

## A SHORT NOTE ON THE HERPETOFAUNA OF BRISBANE AND ITS SUBURBS

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A visit to Brisbane, ostensibly to visit the Australian based members of my family, from Tuesday 23 March to Friday 9 April, 1999, gave me an opportunity, between bouts of serious tribal business, to observe a few of the more familiar reptiles and amphibians to be found in urban and suburban locations. It is always very intriguing to arrive in a completely new country without any realistic preconceptions of what the fauna might be like, and noting with interest everything that one encounters. Although it was the antipodean autumn and even subtropical Brisbane was no longer warm enough to demonstrate the larger monitors or pythons, there was still much to be discovered. Armed with a cap to keep off the sun and a pocket sized copy of 'A Photographic Guide to Snakes and Other Reptiles of Australia' by Gerry Swan of the Australian Museum, I sought as many opportunities as possible to mix family obligations with herpetology.

Brisbane is situated at the mouth of the Brisbane river at latitude 27 degrees 30 south, and is enclosed by a C-shaped range of mountains of average height 600 metres. They are part of the Great Dividing Range, and still are clad in part by significant fragments of both rain and sclerophyll forest, forming a habitat for many of Australia's 760 odd reptile species. Lying off the coast of Brisbane, in Moreton Bay, are several sand islands clad with rain forest; Moreton Island furthest offshore, with Bribie Island to the north and North Stradbroke Island to the south. The city itself, though only having a population of one million inhabitants, covers an area as large as Greater London, though most of this is very low density suburbia, consisting for the most part of small bungalows in very large gardens. The centre of Brisbane consists of the original early 19th century town built in a decorative Regency style both in

brick and timber; the earlier suburbs with many wooden houses known as Queensland cottages; later urban architecture from turn of the century and the exciting modern high-rise inner City development. Despite being in the sub-tropics, the general ambience is very southern English, both in architecture and affect. We spent a few days in Springhill, an old suburb in the north-west of the city; several days in Logan City, a very new suburb in the south; the Easter weekend near Montville, a tourist village in the rain forests 60 miles to the north and visits to Bribie and North Stradbroke Islands. We also visited the national park rain forests in the Tamborine Mountains 30 miles to the south of central Brisbane.

### AMPHIBIA

We only saw two species of amphibian; one easily identified toad which was seen both in its adult and larval form, and an unrecognised anuran seen briefly at night.

#### **Bufonidae**

*Bufo marinus*. Cane Toad, Giant Toad

This huge toad, which can grow to 24 cm in length, secretes toxins from its paratoid gland which are capable of killing most potential predators, including quite large snakes. An adult was observed on the night of 4 April noisily micturating against a lamp standard base on a garden footpath in Montville. Scores of newly metamorphosed specimens were seen leaving a pond in Springhill's public park on 27 March.

#### **? Hylidae**

A virtually unmarked brown coloured frog about 10 cm long with a primitive face seen briefly jumping through vegetation after rain on the night of 3 April.

REPTILIA

**Gekkonidae**

? *Hemidactylus frenatus*. Three small, pinkish brown geckos, about 10 cm long, seen at night on an illuminated motel sign in Springhill. Neither their appearance nor habitat seemed correct for any native Queensland species; We therefore wondered whether they could be imported examples of this common Asiatic animal.

**Agamidae**

*Pogona barbata*. Eastern Bearded Dragon. A 50 cm long example of this heavy headed, spiky lizard whose throat is covered with enlarged spines was seen basking on a tree stump right at the side of a path in the Botanic gardens, in the City centre, about midday, 24 March. It made no effort to move even though it was less than a metre from my feet.

*Physignathus lesueurii*. Eastern Water Dragon. This dramatically handsome, 90 cm long animal, the largest lizard that we saw in Australia, was observed in a characteristic position basking on a fallen log bridging a fast flowing river in the Cedar Creek National Park in the Tamborine mountains, 30 miles south of Brisbane, in the early afternoon of 27 March.

*Diporiphora australis*. Eastern Two-lined Dragon. This small, approximately 17 cm long lizard was observed basking on a tree stump right in the centre of Brisbane in a children's play park by the river. A series of broad brown bars across its light grey body were divided by three yellowish-white longitudinal stripes, which gave it a very striking appearance.

*Amphibolurus muricatus*. Jacky Lizard. We saw an example of this sombre coloured, robust agamid of approximately 30 cm in length basking on some dead vegetation on the shore-line at Redlands Bay, departure point for ferries to North Stradbroke Island which is about 12 miles south-east of the city centre. It seemed quite

unconcerned by our presence, and let me approach very close to photograph it.

**Scincidae**

*Cryptoblepharus virgatus*. Cream-striped Shining Skink. A tiny 8-10 cm metallic textured lizard with a black bordered silver stripe along each side of its grey-bronze back which is very abundant on wooden garden fences, though it can be found on waste-ground right in the centre of Brisbane. Very numerous in both Logan City and Springhill.

*Ctenotus robustus*. Robust Ctenotus. We saw two of these 24-35 cm long skinks; one basking in wooden waste-ground adjacent to Logan City's public park on 24 March, the other on Bribie Island on 6 April, concealed under a thorny hedge by the beach. This lizard is distinguished by its characteristic chequered and linear pattern.

*Egernia major*. Land Mullet. This huge 60 cm long black skink gets its name from its fish-like shiny scaled body and its strange slithering movements. We saw one travelling slowly through leafy undergrowth in a shady part of the Cedar Creek National Park, in the late afternoon of 27 March.

*Eulamprus quoyii*. Eastern Water Skink. Five adults of this 30 cm. long, typical brown skink were observed basking on fallen trees by a river in a wooded creek adjacent to Logan City's public park. This is a golden olive-brown animal with scattered dark flecks and with a creamish-white stripe extending from the eye down each side of the back.

*Eulamprus tenuis*. Bar-sided Forest Skink. One specimen of this 18 cm long lizard, identified by its brown, reticulated pattern was seen on a railway bank near Springhill public park on the afternoon of 8 April.

*Lampropholis delicata*. Dark-flecked Garden Sunskink. This is like both the Cream-striped Shinning Skink and the following animal, the

Pale-flecked Garden Sunskink, which is very abundant in suburban gardens. In colour it is a metallic brown with tiny dark flecks. Unlike the Shinning Skink which basks on vertical surfaces, this lizard tends to remain on the ground.

*Lampropholis guichenoti*. Pale-flecked Garden Sunskink. Distinguished from the previous species by its bright copper coloured head and the scattering of light as well as dark flecks on its dorsal surfaces, this tiny lizard of 6-10 cm in length is equally abundant in suburban gardens.

### **Varanidae**

*Varanus varius*. Lace Monitor (100-200 cm). Several of these large, impressive, but common lizards were seen rummaging in litter bins in a car-park at the sea-side resort of Noosa a fortnight before our visit to Australia had begun. When we visited the town we saw nothing.

### **Elapidae**

*Demansia psammophis*. Yellow-faced Whipsnake, 80-100 cm in length. Four of these very attractive slender, olive coloured snakes were seen basking on flower-beds and pathways after several days of heavy rain at Montville, in our garden near the rain-forest park. This timid little snake is slightly venomous, and can be distinguished from similar species by a very distinctive yellow shape surrounding its prominent eyes. It also has a reddish-brown flush on the foreparts of its body.

### **DISCUSSION**

When one considers that there are over 760 species of reptile in Australia, one can hardly give oneself a pat on the back for only observing a dozen lizard species and one snake. Nevertheless coming to a country where one can sit in the garden supping an iced beer and observe three reptile species quietly going about their business at the same time is quite a unique experience. The abundance and proximity of reptile species is a delight in itself, transforming the dullest little park and the most manicured of suburban gardens into a herpetological wonderland.

### **REFERENCES**

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