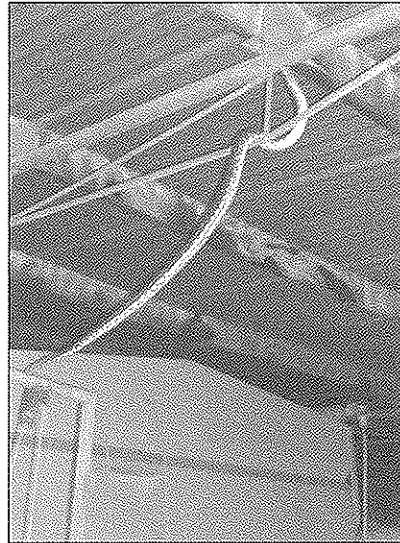
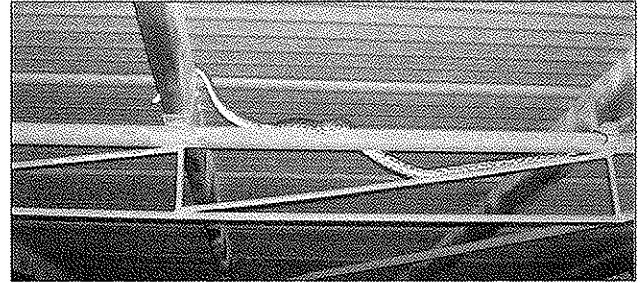


A PYTHON ON THE RAFTERS!

Tricia Sprigg

Our family farm, 12 kms north of Wagin, has always been shared with carpet pythons (*Morelia spilota imbricate*). Growing up as a child on the farm I can recall on several occasions when Dad would carry a python back to the hay shed after it was accidentally loaded onto the truck with a load of hay. One poor python wasn't so lucky. The python made its way into the house and was hiding in some clothes which were scheduled for mending. Mum, who to be quite frank is terrified of snakes, came across the python. Unidentifiable in the darkness, and panicked by the knowledge that a snake was in the house with the children, the python's fate was sealed with a lethal blow of the fire poker. Dad returning from the paddock had more sympathy for the deceased python than for my traumatised mother!

I often wondered how the python managed to get into the house. On a recent trip back to the farm, which is now in my brother's hands, part of the mystery was revealed. I was reversing the tractor into the shed when out of the corner of my eye I saw something fall to the ground. I lent over the side of the tractor and to my surprise there, lying on the ground less than a metre away from where I sat, was a python. I suspect the noise and fumes from the exhaust had frightened the python and caused it to fall from the rafters.



I climbed out of the tractor and joined my brother to watch the python as it scaled up a 1 metre frame of 3/4 inch square tubing suspending a pencil auger. There was nowhere for the python to go once it reached the top of the frame, so my brother wheeled the auger over to the lowest part of roof. I was even more amazed how the python managed to cling to the tubing while it stretched more than half of its body length through mid air towards the rafter. Once its snout was over the rafter it only took seconds before it was making its way along the rafter to a more secure spot near the iron.

My brother has been fencing off some remnant vegetation over the last few years so hopefully these beautiful pythons will soon be able to find safer areas to hibernate, although I suspect they will always find machinery and hay sheds attractive.