

POLICY STATEMENT NO.22

**TAKING, KEEPING AND DISPLAY OF LIVE
REPTILES**

NOVEMBER 1992

1. BACKGROUND

Western Australia has a diverse reptile fauna numbering in excess of 400 species in three turtle families, seven snake families and the crocodile family. All indigenous reptiles are protected fauna under the Wildlife Conservation Act 1950.

It is an offence to take (defined to include kill, capture, molest, hunt or attempt to do so) or possess reptiles except in accordance with a licence. The only exceptions are the taking of certain venomous land snakes and sea snakes when they constitute an immediate danger to human life, farm stock or domestic animals (open season notice in Government Gazette No. 41 of 22 June 1984); secondly, the temporary care of sick or injured fauna in accordance with Wildlife Conservation Regulation 28(2) and thirdly, the taking of reptiles by Aborigines in accordance with Section 23(1) of the Wildlife Conservation Act.

The Department's objective is to protect and conserve all species of reptiles in the wild throughout Western Australia. Experience has shown that, in order to facilitate this, it is necessary to restrict and control the taking, keeping and display of reptiles. However, a small number of well controlled and well managed collections and displays can play a positive role in conservation through public information and education, and through the contributions of professionally qualified and some amateur herpetologists (i.e. persons who may have no formal scientific qualifications or association with scientific institutions, but have a strong affinity with, and desire to study, reptiles and demonstrated reptile handling experience) to our understanding of the biology and ecology of reptiles. There is also a demand for a small number of collections to be maintained for venom supply purposes.

The need for a strict policy regarding the keeping of reptiles in captivity is based on experience in Western Australia, interstate and overseas. The practise of keeping snakes and some other reptiles for hobby purposes can ultimately have the potential to threaten the survival of wild populations, particularly of species favoured by collectors. There has been limited demand to date in Western Australia by members of the public to keep snakes and other reptiles in captivity. It is, however, a well established hobby in some other States and countries. It would probably become so here if there were a liberal policy for the taking and keeping of reptiles.

Western Australia has a number of reptile species, particularly rarer species and pythons, which are greatly sought after by collectors, both within and outside Australia, and are therefore of high value. An increase in taking from the wild could adversely affect the conservation status of the scarcer varieties. Liberalisation of policy covering taking and

keeping would inevitably increase rates of collection from wild populations and disturbance of animals and their habitats.

Snakes and lizards, in particular, present special problems with respect to administration and inspection of animal collections. They can be difficult and, in some cases, dangerous to handle and difficult to identify to species level. On the other hand, experienced handlers find them easy to catch from the wild, conceal and transport. Many species will breed in captivity, creating uncertainty as to the origin of individuals. In addition, captive reptiles which escape or are intentionally released into areas other than those which they originate from, can have a adverse effect on wild populations.

There is considerable illegal collection and trading of reptiles in Australia as well as smuggling of reptiles out of Australia. A liberal policy towards the taking, holding and display of reptiles would increase law enforcement problems, as illegal activities could be facilitated by the "cover" that would be provided. The costs of administration and inspection in the case of liberal policy would be high. To allow imports, involving the keeping of reptiles for private purposes, even with the use of transponder chip implants for identification and DNA fingerprinting technology to check breeding claims, would prove costly to administer and enforce and pose a threat of wild establishment of species exotic to the location of keeping.

The Minister has discretionary power to issue licences to take and keep reptiles for purposes prescribed in the Wildlife Conservation Regulations. Reptiles are protected fauna and the overriding consideration in licensing decisions is the conservation of reptiles in the wild, which is the Department's statutory responsibility. The granting of a licence is therefore a privilege and not a right.

2. OBJECTIVE

To assist in the protection and conservation of reptiles in the wild throughout Western Australia by restricting and controlling their taking, keeping and display.

3. POLICY

The Department will permit the taking and keeping of reptiles for public information and education, scientific research, limited private study and venom supply purposes subject to the objective in Section 2 above and the policies and conditions set out below. Commercial trading in reptiles will not be permitted.

4. TAKING OF REPTILES FOR SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND MUSEUM COLLECTIONS

4.1 Comment

There is a need to provide for scientific research on reptiles by *bona fide* researchers employed by, or formally associated with, recognised scientific institutions. This can be achieved by licensing the taking and keeping of reptiles for scientific purposes. (Private study by approved amateur herpetologists is to be provided for under education/public purposes licences.)

Some amateur herpetologists wish to conduct private expeditions to photograph and study reptiles. In these circumstances, they may locate possible new species or specimen of species poorly represented in museum collections. Where such private field trips are endorsed by the WA Museum, it is appropriate for licences to be issued for limited collection of unusual specimens and poorly represented species, provided all specimens are deposited with the WA Museum.

4.2 Policy

The taking of reptiles from the wild, and their keeping, may be permitted in the case of research to be conducted by persons with recognised scientific qualifications and/or experience and an association with recognised scientific institutions.

4.3 Implementation

4.3.1 Regulation 17 licences (Licence to Take Fauna for Scientific Purposes) may be issued to *bona fide* researchers with recognised scientific qualifications and/or experience and an association with recognised scientific institutions.

4.3.2 Application involving species declared pursuant to Section 14(2)(ba) of the Wildlife Conservation Act 1950 to be "fauna which is likely to become extinct, or is rare" will be approved only in special cases and where there is a conservation benefit. Applications involving species declared to be "fauna which is otherwise in need of special protection" will be considered on a case by case basis.

4.3.3 Regulation 17 licences will not generally be issued to amateur herpetologists, unless they meet the requirements of paragraph 4.3.1 above, by working on behalf of a recognised scientific institution.

4.3.4 Amateur herpetologists may also be issued with Regulation 15 licences providing for the taking of limited numbers of museum specimens when embarking on private field trips, if they can demonstrate, by a written endorsement, that they have support of the WA Museum.

5. PRIVATE KEEPING OF REPTILES

5.1 COMMENT

People who wish to keep reptiles in a private capacity fall into four broad categories:

- (i) Those who handle reptiles in the course of their occupation and who wish to continue their activities at home;
- (ii) Those (including amateur herpetologists) who have a very strong affinity with reptiles and who use their knowledge, or wish to do so, to serve the community in various ways, e.g.:

- supply of snake venom to hospitals and research institutions;
 - public education;
 - provision of a reptile removal service and depository for injured reptiles;
 - private study;
- (iii) Schools or local groups who wish to keep reptiles for interest; and
- (iv) Hobbyists who wish to keep reptiles as pets for their own interest.

The second group can perform a useful service by dealing with injured reptiles and removing dangerous reptiles from private homes and gardens. While some carry out private study/research, it is not generally the primary function or interest of amateur herpetologists. There is, however, scope for some dedicated and experienced amateur herpetologists to contribute to our knowledge of reptiles through basic biological and `herpetocultural` study. In so doing they can provide a `public benefit`.

The licensing of amateur herpetologists will inflict a cost to CALM in terms of licence issue and monitoring of the keeping, breeding and disposal of reptiles. There are however potential conservation benefits from the increased knowledge of reptiles that a limited system of private keeping and study can provide.

While some reptile species can be raised and kept in captivity on artificial diets, it is common for species to prefer and in some cases require live prey, including live species of protected fauna. Many snake species, for instance, are dependant on a natural diet of small lizards and frogs. It is unacceptable to allow the proliferation of the taking of protected fauna for food purposes for captive snakes and as such the private keeping of snakes which require a live fauna diet needs to be strictly controlled.

5.2 Policy

5.2.1 The taking and keeping of reptiles as pets or for private hobby purposes will not be permitted.

5.2.2 Reptiles may be permitted to be kept in a private collection for educational or public purposes where at least one of the following criteria is met.

- a) snakes may be kept in a private collection for educational or public purposes under a Regulation 16 Licence:
 - (i) where it can be shown that there is a need for a collection of snakes to be available for education (e.g. to facilitate community appreciation of morphological differences between venomous and non-venomous snakes);or,
 - (ii) to facilitate species identification in cases of snake bite;or,
 - (iii) where there is a need for a source of snake venom for research or medical purposes from a particular species which cannot be otherwise obtained.
- b) Limited numbers of reptiles may be kept for private study by amateur herpetologists under a Regulation 16 Licence, where:

- (i) the private study is determined, by CALM, to be for the purposes of adding to the knowledge of the biology of reptiles and ;
 - (ii) the amateur herpetologists can demonstrate, by documentation and references, his/her ability to care for and study the reptiles in question.
- 5.2.3 A bona fide researcher who conducts research on reptiles may be permitted to keep reptiles at home for limited periods as part of his/her research program.
- 5.2.4 A researcher who works with reptiles or any other person who works with reptiles (e.g. in Perth Zoo or a wildlife park), but does not fulfil the requirements of paragraphs 5.2.2 or 5.2.3, will not be permitted to keep reptiles at home.
- 5.2.5 Limited numbers of common local lizards, non lethal snakes and freshwater turtles may be permitted to be kept temporarily at schools for the purpose of basic study and reptile appreciation under Regulation 16 licence.
- 5.2.6 Persons wishing to hold in captivity, under Section 5.2.2, species of snakes which require a diet of live protected fauna (such as lizards and frogs) will be required to demonstrate, with references;
- the extent of and need for the specialised diet, including an estimate of the weekly food requirements of the snakes to be held, and
 - the conservation value of being permitted to hold those snake species, prior to licence issue. Where approval is given to take and/or to hold snakes which depend on live fauna for food, the applicant will be required to obtain a Regulation 15 licence to take fauna as food for the captive reptile, or to have the Regulation 16 holding licence endorsed accordingly.

5.3 Implementation

- 5.3.1 The holders of Regulation 16 licences of approved private collections will normally be required to obtain their stock from captive sources, however, Regulation 15 licenses (Licence to Take Fauna for Educational or Public Purposes) may be issued for the taking of common species from the wild. The taking of declared threatened species will not generally be permitted. When application is made to take and hold reptiles, the applicant will be required to identify the food requirements of the species (where known) and the proposed captive feeding regime.
- 5.3.2 Regulation 16 licences (Licence to Keep Fauna for Educational or Public Purpose) may be issued to persons who fulfil the requirements of paragraph 5.2.2, subject to the following guidelines:
- a) Educational licences for snake collections.
 - (i) Licences to hold a snake collection for educational purposes will be issued on an appropriate area basis (i.e. one per area), at the discretion of the Department.
 - (ii) Generally, only snakes which naturally occur in the area for which the licence is issued will be allowed to be kept and limits will be set on both the maximum number of species and specimens of each species (about 10) which can be kept.

- (iii) Collections will generally be limited to venomous snakes, in addition to which one or two non venomous species may be permitted to be held.
 - (iv) Licensees will be encouraged, and may be required, to give talks and lectures using snakes for demonstration
 - (v) Licensees will be expected to respond to requests from within their area to assist in moving reptiles, to assist in the rehabilitation of sick or injured reptiles or the relocation of reptiles under appropriate licences and the provide venom to hospitals and research institutions.
 - (vi) Breeding in captivity is to be restricted to a level necessary to maintain the collection and captive-bred progeny may be disposed of only with the express permission of the Department.
 - (vii) The keeping of declared threatened species will not be permitted, except for the temporary care of sick or injured reptiles in accordance with Regulation 28(2), or in the case of snakes acquired from captive sources, with the express permission of the Department.
 - (viii) The holders of Regulation 16 licences for approved private collections will normally be required to obtain their stock from captive sources. However, Regulation 15 licences (Licence to Take Fauna for Educational or Public Purposes) may be issued for the taking of common species from the wild, but the taking of declared threatened species will not be permitted.
- b) Educational and public purposes licences for amateur herpetologists.
- (i) The particular reptile species permitted to be kept for study by amateur herpetologists under 5.2.2 b) and the details of the study to be approved will be considered on a case by case basis. Criteria used to assess applications will include, the natural distribution of the species, proposed source of the captive specimens, housing and feeding requirements, wild and captive population status and the published information available on the species.
 - (ii) An amateur herpetologist will need to obtain the written support of at least two referees associated with a recognised tertiary institution, scientific organisation or herpetological society (such as the Western Australian Society of Amateur Herpetologists) attesting to his/her ability to handle, study and care for reptiles. At least one referee is to be a qualified researcher (i.e. having scientific qualifications and/or demonstrated reptile research experience).
 - (iii) The disposal of reptiles at the conclusion of the private study will be determined on a case by case basis. Because of the difficulties which would arise with the disposal of excess reptiles, captive breeding will be kept to a minimum. Reptiles collected for study purposes or bred under licence will normally be disposed of by either transfer to public zoos, suitable wildlife parks or other licensed holders, or will be destroyed. They will not generally be permitted to be released in the wild (except under an approved breeding or release program), sold, or transferred to private hobby collections in Australia or overseas.

5.3.3 A person who fulfils the requirements of paragraph 5.2.3 will have his or her activities endorsed as a condition of the Regulation 17 licence.

5.3.4 Regulation 15 and 16 Licences (Licences to Take and Keep Fauna for Educational or Public Purposes) may be issued to schools for the purposes of paragraph 5.2.5.

6. COMMERCIAL DISPLAYS IN WILDLIFE PARKS

6.1 Comment

Requests from wildlife parks to display reptiles have generally been refused in the past, as part of a deliberate policy of containment. Allowing commercial display in wildlife parks inevitably leads to increased interest in these groups from other wildlife parks, hobbyists and collectors, resulting in increased pressure on wild populations from both legal and illegal operators. The existence of legal avenues can be used as a "cover" by illegal collectors and traders.

There is an increased need for inspection, enforcement and administration by the Department where wildlife parks display reptiles. Their keeping imposes a higher cost than the keeping of either mammals or birds, because of the increased difficulty of inspection and the high level of concern about possible illegal activities.

Balanced against the foregoing is the view that well-managed wildlife parks displaying relatively small numbers of snakes can play a positive role in conservation through public information and education, particularly with respect to facilitating community appreciation of venomous snakes and the differences between venomous and non-venomous snakes.

The Perth Zoo is not covered by 6.2 and 6.3 below. While licences from the Department are required for the taking of fauna in Western Australia, for interstate movement of fauna to or from the Zoo to wildlife parks or persons in Western Australia, the keeping of fauna by the Zoo is governed by the *Zoological Gardens Act 1972*.

6.2 Policy

6.2.1 Displays of approved species of snakes in wildlife parks may be permitted.

6.2.2 Displays of lizards and tortoises in wildlife parks will not generally be permitted.

6.2.3 Displays of marine turtles and sea-snakes in wildlife parks will not be permitted, except that permission may be given to a strictly limited number of wildlife parks specialising in the display of marine fauna.

6.2.4 Approval of any displays of reptiles in wildlife parks will be subject to the proposal meeting security, animal care and educational standards set by the Department.

6.3 Implementation

6.3.1 Regulation 16 licences (Licence to Keep Fauna for Educational or Public Purposes) for reptiles, may be issued to wildlife parks subject to :

- (i) a case being demonstrated for displays of reptiles in the context of public information and education.

- (ii) the applicant submitting documentation demonstrating the Department's standards for security, animal care and public information will be met.
- 6.3.2 In addition to the normal licence conditions applicable to wildlife parks, the following guidelines will apply to any Regulation 16 licences for snakes issued to wildlife parks.
- (i) Generally, only snakes which are listed in the attached schedule will be allowed to be kept, although consideration will be given to requests to keep other reptiles, provided high standard keeping facilities can be provided, and appropriately trained and qualified staff are employed to care for the special needs of these species.
 - (ii) Collections of snakes will generally be limited to venomous species, in addition to which one or two non venomous species may be permitted to be held.
 - (iii) Breeding in captivity is to be restricted to a level necessary to maintain the collection and captive bred progeny may be disposed of only with the express permission of the Department.
 - (iv) The keeping of declared threatened species will not be permitted except for the temporary care of sick or injured snakes in accordance with Regulation 28(2), or in the case of snakes acquired from captive sources with express permission of the Department.
 - (v) The keeping of snakes in open pits will not be permitted because display by such means is less conducive to public education objectives than other available means (e.g. aquarium- style tanks), and it also presents difficulties for Departmental officers in checking holdings.
- 6.3.3 Wildlife parks authorised to display reptiles will normally be required to obtain their stock from captive sources. However, Regulation 15 licences (Licence to take Fauna for Educational or Public Purposes) may be issued for the taking of common species from the wild, but the taking of species declared to be threatened will not be permitted.
- 6.3.4 Applications to take marine turtles, sea-snakes or crocodiles for wildlife parks, or to keep such reptiles in wildlife parks, will be determined on a case-by-case basis. In particular, Policy Statement No. 24 deals with crocodiles.
- 6.3.5 Licence fees will be imposed as prescribed in the Wildlife Conservation Regulations.

7. TEMPORARY DISPLAYS

7.1 Comment

There is interest in having temporary displays of reptiles at venues such as shopping centres, agricultural and district shows. Such displays can play a positive role in conservation and safety with reptiles through public information and education.

7.2 Policy

Temporary displays of reptiles by Regulation 16 or 17 licensees may be permitted, subject to the proposal meeting security, animal care and educational standards set by the Department.

7.3 Implementation

Applications for temporary displays will be determined on a case-by-case basis and the Department will have regard to the interests of any other Regulation 16 licensees in the general vicinity of the proposed display venue.

8. OTHER

8.1 Regulation 4, 15, 16 and 17 licences relating to reptiles will be issued in accordance with the Wildlife Conservation Regulations and subject to conditions. In particular, licences will be reviewed each year, they will specify the numbers of each species which may be taken or kept, and require that specimens may be disposed of or transferred only with the approval of the Department.

8.2 The Department will maintain records of licences and will maintain levels of inspection and enforcement activity.

Syd Shea
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

24 November 1992

DISTRIBUTION

Attachment: Schedule - List of snake species which the Department may permit to be kept in wildlife parks.

Schedule

LIST OF SNAKE SPECIES WHICH THE DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND LAND MANAGEMENT MAY ALLOW TO BE KEPT FOR DISPLAY IN WILDLIFE PARKS

Notes:

1. This schedule is an attachment to and should be read in conjunction with Departmental Policy Statement No. "Taking, Keeping and Display of Live Reptiles".
2. A wildlife park may be permitted to keep and display only those snakes listed below for the region in which the wildlife park is situated.
3. For each region the list is limited to species which naturally occur in the region and includes venomous species plus one or two non-venomous species.

<u>REGION</u>		<u>SPECIES</u>
South West	<i>Notechis scutatus</i> <i>Pseudonaja affinis</i> <i>Pseudonaja nuchalis</i> <i>Pseudonaja australis</i> <i>Acanthophis antarcticus</i> <i>Morelia spilota imbricata</i> <i>Morelia stimsoni</i>	Tiger Snake Dugite Gwardar Mulga Snake or King Brown Snake Southern Death Adder Carpet Python (southern subspecies) Stimson's Python
Pilbara	<i>Psuedonaja nuchalis</i> <i>Psuedonaja australis</i> <i>Acanthophis pyrrhus</i> <i>Psuedonaja modesta</i> <i>Morelia stimsoni</i> <i>Aspidites melanocephalus</i>	Gwardar Mulga Snake or King Brown Snake Desert Death Adder Ringed Brown Snake Stimson's Python Black-headed Python
Kimberley	<i>Psuedonaja nuchalis</i> <i>Psuedonaja australis</i> <i>Psuedonaja modesta</i> <i>Acanthophis praelongus</i> <i>Morelia spilota variegata</i> <i>Morelia childreni</i>	Gwardar Mulga Snake or King Brown Snake Ringed Brown Snake Northern Death Adder Carpet Python (northern subspecies) Children's Python
Remainder (arid and semi arid regions)	<i>Psuedonaja nuchalis</i> <i>Psuedonaja australis</i> <i>Acanthophis pyrrhus</i> <i>Psuedonaja modesta</i> <i>Pseudechis butleri</i> <i>Morelia spilota</i> <i>Morelia stimsoni</i>	Gwardar Mulga Snake or King Brown Snake Desert Death Adder Ringed Brown Snake Yellow-bellied Black Snake Carpet Python (southern subspecies) Stimson's Python

*Declared to be "fauna which is otherwise in need of special protection" pursuant to Section 14(2)(ba) of the *Wildlife Conservation Act 1950* (see notice in Government Gaazette dated 16 November 1990)