to host a Bi-centenary Herpetological Conference in Brisbane in 1988. Rick volunteered to write a letter of encouragement to Jeannette and Glen (copy enclosed). The Association feels that this would be a real plus for Qld Herpetology, given the states very rich, but neglected herpetofauna.

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A.C.T. HERPETOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION



Dr. Jeannette Couracovich  
Curator of Reptiles,

Dr. Iylen Ingram  
Curator of Amphibians,  
Queensland Museum,  
Gregory Terrace,  
Fontitude Valley Qld. 4006

cf Bureau of Flora and Fauna  
G.P.O. Box 1363  
Canberra A.C.T. 2601

4-7-86

Dear Jeannette and Iylen,

At its monthly meeting last night  
the A.C.T. Herpetological Association was informed of your joint proposal  
to host a Bi-centenary Herpetological Conference at the Queensland Museum  
in 1988. This announcement was welcomed and I wish to advise  
that the Association commends you and adds its support to the proposal.

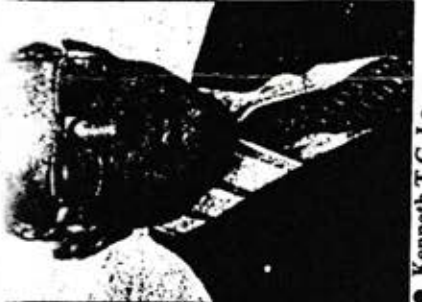
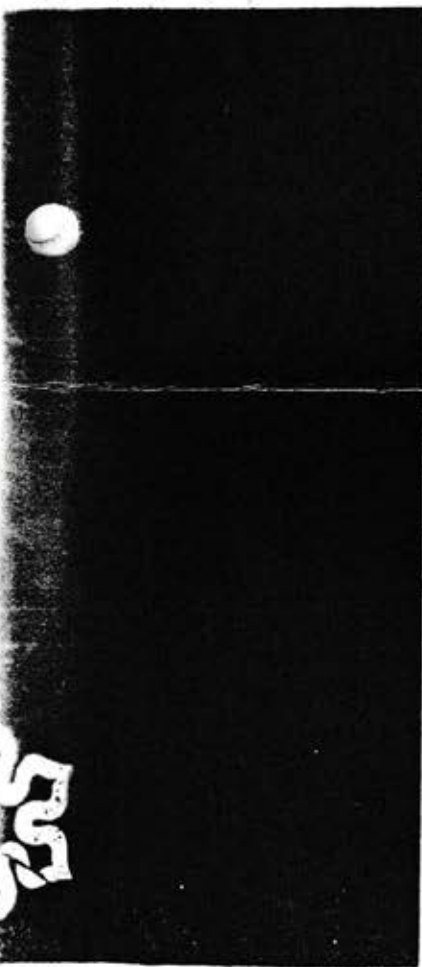
We wish you well in the difficult planning stages  
ahead,

Best wishes,

Richard Longmore  
on behalf of the ACTHA.



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● Kenneth T.C. Lo.



● Chum Choi-sang.

Returning members, Mr Kenneth T.C. Lo and Mr Shum Choi-sang, who between them gave 30 years' service to the Council.

Mr Lo, appointed a councillor 19 years ago, in 1966, has played a big part in improving sporting and leisure facilities as Chairman of the Recreation Select Committee. Mr Shum, appointed 11 years ago, devoted much effort to the Council's market construction programme.

See also Page 3

# The tale of four snake-hunters

THOSE bent on acquiring a collector's knowledge of Hong Kong's reptiles and amphibians — meaning snakes and frogs, among other creatures — must be prepared to spend many days and nights in the roughest of rough territory.

Strong legs, strong teeth and a tough skin are useful assets for such enthusiasts. For they must learn to clamber up steep, rocky stream courses in the dark, with a flashlight held in the mouth. And they must accept the risk of the occasional snakebite.

One man who has the right qualities and aptitudes is Anthony Bogadek — priest, scientist, teacher and natural historian. He is now about to become an author, as a contributor to the Urban Council's series of books on the fauna, flora and minerals of Hong Kong.

"Hong Kong Amphibians and Reptiles" will be published later this year. It comprises descriptions of 99 species — 23 kinds of amphibian and 76 kinds of reptile. The amphibians are:

frogs (19 species); toads (3); and newts (1). The reptiles are: snakes (47); lizards (18); and turtles and terrapins, known collectively as chelonians (11).

There are three authors. Two, Michael Lau Wai-ning and Stephen J. Karsen, are young men in their early twenties. Listed third after them is Bogadek; aged 53, he is senior science master at St Louis College, a school in Western District.

Father Bogadek is a remarkable man. Compact in build, his physical fitness is unmistakable. He is also extremely modest. Many other scientists in his position might have chosen to present "Hong Kong Amphibians and Reptiles" as their own exclusive work. In fact, it was only with great reluctance that he consented to being named at all on the title-page.

He is much keener to talk about his young collaborators than about himself. And he often diverts conversation to the man to whom the book is dedicated: the late J.D. Romer, "our friend and

teacher, who introduced us to the wonders of herpetology".

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Herpetology means the study of amphibians and reptiles. And John Romer became known as Hong Kong's leading herpetologist in the 1960s and 1970s, when he worked for the Urban Services Department in charge of its Pest Control Unit and was also honorary curator of mammals at the Zoological Gardens.

Over those two decades Romer, who came to Hong Kong in the 1950s, became known popularly as "Hong Kong's Snake Man". He was the author of "The venomous Snakes of Hong Kong" (also published in the Urban Council's series on the natural environment) and when he retired to England in 1980 he planned to produce a *magnum opus* on the territory's amphibians and reptiles.

He fell seriously ill before he could begin work and within months he was dead. His collection of specimens remains in the British Museum in London, where he

had sent it from Hong Kong. But all efforts to locate the extensive notes on which the book was to be based have so far failed.

After John Romer's death several people in Hong Kong felt strongly that the project should not be abandoned. Among them was Brian Wilson, the former Director of Urban Services and a keen naturalist, now retired and living in Australia. He urged Father Bogadek to accept the challenge; and "Hong Kong Amphibians and Reptiles", when published, will be the result.

Scientific achievements are nearly always the outcome of collaborative efforts, often including a multi-national element of co-operation, and that is true of this work. In a real sense there are four main contributors: Romer, the Englishman who laid the basis for the project and whose memory has inspired it; Michael Lau, Hong Kong Chinese and now studying biology at Canberra

Continued on Page 4



● Father Bogadek, one hand gloved as a precaution, displays the markings of a venomous snake.



# Reptile book author looks back on the long years of exploration



Collector extraordinary: Stephen Karsen, aged about 15.



Dedicated researcher: Michael Lau Wai-ning at school.

Continued from Page 1  
University. Stephen Karsen, a young American, now back in Michigan; and Father Bogadek himself, an Italian of Slav descent from Trieste who has regarded Hong Kong as his home since 1948.

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"It was John Romer who got me interested in reptiles", says Father Bogadek. "I first met him in 1975. He was giving some extra-mural lectures at Hong Kong University, and I was one of the students.

"After one lecture he persuaded me to join the Natural History Society of Hong Kong. Next, he encouraged me to have a go at collecting. So I began climbing about the slopes behind the university — not far from St Louis School, where I work; and much to my surprise I came across a fair number of snakes. I was very inexperienced in those days — just about every specimen I took to Romer for identification.

"Also to my surprise, I found that my collecting activities became useful to Romer. Because of a back ailment he was physically unable to undertake field work in difficult terrain.

"He was extremely interested in the specimens that I brought in, especially since several belonged to species which had not been sighted for some years. In fact it was news to him that there was an area so rich in reptiles so close to town."

One thing led to another. Father Bogadek extended his collecting to take in lizards, frogs and turtles as well as snakes — indeed he needed frogs as food for some of the snakes. He also spread his net wider, making expeditions to Lantau and other islands and many remote parts of the New Territories.

He housed the collection, today comprising about 40 species, in a basement of the school building. As it began to grow, his science students became progressively involved. Many started to share his enthusiasm and young volunteers were now joining him on his explorations. A St Louis herpetological group was formed.

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It was at this stage, in 1978, that a studious 14-year-old boy, Michael Lau Wai-ning, entered the Form III biology class and came to his teacher's attention.

by Father Bogadek as an exceptionally shrewd observer of animals and animal behaviour.

"He was an avid reader and he had a keen eye for detail. In short he had — and, I'm sure, retains — the talents needed for serious scientific research.

"When it came to observing animal physiology and behaviour, his patience and sharp eyesight were a great help. For example, they enabled him to establish exactly how one particularly small snake set about eating minute termites — by first breaking off the thorax of the insect."

In 1981 Michael entered an essay competition sponsored by the World Wildlife Fund. The piece that he submitted, largely about reptiles, won the first prize, which for him was a naturalist's trip to Nepal.

## How two schoolboys and a priest extended the trail blazed by John Romer

Aged 21, he is now in the second year of his biology degree course in Australia. A bright professional future is predicted for him.

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A few months after Michael Lau joined the school's herpetological group, Father Bogadek had a strange encounter in a water-supply tunnel near Sek Kong, in the course of a Natural History Walk conducted by John Romer.

"I had found a turtle — and one of the party, a ginger-haired American boy, came up to me and said he wanted to take it home with him. Romer had to dissuade him, by explaining that it was a protected species and that a permit to retain a specimen had to be first obtained from the Agriculture and Fisheries Department."

This was Bogadek's introduction to Stephen Karsen, who was then a 15-year-old student at the Hong Kong International School at Repulse Bay and who was to accompany the priest and Michael Lau on many a subsequent collecting expedition.

"Stephen proved himself to be an outstanding collector", says Father Bogadek, "and he was a most unusual character. He had enormous

energy and determination; and, amazingly, when he set out to catch a certain specimen he nearly always came back with it. He seemed to know exactly which stone to look under.

"I was with him once climbing up a stream course when we spotted a rare snake in a pool about 10 feet deep. He dived straight in after it and brought it out, though this cost him quite a few bites.

"On another occasion he arrived back at his school with a Burmese python (Hong Kong's biggest snake, which can reach six metres in length) wrapped round him. He could walk for miles in any sort of country, however rugged, and in all weathers."

The son of a Protestant missionary teacher, Stephen had started collecting snakes at the age of eight, and years

the dedication of the book indicates, it was a sense of the "wonders of herpetology" which provided the driving force for their common endeavours.

But what exactly are the "wonders of herpetology"? What is the magic attraction of reptiles and amphibians?

Father Bogadek says it's difficult to explain, and pauses before replying. "Perhaps", he suggests finally, "the answer lies in beauty and mystery. The form and colouring of these creatures are so fascinating. And, with snakes, there is the fascination of observing all the things that creatures without limbs manage to do.

"We know so little about these animals, because so much of their lives is lived where we can't see them. One repeatedly finds that what is written about them in books and is generally accepted as part of the authentic record is contradicted by one's own observations."

Clearing up mysteries, even minor ones, says Father Bogadek, brings moments of excitement. One example was the rediscovery of Romer's Tree Frog, a tiny creature (average length 1.5 centimetres) which is Hong Kong's smallest amphibian.

"John Romer discovered the species on Lamma Island in 1952, but from 1953 onwards there was no recorded observation of a specimen. He therefore urged me to keep looking for it. The trouble was that the remote cave where he'd found his specimens had collapsed and one had to explore elsewhere. It was rather like looking for a needle in a haystack.

"Stephen and I spent many evenings on the island searching for signs of the frog, which is strictly nocturnal.

"Then, one night last May, just as we were about to

of experience made him adept at recognising a species in the field.

He had also travelled widely. Fortunately for his fellow passengers on aircraft, none of the specimens he often carried with him — in pockets or in hand-baggage — escaped while air-borne.

In a recent letter from Michigan he reported happily that he now had about ten acres of land round his home which he could explore for reptiles without restriction.

"In Hong Kong," recalls Father Bogadek, "he found it frustrating to be confronted by notices proclaiming 'Crown Land — Keep Out' or 'MoD Property — Restricted Area'. In fact he tended to ignore such notices if he thought there was a worthwhile specimen in the location."

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It emerges that two of the three authors of "Hong Kong Amphibians and Reptiles" were schoolboys at the time when they contributed to the work — and boys of widely divergent talents and make-up.

What brought them and Anthony Bogadek together? Clearly, there was the common link with John Romer, the "friend and teacher" of all three. Equally clearly, as

gave up because the last ferry from Sok Kwu Wan back to Central was due to leave very soon, we heard a thin high-pitched sound near some caves. We decided that the sound could not have come from a cricket and that it was worth persevering for a few minutes more.

"And then, with the aid of our torches, we saw it — a minute almost insect-like creature making arcs in the air as it leaped around. That was the first one; we soon spotted others. We just made it to the ferry."

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Other comparable discoveries resulted from the thousands of hours of fieldwork, observation, note-making and writing that the project demanded from the three authors.

"No new species came to light," says Father Bogadek. "But the book does include recordings of several species not previously known to be present in the territory. This sort of fact-gathering does serve to reduce the vast area of ignorance, and has scientific and educational value."

Another intended function of the book is to familiarise general readers with the ways of reptiles and amphibians, and thus to combat the irrational revulsion that so many people feel about them.

"Apart from their beauty," Father Bogadek points out, "many species play a useful role in our environment — as eaters of rats or mosquitoes, for instance. We hope that the book will encourage people to respect these animals and help to conserve them."

The book will include some common-sense advice on how to avoid alarming — and thus possibly angering — a snake, and on how to treat a venomous bite if one is unlucky enough to be bitten.

"But there's little real dan-

ger so long as one behaves sensibly," says Father Bogadek. "We should all remember that snakes are not basically aggressive towards humans. Their instinct is to keep out of our way."

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For Father Bogadek, the publication of "Hong Kong Amphibians and Reptiles" will be the culmination of 10 years of herpetological — as student and teacher — collector and recorder.

Another ten years of his life were devoted to theological training. He began his novitiate in Italy in the late Forties and was ordained into the priesthood in 1958. The Salesian Order which he then joined was founded 125 years ago by Don Bosco, dedicated to caring for children in difficulties; it is now essentially a teaching order.

There was also another decade of in-service training as a teacher, combined with scientific studies. In 1968 he graduated from Dublin University with a first-class honours degree in biology, and was offered the chance to follow a doctoral degree course in bio-chemistry.

If Anthony Bogadek had said yes to this option, it is extremely unlikely that he would ever have met Romer. In the event he decided he was needed as a teacher back in St Louis School, and there he returned.

The loss to biochemistry has turned out to be a gain for herpetology. It has also been a gain for Hong Kong, in the judgment of all who are interested in the natural history of the territory. Finally, John Romer, one feels, would take keen delight in a publication that will honour his memory, keep his name alive and encourage others to follow the tough, winding yet rewarding trail that lures collectors onwards and upwards.



John Romer in the Zoological Gardens, a picture taken shortly before he left Hong Kong. With him (centre) is Dr Kenneth Searle, the Urban Council's Honorary Zoological Curator, a close associate and friend of Romer.