

Reptile Reads

Strophurus taenicauda
Illustration by Marion Westmacott



By Phil Tripp

I've had an interesting series of debates with some individuals within the pet industry as to the suitability of standard retailers to be granted the right to sell reptiles as pets. I don't object to the keeping and breeding of them by knowledgeable herp keepers, enthusiasts and, with the right breeds, younger people.

I've had snakes as pets, but they were not kept in a box or glass cages when I was a kid. They lived in the rock wall around my house, were simple garter snakes that didn't bite nor had venom and were generally easy to play with if left to their own ways afterwards. They remained unconfined, wild and rather happy, or at least it seemed.

When I was in my twenties, I acquired an iguana (illegal here but similar to the goanna) and also was given a rather large female Tarantula, similar to the Huntsman of Australia. These were not 'easy' pets to take care of and they gave me a respect for the need to know about proper enclosures, substrates and furnishing, heating and temperatures, lighting, feeding, water and signs of stress or illness.

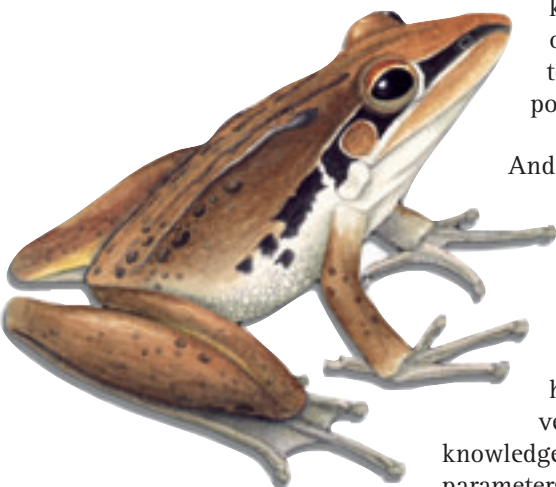
More recently, I was asked to support the Pet Industry Association's proposal for retailers to sell reptiles as opposed to breeders, but I couldn't get behind it because of a chance discovery of a wild python over the summer and what I found out about domesticating, for profit, a species that was unlike the easier dogs and cats, but not dissimilar to the complexity of birdkeeping. I also didn't feel confident in ALL retailers being allowed to sell livestock as the rules were proposed, rather I felt that the sale of reptiles, amphibians and some suitable native fauna should be restricted to those operators who had the training,

knowledge and facilities to not only give the advice, but also to determine the suitability of potential owners.

And here's where the parallel lies.

There are easy birds like parakeets, finches and budgies which require basic care, feeding and maintenance and more exotic species which take a major investment in housing, health and nutrition as well as a very active regimen of care and knowledge of far more behaviour parameters. I should know now. I have had two very different parrots for nearly a decade and seen quite a few owners as well as retailers whose approaches vary widely.

This compares easily to reptiles and to some degree, amphibians. So it was a great coincidence that I received three books that cover the bases which I am happy to share here for those who are aspirants to own and care for a particular species, those who already have one but need to know the next level of information or awareness of various factors, plus those who are real enthusiasts.



Litoria nasuta
Illustration by Marion Westmacott



**Cronin's Key Guide:
Australian Reptiles & Frogs**
\$35 by Leonard Cronin.
Published by Allen & Unwin 230 pages

This is a very well illustrated and written book on Australian fauna of the herp and hopper breeds. I didn't know that there are 760 species of reptiles and 200 frogs. I know the estuarian croc is the largest on earth and the taipan is the world's deadliest snake, but I was unaware of the lizard that walks on water—the beaded gecko—nor the water-holding frog from the harshest deserts. This book is a fascinating introduction to dragons, snakes, monitors, lizards, legless reptiles, crocs and turtles as well as frogs, salamanders, skinks and geckos.

It won't tell you how to care for them but it gives a ready identification guide as well as a map of their range, notes on their development, behaviour, diet and habitat. Each species gets their own page, but it is limited to the most commonly encountered ones. It also gives status of the species whether plentiful, threatened or bordering on extinction.

I thoroughly enjoyed the profiles and illustrations and think it's a great book for younger people to

appreciate the variety of fauna in our country as well as adults who want to learn that much more but still fall short of wanting a manual for care and feeding.

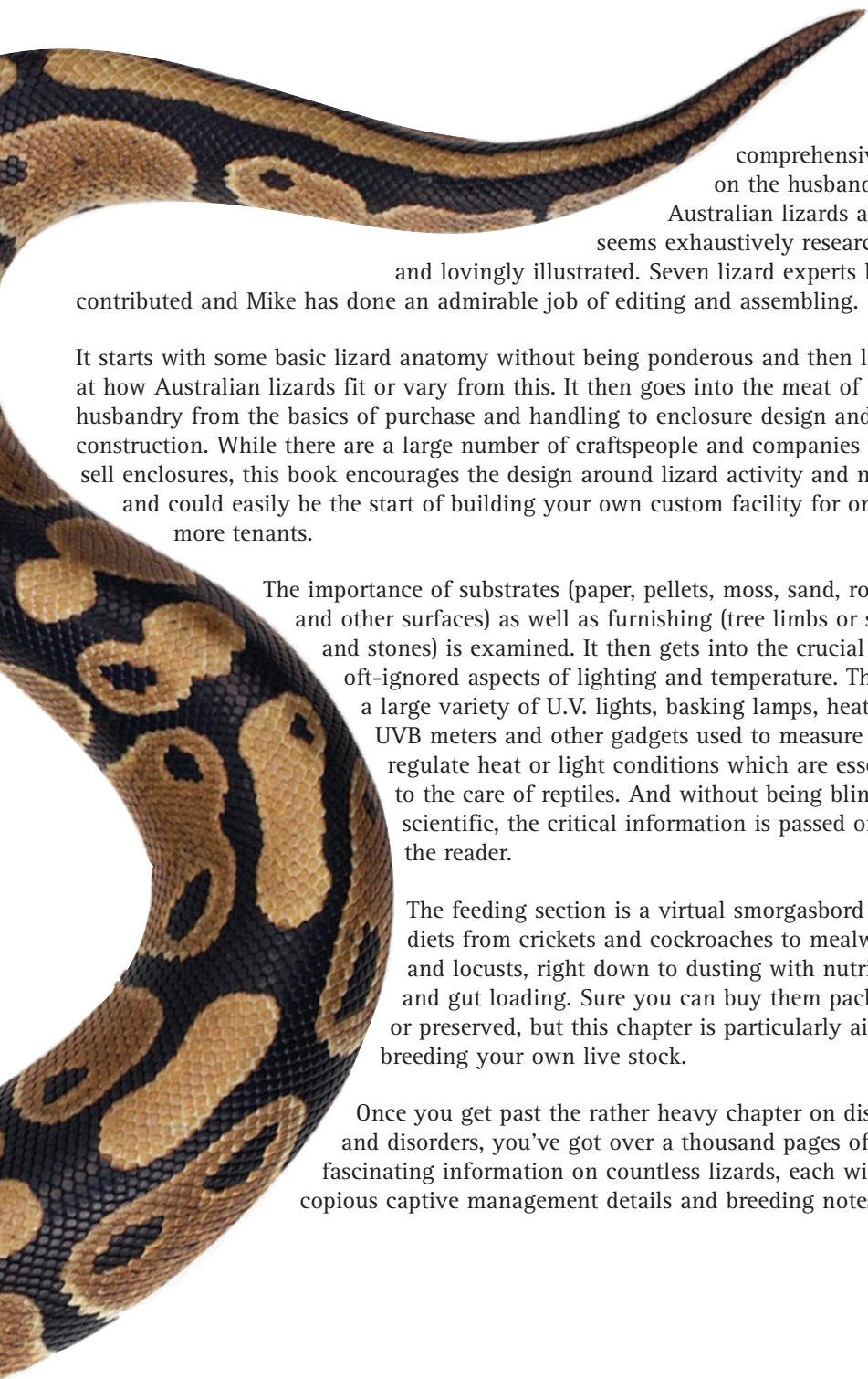
Keeping & Breeding Australian Lizards
\$70 edited by Mike Swan. Published by Mike Swan Herp Books www.mikeswanherpbooks.com.au (03) 9739 5690. 618 pages and over 1000 colour photos

This is an astonishing book in both its size and images. While there are at least two regular reptile magazines on the news stands and have been a variety of books on the subject, this seems to be the best in show. It claims to be the first



Image: Damian Goodall www.eyefornature.com.au

Carpets - D Goodal



comprehensive book on the husbandry of Australian lizards and it seems exhaustively researched and lovingly illustrated. Seven lizard experts have contributed and Mike has done an admirable job of editing and assembling.

It starts with some basic lizard anatomy without being ponderous and then looks at how Australian lizards fit or vary from this. It then goes into the meat of captive husbandry from the basics of purchase and handling to enclosure design and construction. While there are a large number of craftspeople and companies that sell enclosures, this book encourages the design around lizard activity and needs and could easily be the start of building your own custom facility for one or more tenants.

The importance of substrates (paper, pellets, moss, sand, rock and other surfaces) as well as furnishing (tree limbs or sticks and stones) is examined. It then gets into the crucial and oft-ignored aspects of lighting and temperature. There is a large variety of U.V. lights, basking lamps, heat pads, UVB meters and other gadgets used to measure and regulate heat or light conditions which are essential to the care of reptiles. And without being blindingly scientific, the critical information is passed on to the reader.

The feeding section is a virtual smorgasbord of diets from crickets and cockroaches to mealworms and locusts, right down to dusting with nutrients and gut loading. Sure you can buy them packaged or preserved, but this chapter is particularly aimed at breeding your own live stock.

Once you get past the rather heavy chapter on diseases and disorders, you've got over a thousand pages of fascinating information on countless lizards, each with copious captive management details and breeding notes.

Keeping & Breeding Australian Pythons
\$50 edited by Mike Swan. Published by Mike Swan Herp Books www.mikeswanherpbooks.com.au (03) 9739 5690. 350 pages



From someone who had a couple of snakes as a kid and then 40 years later discovered a female carpet python nesting with eggs in front of my house in Coffs, this book is a real jaw opener. Aside from the stunning photography on high gloss paper like its lizard counterpart, Mike has brought together an array of leading Australian breeders to



Simoselaps Bertholdi
Illustration by Marion Westmacott

“I know the estuarian croc is the largest on earth and the taipan is the world’s deadliest snake, but I was unaware of the lizard that walks on water.”



Image: Damian Goodall www.eyefornature.com.au

Western Blue-tongue Skink Tiliqua Occipitalis

present information on their particular species. In addition, the herp photographers contributed their best shots of the species.

There are 16 contributors giving a wealth of information on all breeds of Australian pythons, species accounts, their care, breeding, diseases and their mutations. I only wish I had this book when I accidentally discovered ‘Petula’ nesting under a piece of carpeting that my tenant had laid out for her and the couple of dozen eggs she was hatching.

I would have known about the possibility of infecting her with bacteria or viruses from myself as well as the live mouse, rat and gerbil (all of which had been pacified by lowering their body temperature to stupor level). And I’d also have been warned of the reasons that feeding live food is dangerous to the python if the prey fights or bites in the throes of being killed and eaten.

This book is no less exhaustive than Mike’s reptile and frog tome with incredible detail and staggering photography. I learned a lot from the diseases and disorders section, which was comprehensive in the detection and treatment options for parasites and other ailments.

There are charts on hatching numbers, a huge amount of reference materials by type of snake and special care notes. It’s the sort of manual that you shouldn’t be without if you are going to be a hobbyist or even keeping a python as a pet.



Image: Damian Goodall www.eyefornature.com.au

Frilled Lizard Chlamydosaurus Kingii