

# Big Brown Snakes - The Cynic Speaks Again...

By Raymond Hoser

I'm back again with a few more passing comments on those big monster Eastern Brown Snakes.

Recall a while back I was whining about what I said are grossly exaggerated claims of oversized eastern Brown Snakes (*Pseudonaja textilis*) here in Victoria (refer to Hoser 2001 and Higgins 2000).

Here's an update from my corner of the world.

It was at 7.30 PM 10 February 2001, when I was driving towards Sydney on the Hume Highway when I saw this monster Eastern Brown Snake (*Pseudonaja textilis*) dead on the main road.

It was absolutely H-U-G-E.

As a very fair and reasonable guess, it was about 3 metres. It was also as thick as any King Brown Snake (*Cannia australis*) or even a python of the same length.

Hurling along at 100 kmh and with a trailer in tow and travelling within a mass of trucks I was simply unable to stop.

The snake was already dead and due to the location (61 km south of Benalla), I decided it wasn't viable to try to stop the car, cause an accident and then (if I survived all this) to rush the snake off to a freezer somewhere for authentication.

But let me say this: I've been in the herp game for many years and seen many a large elapid and I know what a two metre and a three metre snake look like.

Put it this way, this snake was certainly larger than the two and a bit metre Collett's Snakes (*Panacedechis colletti*) that Scott Eipper and Neil Sonneman have, so I knew what I was looking at!

Anyway, although it was impossible to stop, I was able to get a few other key statistics. It was exactly 61 km south of Benalla, as the 60 km to Benalla sign was about 1 km further up the road.

The weather at the time was cool and dry, with an air temperature of just 17 degrees Celsius.

And there you have the story.

Er, well almost...

Now as a true man of science (or so I like to think), I just had to stop and check this thing out.

But like I told you before I couldn't. Remember, I was hurtling along at 100 kmh and with a trailer in tow, my brakes would've been bad at best and of no use when I had a truck to my front, left and back.

I had no choice but to keep driving on.

But like I said, I knew I had something good, and so nothing was going to stop me.

I managed to ease over to the roadside about a kilometer past the snake.

Then I waited a few minutes for a break in the traffic and did a U-turn on the highway and with my hazard lights I went along the roadside (facing traffic) until I got to where the snake was.

It was H-U-G-E.

I got out the tape measure. And what was it?

5 feet, 11 inches in the old measurements; (under 2 meters in the metric system).

I couldn't believe it, so I measured it again, ... and again.

How could I be so wrong?

But let me tell you something. The snake was really thick.

It was the thickest eastern Brown Snake I could ever recall seeing.

For the record, it was also a male and had been dead for about an hour, based on the relatively fresh nature of the carcass.

So why have I recalled this story?

Just to show that even the best of minds and intentions can lead to some horrible mistakes.

And what if I had mismeasured and added another foot or so?

would the measurement have ended up here and as an official record?

This gets us back to square one.

When talking big snakes, we must have the body!

No if's, but's or maybes.

While talking big Brown Snakes, I should also mention the sizes of the King Brown Snakes (*Cannia australis*), that I saw in a few of the State Museums last year.

Some were absolute monsters, but anything over 2.5 metres was extremely rare.

For some reason, the really massive snakes with massive heads, just didn't seem to come out all that much longer.

The more I think about things. The more doubt I have of some of the various "official" records being touted around the traps.

This includes the alleged 28 and 25 foot Scrub Pythons (*Australiasis amethystina*) so frequently mentioned in the books. Where's the bodies?

And ditto for some of these monster Taipans and Death Adders that are regularly referred to.

Just recently (2001-2) on the Australian herps list server we had posts by David Williams claiming massive crocodiles and Taipans from New Guinea, only to be greeted by a number of cynical comments from John Weigel of the Australian Reptile Park. Ever skeptical, he too wanted to see the bodies.

My guess is that if someone were to actually search the museums and like institutions for "the largest" of any and all different species of Australian reptiles, more and more of our previously published maximum sizes will have to be downgraded.

**Now here's my latest idea.**

How about someone start up an "official register of largest specimens of every known species of Australian reptile and frog", based on standard statistics of body length, (snout-vent and total length including tails), and then making these statistics widely available including via the internet.

Make it known that these record animals must be based on identifiable specimens lodged in public museums so that they can be checked up on should the need ever arise.

Not only would such a database resolve these endless arguments about the "largest" and records for each species, but it would also become a useful tool to aid lay people seeking to identify unusually large specimens they find in their day to day activities around the country.

Ditto for this idea in other parts of the world as well.

**Literature Cited:**

Higgins, J. 2000. 'Big Brown Snakes', *Crocodylian - Newsletter of the Victorian Association of Amateur Herpetologists*, 2 (7) .

Hoser, R. T. 2001. 'Big Brown Snakes - The cynic speaks', *Crocodylian - Newsletter of the Victorian Association of Amateur Herpetologists*, 2 (8) :9.

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