

# **ACT HERPETOLOGICAL ASSOC.**

## **N E W S L E T T E R**



**JUNE, 1987**

### **TABLE OF CONTENTS:**

1. Editor's Report
2. Breeding of Blue-Tongue Lizards - by Paul Scanlan
3. Reptile Breeding - A Justifiable Goal?
4. Notes on Captive Breeding of the Taipan
5. Membership Form

# **EDITOR'S REPORT**

## **NEXT MEETING :**

The next meeting of the A.C.T. Herpetological Association will be on :

**THURSDAY, 25TH JUNE, 1987 AT 7:30 PM**

There will be a short business meeting starting at 7.30 and the general meeting will commence at 8.00 pm.

## **REPORT OF LAST MEETING :**

Our last meeting held on 27th May, 1987 was very well attended and many thanks to all those who paid their membership fees so promptly. Over \$100.00 was paid and our Treasurer, Paul Hardiman was kept busy writing receipts all night!

It was decided to open a cheque account in the name of "A.C.T. Herpetological Association" with Paul Hardiman, Ross Bennett and Sue Tudor acting as signatories.

## **MEMBERSHIP FEES :**

Subscriptions are now due and may be paid at our monthly meetings or forwarded to the Treasurer at the following address :-

Mr. P. Hardiman  
Treasurer  
A.C.T. Herpetological Assoc.,  
115 Fullagar Crescent  
HIGGINS ACT 2615

A membership form is included in this newsletter to be forwarded with payment of fees.

## **TALK :**

Many thanks to John Wombey for his interesting and informative talk and slide show on snakes.

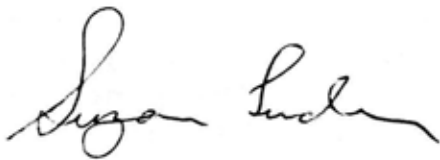
## **TALK FOR NEXT MEETING :**

The talk for our next meeting will be given by one of our youngest members, Paul Scanlan, on his recent success in breeding Blue Tongue Lizards.

## PROGRAM FOR THE YEAR :

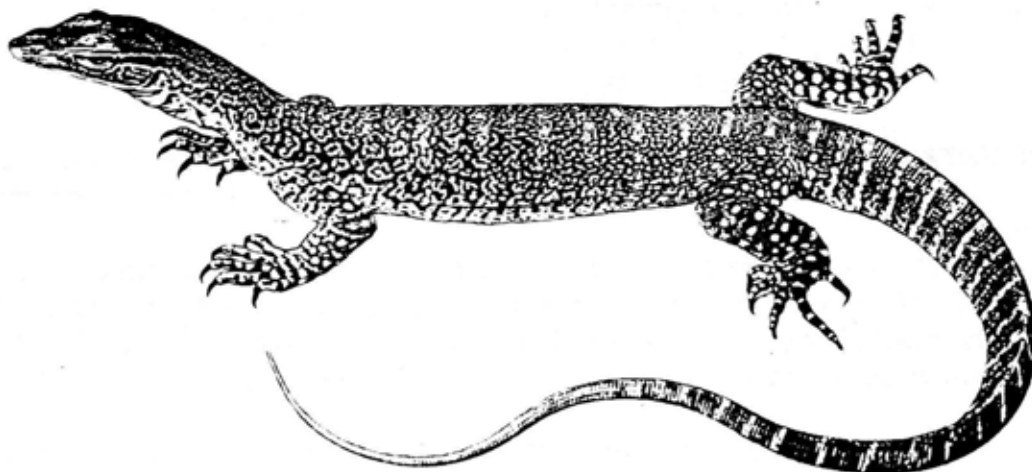
We have decided to hold our meetings on alternate 4th Wednesday and Thursday nights to allow as many members as possible to attend. To avoid confusion I have prepared the following program for the rest of the year :-

|           |   |              |      |
|-----------|---|--------------|------|
| JUNE      | - | THURSDAY     | 25TH |
| JULY      | - | WEDNESDAY    | 22ND |
| AUGUST    | - | THURSDAY     | 27TH |
| SEPTEMBER | - | WEDNESDAY    | 23RD |
| OCTOBER   | - | THURSDAY     | 22ND |
| NOVEMBER  | - | WEDNESDAY    | 25TH |
| DECEMBER  | - | 3RD THURSDAY | 17TH |



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## BREEDING OF BLUE TONGUE LIZARDS :

On Saturday 21st of March, 1987 a Common Blue-Tongued Skink (*Tiliqua scincoides*) in my collection gave birth to 8-1/2 young. The extra half lizard came from the fact that a Siamese twin or an example of incomplete twinning was born. This lizard had 5 limbs (an extra front leg with 10 toes) and 2 heads. Its back was arched and did not form part of the smooth cigar-shaped body which his brothers and sisters had inherited. Both heads ate and drank and did what normal heads do independently. It was noticeably smaller than the rest of the litter. Unfortunately on the 5th April, 1987 this lizard ceased to live - cause of death as yet unknown. At the present time its body resides at the C.S.I.R.O. museum under the care of Mr. John Wombey.

One possible reason for the incomplete twinning may have been that it was the female's first litter which also accounts for the not so large number of young. Another factor may be that the parents are a different colour phase and so may be genetically different, causing the genetic freak. If anyone has any other information about two-headed lizards, particularly Blue-tongues I would be very interested.

On Sunday 22nd March, 1987 again my collection swelled in the ranks. This time a Blotched Blue-Tongue was giving birth. Unaware that any lizard was in labour I strolled into the reptile enclosure and at the same time the Blotched Blue-Tongue rushed to my feet. Normally a rather timid lizard, she seemed to not want my presence. It was just then when the last of 4 young were born. The mother lizard had deliberately tried to ward me off. Maternal instincts perhaps? I also discovered in the cage a yellow mass about the size of one of the baby lizards. This, I am told was an unfertilized egg. But the young that were born were not ordinary Blotched Blue-Tongues. These lizards are hybrids, *Tiliqua scincoides/nigrolutea*. Another point is that I believe the father of the Common Blue-Tongues was also the father of the hybrids. These hybrids however are by no means unique, both Eric Worrell and the late G. Longley have bred them. Apparently their hybrids proved to be fertile themselves and reproduced for several generations. I, too, hope to breed the hybrids and am sure the young, if any, will be of interest.

The two litters of young just described were the first that I have recorded. I have had the adults in captivity for over two years and so mating did not occur in the wild, unless of course delayed fertilization has taken place which I doubt. I would have to rate my weekend of the 21st and 22nd of March, 1987 as the most interesting herpetology-wise and I hope that the coming Autumn brings just as good a litter.

(Written by Paul Scanlan, junior member of the ACT Herpetological Association)

The following article has been reprinted from the R.K.A. Journal :-

### REPTILE BREEDING : A JUSTIFIABLE GOAL?

The propagation of reptiles - especially of those species whose habitats are generally under agricultural seize, should be encouraged - not discouraged as is the current situation in N.S.W. People like Gerald Durrell and David Attenborough tell us that the terrarium may be the only future for many vertebrate species that stand between man and his expanding realm. The authorities (N.S.W. National Parks & Wildlife) apparently do not feel that the amateur herpetologist is the appropriate vehicle for reptile breeding programs: that these things should be left entirely to existing A-Class zoos, universities and government research centres.

In reality, only a conservative amount of native reptile propagation is presently being undertaken through these "acceptable" channels; substantially less than is attained with birds. The Australian zoos are successful in breeding many of their stock, but practicality and logistics restrict their inventory to a sadly finite number of native species. By contrast, a disproportionate amount of breeding does occur in the collections of private hobbyists - the greatest fraction of these being illegal, "underground" keepers.

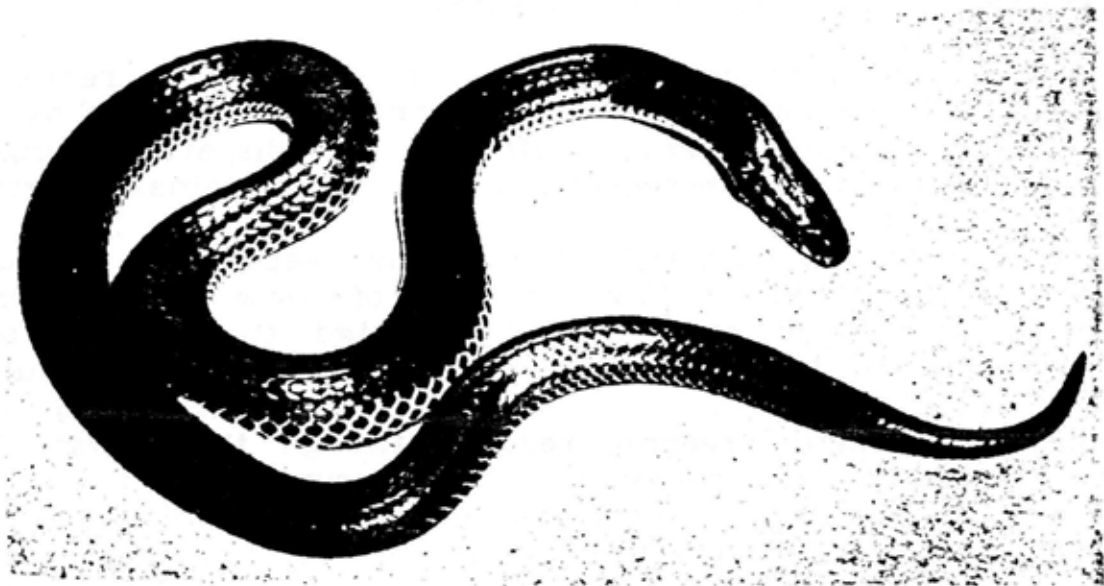
Perhaps it is because our numbers are much fewer than the many bird keepers and aquarists in NSW that we have never been able to raise issue effectively with the NPWS as these people have successfully done. It's more likely however, that we've simply not put enough effort into the matter. In any event, at present, our hobby is not given the same degree of acceptability as is granted to the keeping of other classes of vertebrates.

The overall situation in captive reptile breeding is really little different than that of captive bird breeding; it is a goal set by many keen young reptile keepers. The greatest disparity being that generally speaking, bird breeders need not fear criminal prosecution!

It is true that approximately 120 reptile keepers are licenced in N.S.W. by the NPWS. The majority of these people represent hobbyists who were automatically granted the consent of the authorities when the restrictive legislation and NPWS regulations came into effect in early 1974. Many of these people have established excellent breeding records, though the newest NPWS policy disallows the distribution of arising progeny to new, unlicenced hobbyists. Furthermore, licenced reptile keepers are granted permission to collect new specimens under only the rarest of incidences. In fact we know of no recent instances where this has occurred. Neither are there any licenced trappers or collectors of reptiles as there are for birds.

For every legal reptile keeper in N.S.W. there are in our estimation a number of individuals - mainly young people, who are presently maintaining reptile collections illegally. Others are unwilling to take a chance and risk criminal prosecution and can only wait for the authorities to loosen up their restraints of the issuing of new licences and collecting permits. Once taken by the interest in reptile keeping, it's not such an easy thing to give away; one can't simply lay it to rest in the manner that one would shelve a winter coat when summer arrives. And one shouldn't have to; at least not without being given valid reasons for being required to do so.

We aren't asking for anything unreasonable from the authorities; we would like to be able to transfer to one another (regardless of recipient's licence status) the progeny of captive breedings, and when offspring are not available, to be permitted to collect (under fair guidelines and controls monitored by NPWS) small numbers of wild specimens. We agree that reptiles shouldn't be secured from within the bounds of our national parks or wildlife refuges. We have consulted several of Australia's leading herpetologists in the matter of controlled collecting. All have indicated an opinion that little or no threat could be imposed by our collecting efforts to the population stability of any given reptile community. Common sense dictates that reptile collecting will always occur, regardless of its legality - it always has. So why not regulate and monitor it properly? We cannot very well breed reptiles for distribution without first obtaining breeding stock in some legal and practical manner.





**NOTES ON CAPTIVE BREEDING OF THE TAIPAN *Oxyuranus scutellatus* - NEVILLE BURNS**

(REPRINTED FROM R.K.A. JOURNAL)

The Taipan is a large elapid snake, found in northern areas of the continent, the two specimens that are the subject of these notes being from the Cairns district of North Queensland.

The male (total length 188 cm) has been in captivity for approximately six years, and the female (total length 183 cm) for approximately four years.

The specimens were maintained in glass-fronted wooden cages with heating provided by sub-floor incandescent globes. Hide boxes were provided. The specimens were maintained separately throughout their captivity prior to the female being introduced to the male's enclosure at 1200 hrs on 25th July 1984. Immediately after this introduction, the female emerged from her hide box; the male following her around the cage. He then crawled on top of her, rubbing her dorsal surface with his chin, jerking and twitching. At 1300 hrs they were seen to be joined, and remained so until 1700 hrs.

The specimens were left together, the male feeding readily but the female refusing food when offered at 1900 hrs on 4th August. On 12th August the female was seen to be opaque and after sloughing on 20th August continued to refuse food. No other matings were observed and at 1900 hrs on 4th October the female was found to have deposited 12 eggs in the hide box she was occupying with the male.

The eggs were immediately removed and placed in a plastic household food container with a transparent lid, in a medium of vermiculite and water weighed on a gram scale (not measured!) so that the mixture was of equal weight water and vermiculite. The eggs were placed not touching each other and covered with a thin layer of the incubating medium. A sensor attached to the temperature controller was placed through a small hole and laid flat upon the medium and a thermometer placed in the actual plastic container with the eggs. The container had been pre-heated to a temperature of 29C and the temperature throughout the incubation period fluctuated from 29C to 31C. At 0700 hrs 24th December one egg was found to have a head protruding from it. By 2000 hrs the same day, two more eggs were slit and the first juvenile was still in the egg. As each of the eggs was slit, they were removed and placed in a separate box.

The first juvenile did not emerge from the egg until 0830 the next morning, and was closely followed by others. Over the next two days all 12 hatchlings emerged from the eggs, the last at 2000 hrs on 26 December. Thus, incubation time ranged from 82 to 84 days. The juveniles shed their skins approximately one week after hatching, and most of them fed almost immediately on pink rats.

It should be noted that during the last few weeks of incubation, ten of the twelve eggs showed definite pre-hatching wrinkling; the last two to hatch showing markedly less than the others.

### Acknowledgements :

I would like to thank Mr. Neil Charles for his advice both prior to the laying of the eggs and during the period of incubation, and Mr. Stephen Grady for his construction of an accurate temperature controller.

Editors Note : Below is a diagram of incubation container set up as used by Neil Charles (and as followed by Neville Burns - see above). After hatching the eggs over a dozen species over the past few years (including scrub pythons - a rainforest species, fierce snakes - inhabitant of extremely arid country), Neil has found, as has Neville, that hatching of viable eggs is generally 100% effective; owing (according to Neil) to the standard moisture content than can be scientifically determined. Once sealed as in diagram, no water need (nor should) be added. Occasional openings of the container do not cause appreciable evaporation of water in vermiculite according to Neil. Also whether the eggs are separated, or buried beneath (as opposed to sitting upon) the vermiculite seems not to matter.

