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ACTHA Inc. News
Feb - Mar '19
Newsletter of the ACT Herpetological Association Inc.

The dates are set for Snakes Alive! 2020
Monday 13th to Sunday 19th January

Who would like to see their own herp pic on our 2020 *Snakes Alive!* flier?

We are looking for a suitable image to go on our flier, which will also be our 20th year at the ANBG!!

The image will need to have a 'pale' background to allow text information to be inserted.

Please send your picture to margaretning1@gmail.com and the person whose pic is chosen will receive one year's free ACTHA membership!

Diary date

The *bi-monthly* meetings of the Association are usually held on the **third Tuesday of the month at 7.30pm**. Our usual venue is:

***Belconnen Soccer Club*, Hawker**
(cnr Belconnen Way & Springvale Drive)

Upcoming meeting:

Tuesday, 19 February 2019

Our Guest Speaker:

Dr. Stephanie Courtney Jones is a Conservation Wildlife Officer at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve working on threatened species recovery including the Northern Corroboree Frog. Stephanie has worked on conservation and biological research projects throughout arid zones of Australia and Africa, to the tropical rainforests of South East Asia, with a wide range of animals both in captivity and in the wild. In this talk, Stephanie will tell tales of the herpetofauna found in the remnant lowland rainforests on Pulau Buton, south east Sulawesi, working as a researcher in the Wallacea Region and what work is being done to conserve the unique herpetofauna of Sulawesi.

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Your Committee for 2018 - 2019

President	Jason Spurr
Vice President	**Ric Longmore***
Secretary	Dennis Dyer
Treasurer	Margaret Ning
Newsletter Editor	Mandy Conway
Webmaster	Angus Kennedy
Public Officer	**John Wombey ***
Excursion Officer	
Conservation Officer	Joe McAuliffe
Committee Members	Scott Keogh
	Iris Carter
	Greg Flowers
	Roy Chamberlain
	Peter Child
Youth Representative	Liam Thornton

* *Denotes Life Members*

ANBG Bush Blitz Sunday, 2 December '18

By Rosemary Blemmings

Our Bush Blitz presence at the ANBG today went really well. Everyone worked together with each bringing their own style and approach to meeting the public, sharing their knowledge, experiences and the informality that leads to messages being remembered.

ACTHA's Liam brought a Lace Monitor for its first such outing and it seemed to enjoy being out in the sunshine after being inside at first. Grassland plants were placed around the Earless Dragon and the Legless Lizard's tanks which gave them a place to 'hide'.

The diamond python was a great hit too. Dennis did much of the setting up with Mark and Jason arriving soon after.

Luke, Emma and the children came closer to lunchtime and were really busy about the gardens. Luke was busy as an explainer too.

There was plenty of networking going on throughout the day for all of us and with the Bush Blitz scientists having their diverse displays actually in the C Morrison building. Snakes Alive! had publicity material around the ACTHA section and during conversations. So all your wonderful organising paid off handsomely.

Snakes Alive! Exhibition 2019

This report by Margaret Ning, with recall assistance from Dennis Dyer and Geoff Robertson. All images by Lucinda Royston unless otherwise attributed.

Snakes Alive! 2019 was held from 14 to 20 January, again in the Crosbie Morrison Building, Australian National Botanic Gardens, and was a most successful event. Whilst there were fewer visitors than last year (3170 in 2018), 2660 visitors came through our doors which was still impressive considering that four of the days experienced temperatures in excess of 40 degrees whilst the other three days were either 35 or 36 degrees!

On arrival at *Snakes Alive!* visitors encountered Rosemary outside the building, attending the nature table where she was able to inform visitors about local conservation groups and Canberra Nature Park, encourage young folk to put in time at the colouring-in table, and to assist with entry issues. Also outside, Kay helped with the colouring-in table, and Mark helped with sorting the pre-paids during busy periods. Lucinda controlled the entry to *Snakes Alive!* ably assisted by Amber, Iris and Helen who also covered the raffle sales, which received the best fundraising since 2011.

In the main room, the enclosures, including the handling enclosure, were placed around the perimeter which meant that it had a more 'open look' and there was considerable room in the center to accommodate the 'feeding session' crowds which were boosted by holiday program children. Most of our python species, all our monitor species, a croc and Ric and his desert death adder rounded out the display in the main room. Mark quietly managed the handling enclosure in its new location.

Most of the venomous snakes and a Canberra Reptile Zoo (CRZ) safety display were located in the middle room, accompanied by some extremely exciting python species (green, rough -scaled and scrub pythons), turtles and some more lizard species. Geoff's perennial slide display of local herpetofauna had its usual prominent position.

Our local threatened species and a couple of additional frog species were once again placed in the smallest and coolest room While we were given 12 Corroboree Frogs this year, they proved to be fairly elusive, but still always managed to generate huge enthusiasm. Great interest was shown in our Grassland Earless Dragon, Striped Legless Lizard and Green and Golden Bell Frogs, which provided many opportunities to explain why the precious animals had become threatened and what was being done to stop their rapidly disappearing numbers in the wild.

Despite the very hot weather, it was a most enjoyable week. Thirty adult ACTHA members and ten junior members helped out for anything from a couple of hours to the whole week of the display. Fourteen hardcore ACTHA members managed to stay at *Snakes Alive!* for at least five of the seven days!

A total of 43 species of reptiles and frogs were generously provided by ACTHA members; including Peter Child and the Canberra Reptile Zoo, fifteen other ACTHA members plus the ACT Government.

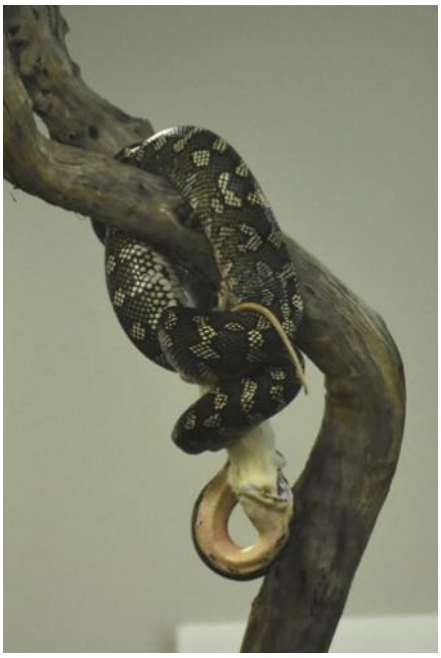
This is the largest display we have mounted in our twenty years at the Australian National Botanic Gardens.

The venomous (elapid) snakes were a real treat, and are always very popular. Our 18 python species delighted most, particularly younger, attendees, many of whom were conspiring to get their parents to purchase one. On many occasions we informed visitors of the licensing process involved in acquiring a pet snake.

A young visitor dressed up in a reptile outfit!

Bearded Dragon, Pogona sp.

Rosenberg's Monitor, Varanus rosenbergi



Feeding time: Diamond Python, Morelia sp. spilota

The great variety of skinks and dragons, especially local ones, were greatly admired and their presence sends many good messages about how to observe and care for habitat in the wild or within our urban sprawl. The goannas attracted great interest, especially as there has been much media attention about local reporting of Rosenberg's and lace monitors. More people can now tell the difference between a legless lizard and a snake thanks to the presence of the Striped Legless Lizard which was generally observable. The presence of geckos meant that all five groups of Australian lizards were on display. The turtles and crocodile are always a source of great interest.

A late entry at *Snakes Alive!* was a pair of colourful Goldfield Shinglebacks which were displayed from Friday onwards. It was an adventure for Allie, their owner, to get them to us, but it was all worth it as they were a very exciting exhibit.

We conducted almost 30 feeding sessions, some photos of which are on the ACTHA website (www.actha.org.au). Morning sessions were usually crowded and hence required much tact to get everyone's cooperation. We had an excellent range of presenters from our volunteers and for the most part the audiences were spellbound: there was always an audible gasp when a snake or goanna struck its food prey item.

Midweek we celebrated with our usual Wednesday evening pizza night, which was enjoyed by all. However, it would not have been the same if we had failed to get our annual ditty on the event from Dennis. He did not disappoint.

Traditional publicity was limited this year, with two radio interviews and a couple of Canberra Times visits, reports of which were published quite quickly however. Facebook boosts enabled us to reach an ever-widening audience. Remotely from Sydney, Gus did most of the Facebook organising, ably supported by Alisdair, a lot closer to home, who also directed traffic on our Facebook page.

Highlights:

Our team of young, but now veteran, volunteers knew the ropes and swung into action. Led by Anam and Liam, and ably supported by Alisdair, Angus, Ben, Lainey, Peter and Shahzad, they carried out their 'duties' and brought a whole new group of young ones into the fold. The newcomers, Alex, Josh and the two Zoes, were enthusiastic followers. Their main tasks included introducing our lizards and snakes to the public and keeping the enclosures clean and watered.

There was also a handful of more mature newcomers (Andy, Emma, Kaitlyn, Luke and Ollie, with the latter accompanied by his young son, Rupert, who also joined in) who with regular 'maturees' (Ali, Dennis, Jason, John, Ric, Rob and Roy) seamlessly filled in wherever the need existed.

Ric was back with us on a full-time basis this year, imparting his wisdom, catching up with everyone, and having the opportunity to get a comprehensive article on his career into the Canberra Times.

Feeding sessions were excellent opportunities for our members to pursue public speaking skills, and while everyone enjoyed their opportunities, some had to overcome their shyness. Liam did the lion's share of the feedings (no shyness there….), bringing in additional animals daily, if necessary.

Greg Cover introduced Denise the Jungle x Diamond Python and did his snake safety talks; Luke fed two green pythons virtually

Liam feeding one of the pythons

Caitelin feeding lizards

Zoe showing visitors an Eastern Blue-tongued Lizard

simultaneously; with other feeding sessions by our younger members.

Animal welfare consciousness was high, with Jake's, Luke's and Rob's experience and regular attendance keeping focus on it.

Importantly our volunteers ensured that our two 'back' rooms were always attended, as security and safety are a vital component of any display.

Geoff's MC'ing and crowd control at the feeding sessions, and general microphone mastery, were crucial, as per usual.

And finally, Mandy kept up the supply of comprehensive and attractive animal enclosure tags for our record number of display species.

Margaret's personal highlight

I saw a Peron's Tree Frog leap 300mm across the inside of its tank. I was excited.

Snakes Alive! could not take place without ongoing support from the ANBG and its staff, and they were always there, with a smile and timely response when called upon. It is a wonderful relationship. I mentioned earlier that it was our 20th year of *Snakes Alive!* at the ANBG, but it was only while talking to someone at *Snakes Alive!* with a loooong corporate memory that we realised that. We may bill next year as our 20th, with appropriate publicity.

The Sunday evening clean up was extremely efficient, and we were out of the Crosbie Morrison Building, leaving it clean and presentable, by 5.45pm! Amazing!!

And the dates for ***Snakes Alive!* 2020 are Monday 13 January to Sunday 19 January.**

Chamydosaurus kingii, Frilled Lizard having lunch

Albino Carpet Python

Dennis showing visitors a Centralian Python

Rosemary and Margaret having a well earned break

Some youngsters prefer a little quiet time outside colouring in the reptile/frog A to Z Wiradjuri drawings. Great pic Rosemary!

2019 *Snakes Alive!*

Composition by Dennis Dyer

Time has again spread her pall like a chore
And Snakes Alive is with us once more.

Open are the Garden's wrought iron gates
To welcome all eager folk through the door.

Oh! is there not one Herpo blessed
Who does not feel the moral duty,

Of inspiring a Worldly interest
In some colourful and native beauty?

Herpers are you; what and how do you herp?
Pythons, lizards, frogs, turtles and elapid,

Talking, displaying and demonstrating without a burp,
Whilst they slide, walk, hop and swim, hoping to be fed.

We've information splendid about food, environment and animal,
And know the herps of Australia and quote their facts historical,
From Pygmy Python to Amethestine in species categorical.

In short; This is the very model of a modern Herp Festival!

'Not much there for snakes': Python retrieved at Old Parliament House

By Jasper Lindell, The Canberra Times, 10 December 2018

Snake catcher Luke Dunn was called by Old Parliament House security to retrieve a non-venomous python, which isn't native to the ACT, at around 11pm on Sunday night.
Mr Dunn handed the snake to ACT Parks and Conservation on Monday morning.

The python was assessed by a government vet on Monday and showed signs of malnutrition, parasite infestation and old injuries.

"The snake had to be euthanised for welfare reasons," ACT Parks and Conservation said.

Mr Dunn said it was likely the python caught a ride on a vehicle into the ACT or it was an escaped pet. Carpet pythons are found along the east and northern coast of Australia and in inland locations, he said.

But Mr Dunn was uncertain the python found on Sunday was a pet. "It was very lean, very, very strong. It also had parasites along its skin. It had mites on it," he said, which pointed to the snake being wild.

Snakes exotic to Australia are euthanised but carpet pythons, which are native to parts of Australia, would generally be released or returned, Mr Dunn said.

An ACT Parks and Conservation spokesman said every effort was made to rehome surrendered native pythons.

"We remind owners to never release a captive-bred python into the wild."

Mr Dunn said it was the first call out to retrieve a snake in the Parliamentary Triangle he had received.

It wasn't the only snake caught in Canberra at the weekend. An extremely venomous eastern brown snake (*Facebook image above*) was caught on Bunda Street in Civic in the same week. It was released at an undisclosed location away from houses.

Serpent sightings in Australian cities

By Kat Donaghey, The New Daily, 5 December 2018

Deadly snake sightings are on the rise in the urban jungle, with increasing reports of venomous reptiles in Australia's busy capital cities.

Feared species including the potent eastern brown, red-bellied black and tiger snakes are popping up in established inner-city suburbs.

And with the impending hot summer, experts warn metropolitan dwellers could be more at risk of bites, with figures showing two-thirds of snake and spider fatalities occur in cities and towns.

About 3000 snake bites occur in Australia each year, however there are very few compared to countries such as India.

Horror stories

The New Daily spoke to snake catchers in Queensland, NSW and Victoria who agreed snake reports in cities were on the rise, however that did not equate to larger snake populations.

Snake Boss Julia Baker, who has a program on Animal Planet and runs 1300 Catch It in Brisbane, said she had caught snakes in urban areas like Brisbane's Queen Street Mall, Spring Hill and Kedron.

Ms Baker said the prevalence of snake food sources, such as rats and mice (especially around urban chicken coops), and the attraction of water such as pools, dog bowls and even air conditioning, lured snakes to people's homes and gardens.

She said especially in summer, sweltering snakes were on the move looking for water sources in which to take a dip.

"I've had a job where a girl jumped into her pool in a bikini only to see an eastern brown swimming around," Ms Baker said.

"Another guy's pool at Everton Park turned green because a python had curled inside the pool filter and blocked it.

Above: A snake made its home in a pool filter in Brisbane. Pic: 1300 Catch It

"We have tree snakes that slide under doors because they're passing through and sense the cool air conditioning inside the house.

"I had a job where a mother-in-law went to the toilet and a snake was curled around the toilet paper.

Above: A firefighter at Rutherford Fire Station found a surprise visitor hiding in their helmet. The red-bellied black snake was safely removed by a professional handler. Pic: Fire and Rescue NSW

Above: Snakes can often be found near sources of water in the warmer months, such as household sinks. Pic: 1300 Catch it

"Another job an Indian fellow was cooking a curry for the family when a python fell through the skyhole and he ran out of the kitchen."

Snakes on wheels

Sydney's metro area snake catcher Rob Ambrose said it was not possible for snake populations to have increased. He said social media had a lot to do with the hype around slithery sightings.

"Snakes are there. They always have been, but the stories and posts on social media have made it a big thing," he said.

Mr Ambrose said species such as the red-bellied black snake popped up in quirky locations like Sydney's George Street, usually because they were accidentally transported after hiding in cars.

"A good snake season is when you see a lot of snakes and that is how it should be," Mr Ambrose said.

"Unfortunately we have developed extreme behaviour towards snakes and Australians are not connected to the native wildlife."

Spotted!

From Matthew Higgins

We found this blue tongue in our garage at Bega (*see pics taken by Steph*). It was most unusual in that it was neither strongly barred as one would expect with the eastern species (the species located in s-e NSW), was mostly light yellow-cream, and it certainly wasn't the blotched species. We can only assume it is a colour variant of the eastern. It was of adult size as is apparent in the pics. We safely moved it to a sheltered part of the garden.

Albino or leucistic?

ID from Glenn Shea: Yep, that's an eastern bluetongue. These unpatterned individuals are very rare, but do pop up occasionally. Martin Whiting at Macquarie University sent a tan/grey one about a year ago from one of the western Sydney suburbs (again, a wild individual). Not sure what the genetics of this variant are like (to my knowledge, no-one has yet looked at trying to breed these variants to see whether it's a simple recessive or dominant gene, or something more complex).

Also by Matthew...

The image at right shows a Lace Monitor that was hunting for scraps at Kianinny Bay, Tathra. "I thought that the turquoise colour around the throat was of particular interest." Matthew pointed out.