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## ACTHA INC. NEWS OCT - NOV 2010

*Newsletter of the  
ACT Herpetological  
Association Inc.*

### IN THIS ISSUE

**Christian Robertson:** The ACT Herpetological Association is saddened by the tragic loss of our esteemed member Chris, *page 2*.

**Wet weather & collecting snails for your reptiles:** Timely advice from a previous newsletter, *page 3*.

**2010 Spring Frogwatch Census:** it's now in full swing and you can still help, *page 4*.

**Field volunteers in South Australia wanted for Summer 2010/2011 :** Where? Northern Eyre Peninsula, near Kimba. Field trips by the Fenner School of Environment and Society, ANU, are being organised from mid Dec 2010 to end Feb 2011, trapping reptiles and invertebrates, see *page 5* for details.

**John Wombey's passion, besides amphibians and frogs :** a rare musical skill, *page 6*.

**Can you identify this frog?** a reader asks, *page 6*.

**'Home ranges of, and habitat use by, the grassland earless dragon in remnant native grasslands near Canberra':** a paper on the above topic, written by several ACT herpetologists of note, was presented in a recent edition of The Aust. Journal of Zoology. *Page 7* contains an abstract and details of where the full paper can be found.

**Reptile photography by members:** well? *page 7*.

**Pet reptiles and avoiding zoonoses:** Peter Child, Reptiles Inc. was invited to be our guest speaker at the August meeting to discuss some of the husbandry do's and don'ts for ensuring you and your pet reptile stay healthy, *page 8*.

**Burrowing into ACTHA's past, 1988:** *page 10*.

**ACTHA November weekend expedition to Sydney to meet Messrs Cogger & Heatwole and visit some reptiles:** see the backpage, *page 12*, for all the details you need to be able to join us.

### YOUR COMMITTEE

President	Joe McAuliffe
Vice President	Ric Longmore
Secretary	Vacant
Treasurer	Margaret Ning
Newsletter Editor	Mandy Conway
Public Officer	<b>John Wombey *</b>
Excursion Officer	<b>Ric Longmore *</b>
Committee Members	Philip Robertson Dennis Dyer Peter Child Iris Carter
Student Representative	Jake McAuliffe

*\* Denotes Life Members*

### DIARY DATE

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

### UPCOMING MEETING

**Tuesday, 19 October 2010**

**Guest Speaker: Tim McGrath,**  
**Species Information Section, DEWHA**

**Chasing threatened reptiles in the Brigalow Belt of Queensland**

Tim and a colleague will give a presentation outlining a project the Commonwealth Government is undertaking to protect these reptiles.

### ACTHA'S ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 19 OCTOBER 2010

**Southern Cross Club, Catchpole Street, Macquarie,  
Belconnen.**

ACTHA's AGM will be held at 7.30pm and this year sees a call for help.

**Our Snakes Alive! Exhibition has lost some of its key organisers and volunteers which will affect the 2011 display.** This once a year event allows ACTHA to provide substantial funding for herpetological research, Corroboree Frog conservation and the Aust. National Botanic Gardens.

**As a member of ACTHA please come to this meeting and support your Association. We need you!**



## ACTHA WILL MISS YOU CHRIS

"Christian Robertson, known to many of us as Chris, was an enthusiastic ACTHA member. When it came to setting up, running and packing up *Snakes Alive!* he was always there willing to lend a hand. During the week long Exhibition Chris would devote a serious amount of time showing children reptiles and allowing them to experience their wonders: no one did this better than Chris. Although as tiring as an energy sapping week long exhibition can be for members, I believe Chris savoured every moment and enjoyed it immensely.

For me, I have many fond memories with Chris, whether it be spending half a day trying to get a lounge chair through his door that was clearly not going to fit (we got it through eventually) or helping him to prepare for his first snake, which initially started out to be a Murray Darling Python. Of course, true to Chris's form, his desire to own a big snake grew and regardless of my advice he had set his sights firmly on a Scrub Python. When I asked him "why do you want one of those?" he looked a bit puzzled and said "what? is there a bigger one I can get?"

For ACTHA, Chris was largely responsible for recruiting and encouraging young members to get involved. The time and effort he put into *Snakes Alive!* was second to none and he was a valued member of the ACTHA Committee.

The ACT Herpetological Association will miss you. I will miss you and so will all of our members."

Joe McAuliffe, President

23 August 2010

### *From the Editor*

Chris' funeral was attended by many of his friends from ACTHA. The sheer number of the many other friends he made during his life - motorcycle colleagues, charity groups who benefited from his fundraising prowess, hospital workmates who preferred to let *him* shave his head for donations to find a cure for cancer, a senior policeman who was one of his childhood mates - was astounding, with people overflowing well outside the chapel.

*Extracts from the eulogy given by his dad Geoff, a fellow ACTHA member, follow.*

"Chris loved people and life. That love grew from within him and from the love he received from others and the suffering he endured. Chris would be very pleased by your attendance today. He liked a good celebration.

Christian Juan Jose Robertson was born in Sydney on 27 November 1971.

Chris had a poor birth and as there were strong concerns about brain related problems, he was held back from adoption. However, he received daily physiotherapy and at seven months he could throw a baby bottle with incredible accuracy.

Chris, like his siblings, was fascinated by people, and from a young age studied people whom he questioned and watched very carefully. He also sought and delighted in, the company of close friends.

When Chris found his niche, he would revel in it, and push himself to excel. We know about Chris' love of skating, pushbike riding, motorbikes, snakes, rock climbing and, in his own way, the bush. The downside of all this, were the many spills and injuries. By the way, like his last bike, Chris' first bike was red and it was one of those bikes that you push with your feet. He was very adept and fast on it.

For some reason, Chris attracted many attacks. When Chris was three, my father rescued him from a group of boys who were holding him underwater. At school, he suffered many taunts, including "Darkie". Helen considered that some of his teachers did not always treat him well. As a young adult, one night in Civic he was beaten unconscious when not totally sober. The police put him in the lock up for safekeeping. Faith came to the rescue next morning but met Chris' dictum, "not to tell Mum or Dad". After one injury where he broke his arm, he did not speak for three months. Another event scarred him for a long time,

when, in his early twenties, he was attacked in his apartment by someone with an iron pipe. It took many years before he felt safe to be alone and outdoors.

Chris appreciated life because he knew the dark side; he drew strength from his vulnerabilities, and he greatly enjoyed working with adults who were vulnerable, and children. He loved being a childcare worker, a wardsman, and a carer of the aged and people with disabilities. While he excelled at this work, he did find it hard to detach himself from other people's suffering and got frustrated with what he saw as indifference.

Many of Chris' friends were also attracted to Chris because he had so many insights into life.

Chris also became very community minded and he liked to combine his passions with events that would educate the community and/or raise money. He liked to talk about his passions, and I have seen him on many occasions keep small audiences fascinated, and he liked to organise events. He was a fixture on bike rides and at *Snakes Alive!*. He would also have his wonderful

hair cut off or grow moustaches to raise money. Doing such things was fun for Chris and he loved to be a showman. He revelled in his sense of art expressed in his tattoos and dress, particularly if he could create a sense of drama, and shock people. Let's not deny that he loved publicity.

When I learnt of Chris's death and saw him for the last time, the strong thoughts in my head were that Chris was happy and at peace with the world, he was doing something he enjoyed when he died, and he was not the cause of another's misfortune. Many of us probably had plans for our future with Chris, but I think he would be happy with his lot.

Chris, there is much each of us should thank you for. You have enriched us and taught us many lessons. As your father, I am very proud of you and all that you achieved. While we shall miss you, we shall carry you with us and pass on your example and stories for generations to come.

You are a free spirit now."



## WET WEATHER & COLLECTING SNAILS FOR YOUR REPTILES

It's been raining a lot in our region which invariably means the snails living in our gardens will be on the move. "Great stuff" I hear you say, "my lizards will be stoked!"

Yep, they will love the snails being offered. But how do you know the snails are safe and unbaited?

The following advice will help.

- 1) Gather the snails and place them in a container: a plastic mouse tank with the well vented lid is ideal. It is very important to keep the snails in the container without any food, water or substrate. They can sleep in their shells for up to 2 months so you aren't being cruel. Add any food etc and you will end up with a frothy and wet mess with dead, fermenting snails. Store the container somewhere out of the weather.
- 2) Check the container in a week, especially the snail poo. If any of the poo is a bright, fluorescent green then the snails have recently dined on snail bait and are poisoned. Throw the whole lot out.
- 3) If the snail poo looks 'normal', then you can feed them something nourishing like fresh grass or vegies for 24 hours before, in turn, feeding them to your lizards.

Most snails come out after nightfall, so collect them using a torch and you'll have snail dinners for a couple of months.

*Please call a fellow herper to get you out of trouble if the police turn up: roaming around outside with a torch may spark interest with your neighbours!*

### 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.*

## THE CANBERRA REGION'S 2010 FROGWATCH SPRING CENSUS

Emma Keightley, ACT & Region Frogwatch Coordinator, Ginninderra Catchment Group, updates ACTHA on this year's Census.

"Two very successful 'Frog call identification evenings' were held in September. Approximately 70 people enjoyed expanding their frog knowledge as well as the chance to practice identifying different species and estimating abundance from recorded frog calls.

Thanks to all who participated in these fun and informative evenings and thanks to Dr Beth Mantle for sharing her knowledge with us.

A number of participants requested more practice with the frog choruses so I have uploaded the recordings and answers to our website. This way even those of you who weren't able to attend can have go at it! I hope you find this useful.

Please stay tuned for upcoming emails about the Frogwatch 2010 Spring Census, it looks like we may have a great spring!"

### Leap into Frogwatch this Spring!

#### The facts:

Frogwatch is a community activity which aims to involve large numbers of volunteers to undertake frog monitoring in the ACT and region.

To participate, volunteers were asked to attend one of the free training events which included a Frogwatch kit covering the identification of frog species, how to use Frogwatch Field Data Sheets, undertaking habitat assessments and performing frog monitoring activities. Short walks followed each event where participants could practice their new found skills.

Preparation for Frogwatch 2010 included training and information evenings in Queanbeyan and at the Australian National Botanic Gardens. A 'Look 'n' Learn' marquee was also setup at Floriade.

October 1 saw the start of the Frogwatch monitoring period with advanced training conducted in the Queanbeyan region and at Tidbinbilla and Mulligans Flat Nature Reserves.

October 31 sees the end of the Frogwatch monitoring period after which Emma and her team will be very busy collating all the submitted records.

The ACT and Region Frogwatch Program is coordinated by the Ginninderra Catchment Group with the assistance of funds made available through the *Caring for our Country Initiative* with the support of the ACT Natural Resource Management Council.

The Ginninderra Catchment Group would also like to acknowledge the generous contributions of Dr Murray Evans, Dr Will Osborne and Dr David Hunter as well as the Australian National Botanic Gardens.

The 'Creating a frog friendly habitat' brochure that ACTHA supported with a grant in 2009 finally arrived in August this year. Copies will be available at the next *Snakes Alive!* Exhibition, however please feel free to contact Emma if you'd like a copy now.

Ph: 6278 3309

Email: [frogwatch@ginninderralandcare.org.au](mailto:frogwatch@ginninderralandcare.org.au)



#### Common

Eastern banjo frog  
Spotted grass frog  
Burrowing Frog  
Plains froglet  
Common eastern froglet  
Orange-groined toadlet  
Peron's tree frog  
Brown-striped frog  
Broad-palmed frog  
Lesueur's frog

*Limnodynastes dumerilii*  
*Limnodynastes tasmaniensis*  
*Neobatrachus sudelli*  
*Crinia parinsignifera*  
*Crinia signifera*  
*Uperoleia laevisgata*  
*Litoria peronii*  
*Limnodynastes peronii*  
*Litoria latopalmata*  
*Litoria lesueuri*

#### Scarce

Brown toadlet  
Northern corroboree frog  
Cotter River frog

*Pseudophryne bibronii*  
*Pseudophryne pengilleyi*  
*Litoria sp. affin phyllochroa*

#### Vulnerable

Southern toadlet  
Corroboree frog  
Green and golden bell frog  
Southern bell frog

*Pseudophryne dendyi*  
*Pseudophryne corroboree*  
*Litoria aurea*  
*Litoria raniformis*



# FIELD VOLUNTEERS WANTED

## South Australia

Summer 2010-2011

### WHERE?

Northern Eyre Peninsula (near Kimba – home of The Big Galah!)

### FIELD Codes & DATES

1N: 11 December 2010 - 2 January 2011

2S: 2 January 2011 - 23 January 2011

3N: 23 January 2011 - 9 February 2011

4S: 9 February 2011 - 2 March 2011



*Moloch horridus, Thorny Devil*  
Photo: <http://wild-facts.com>



*Nephurus stellatus, Knob Tailed gecko*  
Photo: © Juliana Lazzari

### WHY VOLUNTEER?

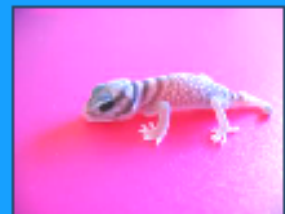
- Gain valuable field-based experience - including trapping reptiles, invertebrates & working in a small team.
- Learn about modified mallee landscapes.
- Help contribute to research in fragmented environments.

### WHAT IS SUPPLIED?

Food & accommodation, all work equipment & travel during fieldwork.

Note: You will need to get to Kimba\* or Wudinna\* where you will be picked up & dropped off.

\* Premier Stateliner buses 08 8413 3555  
or [www.premierstateliner.com.au](http://www.premierstateliner.com.au) (see Adelaide to Ceduna time-table)



*Nephurus stellatus, Knob Tailed gecko*  
Photo: © Juliana Lazzari

### Interested? Want more details?

Email: [Juliana.Lazzari@anu.edu.au](mailto:Juliana.Lazzari@anu.edu.au)

or ring: 0438 837 251 / 02 6125 6327



*Drying clay pan, Pinkawillie reserve*  
Photo: © Juliana Lazzari

No experience necessary but you must have a good level of general fitness as the work will be physical & you must be able to work in and contribute to a small team.



*Tiliqua rugosa, Shingleback lizard*  
Photo: © Juliana Lazzari

Australian National University, Fenner School of Environment and Society

(<http://fennerschool-research.anu.edu.au/mallee-fire/process/>)

## ACTHA MEMBER JOHN WOMBEY'S OTHER PASSION

*By Mandy Conway, Editor*

John Wombey is passionate about amphibians and reptiles and has been a member of ACTHA since its inception in 1985. Not only has he taken members out on many field trips to hear and find frogs, he's passed on his enormous wealth of knowledge and experience, a lot gained through his work at CSIRO, to ACTHA members and the general public who attend events like our *Snakes Alive!* Exhibition. The caricature (*below left*) was drawn by Mike Thompson for the April 1990 ACTHA Newsletter. John hasn't changed much!

He also has another passion: playing the bagpipes. In fact he has played the bagpipes since 13 years of age, in bands and at all sorts of ceremonies.

I recently attended one of his performances, the closing ceremony at the Australian War Memorial, which I thoroughly enjoyed. The setting was peaceful and thought provoking.

*Does any other member have a skill or interest they'd like to share?*

*Please let this Editor know.*



### AMPHIBIAN IDENTIFICATION

These frogs (*right*) are in a very old house in Longreach, towards central-west QLD. The photo was taken one evening in early Sept 2004 by Marg Peachey, novice amphibian photographer.

Approx 2-3cm snout to vent, they still live in the house hiding in vases, bottles and occasionally the electric jug.

What are they Marg asks?

*Editor*



## Home ranges of, and habitat use by, the grassland earless dragon (*Tympanocryptis pinguicolla*) in remnant native grasslands near Canberra

Toni A. Stevens, William S. Osborne and Stephen D. Sarre, Institute for Applied Ecology, University of Canberra

Murray C. Evans, Research and Planning Unit, ACT Parks, Conservation and Lands

A recent edition of *The Australian Journal of Zoology*, 2010, 58, 76-84, contained a very interesting paper on the above.

An abstract is given below and the full document can be viewed by visiting <http://www.publish.csiro.au/journals/ajz>

**Abstract.** The grassland earless dragon (*Tympanocryptis pinguicolla*) is a habitat specialist restricted to the highly fragmented native temperate grasslands of the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and nearby New South Wales (NSW). These grasslands, which are listed as an endangered ecological community, continue to be affected by a range of processes including development and overgrazing. Although changes to its habitat present a significant threat to the grassland earless dragon, little is known about its spatial and habitat requirements. We used radio-tracking to study the home-range areas and habitat requirements of 10 adult lizards in native grassland adjacent to Canberra, ACT. We found that burrows excavated by arthropods are an important resource for grassland earless dragons, with individuals having one or two home burrows around which they maintained home ranges of between 925m<sup>2</sup> and 4768m<sup>2</sup>. Fidelity to these burrows increased with the onset of winter, indicating their importance as over-winter refuge sites. Within the native grasslands, grassland earless dragons were found to use a broad range of grassland structure as habitat. This result contrasts with the prevailing view that these dragons are confined to well drained, minimally disturbed areas, which include large patches of short grass dominated by *Austrodanthonia*. We conclude that habitat management (i.e. grazing, mowing, burning) for this species should aim to retain structural heterogeneity of native grasslands rather than impose a uniform structure.



Above - two Central Bearded Dragons, with different colouration.

### REPTILE PHOTOGRAPHY BY MEMBERS

I wanted to fill in this space so I've included some of my favourite herp photos. I've asked before, but I'll try again - **PLEASE send me some of your pics...**

Once this newsletter goes onto the web they will appear in full colour for everyone to admire and appreciate.

I will be acknowledging the author of the photos but not necessarily whether it is their animal or not, for privacy purposes.

Editor



*Images on this page by Mandy Conway*



Left - a Central Earless Dragon playing peek-a-boo with mum.

Right - nice day outside, observes this Shingle-back Lizard.



Above - a string of Eastern Water Dragons.



## PET REPTILES AND AVOIDING ZONOOSES



*ACTHA's August 2010 talk was given by Peter Child, Chief Education Officer, Reptiles Inc. This article by Mandy Conway, with assistance by Peter.*

Zoonoses is defined as a disease that can be transferred from animals or animal products to humans. Some examples of potential zoonotic diseases include:

- Bacteria:** Anthrax, Brucellosis, cat scratch fever, E. coli, Leptospirosis, Staphylococcus, Salmonella, Psittacosis, Q fever, Streptococcus, Tuberculosis;
- Protozoa:** Cryptosporidiosis, Giardia, Toxoplasmosis, Coccidiosis;
- Fungi:** Ringworm, Aspergillosis;
- Parasites:** Hydatid tapeworm, Roundworm, Scabies;
- Viruses:** Hendra, Avian influenza, Lyssa virus, Hepatitis.

Carriers include domestic/wild dogs, cats, birds, livestock eg pigs, cattle, sheep, horses, and our amphibians and reptiles. In fact all animals.

Peter provided this fact: "Up to 93,000 people in the USA have been infected with pet reptile associated salmonella. There were an estimated 10 million pet reptiles in the USA in 2002."

The rise in the popularity of reptiles as pets has in turn meant a massive increase in human contact with reptiles, both in the home and at petting displays over the past decade. This does not necessarily equate to an equivalent huge rise in zoonotic incidences.

Peter has conducted hundreds of reptile displays for birthday parties, schools and local government events. The catch-cry of "always wash your hands after petting any animal" is one all visitors would have heard and complied with.

### Reptiles and Salmonella

The most recognised reptile-borne zoonosis, via airborne particles and droplets, direct contact, comes from the family Enterobacteriaceae. *Salmonella spp* is found in healthy and diseased reptiles, both captive and free living in all areas of world. The precise role *Salmonella* has in causing illness and death has been difficult to determine.

Human health implications include self-limiting gastroenteritis to invasive infections that can lead to septicaemia. Abnormal pain, elevated temperature,

dyspnoea, diarrhoea and vomiting are familiar symptoms. It may be fatal due to children under 10 and immuno compromised individuals.

### How do you acquire it?

"You basically have to eat it!" Through the gut system and predominantly through the mouth to the intestines.

The highest incidence of infection in people is through water and food contamination, eating improperly cooked eggs a good example.

Research suggests that captivity predisposes reptiles to excrete salmonella through faeces, which is influenced by factors such as hygiene, diet and stress. Any sudden change in eating habits can cause gastro-intestinal upsets and an increase in bacterial loads.

### Diagnosis

Laboratory tests on sick individuals should be conducted with faecal and/or cloacal swabs for bacterial culture, amongst other tests.

Antibiotic treatment of animals to eliminate *Salmonella* is not effective (unless there is a larger than normal load or the animal is suffering) as there is a likelihood of antibiotic-resistant strains.

Treatment of sick animals and people include fluid replacement, correction of electrolyte imbalances, drugs to reduce vomiting and diarrhoea and other supportive care for the patient to overcome the infection itself. Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs may be given to decrease the effects of endotoxemia.

Septicaemic salmonellosis may be treated with a number of antibiotics including ampicillin, amoxicillin, gentamicin, trimethoprim/sulfamethoxazole, third generation cephalosporins, chloramphenicol and fluoroquinolones. Many isolates are resistant to one or more antibiotics and the choice of drugs should, if possible, be based on sensitivity testing conducted by your local laboratory.

### Research

Some studies have been conducted in Australia, with wild animals sourced from Cape Conran, East Gippsland and animals passing through Healesville Sanctuary. Captive reptiles were tested from this region too.

The colonic mucosa was sampled, swabbing the cloaca of each animal. Samples were then incubated and cultured under aerobic conditions. Samples were considered positive for salmonella if the urea result was negative and the triple sugar ion slants produced hydrogen sulphide. Definitive diagnosis



and stereotyping was done at the Microbiological Diagnostic Unit at the University of Melbourne.

More than 500 individuals (comprising four families and 57 species) were sampled for the presence of Salmonella between Jan 2007 and June 2008. Salmonella was identified in approximately one quarter of animals tested. The rate of infection was relatively low, considering shedding rates of up to 90% have been documented in reptiles.

Significantly fewer wild reptiles were Salmonella positive than captive reptiles. The majority of captive snake species were positive for Salmonella and Salmonella Para B by Java 3b var was the most common isolate.

Preliminary results in the twenty Common Long-neck Turtles *Chelodina longicollis* tested showed zero prevalence.

81% (9 of 11) of the Wild lowland copperhead snakes *Austrelaps superbus* tested were carriers of Salmonella spp.

Of the captive snake species sampled at Healesville Sanctuary 89% were positive for Salmonella with Salmonella Para B Java 3b var, the most common isolate 40% (6 of 15).

Since 2000, the National Enteric Pathogens Surveillance Scheme has received 708 reports of isolates from captive reptiles in Australia, including those from the recent study at Healesville. (Farmed crocodiles were not included.)

Are reptiles too dangerous? "well if you're talking about a 5mtr long croc or a venomous snake... HELL YES!" Peter exclaimed.

But if you're talking about the zoonotic diseases mentioned earlier:

Birds carry 3, Fish 2, Cats 7, Dogs 6

Livestock win the prize with over 12

Reptiles carry 3

### **Disease prevention**

Salmonella prevention and control is common sense.

- Clean enclosures and accessories with reptile or household cleaning disinfectants. Use a wet cleanse method, eg wet rag, to avoid particles being sent into the air you breathe.
- Never mix house and reptile cleaning equipment, table dustpans etc. This includes using the vacuum cleaner to remove substrate or faeces.

- Throw away rags, cloths or sponges after use. Never EVER use the kitchen sink to clean water bowls or equipment.
- After handling reptiles, clean hands well with soap or hand sanitizer and don't forget to wash clothing or objects that may come in contact with a reptile's underside.
- Always supervise children and educate them on good hygiene. Don't kiss your pet!
- Don't allow your reptile to roam freely in areas where children may have contact with the surface area or near food preparation surfaces.
- Don't allow faeces to build up in enclosures. Remove frequently with gloves or a bag and keep water bowls clean and poo free.
- Keep animals stress free and don't overcrowd them.
- Remove and isolate animals that exhibit any symptoms that suggest they are unwell.
- Salmonella is a bacteria susceptible to many disinfectants including 1% sodium hydrochlorite, 70% ethanol, 2% glutaraldehyde, iodine-based disinfectants, phenolic and formaldehyde. They can also be killed by moist heat (121°C for a minimum of 15 min) or dry heat (160-170°C for at least 1 hour).

### **In conclusion**

Peter briefly mentioned the newspaper article which appeared in our last newsletter 'Parents warned on pet reptiles after baby becomes ill', highlighting the fact that it contained several inaccuracies and that euthanasia of the Bearded Dragon was unfortunate. Of note, the sheer number of people in the region who would have experienced diarrhoea and vomiting without seeking medical advice could easily discount the 'first person on ACT records to be infected with a form of Salmonella...' It is also understood that the 'infected vacuum cleaner' had been used to vacuum the debris from an enclosure. Hygiene protocols may have become lax.

The likelihood reptiles are carrying salmonella is real and high. It's important people are aware of the risks associated with animal contact. People with children under 5 years or immuno suppressed especially. While salmonella poisoning is unpleasant the symptoms are only dangerous if left untreated.



## BURROWING INTO ACTHA'S PAST: 1988

By Mandy Conway, Editor

Guest speakers during 1988 covered a wide variety of topics, as the table below shows.

### 1988

Jan	'Herpetofauna of Thailand', Dean Ward
Feb	'Captive maintenance of reptiles', Ron Dencio
Apr	'Desert dwellings of lizards of the Namid', Paul Cooper
May	'Herpetofauna of South Australia', Steve Sarre
June	'Corroboree Frogs: their ecology and conservation', Will Osborne
July	'Colour confusion: variations within some species of reptiles', Ross Bennett
Aug	'Reptiles of the Bathurst region', Gavin Waters
Oct	'Frogs of the ACT', Will Osborne

The year started slowly and with a bank balance of \$210. A trial run of allowing members to collect their Newsletters at meetings was deemed a failure. Members appeared to rely on receiving a postal reminder of meetings a few days beforehand.

**February** saw the introduction of short informal talks or 'show and tell' before the main speaker to try and get some genuine interest happening. The poor Editor was trying everything to get some enthusiasm from members who 'couldn't be bothered to write...' (*I know how he felt! hint, hint*). Something worked because **April's** Newsletter grew to five pages:

- Ross Sadlier and Allen Greer at the Australia Museum were contacted for any data they had on *Tympanocryptis lineata* in this region. They sent records of 2 individuals from Canberra and 1 from Cooma. Members were asked to look through their field notes for any unusual dragons they may have seen in the past;
- nice article on Asian flying lizards and a book review of 'Living snakes of the world', written by JM Mehrtens;
- two newspaper articles on venomous snakes hiding in cars: a 1.5m King Brown hiding under the bonnet of a car the NRMA were working on, and a 1.2m copperhead travelling 500km in a Mazda 929 coupe, coiled at the driver's feet. Oh, a further 3 copperheads and 5 fat blue-tongue lizards were also removed from the same vehicle. Where had this car been parked?!

**July** saw Committee positions defined and persuasively filled. Also,

- A **wildlife prosecution** article was a bit disturbing. P & R Robson of Fremantle, WA, were convicted of trying to post **57 reptiles** to Denmark and Germany in January and

September 1986: 41 shingle-backs, 2 bearded dragons, 1 blue-tongue, 8 skinks, and 5 geckos, estimated to be worth A\$20,000 (US\$14,000) on the European market. Fortunately the packages were intercepted before they left the country.

Imprisonment was

suspended on good behaviour bonds of A\$15,000 and a fine of \$2,000.

- The newspaper article of Joe Bredl's frightening encounter with an Inland Taipan (*reproduced on page 11 of this Newsletter*) made interesting reading.

**September's** Newsletter detailed an excursion by several determined ACTHA members to search for our local legless lizard, *Aprasia parapulchella*, at Coppins Crossing. Members searched for an hour and a half, very carefully lifting and replacing rocks, and were amazed to find a total of 11 specimens of the endangered species.

A newspaper article presented the dire situation of the **Western Swamp Tortoise** which inhabited the once extensive wetlands of Perth, now little more than a muddy pond. The article outlines the efforts by Perth Zoo to breed this tortoise in captivity, with very few eggs being produced, making the task very difficult.

**November's** Newsletter included a report by Jo Vandermark (*see top of page 11*) on the **Bicentennial Herpetological Conference**, held at the Queensland Museum, Brisbane in August 1988. It was attended by a dozen ACTHA members, some of whom presented papers:

- Dave Carter** - Courtship & mating in wild *Varanus varius*
- Arthur Georges** - Nesting behaviour of the Pig-nose Turtle
  - Biochemical systematics of Aust Chelid Turtles
- Rob Jenkins** - Dispersal & movement of *Crocodylus porosus* in Kakadu
- Richard Longmore** - Zoological catalogue of Aust database system
  - Distribution of snakes of Elapidae in Aust
- Will Osborne** - Dist & Conserv of *A. parapulchella*, Canberra region
  - Morph & genetic divergence in Corroboree Frogs
- Sylvia Spring** - Commonwealth's role in marine turtle conservation
- Dean Ward** - Morph adaphins for tree-climbing in the lace monitor.

Speakers at the Conference were restricted to fifteen minutes, normally ten to present their research and five to answer questions. It is an exacting discipline to have to condense one's research findings to ten minutes! But while one can sympathise with the speakers in the problems this posed, it certainly made for a most stimulating format - six presentations before morning tea, six more before lunch, six between lunch and afternoon tea, with another three or four after that. Altogether, seventy-five papers were presented in three days, ranging through morphological, biochemical, biogeographic, epidemiological, electrophoretic, evolutionary and distribution studies, from macro studies of turtle classification to micro studies of geckoes toes, from the wet dreams of water dragons to the expanding earth theory, from the reptiles of Madagascar to Herpetology based visitor programmes at the Melbourne Zoo!

With such diversity and concentration inside the Conference lecture theatre and tantalising exhibits and displays of the superb new Museum surrounding us, even Expo '88, just across the road, could barely compete for our attention!

Congratulations to Jeanette Covacevich for a superbly organised conference. Admittedly it was my first Herpetology conference, but I can't imagine a conference being better organised and it was such a great experience to be with ninety other people all similarly enthused about our fantastic and wonderful herpetofauna. May there be one hundred and ninety by the next conference - we need them!

Jo Vanderman

The following account is condensed from an article in the 'Daily Mirror' of May 16, 1988. The author is Kerry Wakefield. The article dramatically illustrates how easily things can go wrong - even for experts. This is the second recorded bite from an Inland Taipan...

April had brought heavy rains to the sandhills and stony plains around Clifton Hills station, in South Australia, far to the north-east of Lake Eyre, on the edge of the Simpson Desert.

For Hungarian-born Joe Bredl, 65, and his friend, Albert Fischer, 70, of Adelaide, this was perfect reptile-hunting time.

Bredl wanted three western taipans for breeding.

He had worked with snakes for 30 years, and in 1961 had set up Bredl's Reptile Park and Zoo at Renmark.

Bredl and Fischer had set up camp about 20km from the station and laid their traps.

At 9am on Sunday, May 1, they went collecting and had bagged their first western taipan when Bredl spotted another snake.

"I saw this snake, only part of its tail, hanging out of a bush," Bredl recalls. "It was disappearing. I quickly grabbed it to pull it out."

"That's when I realised I had a giant of an inland taipan, over two metres."

"The snake swung back in a split second. I felt the penetration of one fang in my body."

"I swung the snake away from me and tried to stop its second fang from penetrating. I was in trouble."

What Bredl would later call a reflex action, he tried again to catch the snake. As it readied for a second strike, Bredl came to his senses.

He left the snake, ripped off his shirt and asked his friend Fischer to try to suck the bite.

Then Bredl got Fischer to cut the bite and suck more poison out.

The pair were about 2km from their four-wheel drive vehicle. Fischer told Bredl to stay put while he got the truck, but Bredl refused, and started to walk very slowly back to the truck, pressing down on the bite to slow the venom's circulation.

By the time Bredl got to the truck he was in a bad way - the walk had propelled the venom through his system.

When Fischer drove off wildly down the dirt track, Bredl vomited and lapsed into unconsciousness.

They reached Clifton Hills station at about 9.45am, where the owner rang the Royal Flying Doctor Service at Port Augusta.

The closest help lay at Santos's Moomba oilfield, about 170km away. The paramedics had a helicopter, but it wasn't big enough to transport Bredl.

It was despatched to Clifton Hills to give Bredl immediate aid, but the RFDS also flew in and ferried Bredl to Moomba, where he was met by a team from the Royal Adelaide Hospital.

At 11.30am the Moomba helicopter arrived at Clifton Hills. RAH doctors Griggs and

Gilligan had radioed ahead that Bredl was to be given antivenom only as a last resort.

The paramedics administered a drug that stopped the vomiting, and put in a dextrose drip.

Ten minutes later the Royal Flying Doctor Service's Chieftain put down. Bredl was loaded on the plane for Moomba, where he arrived at 1.45pm.

There to meet him were the RAH team: Dr Gilligan, a nurse, a St John Ambulance attendant and Dr Julian White, one of Australia's leading snake-bite experts and a consultant to the RAH.

Dr White would disagree with Bredl's management of the bite. Cutting and sucking snakebites was an old-fashioned treatment which had probably hastened the spread of the venom. The recommended procedure is to apply a pressure bandage firmly and keep still.

A decision was made to get Bredl to Adelaide as fast as possible.

At 2.15pm the RAH's King Air helicopter took off, with Bredl hooked up to machines measuring his heart action, his breathing capacity and the oxygen in his blood.

At 4.30pm they arrived in Adelaide, but Bredl's condition was deteriorating: his speech had started to slur, his grip had grown weak and he was suffering double vision.

In the plane Dr White found Bredl's blood would no longer clot. If he haemorrhaged, his bleeding could be unstoppable.

By 5pm Bredl was in the hospital's intensive care unit. With him were Doctors Griggs, Gilligan, White, the registrar, Dr Archer, and three critical care nurses. The doctors felt Bredl had a less than even chance.

By 5.30pm Bredl's breathing was down to one quarter the normal rate. The doctors decided to start using antivenom. They gave Bredl more drugs to suppress allergic reaction.

At 5.32pm the feared allergic reaction took hold: Bredl's blood pressure plunged to an unsupportable level of 40/50. A lumpy rash erupted over his body and he started wheezing.

"We're in serious trouble," Dr Griggs announced.

Adrenalin was pumped in; it jolted the blood pressure back to 150. More steroids were used, to try to suppress the production of antibodies and the allergic reaction. Death seemed imminent.

A theoretical but untried solution existed: a massive dose of antivenom might overwhelm the antibodies and knock out the venom. But would Bredl survive?

The unit had only two doses of taipan-specific antivenom, not enough for the proposed strategy. Normally, a snake bite can be cured with one dose. Before the night was out, Bredl

would have used six.

Dr Griggs rang a Commonwealth Serum Laboratory official at home, and he agreed to open up the lab to get the antivenom.

At 6pm Bredl was given a big dose of a stronger steroid, again to dampen his allergic response and to try to stop the production of antibodies.

A little after six, the second antivenom dose was given. Over three hours, the doctors juggled the antivenom dose, slowing it down when Bredl's allergic response became life-threatening.

Dr Griggs used Bredl's rash as an indicator: when it grew angry he slowed the antivenom.

By 9pm Bredl had been given four doses of antivenom and the rash had vanished. The urine began flowing more freely through Bredl's kidneys. By 10.30pm a blood test showed signs of improvement in Bredl's blood coagulation.

A fifth dose of antivenom was given at 11pm and a sixth at 1.30am.

By 2am the last of the original team still at Bredl's bedside, Dr Griggs, felt able to go home.

Bredl was discharged from Royal Adelaide Hospital a week later. He is now more allergic to antivenom than ever before, and his kidneys are seriously damaged.

Would he continue catching snakes?

"Oh, yes, but this thing taught me a very great lesson," Bredl muses. "Don't take any risks."





**ACT HERPETOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION INC.  
2010 - 2011 MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL NOW DUE**

Membership renewal runs from 1 July 2010 to 30 June 2011 and costs \$10 for all memberships. Herpetofauna is an additional \$12 for the two issues of Dec 2010 and June 2011.

**Payment at our October meeting** would be appreciated.

**OR** please make your cheque out to ACTHA Inc., fill in your details below and send it to the ACTHA Membership Officer, PO Box 160, Jamison ACT 2614.

Surname:

Given name(s):

Address:

State/Territory:

Postcode:

Telephone (h):

Telephone (w):

Email:

**OR** you could make a direct deposit to ACTHA's bank account:

St George Bank, BSB 112-908, A/c 040003311

*Don't forget to note your name so we can identify whose payment it is on our Bank Statement.*

Queries? please call Margaret on 02 6241 4065 (h).

**ACTHA'S ANNUAL  
GENERAL MEETING  
19 OCTOBER 2010**

**Southern Cross Club, Catchpole  
Street, Macquarie, Belconnen.**

ACTHA's AGM will be held at 7.30pm and this year sees a call for help.

**Our Snakes Alive! Exhibition has lost some of its key organisers and volunteers which will affect the 2011 display.** This once a year event allows ACTHA to provide substantial funding for herpetological research, Corroboree Frogs and the ANBG.

**As a member of ACTHA** please come to this meeting and support your Association. We need you!

**ACTHA EXPEDITION TO SYDNEY 20-21 NOVEMBER 2010**

We have arranged a trip to Sydney to visit the National Museum, a couple of reptile parks and to meet two reptile gurus: **Messrs Harold Cogger and Hal Heatwole.**

Pinning down a date and time to connect with these extremely busy gentleman has been an interesting exercise but so well worth it!

Plans thus far are to leave Canberra on Friday 19th after work and stay somewhere cheap, as close as possible to our destination. Depending on numbers/cars we will either drive or catch public transport to the Darling Harbour area first thing Saturday morning to visit the Reptile Sanctuary before meeting Hal Cogger, Hal Heatwole and Ross Sadlier in the afternoon for a possible tour of the National Museum. Saturday evening sees a group dinner with Monsieur's Cogger and Heatwole.

First thing Sunday morning we drive to the Gosford Reptile Park and head home after lunch.

**Any ACTHA Members wishing to join the expedition need to let me know by Friday 12th November**

**Mandy Conway: [mmconway@homemail.com.au](mailto:mmconway@homemail.com.au)**

Attendees will be contacted with final travel details around Monday 15th November.

*A once in a blue moon opportunity not to be missed!*



ACTHA News

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