

January 2001

# pet Reptile

Reptile

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in the wild

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control  
system



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Issue 40



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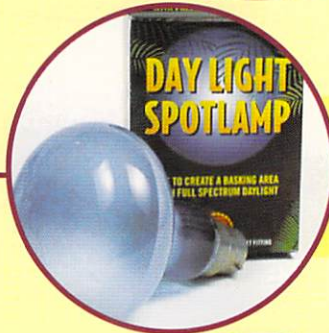
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Grey-eyed Reed frog  
Photo: Ken King

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## Debate rages on...

Looking through the letters received here at *Pet Reptile* this month, it seems many of you still have strong feelings about the RSPCA and their treatment of herpetology as a hobby. It seems to be the organisation's lack of knowledge surrounding exotic pets which gets tempers rising.

Surely if there were more information and support available from big organisations like this, then perhaps the bad feeling about reptile keeping could be stamped out – it's all about working together.

Another issue also raising a few eyebrows is that of the correct handling of giant snakes, with reference to a certain photo we published last year, beginning this contentious debate in the first place. Turn to page 42 to read more about this and all of this month's other issues.

I hope you all are continuing to enjoy *Pet Reptile*, which grows stronger and stronger each month – see you next issue.  
Kathryn ~ Editor  
ktwyford@freepubs.co.uk

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# REPTILE ENCOUNTERS

Colin Stevenson went to the Australian Reptile Park in Sydney for a great day out down under

**L**ike his movie-star namesake, 'Arnie' the snapping turtle proved to be a tough-cookie, found wandering amongst the cinders of the gutted main building of the Australian Reptile Park, after 500 reptiles and spiders were lost in a fire in July 2000. Established in 1958 by famed Australian herpetologist Eric Worrell, the park has long been a popular tourist attraction just north of Sydney on the central coast of New South Wales. After much anguish and hard work, the park is now open again with an extensive collection of native and exotic reptiles.

The park itself is situated in natural bushland, with a wide variety of native trees and plants and there are two reptile shows each day, featuring educational talks on various reptiles, snake milking and handling. The reptile park is also the recipient of some major tourism awards in Australia and is involved with endangered species breeding programs.

## PLODDY

As you arrive at the park, a yellow, 30m, 40-ton dinosaur marks the entrance - this is 'Ploddy' the park mascot since 1963. You then pass through 'Temple of Doom'- style

pillars, overlooked by a huge frilled lizard - the scene is then set for a great reptile encounter.

Upon entering the park, there is a series of display pits designed to create a natural environment for many species of lizard, turtle and snake. In these outdoor enclosures, visitors can view venomous snakes such as Red-bellied black snakes, Taipans and Tiger snakes, alongside Murray River turtles, Eastern Blue-tongued skinks, Bearded dragons, Water dragons, Mountain dragons, Long-neck tortoises and Cunningham's skinks.



'Ploddy' - The entrance to the park



Feeding time for Eric

### FAMOUS RESIDENT

The most famous resident of the reptile park is Eric, a 5m saltwater crocodile (*Crocodylus porosus*) - named in honour of Eric Worrell. As I basked in the Sydney sun, Eric basked in his spacious outdoor enclosure, and in the glory of being 'Australia's most loved crocodile'.

Evicted from his Northern Territory home after becoming impossible to live with (he kept killing his cage-mates), he came to the reptile park in 1989 and record crowds descend to see him being hand-fed every Sunday.

The American alligators at the Park have been bred here since the 1970's - the only place in Australia to have done so. They supply zoos around Australia that wish to display this exotic species and provide eggs for research purposes. The alligators are in a large lake recreating their habitat in the USA and the climate is ideally suited, so they can remain outdoors all year.

In other enclosures are large Lace monitors, Galapagos tortoises and a large turtle pond. Roaming free within the grounds are kangaroos and there are many other Australian mammals including koalas, various birds, echidnas, wombats and Tasmanian devils.

Within 'Croc College' there are displays and educational posters on many animals, including spiders and insects - the entrance to this is through the jaws of a 20m crocodile.

It is here too, that the indoor reptile exhibits are held and also where the fire did most damage. Species now homed here include Frilled lizards, albino Blue-tongues, taipans, King brown snakes, Green tree pythons, Green iguanas, Fijian banded iguanas, Death adders, Eyelash vipers and Merton's Water monitor.

### ANTI-VENOM

Around 300 people each year are saved after receiving anti-venom for snake or spider bites in Australia and the park is the main supplier of snake and funnel-web spider venom for this programme. ▶

### FIRE!

The fire, which devastated the park on July 16 2000, was caused by an electrical fault in a heat mat. It gutted ¾ of the main building, killing Australia's largest collection of lizards, snakes, amphibians, turtles, crocodylians and spiders in a three-hour inferno. The park's venom programme and endangered species breeding programme also perished, but the parklands and animals in outdoor enclosures were untouched. Having rebuilt the offices and enclosures and restocked many of the species lost, the park is aiming for a full reopening mid-December 2000.



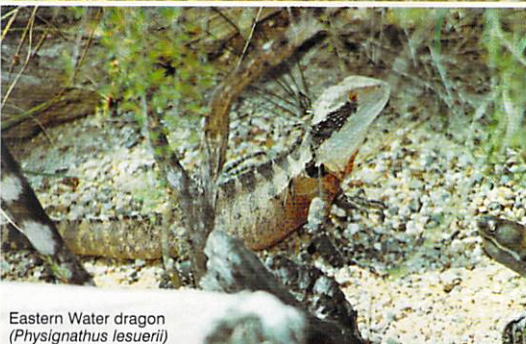
Albino Blue-tongue



American alligators  
(*Alligator mississippiensis*)



Death adder



Eastern Water dragon  
(*Physignathus lesuerii*)



Eyelash viper  
(*Bothrechis schlegelii*)



Merton's Water monitor  
(*Varanus mertensi*)

# Huge crocodilians, venomous snakes, exotics and lizards all make for an amazing day



Fijian banded iguana (*Brachylophos fasciatus*)

Until the anti-venom for Taipans was developed in the 1950s, bites were usually fatal. Very much a case of overkill, the Taipan produces enough venom to kill 12,000 guinea pigs in a single bite - though why they produce such powerful venom remains unknown.

Staff at the park have the lucky job of grabbing hold of these highly venomous (and highly irritable) snakes, getting them to bite into a rubber cap over a jar to collect the venom as it drips from the fangs.

But if you thought this was a tough job, spare a thought for the unsuspecting horses in the Commonwealth Serum Lab. These horses are injected with the processed venom in increasing doses until they have built up sufficient antibodies. When injected into the bloodstream of someone bitten by a snake, these antibodies then attack the venom, neutralising its effects. The horses are however given a life of luxury and the procedure is harmless, with minimal stress caused. Though the loss of the anti-venom programme in the fire was a setback, it is being re-established as quickly as possible.

## A FAVOURITE PLACE

The Australian Reptile Park has always been a favourite place of mine. Huge crocodilians, venomous snakes, exotics and lizards all make for an amazing day. And with Sydney still very much an 'in' place after the Olympic Games, anyone planning to go should be pleased to know that within an hour of the city, there is a great reptile park. **END**

## FURTHER INFORMATION

The Australian Reptile Park, Pacific Highway, Somersby, New South Wales, Australia.  
Tel: 0061243401146, or go to [www.reptilepark.com.au](http://www.reptilepark.com.au)



Red-bellied Black snake (*Pseudechis porphyriacus*)



Shingle-back lizard



Lace monitor (*Varanus varius*)