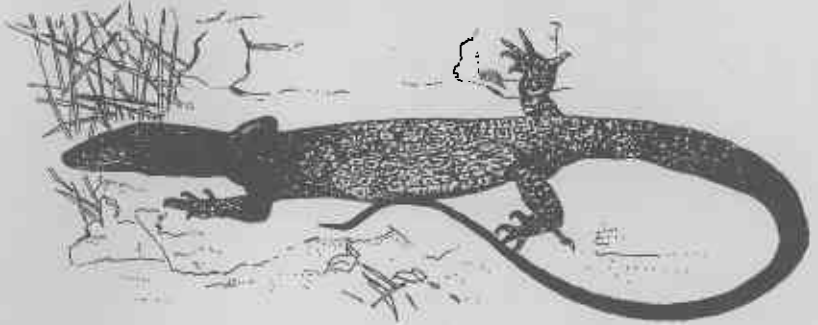


Black Tailed Monitor – *Varanus tristis*



BLACK TAILED MONITORS (black goannas) are widespread over most of northern WA, Perth is at the southern limit of their extent. Most southern forms are very dark, although the juveniles are more colourful with yellowish speckles, while inland forms often retain the indistinct yellowish markings into adulthood. They can grow up to 80 cm long.

They are excellent climbers, resting in a hollow or basking on a limb high up. Look for scratch marks on smooth-barked trees such as wandoo (or verandah posts). They specialise in hunting for birds' nests and eggs, but will also take frogs, mice, lizards and various insects. Within a hollow tree, the animals move around to find hotter or cooler places, and so help to regulate their body temperature. Ceiling spaces are ideal on all counts. In winter they sleep near the chimney!

Young animals would have numerous predators, including cats and birds such as kookaburras, but the adults are killed by dogs or carpet snakes. They are often road casualties, as they bask on the tarmac to raise their body temperature. If they are noticed, small birds often mob them, so, when emerging from a den site, the black goanna looks around very carefully before moving

out. Sometimes this nearly gives a heart attack to people when they look out of their window and see a long snaky neck peering at them from the rafters!

If they are disturbed when on the ground, they run up things to escape, usually trees. If you note one running away, try sneaking up on a likely tree, you can catch him sidling around to keep the tree between you and him! There are several stories of the animals running up people, and I once observed the effect on a horse ... I clearly saw the startled goanna hurl itself sideways off the horse's shoulder as Brandis (the horse) tried to go vertical himself. After that, things got a little hectic for a while!

Around human dwellings, black goannas (or chuditch) may take mice or rats that have been poisoned. If the rat-poison is used according to the label instructions it is unlikely that the predators would eat enough of the dead rodents to cause them any problems. Use a bait station, and never overdose, as if you do that the rat may die before the poison has decomposed inside it – that would be fatal to a predator. Better still, of course, is not to use poison at all and try to persuade your neighbours not to do so either. – Ed.