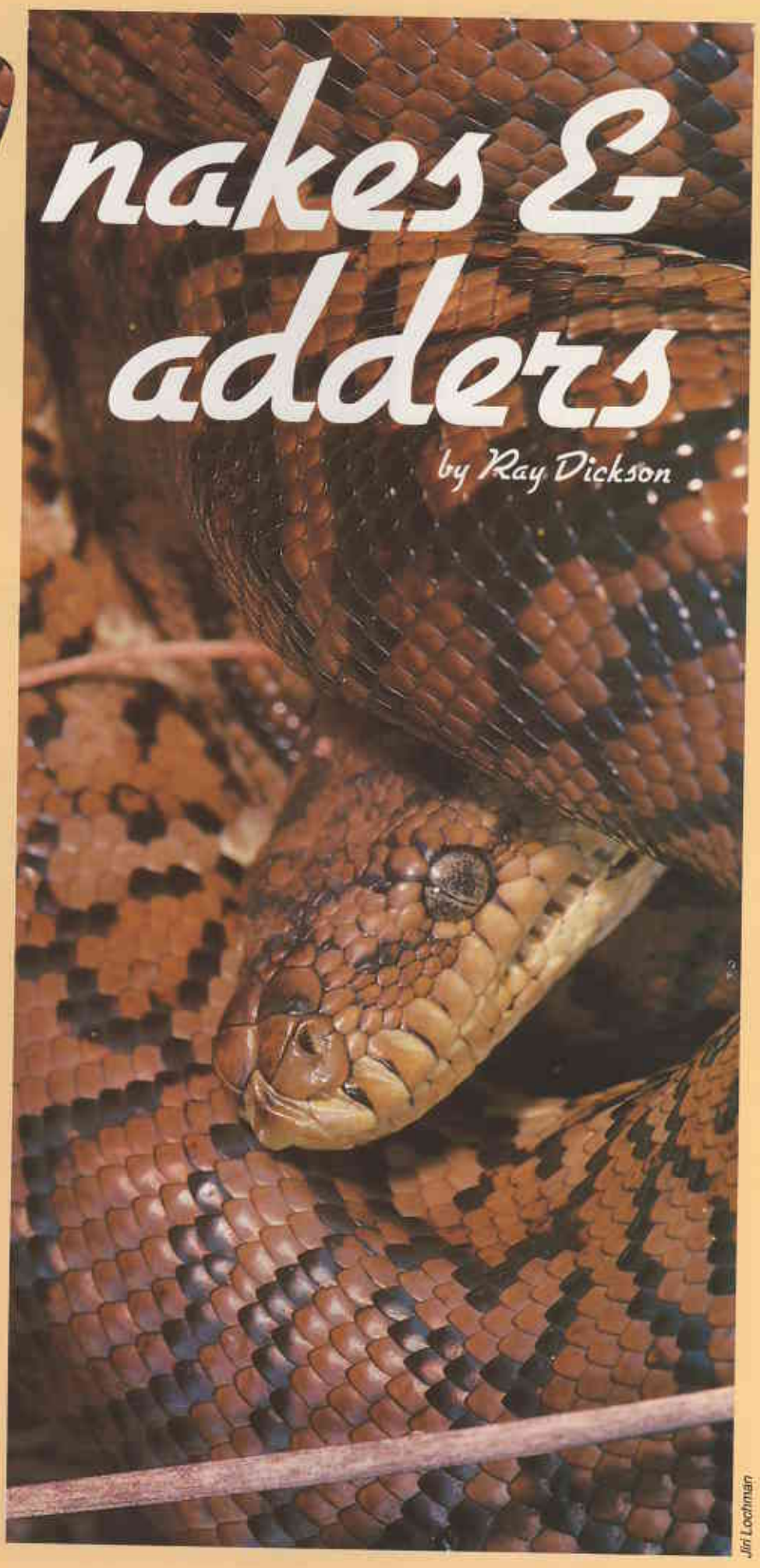
Snakes & adders

by Ray Dickson

The hot sun brings forth the adder.
W. Shakespeare



Carpet Python
Morelia spilota (Lacepede).

Jiri Lochman

SNAKES, in common with other reptiles such as turtles and lizards, are "ectotherms": their movements in search of food, shelter or a mate are controlled by the temperature of their environment. In winter lower temperatures not only slow down and inhibit a snake's movements, but also drastically effect its ability to catch and digest prey due to a corresponding decrease in metabolic rate. So, they become inactive.

With the onset of warmer weather in spring and early summer they emerge from hiding often considerably slimmer and hungrier. In the search for food they are unusually active and often cover much more ground than normal. In areas of greater human population density the inevitable occurs. SNAKES AND PEOPLE MEET!

Jiri Lochman

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A Blind Snake (*Ramphotyphlops australis*) (top).
Stimson's Python (*Morelia stimsoni*) (above).

The switchboards of CALM, Police HQ, the Museum and Perth Zoo are besieged by worried householders seeking help to deal with unwanted snakes in the vicinity of their homes.

Encouragingly, the accent of these enquiries has shifted away from seeking advice on how to kill snakes. A more ecologically conscious public is nowadays eager to learn ways of discouraging their immediate presence. Snakes, after all is said and done, form an important part of the balance of food chains in the Australian environment as a whole.

The south-west is home for three families of Australian snakes.

The **Typhlopids** or burrowing snakes live mainly in top soil, surfacing at night to feed on termites and other small insects. They are harmless and non-venomous and are usually only seen when the topsoil is disturbed.

Marie Lochman

Bert & Babs Wells

Dugite (*Pseudonaja affinis*).

How to prevent snakes from entering and remaining on your property.

1. Keep your property free of rodents - they are an attractive food source for snakes. If you have pets such as horses or caged birds, do not leave grain or seed for mice to feed on.

2. Stack timber and sheets of tin in a manner which does not provide dry, insulated shelter for snakes.

3. Keep grass short and reduce the chance of accidentally stepping on a snake.

4. Wear stout boots or shoes and trousers when walking in overgrown areas.

5. Alert children and strangers to the dangers of snakes and snakebite.

6. Do not attempt to catch snakes by hand. Most snakebite cases dealt with in State hospitals resulted from attempts to catch, molest or kill wild snakes.

7. LEARN FIRST AID FOR SNAKEBITE.

Jiri Lochman

Bert & Babs Wells

Venomous duo, the Black Tiger Snake (*Notechis scutatus occidentalis*) (top) and the Common Death Adder (*Acanthopis antarcticus*).

The **Boids** are a non-venomous group of medium to large snakes represented by the Carpet and Stimson's Pythons now found only in remote areas.

The **Elapids**, a family of fixed front-fanged venomous snakes, most of which are harmless, include in the greater metro area, the potentially dangerous Dugite, Tiger Snake and Death Adder.

DUGITES are found in a variety of dryer habitats, often in well settled suburbs which still have some native bushland, and also in the vicinity of the coastal sand dune belt and the Darling Ranges. They frequently shelter under debris or even houses.

TIGER SNAKES prefer to feed on the larger types of frogs, and are common around wetlands and river banks. They can shelter comfortably throughout the year in grass tussocks and bulrushes.

DEATH ADDERS are now confined mainly to areas of forest in national parks and in Water Board catchment areas, although they occasionally appear near the banks of rivers, perhaps having been accidentally carried down stream.

Please remember that snakes, in common with other native fauna, are protected by law and anyone found wantonly destroying them can face stiff penalties.

FIRST AID

Methods of dealing with snakebite in Australia are probably the most advanced in the world, thanks largely to intensive research by C.S.I.R.O. into venom constituents and their passage through and affect on, the human body.

First Aid Treatment

1. Immediately apply a broad firm bandage around the limb to cover the bitten area. It should be as tight as one would bind a sprained ankle. As much of the limb should be bound up as possible. Crepe bandages are ideal but any flexible material can be used, e.g. tear up clothing or old towels in strips.

2. The limb must be kept as still as possible. Bind some type of splint to the limb - e.g. piece of timber, spade, any rigid object.

3. Bring transport to the victim whenever possible.

4. Leave the bandages and splint on until medical care is reached.

Do not cut or excise the bitten area.

Arterial tourniquets are no longer recommended for snake bite.

Don't wash the bitten area. The snake involved may be identified by the detection of venom on the skin. If the snake can be safely killed bring it into hospital with the victim.

LANDSCOPE

Volume 4, No. 2
Summer Edition/January 1989

EDITORIAL

It is difficult to remember a time when our daily news did not feature some environmental controversy. To people involved in environmental research and management, the popularity of 'the environment' is a mixed blessing.

Greater public consciousness of environmental issues has meant increased funding and, to some extent, greater prestige. But many scientists working on ecosystems are uncomfortable when their work is placed in the political spotlight.

The knowledge that a scientific observation that once would have been tucked away in a scientific journal to be read only by a few colleagues could become the centre-point of a political controversy is daunting.

Retaining objectivity in any research area is difficult. For those engaged in research on the natural environment it is even more difficult. Unlike the physical sciences in the natural sciences the truth is often camouflaged by interactions between factors which vary over time and space. When the results of this type of research are placed in the political arena, the mixture is often volatile and the truth a casualty.

To enable scientists to better seek the truth and communicate it, the scientific community has adopted what has been called "the scientific method". The scientific method is a code of conduct with rigid requirements. An offshoot of that code is a set of rules which scientists must follow, at least in reputable scientific journals, if they are to have their research published. Unfortunately, a byproduct of this is that scientific articles are not the easiest to read and are often plain boring.

Given that the environment has become a major political issue, it is important that those involved in the debate are fully informed. But scientists are faced with a dilemma. They need to popularise their work to reach a wider audience. On the other hand, they cannot afford to lose objectivity.

NATIVE CREATIONS

Nouvelle jardins, multiculturalism or laissez-faire; which garden fashion will you choose? Turn to ***page 22.***

WILD MARRON

Do our wild marron have a future or will local gourmets keep catching them to the point of extinction? Find out on ***page 4.***

KARRI MAGIC

What is really going on in the karri forest? On ***page 32*** *we take a look at the system of conservation reserves that have been established to preserve this awe-inspiring forest.*

STRANDED!

Relive the euphoria of the Augusta whale rescue on ***page 18.***

BACK TO BASICS

With today's massive land boom it's hard to imagine that the State once couldn't give land away fast enough. Now the government is buying back our valuable conservation areas. See ***page 43.***

DESERT GEM

The Gibson Desert Nature Reserve covers over 1.8 million hectares. It is a desolate but subtly beautiful landscape. Read about this unique area and the management problems it presents on ***page 48.***

SNAKES & ADDERS

Slim and active snakes have emerged hungry from their winter hibernation. But they're not all venomous. See ***page 51*** *for tips on living with snakes.*

AFTER THE FOX

Foxes pose a major threat to native mammals and other fauna. Can we outfox them? See ***page 12.***

A SIGHT TO BEHOLD

'Its pouch can hold more than its belly can', goes the popular rhyme. Find out more about this awkward but graceful bird on ***page 39.***

Cover Photograph

One of our natural wonders - the beaches of Hamelin Pool (Shark Bay) consist of billions of small shells.

Photo by Bill Bachman.

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Production: Margaret Wilkie/Karen Addison
Colour Separations by The Colour Set
Printed in Western Australia by Kaleidoscope

Published by Dr S Shea, Executive Director, Department of Conservation and Land Management, 50 Hayman Road, Como, Western Australia 6152