

## ACT Herpetological Association (ACTHA)

“Herpetology” is the scientific study of herpetofauna, which include snakes, lizards, and turtles (collectively referred to as reptiles) and frogs. Australia is very rich in herpetofauna. The Southern Tablelands, including Canberra, has:

- Forty-seven lizard species, including monitors, geckos, legless lizards, dragons, and skinks.
- Fourteen snake species, including twelve elapids (venomous front fang snakes), one python and one blind snake.
- Two fresh water turtle species.
- Thirteen frog species.

### What is ACTHA?

The ACT Herpetological Association is a non-profit organisation whose members consist of

professional and amateur herpetologists, and persons interested in the conservation or keeping of reptiles and frogs. The association is dedicated to promoting an understanding of Australian herpetofauna so that the habitat of Australian

reptiles is assured, and encouraging good animal-keeping practices when animals are kept by individuals families.

ACTHA believes “the only good snake is a live one”, challenging the misconception that these fascinating animals are to be feared.

ACTHA holds meetings every two months, runs occasional field trips, and holds an annual “snakes alive exhibition” in January at the Australian National Botanic Gardens.

Membership is open to individuals, families, other non-profit organisations, educational institutions, government agencies, and businesses. The cost is \$10 for individuals and families, and \$50 for organisations. Members can participate in the association’s activities, and receive the association’s regular newsletter and animal care sheets.

### What is happening to our herpetofauna?

Frogs and reptiles pre-date and survive the dinosaurs, and are even more fascinating. Unfortunately our herpetofauna have been suffering serious decline due to loss of habitat, anti-reptile attitudes, chytrid fungus (which has devastated frogs) and domestic and feral cats and dogs.

Many species which were once common, are no longer common or are even rare. Unfortunately, too little is known about the numbers and life cycles of many reptiles and frogs. Some herpetofauna facts are:

- Serious declines have taken place in the northern and southern corroboree frogs, and they are now listed as threatened. It is believed that without human intervention, these frogs will not survive in the wild. ACTHA has been supporting work being undertaken by the ACT government and in Victoria to breed corroboree frogs and return them to the wild.



- The green and golden bell frog, once numerous in the region, was believed to be extinct in the Southern Tablelands. However, one population has now been found there.
- Many frog species, including those mentioned already, have succumbed to chytrid fungus. Despite research done to date, there is no obvious cure to this fungus.
- Southern Tablelands grasslands were once extensive. In Canberra only five percent of these natural grasslands still exist. In the remainder of the Southern Tablelands the situation is less encouraging. Four reptiles which live in these grasslands are now listed as threatened. These include the grassland earless dragon, the striped legless lizard, the pink-tailed worm lizard, and the little whip snake.
- The bearded dragon was once very common, and old timers say they could be found on every fence post. They are now rarely sighted.
- Where habitat has been retained, some reptiles seem to thrive, and some, such as the blue tongue have even adapted to the urban life style.



## How can you protect frogs and reptiles?

There are many things that you can do to protect our frogs and reptiles. These include:

- Learn about them through TV programs, reading (there are many good national and local books on reptiles and frogs), visiting ACTHA's annual display, and/or the Australian Reptile Centre at Gold Creek.
- Join ACTHA, MARK (Monaro Amphibian and Reptile Keepers), and/or Frogwatch.
- Join the 'slow down your car campaign' to stop the unnecessary road kill of our turtles, lizards, and snakes.
- Identify reptiles and frogs that you may see – but do not try to feed or capture them.
- Be aware of their habits, especially road crossing activities. Assist in ensuring animals cross roads safely.
- Keep cats and dogs inside or on a leash.

## How easy is it to keep reptiles and frogs?

The ACT and NSW have legislation about keeping herpetofauna which generally requires that licences are required to keep these animals. To keep animals you need to be aware of lighting, heating, and feeding requirements. ACTHA has care sheets for many different types of animals.



*Photos: bearded dragon (front page), northern corroboree frog and striped legless lizard (middle pages), tiger snake and baby Murray turtle (back page). Photos provided by Ross Bennett, Geoff Robertson and John Wombey.*

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