

MEMBERS PAGE

WHAT KIND OF FROG?

We live on a small bush block, close to Lake Powell on the west side of Albany. The property itself is divided by a drainage channel conveying storm water to the lake. Being close to water, we share the environment with a host of frogs; the quacking frog, moaning frog, banjo frog, slender tree frog, spotted thigh frog, motorbike frog and various froglets that we still have to identify. We have noticed that with this year, being so wet, there are many more adult frogs than there have been over the past four to five years. Our snake numbers also seem to be fewer. The king skinks still seem to be out in force and we have noticed that they hunt frogs, grabbing them by their hind legs and flaying them backwards and forwards as does a crocodile with its prey, then devouring them when they are pacified.

One particular frog has roused our curiosity because of its dramatic defence behaviour, and not being experts we have yet to identify it. Its first reaction to disturbance is a very loud screeching. This is piercing and sustained. If escape seems impossible, its next ploy is to appear aggressive. When approached (by a hand) it raises itself on its toes so that it appears somewhat larger and it jumps straight at its aggressor with its mouth open. It has a large gape, even for a frog, and will actually grab a finger tip (quite painless!!!) Finally, if these two behaviours do



Cliff and Margaret White with one of the frogs more commonly found on their property - a motorbike frog (*Litoria moorei*)

not work to its advantage, it enacts the most amazing ploy of all - it feigns dying!! It stretches out its fore and hind limbs stiffly and at the same time pushes itself on to its back. In this position it quivers and jerks spasmodically, gradually becoming rigid and changing colour! The drab grey and white colouration combined with the extended body (which appears dry and shrunken) has the appearance of something dead - long dead - it fooled us! Heart failure maybe? We were sure it had expired. However, after a fairly protracted time the changes reversed and it eventually hopped away. Obviously this last behaviour cost a lot of effort because the frog seemed a bit slower and maybe even exhausted.

Margaret and I have witnessed this drama on only two occasions, which coincide with the number of

times that we have seen this particular type of frog. We hope to see it again, although we may have to wait a while. We will have a camera ready next time.

Cliff and Margaret White, Albany

*Dale Roberts, Dept of Zoology, UWA, says: "The behaviour sounds like *Neobatrachus pelobatoides* which screams when agitated, blows itself up and stands on all fours. I haven't seen the next bit where it feigns death but that does not surprise me. Colours could be this species but the grey is more suggestive of *N. albipes*. They may both behave the same way, and both are likely to occur in your area. A good clear photograph would be useful. Incidentally, a lot of frogs scream when threatened. *Helioporus* species as well as *Litoria moorei* and *L. cyclorhynchus* often do so."*

IN BRIEF

WATER UNDER THE DESERT?

Recently there was a story in the media about a 'massive', 'new' find of groundwater from the Officer Basin under the Great Victoria Desert. It was going to supply Perth for 4000 years! Philip Commander,

a hydrogeologist with the Water and Rivers Commission, cautions everyone to be very careful about media hype ... The find is not new, the quality is variable and, due to very low rates of recharge, the

proposals for use will need extremely careful evaluation if they are to be sustainable.

For copies of Dr Commander's two papers relating to this, ring 9334 0530.