

WHAT YOU MAY HAVE MISSED - HERP NEWS AND MEDIA WATCH

(EDITED BY RAYMOND HOSER)

"VACUUM CLEANER" USED TO TREAT SNAKEBITE

In what seems to be a world first, a medical equivalent of a vacuum cleaner has been used to save the foot of a Victorian woman bitten by a Tiger Snake (*Notechis scutatus*). Geelong-based surgeon, Ian Holten used the treatment to suck half a litre of envenomated fluids from the foot of a woman, Karen Haigh, after tissue around the wound started to die and poisons started to spread up her leg.

Until now, doctors have usually been unable to treat snake and spider bites that leave tissue damage making reconstructive surgery the usual option. Haigh, 41 was bitten at Little River (near Geelong) on February 26, 1998. Although treated with anti-venom upon arrival at the hospital, the wound worsened over the following 48 hours. Holten described the technique as a success in this case and said he saw no reason why it shouldn't work for other venomous bites that kill skin and surrounding tissue.

The treatment works by vacuum suction which collects the toxins in a sponge, in a manner designed to remove toxins and harmful bacteria. The treatment is likely to be trialled further in the USA and elsewhere.

Sources: Neil Davie (Geelong) and elsewhere.

SPENCER'S MONITOR'S MOVING INTO VICTORIA

Following a lengthy process, Victorian wildlife authorities have allowed licenced keepers to keep and trade Spencer's Monitors (*Varanus spenceri*). Herpetologists Peter Comber and others applied to authorities to have the species added onto state keeping schedules after NT keeper Greg Fyfe demonstrated that the animal survives and breeds well in captivity. Fyfe had already sent numbers of Spencer's Monitors to keepers in SA and Qld., where by all accounts they were doing well. At the time of going to press, some of Fyfe's Spencer's had already (legally) made it into Victoria.

Sources: Brian Barnett and others

GOULD'S MONITOR CONFUSION

Gouldii or *panoptes*? Which is which? After years of confusion, the whole issue has raised its ugly head again. A submission has been put before the International Commission for Zoological Nomenclature (ICZN) to formally suppress the names *Varanus gouldii* and *Varanus flavirufus* in favour of the more recently used name *panoptes*.

The names have been variously used to describe the Sand Goanna from northern and/or central Australia. Until the ICZN rules on the application, made by Robert Sprackland and others, the name *panoptes* remains scientifically invalid. A number of varanid experts from Germany and elsewhere have opposed the application. Although the name *panoptes* is currently a "no-no" a

number of wildlife authorities and regulations still have the name on the books adding to the confusion. In the meantime, persons keeping and/or trading in anything that goes by any of the above names should tread carefully and consult local wildlife departments if in doubt as to the "official/legal" interpretations of the matter.

Sources: *Bulletin of Zoological Nomenclature* (1997) and elsewhere.

NSW AMNESTY - THE RESULTS

Following the amnesty on illegally kept reptiles in NSW in late 1997, NPWS/NSW's own figures dated 13/3/98 show about 4,344 licences issued to people in NSW to keep reptiles. The vast majority are for small numbers of animals, with a total number of reptiles licenced at about 11,038 (an average of less than three per licenced keeper. In spite of rumors abounding during the amnesty period, the list of declared fauna was notable for what wasn't on it rather than what was. After allowing for a mad scramble to obtain fauna (native and exotic) during the month long amnesty, as well as those animals kept (legally and illegally) before the amnesty, and those declared but not actually held (by people seeking to licence them without having yet caught them), the one obvious result was how few animals (particularly exotics) were actually held in captivity in NSW. This clearly made a mockery of statements by NPWS/NSW officials over the previous two decades that private keepers were responsible for the large scale illegal importation of live animals, or collection of native species, for pets.

To date NPWS/NSW have not issued any permits to keep either Oenpelli or Rough-scaled Pythons although it is understood a small number have been "declared".

Other notable totals for NSW (held on licence), are: 116 Southern Death Adders, 7 Northern and 8 Desert; 1 Pigmy Copperhead, 2 Curl Snakes, 80 Lace Monitors, 1 Western Bluetongue, 3 Fitzroy River Turtles, 30 Broad-headed Snakes, 12 Stephen's banded Snakes, 7 Pale-headed Snakes, 11 Spencer's Monitor's, 175 Southern Broad-tailed Gecko's, 3 Burmese Pythons, 1 Pig-nosed Turtle, 68 Blue-Mountains Tree Frogs, 428 Bearded Dragons, 1,165 Eastern Snake-necked Turtles, 23 Inland Taipans, 18 Coastal Taipans, 26 Green Pythons, 103 Black-headed Pythons, 31 Woma Pythons, 31 Scrub Pythons, 10 Keelbacks, 5 Bandy Bandy's.

Sources: NPWS/NSW Wildlife Licencing database 13/3/98 and elsewhere.

ANOTHER SEIZURE

Forestry officials seized 4,000 rat snakes destined for China, at Bangkok International Airport yesterday. The live snakes, a protected species, ranged in size from a half to two metres long. They were packed in about 80

containers meant for frozen shrimps and were destined to be used as food and medicine. The alleged smugglers moved the containers into a customs warehouse at the airport but then disappeared after the snakes were spotted. Thanit Palasuwan, chief of the Wildlife Protection and Control Division, said the snakes, worth 1.2 million Thai baht, were Oriental rat snakes. They were about to be loaded onto a China Airlines flight destined for Guangzhou. Only legally licensed dealers are allowed to export snakes from Thailand. Some Chinese believe snake blood improves their health.

Snakes have often been smuggled to China with the criminals using fake documents and packing the reptiles into seafood or animal containers.

However, police and forestry officials have failed to identify the smugglers, the freight company or the owner of the snakes, said Mr. Thanit, adding that officials would raid the airport again following another tip-off.

Chotipun Sookkasem, an airport freight official, said paperwork should show who had arranged the delivery. He suspected corrupt airport officials had colluded with the smugglers. However, an airport customs official said no one had declared the goods because forestry officials carried out the raid before the suspects appeared with the documents. Agriculture Minister Pongpol Adireksarn said the snakes would be taken to the Wildlife Nursery Centre in Ratchaburi.

Source: The *Bangkok Post* on the WWW.

INDOOR POT BUST MAY BE STATE'S BIGGEST

Buffalo, N.Y.: Police say they found 2,000 marijuana plants, worth \$2 million, growing in two second-floor bedrooms in a house near Buffalo, N.Y. An anonymous tip led police to what they're calling the largest pot-growing operation of its kind in the state. Thirty-three-year-old Scott Miller of Angola, NY, will be arraigned today on drug possession charges. The indoor pot farmers allegedly used high density lights to grow the plants and paid more than \$1,000 in electric bills. According to police, three poisonous lizards guarded the Lackawanna, N.Y., house.

Source: Wes Von Papinou on the WWW from: UPI 27 March 98

PYTHONS DIE, BUT GAS WORKERS SAVE MAN, DOGS FROM FIRE

A heat lamp set up in a bedroom to keep a family's two pet pythons warm is believed to have caused a fire Thursday morning that destroyed the room and killed the snakes, officials said.

Clark County Fire investigators determined the standing heater ignited nearby combustibles inside the mobile home at 4874 Fuentes Court. Spokesman Bob Leinbach said officials were still speculating whether the 17- or the 11-foot-long snake might have knocked over the appliance.

Dennis Free and Grant Garban, veteran employees of Southwest Gas Corp., were being hailed as heroes for

rescuing the family's 15 dogs and an occupant trapped in a back room. Free and Garban had been working in the neighborhood near Nellis Boulevard and Desert Inn Road about 10:40 a.m. when a woman ran into the street yelling that her house was on fire, according to Southwest Gas spokeswoman Sharon Rorman.

Grabbing fire extinguishers from their construction truck, the team was able to confine the fire to the bedroom after assisting in getting the dogs — many of them puppies — into the back of a pickup truck, Leinbach said. The duo also broke a window in a back room through which a man, screaming for help after becoming trapped in the fire, could escape. Firefighters responding to the scene were able to extinguish the flames. While searching the mobile home for victims, Leinbach said firefighters discovered one of the snakes dead and another, severely burned, which was later euthanized.

The discovery of the snakes deeply saddened Free, Rorman said. "He loves snakes, and has some of his own," she said. "It really upset him that they were killed." The huge snakes were estimated to be about 8 inches in diameter, "almost the size of a fire hose," said county fire spokesman Steve La-Sky. Clark County Animal Control was reported to be sheltering the dogs. Damage to the mobile home was estimated at \$8,000.

Source: Wes Von Papinou on the WWW from: The *Las Vegas Sun* (Nevada) 06/3/98

CROC RECOVERING FROM LOVE BITES

One of Australia's largest and most popular crocodiles, 51-year-old "Eric" is recovering well from surgery after becoming entangled in a love triangle. Eric, who is five metres long and weighs over 800 kilograms, is the Australian Reptile Park's mascot, on the New South Wales central coast. He needed surgery when he lost a foot while fighting two female crocodiles who were "in the mood" when he was not.

Source: Wes Von Papinou on the WWW from: Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 14/11/97

1998 FLOODS MAY DROP CROC'S

The Queensland Department of Environment says it expects the recent floods in the Gulf country to have a substantial effect on the region's crocodile population. Crocodile biologist Mark Read says the majority of estuarine crocodiles nest during December 1997 and January 1998.

He says the floods would have effectively drowned many nests, causing the young to die of suffocation. "The floods that we had in the Gulf of Carpentaria this year would have had a fairly substantial impact on the crocodiles in that area," he said. "One of the major impacts that would have effected the population is that any of the crocodile nests that haven't hatched prior to the flood. "Those nests would have most likely flooded and a flood in that sort of situation kills all the eggs that are actually laid inside the nest."

Source: Wes Von Papinou on the WWW from: Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 4/4/98