

WHAT YOU MAY HAVE MISSED - HERP NEWS AND MEDIA WATCH

(EDITED BY RAYMOND HOSER)

RAIDS AND BUSTS

The ink had barely dried on the last issue of *Monitor* and a new chapter was added to the Sand Goanna (*gouldii/panoptes*) saga. A *Varanus gouldii* sent from a South Australian dealer to a Kilsyth (Melbourne) pet shop was seized by DNR (Vic.) officials. The stated reason was that the lizard was an unscheduled species, to wit *Varanus panoptes*! Well, why the taxonomy may be dubious, we can't say the people weren't warned! The earlier cases about these lizards in Melbourne are well known and all over the internet and the South-Australian dealer had a large presence on the www.

It is understood that there is a battle on to try to get the lizard back, but it seems that both sides have dug in their heels and my guess is that the government side will win. After all they've got the money and power to back their actions.

Meanwhile at the International Commission of Zoological Nomenclature (ICZN) and elsewhere the battle to 'legally' resurrect the name *panoptes* has taken a turn. Glenn Shea and Hal Cogger (from Sydney) with Laurie Smith from WA, have proposed a 'musical types' arrangement whereby the old type specimen of *gouldii* is discarded in favour of a brand new specimen from the WA museum already shipped to the UK. At the same time they seek a formal resurrection of the *panoptes* type in WA.

Sources: *Bulletin Zoological Nomenclature*, various.

MORE RAIDS

DNR (Vic.) officials in the middle of winter did a series of 'visits' to check a number of reptile collections. The tactics of some officers came under fire when in one 'inspection' an elderly relative was intimidated by officials during a raid at Port Fairy. A complaint has been made over the incident and it is understood that lawyers are now involved. In a separate inspection, officials were criticized after an outdoor pit was unnecessarily pulled apart and hibernating lizards pulled out and shown to wildlife officers. The criticism of the action came because the act threatened the health of the reptiles. The keeper hadn't been accused or suspected of illegal activity, making the action, while legal, probably beyond the protocols one would expect.

Sources: various.

LEGAL EXOTICS AT LAST

The news from DNR in Victoria hasn't been all bad. Following meetings between DNR and private reptile keepers, licences were finally issued to allow the keeping of exotic reptiles. The licences were issued to those who declared their animals in an amnesty that was advertised some time ago. Animals licenced include Ball Python (*Python regius*), Boa Constrictor (*Boa constrictor*) and Green Iguana (*Iguana iguana*). At the time of the amnesty, DNR said that they wouldn't prosecute those who came forward to declare their

foreign herps. However DNR didn't at the time promise that those people would also be allowed to keep the animals. As a result a number of keepers of exotic species failed to come forward.

There is now lobbying by herpetologists for DNR to have a second amnesty, whereby the ground rules are better spelt out, thereby encouraging more keepers to declare their exotics. The intended result is better cooperation between both sides in terms of management of these animals. Even so far the results have been encouraging, as it has shown that private keepers and the government department (DNR) can work constructively towards common goals. Sources: Mick Pugh, others.

NSW - ANOTHER AMNESTY?

In Sydney, herpetological societies are attempting to talk NPWS/NSW into having a second amnesty. This follows the unprecedented success of the first. Word around the traps up there is that there's still a heap of 'underground' keepers in NSW. In the meantime, NPWS appears to be using their discretion and continue to issue keep permits to most applicants, even though the official deadline for the end of the amnesty was almost a year ago.

The prediction by a Queensland wildlife officer (name deleted) that the NSW amnesty would result in up to 20 Queensland species becoming extinct appears to have been wrong. So far, NSW's amateur reptile collectors have been unable to wipe out any. What can be read into all this isn't entirely certain.

Sources: *Sydney Morning Herald*, others.

QLD RAIDS? - NO PORNO INSTEAD!

Fauna officials in Queensland have come into strife over their excessive use of the internet during working hours. An internal audit found wildlife officers surfing the internet at times they should have been out working. The tax-payer funded cybertours included thousands of dollars access to pay-as-you-enter pornographic websites. Queensland reptile people and aviculturists cynically suggested that they create a new porno website especially for fauna officers in order to keep them away from their collections.

Sources: *The Australian*, others.

IN THE WEST

A Japanese couple got busted in November 1997 trying to get some reptiles home from Perth. Caught as they were boarding a plane at the airport, Shuji Katahari 31, a pet shop owner and Noriku Otsukara 28 a nurse were picked up by customs officers. It was alleged Mr. Katahari had been carrying a salamander (?), four Shinglebacks (*Trachydosaurus rugosus*), one Western Bluetongue Skink (*Tiliqua occipitalis*), One Oblong Turtle (*Chelodina oblonga*), seven Western Bell Frogs (*Litoria* sp.), a scorpion, praying mantis egg case, two

centipedes, eight spiders and three cockroaches. There were five charges for those animals.

The prosecutor also said the pair would be jointly charged with smuggling a Yellow-faced Whip Snake (*Demansia* sp.), Ringed Brown Snake (*Pseudonaja modesta*), three Oblong turtle eggs (*Chelodina oblonga*), a Scalyfoot (*Pygopus lepidopodus*), one *Egernia luctuosa*, and a pair of *Cyclodomorphus branchialis*. There were three charges over the latter reptiles. Although initially remanded in custody, the pair was later granted bail, provided they reported to police daily.

Source: *Herald-Sun*.

SMUGGLING INQUIRY

Following publication of the book *Smuggled* in May 1993, Democrat Senator, Meg Lees promised a Senate inquiry into wildlife smuggling and export. This never eventuated. On October 1st 1996, *Smuggled-2* came out and noted the broken promise about the inquiry. Following renewed reports about the broken promise a Senate inquiry was announced on 28th October 1996.

It was chaired by fellow democrat John Woodley and after lengthy submissions as well as hearings in all major cities of Australia a report was handed down in mid 1998. Although worded in bureaucratic doublespeak, the report called for a further investigation into the sustainable use of Australia's wildlife resources including export of wildlife and products.

Submissions had fallen into two main categories, namely the prohibitionist line pushed by "animal rights" groups and the resource utilization line pushed by wildlife keepers, users, harvesters and scientists. In his report, Woodley noted that all scientists who made submissions backed the idea of sustainable use of wildlife. Peter Mirtschin hailed the report as a major victory for wildlife conservation in Australia. Others including Bill Zingelmann, Fia Cumming and myself saw it as a weakly worded document of little substance. The opinions didn't seem to matter as the report wasn't chaired by a government MP and by all accounts both the major parties have ignored it's recommendations anyway. A government commissioned report with similar findings by bureaucrat Don McDowall published about a year earlier was also buried by the government.

Sources: Various.

FYFE'S PARK ABOUT TO CLOSE

Early 1999 is likely to be the end of Greg Fyfe's Arid Australia Reptile Display at Alice Springs. Changing circumstances involving Greg Fyfe, leasing arrangements and other matters are the reasons behind the park's closure. For many years the facility had been regarded as a benchmark of how a fauna park should be set up. It was noted for it's excellent displays and the fact that the cages were always spotlessly clean. Another thing that always took visitors by surprise was how red the sand was in the cages. It had come from a place now known as 'Fyfe's Hill'.

Greg now manages the reptile and mammal section of

the government owned Alice Springs Desert Park. Most of the reptiles in his private facility will probably be moved to his home, where he expects to continue his breeding programs. Notable exports from Alice Springs include Bredl's Pythons (*Morelia bredli*), Desert Death Adders (*Acanthophis pyrrhus*) and Spencer's Monitors (*Varanus spenceri*).

GREER'S BOOK OUT AT LAST

After delays of a year or two, Allen Greer's long awaited snake book is out. Called *Biology and Evolution of Australian Snakes*, the publisher says it's 'A summary of knowledge on the biology of Australian snakes, covering the eight major lineages of Australian snakes' This includes blind snakes (Typhlopidae), pythons (Pythonidae), file snakes (Acrochoridae), non-venomous advanced terrestrial (Colubridae) and freshwater snakes (Homalopsidae), and venomous advanced snakes (Elapidae), sea kraits (Laticaudidae) and sea snakes (Hydrophiidae).'

The book has 175 colour and b/w figures and sells for about \$82 in Australia. It is available from 'The Herp Shop', other herp book sellers or the publisher. It is published by Surrey Beatty and Sons, 43 Rickard Road, Chipping Norton, NSW, 2170. Australia. Within Australia Phone: (02) 9602-7404

Sources: Various.

COMMON SENSE

Late in 1997, DNR Vic. altered rules for licensed snake controllers to allow for common sense. Under old regulations, snakes caught had to be killed (generally not negotiable), usually by freezing, which seemed somewhat odd since they were meant to be 'protected'. Under new guidelines announced by Fauna Manager Robert Begg, snake controllers are allowed to release 'nuisance snakes' in suitable habitats within 5 km of where found. The move is designed to protect individual snakes that stray into suburbia and find themselves being captured. The 5 km limit is designed to protect gene pools by ensuring that specimens are not released into areas with snakes of a radically different genetic make-up.

Sources: Various.

MORE CHONDROS

In May 1998, 32 year old Chee Meng Chang got busted at Cairns airport with 10 baby Green Pythons stuffed down his jocks. The Singapore national was attempting to smuggle the snakes into the country. Tests at the CSIRO Animal Health Laboratory in Geelong found the snakes to be carrying ranavirus. The virus, currently unknown in Australian reptiles, frogs and fish, perhaps due to the geographical isolation of the continent, could have threatened a number of species had it become 'loose' in the local environment. In August, Chang and an associate were both sentenced to three months jail by the Cairns District Court. It is suspected that a number of frog extinctions in Australia over the last 2 decades could be due to the unplanned release of an exotic retrovirus into the local environment.

Sources: Various.