

# AUSTRALIAN REPTILES - A LOAD OF RUBBISH

BY  
RAYMOND HOSER.

Have you ever taken a good look at the habitat photos in a reptile book? Notice how the areas depicted are always pristine and natural. Rarely is there any sign of human habitation or influence on the sites. A perusal of habitats in my own book *Australian Reptiles and Frogs* (Hoser, 1989), yields little if any evidence of human activity in most photos. No houses, piles of rubbish, car wrecks, or anything else that would detract from the beauty of the photo. Like-

wise in other Australian reptile books such as Steve Swanson's *Lizards of Australia* (Swanson, 1976), or that most recent one by Brian Bush and his friends called *Reptiles and Frogs of the Perth region* (Bush, et. al. 1995). In that book, the authors have seven representative reptile-habitat photos, all of

which appear to be pristine, untouched by humanity, bushland.

And yet if you ask any Australian reptile person about good spots to find snakes and lizards, you'll inevitably find out that many such spots are those lit-

# REPTILE HABITATS RUBBISH!



tered with sheets of tin or other human rubbish. In Australia (and elsewhere) most of us have lifted tin at one time or other and found reptiles sheltering under it.

Why reptiles seem to go for tin in the same way that flies go for you know what, I don't really know. There is an assumption that reptiles go there for warmth, as such cover tends to heat faster than

most naturally-occurring things. However this isn't the only answer. You see reptiles often shelter under sheets of tin when there is other apparently suitable cover nearby, often in a seemingly better position to attract and store warmth.


Maybe it's the uniformity of the crevices formed under tin, or something else that attracts the reptiles. Perhaps one day some keen PhD student will look at reptiles and tin, and solve the mystery for us.

It's not just tin, though. I'd hate to recall the number of reptiles I've found over the years sheltering under railway sleepers, cardboard boxes on the edge of bush tracks and even

old tyres. If you ask me to recall all the reptiles and frogs I've found under man-made cover, I'd fill several books. But having said this, there are a few finds which still remain prominent in my memory.


While it is commonly thought that reptiles prefer pristine environments, an idea that is inadvertently promoted in the literature by various authors (including I must confess, myself), there are many species that are all too happy to avail themselves of man-made cover when it becomes available. For example the easiest place in the upper Blue Mountains (west of Sydney) to find Blotched Bluetongues (*Tiliqua nigrolutea*) isn't in the bush. Rather it's in the suburbs of Leura, Katoomba, Wentworth Falls and

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Blackheath. Here many can be found sheltering under sheets of tin on vacant blocks of land. Spending a day tramping through the near pristine bush in the upper Blue Mountains, you'd be doing well to find just one Blotched Bluetongue. But if you look around houses and vacant lots, to get six in an afternoon is fairly routine. She-oak Skinks (*Cyclodomorphus casuarinae*) are also far easier to find under tin around the suburbs than in the adjacent bush.

The same applies for Pink-tongued Skinks (*Hemisphaeriodon gerrardi*) around Springwood in the lower Blue Mountains.

So assuming some reptiles like rubbish in the form of tin, cardboard boxes, disused timber and so on, it stands to reason that where this is found, so too will reptiles. While broken down houses in areas of bush can be found all through Australia, perhaps the best place to find such rubbish and potential reptile-habitat is the old country rubbish-tip. Almost every town has one!

Over the years, particularly in the late 1970's and early 1980's I went to many rubbish dumps and found many snakes and lizards. Again I stress, the number involved was far too many to remember off the top of my head. Of course the best time to find reptiles in rubbish dumps is in the morning and late after-

noon, which is when diurnal reptiles have taken shelter and the nocturnal ones have yet to emerge. These are the times that most reptiles can be found under sheets of tin and similar cover.

Of all the rubbish-tips I ever collected in, the best was probably that at Cobar, western New South Wales. In the late 1970's Cobar rubbish-tip was laid out as if it was designed purely with the reptile collector in mind. Besides the main dumping area, which rarely has much in the way of reptiles, due to the constant piling up and bulldozing of rubbish, the area surrounding the tip was littered with sheets of tin, boxes and similar debris. This was for about a kilometre in every direction. On top of this, all this ground cover was in an area of relatively dense scrubby habitat with red sandy soil and stunted trees.

In all my collecting for reptiles around Cobar, nowhere came close to Cobar tip in terms of it's herp' diversity or numbers of reptiles found.

The most notable reptiles there were Nettle Dragons (*Ctenophorus ornatus*), Bearded Dragons (*Pogona vitticeps*) and Shinglebacks (*Tiliqua rugosa*). I use the term notable to describe what sticks in my memory and nothing more. I have to apologise for failing to remember what smaller reptiles such as skinks I also found at the tip. However the most common small lizard in the area were definitely

Bynoe's Geckos (*Heteronotia binoei*). In my recollection of what I found at rubbish-tips, I have tended to concentrate on larger species as they are the ones I've remembered. Thus my account of what I actually found is very incomplete.

Cobar tip really was a hot spot for herps. Once I camped there for a week. Almost every day at either morning or late afternoon a friend and I would spend about an hour and a half lifting sheets of tin and other rubbish around the tip. Without fail we'd keep finding Shinglebacks and Bearded Dragons, even after some days in the area; even after lifting the same pieces of cover time and time again. Obviously we were missing heaps of lizards and the lizards were sheltering in different places each night.

While I never found any snakes at Cobar tip, a friend of mine from Sydney found a large Western Brown Snake (*Pseudonaja nuchalis*) there. It had been sheltering under a sheet of tin.

Another spot worth mentioning at Cobar is the cemetery. The local Methodist priest in 1976 was a bit of a herper and he'd seen many Western Bluetongues (*Tiliqua occipitalis*) walking around the cemetery. Another prime spot for Western Bluetongues is a rubbish-tip near Murray Bridge in South Australia, just near the banks of the Murray River. There they are found under sheets of tin.

While talking about cemeteries, it's worth noting that cemeteries, like rubbish-tips, often have lots of man-made ground cover. This includes more sheets of tin, wood, and even fallen tombstones. Obviously from a herpetologist's point of view, the more overgrown and neglected a cemetery is, the better the chances of finding herps. Cemeteries with manicured lawns, tended flower beds and so on are not the places reptile people like.

I remember the old Gore Hill Cemetery in the heart of Sydney's lower North Shore. For years (in the mid 1970's) this cemetery was perhaps the best spot in the area for Eastern Bluetongues

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**Above: Inland bearded dragon *Pogona vitticeps* from Western Victoria. Raymond Hoser.**

**Below: Shingleback *Trachydosaurus rugosus* from Dalby, Queensland. Raymond Hoser.**

(*Tiliqua scincoides*). The cemetery was rarely entered - except by reptile collectors, was large in area and dominated by areas of unkempt grassland (overgrown lawn), fallen or decaying tombstones and gravesites, all of which lent itself to the local reptiles. Other species found there included the Silver Skink (*Sphenomorphus tenuis*) that loved sheltering in cracks in tombstones, as well as the obligatory small skinks such as the Grass Skink (*Lampropholis guichenoti*), Weasel Skink (*Lampropholis mustelina*) and Garden Skink (*Lampropholis delicata*). Occasionally burrowing Three-toed Skinks (*Siaphos aqualis*) were also seen around the cemetery, usually hiding under ground litter, bits of cement and so on.

Speaking of cemeteries, another one springs to mind as a good Bluetongue spot. The Wentworth Falls cemetery just at the edge of the Great Western Highway in the Blue Mountains was where I found one of the nicest Blotched Bluetongues I ever saw. I ended up keeping that lizard for many years. The cemetery was also a good spot for big black Highland Copperheads (*Austrelaps ramsayi*). The big female pictured on page 148 of my book *Australian Reptiles and Frogs* came from there.

And of course, there's always Charter's Towers Cemetery, in North



Queensland. Located along Dalrymple Road, on the edge of the town, I should qualify things by saying that cemetery isn't as good as it's cracked up to be. While I've caught a number of Storr's Monitors (*Varanus storri*) within the grounds of the cemetery sheltering under metal plant boxes and in one case under a headstone on a grave, there are far better spots to

find these lizards outside the cemetery. You see Storr's Monitors are extremely common all around Charter's Towers. A number of local Charter's Towers herpetologists have told me that no amount of collecting is ever likely to wipe out the local populations of Storr's Monitors. Such an assertion is probably true.

Some years ago, Charter's Towers was a major gold town and its population was far larger than at present. In spite of this, Storr's Monitors have survived all through the area including on the very edge of the town and in suburban gardens. The first Storr's Monitor I ever found was when walking along Dalrymple Road on the way to the cemetery. I lifted a sheet of tin under a tree by the side of the road. Sure enough an adult *storri* attempted to run off before being grabbed. In the im-

mediate vicinity of this sheet of tin there were no rocks, so the tin in this case may not have been the preferred habitat, but rather just the best available.

I've heard reports of Black-headed Pythons (*Aspidites*)

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**TABLE - RUBBISH TIPS AND CEMETERIES - AN INCOMPLETE LISTING OF REPTILES SEEN OR CAUGHT BY RAYMOND HOSER OR COLLEAGUES AT THESE LOCATIONS.**

Cobar Tip, Western New South Wales	Bynoe's Gecko ( <i>Heteronotia binoei</i> ) Shingleback ( <i>Tiliqua rugosa</i> ) Netted Dragon ( <i>Ctenophorus ornatus</i> ) Bearded Dragon ( <i>Pogona vitticeps</i> ) Western Brown Snake ( <i>Pseudonaja nuchalis</i> )
Cobar Cemetery, Western New South Wales	Western Bluetongue ( <i>Tiliqua occipitalis</i> ) Bearded Dragon ( <i>Pogona vitticeps</i> )
Tip between Nevertire and Nyngan, New South Wales	Eastern Bluetongue ( <i>Tiliqua scincoides</i> ) Bearded Dragon ( <i>Pogona vitticeps</i> ) Lace Monitor ( <i>Varanus varius</i> ) Curl Snake ( <i>Suta suta</i> ) Devis Banded Snake ( <i>Denisonia devisi</i> ) Holy Cross Frog ( <i>Notaden bennettii</i> ) Water-holding Frog ( <i>Cyclorana platycephala</i> ) Salmon-striped Frog ( <i>Limnodynastes salmini</i> )
Tip near Singleton, near coastal New South Wales, about 150 km north of Sydney.	Grass Skink ( <i>Lampropholis guichenoti</i> ) Red-naped Snake ( <i>Furina diadema</i> ) Yellow-faced Whipsnake ( <i>Demansia psammophis</i> )
Disused tip, near corner of Mona Vale Road and Forest Way at Terry Hills, on Northern Outskirts of Sydney, New South Wales.	Garden Skink ( <i>Lampropholis delicata</i> ) Grass Skink ( <i>Lampropholis guichenoti</i> ) Snake-eyed Skink ( <i>Cryptoblepharus boutonii</i> ) Mountain Dragon ( <i>Tympanocryptis diemensis</i> ) Lace Monitor ( <i>Varanus varius</i> ) Yellow-faced Whipsnake ( <i>Demansia psammophis</i> ) Small-eyed Snake ( <i>Cryptophis nigrescens</i> ) Swamp Snake ( <i>Hemiaspis signata</i> ) Tiger Snake ( <i>Notechis scutatus</i> )
Tip between Engadine and Heathcote, on southern outskirts of Sydney, New South Wales.	Jacky Lizard ( <i>Amphibolorus muricatus</i> ) Mountain Dragon ( <i>Tympanocryptis diemensis</i> ) Grass Skink ( <i>Lampropholis guichenoti</i> ) Heath Monitor ( <i>Varanus rosenbergi</i> ) Swamp Snake ( <i>Hemiaspis signata</i> ) Tiger Snake ( <i>Notechis scutatus</i> ) Eastern Brown Snake ( <i>Pseudonaja textilis</i> ) Small-eyed Snake ( <i>Cryptophis nigrescens</i> )
Gulgargambone Tip, Western New South Wales	Lace Monitor ( <i>Varanus varius</i> ) Blue-bellied Black Snake ( <i>Pseudechis guttata</i> ) Grey Snake ( <i>Hemiaspis damelii</i> )
Walgett Tip, North-western New South Wales	Lace Monitor ( <i>Varanus varius</i> ) Devis Banded Snake ( <i>Denisonia devisi</i> )
Wentworth Falls Cemetery, New South Wales	Skink ( <i>Leiopisma entecasteauxii</i> form A) She-oak Skink ( <i>Cyclodomorphus casuarine</i> ) Blotched Bluetongue ( <i>Tilqua nigrolutea</i> ) Highland Copperhead ( <i>Austrelaps ramsayi</i> )
Tootgarook Swamp Tip, Victoria about 100 km south of Melbourne.	Coventry's Skink ( <i>Egernia coventryi</i> ) Metallic Skink ( <i>Leiopisma metallica</i> ) Garden Skink ( <i>Lampropholis delicata</i> ) Blotched Bluetongue ( <i>Tiliqua nigrolutea</i> ) Eastern Bluetongue ( <i>Tiliqua scincoides</i> ) White-lipped Snake ( <i>Drysdalia coronoides</i> ) Tiger Snake ( <i>Notechis scutatus</i> )
Tambo Cemetery, Central inland Queensland	Shingleback ( <i>Tiliqua rugosa</i> ) Bearded Dragon ( <i>Pogona vitticeps</i> )
Charleville Tip, Inland Queensland	Shingleback ( <i>Tiliqua rugosa</i> ) Western Brown Snake ( <i>Pseudonaja nuchalis</i> )
Cunamulla Tip, Inland Queensland	Bearded Dragon ( <i>Pogona vitticeps</i> ) Western Brown Snake ( <i>Pseudonaja nuchalis</i> ) King Brown Snake ( <i>Pseudechis australis</i> )
Charters Towers Cemetery, North-east Queensland	Storr's Monitor ( <i>Varanus storni</i> ) Black-headed Python ( <i>Aspidites melanocephalus</i> )
Charters Towers Tip, North-east Queensland	Green / White's Tree Frog ( <i>Litoria caerulea</i> ) Cane Toad ( <i>Bufo marinus</i> )

**Continued from page 27**

*melanocephalus*) in Charter's Towers cemetery, but the best I could do there was find a recent slough from one. Again, Black-headed Pythons are known from throughout the Charter's Towers district, so their presence in the Cemetery really doesn't mean much. In the hills immediately behind the cemetery at Charters Towers are more Storr's Monitors, as well as Spotted Pythons (*Bothrochilus maculosus*), which shelter under the numerous granite rocks. These relatively low hills run into higher ones a few kilometres away near the Charters Towers rubbish-tip.

Charters Towers tip is a bit of a lost cause. It occupies a small area on the very edge of town on a different side to the Cemetery. It is within a relatively confined and fenced area. Rubbish appears to be buried daily. A search of the area only revealed a pair of huge Green Tree Frogs (*Litoria caerulea*), perhaps the largest I have ever seen. They were absolute monsters. Mike Tyler, the frog expert from Adelaide Uni believes that these giants from north Queensland may be a separate species from those smaller individuals found in south-east Australia.

There were of course the all-pervasive Cane Toads (*Bufo marinus*) at the tip, but from a herper's point of view, they weren't what we were looking for. Immediately behind the tip was a huge rocky hill. It had too many immovable boulders and rocks to lift to make it easy to find anything. Perhaps the most prominent feature of the hill was the large number of Wallabies seen hopping up and down the slopes. I don't recall seeing a single reptile in this area in spite of a search lasting over an hour.

On another trip to Queensland, I did a search of some other rubbish-tips and cemeteries. That was during August/September 1977. It goes without saying that in Australia, the cooler months are the best time to find reptiles utilising tin and other surface cover for shelter. The Cunnamulla tip in Western inland Queensland, was a small area which didn't have a huge amount of tin and other debris to lift. It did however yield a large Western Brown Snake (*Pseudonaja nuchalis*) and a King Brown Snake (*Pseudechis australis*). Charleville tip, not far up the road, was similar in size and layout to Cunnamulla, but it revealed a Western Brown Snake and a Shingleback (*Tiliqua rugosa*). In common with most of those from south-west Queensland it was chocolate brown with orange flecks.

During the same trip we went to Tambo Cemetery, also in inland Queensland, but further north. The cemetery is on a low hill just on the edge of the town. Tambo cemetery yielded a single large Shingleback. This specimen was ivory-cream in colour - totally different to the Charleville specimen, and unlike any Shingleback I had ever seen before. It is a pity that at the time I didn't take photos of reptiles. I've never seen a Shingleback like it since. The following day, when driving further north in inland Queensland, we stopped for a roadkilled King Brown Snake near Aramac. Sitting on the road next to the dead snake was an immature Shingleback. This one was identical in colour to the animal from Charleville. In other words it was again the typical inland Queensland colour phase.

I have yet to find out whether or not the Tambo animal was a freak, or typical for that part of Queensland. However anyone who has done a study of Shinglebacks would know that this species (or more correctly group of species) has a huge variation in colour depending on geographic location. What did intrigue me though was how the colour of Shinglebacks in inland Queensland had apparently gone from one

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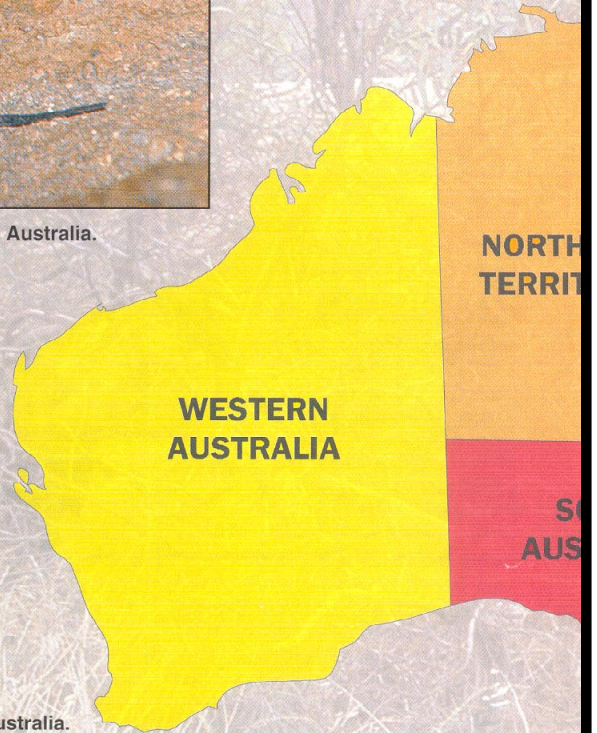
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Bynoe's gecko *Heteronotia binoei* - Shay Gap, Western Australia.

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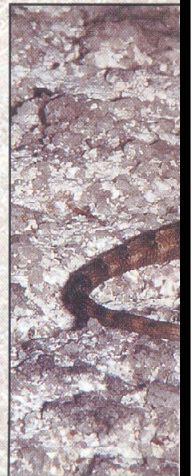
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Shingleback *Trachydosaurus rugosus* - Renmark, South Australia.



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*Liasis childreni* - Barrow Creek, Northern territory.



Western brown snake *Pseudonaja nuchalis* -  
Windorah, Queensland.

lizard *Amphibolurus muricatus* - Geelong, Victoria



*Lampropholis mustelina* - Springwood, New South Wales.



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phase to another and back again, with both phases being totally different. I also note that the two colour-phases were totally different and I found no evidence of intermediates between them. In making this comment, I am assuming that the animal I found at Tambo was typical of that town/area and noting the positions of Charleville, Tambo and Aramac on a map. The three towns are roughly in a straight line, from south to north.

While talking Aramac in central Queensland, I should tell you a bit about the place. The town itself is dry, dusty and decrepit, with only a few hundred inhabitants. The area for miles in every direction is almost flat as a tack, and covered in open grassland, which is often overgrazed and totally treeless. It is one of those inland parts of Australia that really feels like the end of the earth. Herp'wise it isn't much chop either, due mainly to the lack of rocks and other ground cover and the ease with which potential predators can find their prey. On the first occasion I had the misfortune to end up here (passing through of course), I discovered the best thing in the town. It wasn't herp' though. Rather it was the local bakery, which sold the best homemade meat pies I have ever eaten. Even if your not a pie-eater, I advise all visitors to Aramac to indulge in the town's only asset.

New South Wales is however my home state and it is there that I have spent more time collecting in rubbish-tips than in any other state.

One rubbish-tip near the main Newell highway between Nevertire and Nyngan in Western New South Wales was discovered by chance. It revealed a whole host of reptiles. This included a large Western Brown Snake (*Pseudonaja nuchalis*), three Devis Banded Snakes (*Denisonia devisi*), a large adult 2-metre male Lace Monitor (*Varanus varius*) (active), a Curl Snake (*Suta suta*), various smaller lizards, as well as a various frogs including *Limnodynastes salmini*, *Notaden bennetti* and *Cyclorana platycephala*. While I found Bearded Dragons (*Pogona vitticeps*) and Bluetongues (*Tiliqua scincoides*) in the area, Shinglebacks appeared absent. In Western New South Wales, Shinglebacks are most common in well-drained and sandy areas, not those with black soil and/or flood plains. This site, while having red soil, was dead flat and on a flood plain.

Not too far away (within a few hours) is a place called Gulargambone, near the Macquarie Marshes. The rub-

bish-tip there reveals Grey Snakes (*Hemiaspis damelii*), and Bluebellied Black Snakes (*Pseudechis guttata*), although I personally haven't collected at that tip. I have however seen both species crossing roads nearby. Lace Monitors, including the broad-banded "Bells" form are also common in the area. These large lizards are fond of tips, scavenging human waste. In coastal New South Wales, these lizards often take to garbage tins in picnic areas looking for food among the rubbish. They have also been known to shelter in them.

Walgett tip, in north-west New South Wales is famous for it's Devis Banded snakes, but again I personally haven't collected there. That species is however common in black soil river flats in northern inland New South Wales and inland southern Queensland. I've collected them in various locations near Lightning Ridge and in Queensland. Most specimens I find during the day have been sheltering under tin, not logs. A tip by a river not far from Lightning Ridge (just up the road from Walgett) also yielded Devis Banded Snakes.

A rubbish-tip in bushland near Singleton, New South Wales (in the Hunter Valley) yielded a Yellow-faced Whipsnake (*Demansia psammophis*) and a Red-naped Snake (*Furina diadema*), while a disused tip at Terry Hills regularly yielded Yellow-faced Whipsnakes, Small-eyed Snakes (*Cryptophis nigrescens*) and Tiger Snakes (*Notechis scutatus*). South of Sydney, Swamp Snakes (*Hemiaspis signata*) are commonly found in tips and under tin.

Near my own house at St. Ives, in suburban Sydney, there was an old metal car-door lying in a grassy patch adjacent to the Arterial Road Rocky Creek Bridge. When walking along the track into the gully of near virgin bush, invariably the first piece of cover I'd lift would be this car-door. Over the years I did this many times. What was

amazing was how often I'd find a Swamp Snake sheltering under it. One day, I went into the gully and lifted the door to find a single juvenile Swamp Snake resting under it. Some hours later when walking past the same cover on the way home, I again lifted the car door to find yet another Swamp Snake resting. This one was an adult. It must have taken shelter there when I was searching for snakes elsewhere in the gully.

Furthermore in all my years of looking for reptiles in that gully, I never saw a Swamp Snake sheltering under 'natural' cover, and believe me, there was absolutely no shortage of the stuff.

When I was sent to Zigzag Railway near Lithgow, New South Wales in search of White-lipped Snakes (*Drysdalia coronoides*) to photograph, I never found any in the virgin bush. Instead I found them sheltering under rubbish along the side of the road. As for the Black-rock Skinks (*Egernia saxatilis*), that also occurred in the area, well they weren't to be found in the bush either. Instead they were living in a man-made stone wall and the crevices it provided. Herpetologist John Scanlon tipped me off about this before I went there. You see he'd found

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the same thing there some months earlier.

South of Sydney, I found an aggregation of 29 Small-eyed Snakes (*Cryptophis nigrescens*) under a pile of tin at Darkes Forest. That was in May 1977. Small-eyed Snakes are probably the most common species in the area. In spite of this, it is relatively rare to find specimens in the bush. That is compared to the number found under sheets of tin on and near the farms that are found along the main Darkes Forest Road. I remember vividly one winter's day walking for miles over a heathland habitat at Darkes Forest and finding in the middle of an open space a smallish sheet of tin. Lifting it, I found a pair of adult Small-eyed snakes. Nearby rocks had revealed nothing.

Even in Victoria the reptiles seem to go for tin. Recently, in October 1995, Rob Valentic and I went in search of Coventry's Skink (*Egernia coventryi*). This skink is listed as rare and little known. We went to an area we knew they

occurred, namely Tootgarook, on the Mornington Peninsula. We checked out the virgin swamp habitat, where according to the books and a number of scientific papers the skinks could be found. We saw none.

However when we were walking along a drainage ditch in grazing country immediately adjacent to the Tootgarook tip in what was perhaps the most disturbed habitat one could find, we ended up finding four of these lizards. One was sheltering under tin, another under a piece of broken bitumen, while two others were found active near similar such cover. A White-lipped Snake (*Drysdalia coronoides*) was also found under another sheet of tin. Living in Melbourne, where White-lipped Snakes are one of the most prevalent serpents, I've learnt that this species is really big on tin. This really is their preferred habitat. If you want to find these snakes, you're probably wasting your time trying other cover in many areas.

Getting back to rare and endangered species, it's not just the reptiles that go for tin and other rubbish. The Eastern Barred Bandicoot (*Perameles gunnii*) is a small rabbit-seized native marsupial mammal. They recently became extinct on the Australian mainland, except for one single locality. The last stronghold for the species was in and around Hamilton rubbish-tip in western Victoria. Here they sheltered under car wrecks and sheets of tin. I've never collected herp's there, but there is no doubt that there would be plenty.

While talking about tin, I recall a time back in the mid 1970's when a friend and I stumbled upon an old farm house near Belrose. Belrose is now a fairly heavily built-out northern suburb of Sydney, although there is still quite a lot of bush in the area. We told the man at the house we were looking for snakes. The man stated he'd lived there for 20 years and had never seen

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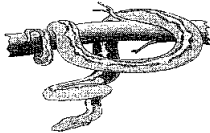
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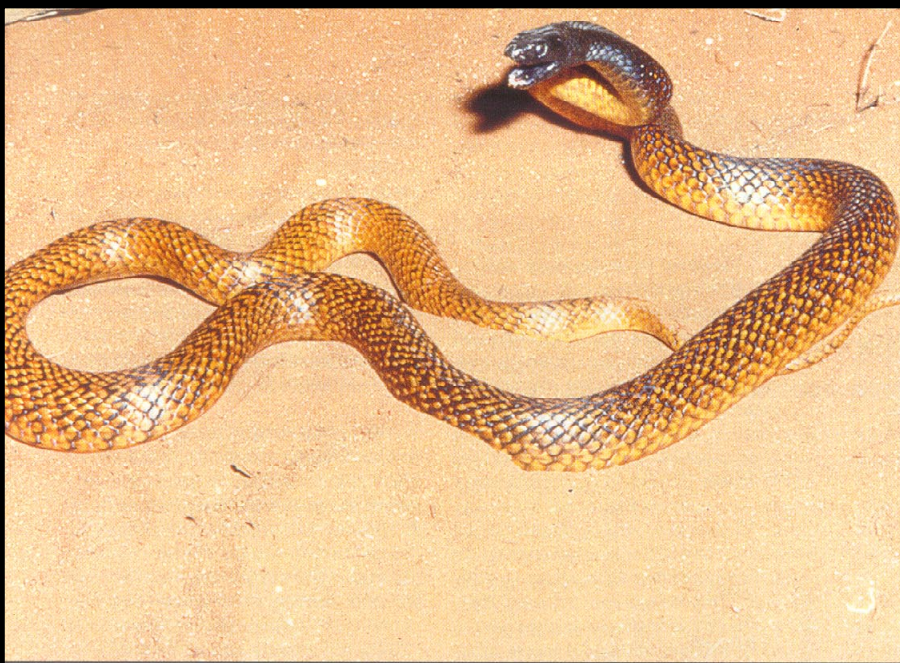
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seen one. He was adamant that none were there. Furthermore, he knew where to look for snakes and he knew there were none - or so he said. While David Spencer continued talking to the man about snakes, I lifted a large sheet of tin right next to where we were standing. Underneath it was a large chunky Red-bellied Black Snake (*Pseudechis porphyriacus*). It measured six feet in the old system (180 cm). So much for no snakes!

I had a similar experience at

Oberon, on the New South Wales central highlands, just west of the Blue Mountains. There too I grabbed a large snake right next to a farmer's house after he'd just given me his best shot at telling me there were no snakes in the area. In that case the snake I found was a Highland's Copperhead (*Austrelaps ramsayi*). The common thread was that it too was sheltering under tin.

John and George Cann are well known Australian herpetologists. For a number of generations their families have conducted educational snake shows in the

Sydney suburb of La Perouse. Having done these shows for many years, they have regularly sought to obtain new snakes from the wild. The snakes of choice are large adult Tigers (*Notechis scutatus*), Red-bellied Black (*Pseudechis porphyriacus*), Copperhead (*Austrelaps ramsayi*) and Eastern Brown (*Pseudonaja textilis*). All four species just love to shelter under sheets of tin.

To make things easier for themselves, the Cann brothers have selected a number of farming properties in country New South Wales and approached the farmers to help them in their quest for snakes. The Cann brothers have then placed a large number of strategically placed sheets of tin around the farms. When they need more snakes they simply

go to the properties, lift the tin and invariably find more than enough snakes to fill their needs. They take the "best" (usually the larger ones), leaving the rest behind. The whole snake-hunting exercise is reduced to a simple routine with a minimal risk of failure.

While talking about strategically-placed rubbish as a good place to find reptiles, it seems that Australians in their untidiness do quite a good job in creating new herp habitats. I remember once walking along the sides of the main Newell Highway between Dubbo and Narromine in mid Western New South Wales. The section of road was unusual in that it passed through an area of bushland instead of the agricultural country most typical of the region. Along either

side of the road was years of accumulation of human litter in the form of paper, plastic, cardboard boxes and various metal and wooden objects. Many of these things formed cover for reptiles. Among the reptiles observed utilising this material for cover or seen foraging within it were Shinglebacks (*Trachydosaurus rugosus*), Nobbi Dragons (*Amphibolorus nobbi*), Gould's Monitors (*Varanus gouldii*(?)) (these may have been *Varanus flavivirufus*), Lace Monitors (*Varanus varius*), Black-headed Snakes (*Unecbis gouldii*(?)) and various small skinks. The fact that the road was elevated and had rocky slopes on either side further attracted reptiles to the area. Adjacent ditches which contained water (from where dirt had been dug for

Above: Western brown snake *Pseudonaja nuchalis* from Tiboburra, New South Wales. Raymond Hoser.

Below: Tiger snake *Notechis scutatus* from Lake George, NSW. R. Hoser.



building the road) formed optimal fish-free frog habitat and was in fact being used by Giant Banjo Frogs (*Limnodynastes interioris*).

While talking man-made herp habitat, I remember being told by a bee-farmer of geckos living in bee hives. The man lived at Darkes Forest on the southern edge of Sydney. I inspected the hives in nearby bushland, which were effectively square plastic structures in which the bees lived. Inside each hive were large numbers of Lesueur's Geckos (*Oedura lesueurii*), the average being six or more adults per hive. This was a far greater population density than seen in nearby sandstone rock formations, which form the typical "natural" habitat for the species. Although covered with nets, I was stung several times while inspecting the hives. It goes without saying that the bees appeared to show no interest or hostility to the geckos found within their hives, even though my initial instincts (proven wrong) would have told me the two species were incompatible.

For those who want to hear the moral to the story, well the answer is I have none.

However, as a final note, I will

tell you a tale about what happened to me when in the United States. It was after the 1993 Orlando International Reptile Breeder's Expo in Florida, when Stefan Broghammer a German, Karim Daous a Frenchman and myself were all in a car driving through the Florida countryside. Stefan was at the wheel and we were speeding along a freeway through forest country on the way to Tom Crutchfield's place. Crutchfield, who is probably well-known to many readers, is one of the biggest reptile traders in the United States.

I saw a broken-down old house, surrounded by sheets of tin and other rubbish. It just stank of herp, so I called on Stefan to stop the car so we could check it out. The two men looked at me as if I was mad. Stefan, who spoke the better English asked me why I wanted to stop. I told him - to catch some snakes. 'Why bother?', came the reply. You see his theory was that any snake we may find under the tin could be bought for a couple of dollars at Crutchfield's if we wanted it. In the United States, so many snakes are being bred in captivity that nowadays not many people bother to go into the wild to try and find them. You see captive-bred snakes are healthier than anything that ever comes from the wild. Besides it would be cheaper to go to a pet shop and buy a locally-oc-

curing snake than spend the extra money on petrol to go looking for one.

Maybe if the wildlife authorities in Australia got their act into gear we could have the same situation here in Australia. Perhaps I'm hoping for too much.

#### **So, how many rubbish tips and cemeteries are there in Australia?**

With virtually every major and minor town in Australia have at least one "rubbish-tip" there are probably thousands of tips in Australia. Some people have described Australia as one big rubbish-tip due to the vast amounts of rubbish deposited around the countryside. Nobody has ever done a count of the cemeteries in Australia, but no doubt these too number in the thousands. On top of the cemeteries used since European settlement in the late 1700s, there are a large number of Aboriginal settlements and burial sites. It is here that counting them becomes tricky. The following account explains why.

Janice Goddard and her husband purchased a property "Mooki" in 1985, near the tiny town of Tingha, near

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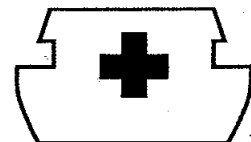
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Inverell, in northern New South Wales. In 1992, the National Parks and Wildlife Service of New South Wales (NPWS) informed them of five alleged Aboriginal cemeteries situated on their 3000 acres. These were also listed with the Federal Government Heritage Commission. It turned out that these alleged sites had not been seen or inspected by any researcher from NPWS, The Heritage Commission or anyone else. In fact they didn't even exist! It was a bit of a mystery as to how these alleged sites ever got onto the map in the first place. In her bid to overturn these listings, (in part) due to the fact they made the property effectively worthless in monetary terms (particularly in the wake of the Mabo High Court case and related Federal Government legislation), Janice uncovered more alleged burials on her property.

NPWS employee and so-called anthropologist Howard (aka Harry) Creamer backed up the listings by producing a report claiming a "Queen Annie", "Mr. Conners" and "Joseph Clarkson" had been buried on the property. It turned out these listings had been falsified by NPWS. Publicly available death certificates showed the first two had been buried at Tingha General Cemetery 9 km away, while Clarkson was buried at "Bassedine" an adjacent property. The source of the information quoted by NPWS was another Aboriginal "elder" whom they also named. The only problem here was that in accepting the date of the NPWS "report" as accurate, the "elder" would have only been 8 months old at the time (as shown from his birth certificate). In other words this report was also a fraud.

Janice complained to the Federal Heritage Commission about the listings and the head of the Commission, a Ms. Sharon Sullivan, close friend of Harry Creamer, appointed a so-called "Independent Arbitrator" to adjudicate and produce a report. That turned out to be none other than Creamer himself. As an NPWS employee, Creamer could hardly have been described as "independent". Besides posing as an anthropological expert, Creamer is also well-known for having produced a thesis on left and right wing Marxism at New England University for a public speaking course.

Creamer produced a lengthy report affirming that "Queen Annie" and others had been buried on the property. This in turn was completely rebutted by Goddard in her own report (who had also produced birth and death certificates and other material from publicly-available records). Goddard was able to point out a vast number of lies and inconsistencies in the report by Creamer and other NPWS generated documents/allegations. Finally, the Board of the Commission accepted that the sites had been falsified and that Creamer had perpetrated the lies, so the listings were deleted from the record.

NPWS Director General Robyn Kruk and Creamer, who by this stage had a strong animosity to Goddard, refused to accept the ruling of the Federal Heritage Commission and kept their own listing on the property. Therefore Goddard had to pursue the matter through other means. Eventually she went through her local member of State



Facing page:

Top: *Pseudonaja textillis* from St. Claire, New South Wales.

Centre: Rubbish tip 20km south of Port Wakefield, South Australia.

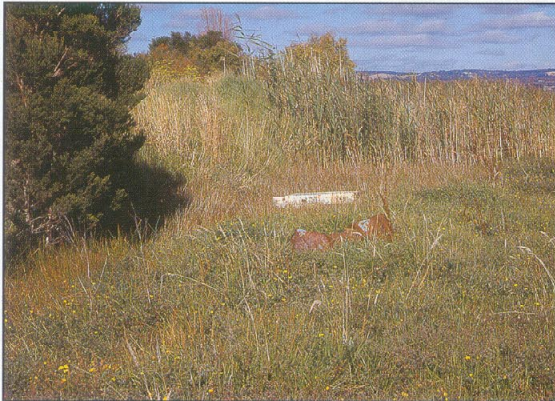
Bottom: Female lace monitor *Varanus varius* from St. Ives, New South Wales.

This page:

Top: Coventry's skink *Egernia coventryi* from Tootgarook, Victoria.

Below left: Habitat in drainage ditch at rubbish tip site at Tootgarook. Victoria habitat for *Egernia coventryi*.

Bottom: Young blotched blue-tongued skink *Tiliqua nigrolutea*. Specimen from Frankston, Victoria. Raymond Hoser.



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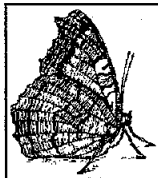


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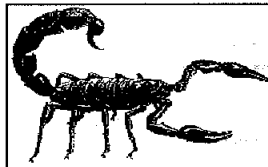
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Parliament Mr. Ian Slack-Smith, who petitioned then Minister Chris Hartcher to direct his department to cancel the listing. And so it was done. In state bureaucratic jargon, the listing on Goddard's property had been "place". Upon removal of this (by Ministerial order), Kruk and Creamer slapped a new listing on the property. This time it was declared a "relic". Thus, while NPWS had abided by their Ministerial order, the effect on Goddard was the same.

During the course of her inquiries, Goddard uncovered a massive scam operating in NPWS whereby bureaucrats in the department falsify aboriginal sites and listings in a bid to justify their existence and seek further government funding in order to upgrade the sites and so on. Goddard had by 1996 accumulated a huge dossier of falsified sites. Oddly enough in a draft copy of a book to be published by Creamer called, "A sift and a dreaming", Harry Creamer concedes

that many alleged aboriginal sites are falsified and that the potential number of sacred sites is therefore infinite. In his book he states "the potential number of sites of contemporary significance is for practical purposes limitless as new sites are invented". Goddard also found out that a key person involved in getting Creamer his position in NPWS had allegedly been none other than Ms Sharon Sullivan. In terms of a motive to falsify these sites, Goddard thought it was simply a case of self-justifying bureaucracy and perhaps in Creamer's case an attempt to bolster later political ambitions by claiming to have done lots for the Aboriginal cause by listing heaps of sacred sites. In terms of the perpetuation of the lies by Creamer and associates, Goddard could only conclude that they could not accept the fact that they'd got it wrong. For reptile people this account is more alarming as the same people are in charge of listings of rare and endangered species in New South Wales and these two seem to get "invented" with ever-greater

frequency.

A recently-exposed scam in NSW is where NPWS employees allege to have found endangered species on private property that has a development application pending. When endangered species are found on a property, NPWS officials have the "veto" power to either prevent or allow such developments to take place. Due to their cryptic nature, reptiles and frogs are the favoured species used to stop/hinder developments. It has recently been alleged by numerous unconnected persons that NPWS officials are obtaining specimens of "endangered" (schedule 12) species and then claiming to have found them at a given place (not the real place) and stalling the development. Following payment of a "bribe", the NPWS allow development to proceed.

NPWS were able to stall a development near Queanbeyan in New South Wales because a Schedule 12 legless lizard (*Aprasia parapulchella*) was allegedly found there by one of their officers. Further investigation revealed the land (proposed subdivision) was not habitat for the species. Another development in inner suburban Rosebery (in Sydney) was held up again by NPWS until the owner "paid them off" with \$40,000. NPWS further confuse the issue by vetting all persons to conduct "fauna impact statements" to ensure that they can control the outcomes to suit their own agendas. (A similar situation has also existed in Victoria for some years with a number of eminent scientists publicly protesting over the scams). So it seems that in NSW (at least) not only are the numbers of cemeteries unlimited, but so too are the potential areas where endangered species supposedly live.

While talking Australian Aborigines, it has been shown that if all Federal and State Funding for Aborigines had actually gone to the people over the last ten years alone, they would all be multi-millionaires. Instead, over 95% of this money has been swallowed up by (overwhelmingly "white") state and federal bureaucracies such as NPWS and The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). As a result, most of them still live in abject poverty on the outskirts of outback towns.

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