



GOANNAS

If you are walking through the bush or driving along the road and are suddenly confronted with a goanna you may be excused for a momentary lapse into a Jurassic Park moment. Goannas are recorded as existing some 90 million years ago and reached Australia some 15 million years ago and it is believed they have changed very little over that period.

Goanna is an Australian name for Monitor. Derivation of the word is uncertain. One theory is that it is a derivative of Iguana (a group of unrelated South America lizards) another is that an aboriginal had a pet goanna which he used for hunting and he called it Anna and when he went hunting he would call "Go Anna, Go Anna" (You can believe it if you like!!)

There are 27 monitors recorded in Australia but the only one recorded in our area is the Lace Monitor (*Varanus varius*). The rest are located in the warmer northern and western parts of the country.

Lace monitors can grow up to 2 metres. There does not appear to have been much research as to how long monitors live with varying theories resulting in between 20 and 30 years.

My experience with Lace Monitors is that they are generally not afraid of humans if approached cautiously so as not to frighten them. I have found them in a small pond next to the house on a hot day, on the house verandah and generally wandering around the place. I have never found them aggressive (as some people believe them to be) although, as with all creatures, if their life is threatened in some way they could become aggressive and could do some serious damage with their claws and teeth. I have sighted them between the months of September and May. During the colder months they hibernate – where? I do not know. Do you?

Lace Monitors breed by laying eggs - generally 6-8 per clutch each year. They are generally solitary animals coming together only during spring and summer to breed. It is believed the Lace Monitor exclusively lays its eggs in termite mounds. It scratches away an area of mound, lays its eggs and leaves it to the termites to repair the damaged mound wall engulfing the eggs. As



termite mounds are maintained between 25 and 30 deg. C it is an ideal incubator. The female will return to dig out the hatchlings. The incubation period is believed to be between 8 and 10 months.

So check out the termite mounds in your area and you may find some recent some wall repairs.

Left– Termites repairing wall of mound. I don't know if the damage was due to goanna or not. Did not see any hatchlings.

Some interesting facts;

- Goannas are good swimmers and will often head for water if in danger.
- Goannas climb trees as a means of refuge and to collect birds eggs and birds.
- They will feed on eggs and any kind of meat and are particularly drawn to dead rotting flesh (probably due to the smell).
- They have a very long tongue that can be used for foraging and is also used to pick up scent in the air and on the ground.
- In particular the larger monitor can use his very powerful tail as a defence mechanism and to injure or kill animals.
- They have large curved teeth that are suitable for tearing meat but not chewing. Their prey is generally swallowed whole.
- Goannas live in well-timbered areas but will venture into cleared areas to feed on carrion.

The Lace Monitor status is considered vulnerable.

Goannas are a protected species and it is illegal to kill them.

Kaye Proudley has a video she recorded of a Goanna being mobbed by screeching sulphur-crested cockatoos as it raids their nest atop a tree near Kaye's place.

The following are some of the sightings at my place.



I got a photo of this bloke in front of a paling fence and was able to measure between the palings. He measured 5 ft 2 in. / 1.57 metres

Inset shows his hind foot and claws.



I was able to get within 4 feet of this bloke (on my stomach) to get an eye-to-eye shot.





Quite well camouflaged against the grey bark of the Messmate.

Frogs Follow-up

Following my previous article on Frogs Kaye Proudley responded with frogs she has heard at her place in addition to those mentioned in the article plus a couple of pictures.

Whistling Tree Frog, Eastern Common Froglet, Vic. Smooth Froglet, Striped Marsh Frog, Spotted Marsh Frog (Southern Race), Red-groined Froglet and Southern Toadlet

Thanks to this information Kaye I have been able to locate 2 more frogs on my property as a result of your list.



Top - frogspawn on Kaye's dam.



Right – Striped Marsh frog

Landcare is about protecting and restoring our environment to allow all forms of nature (fauna and flora) to survive in harmony and balance. I do not claim to be an expert on Flora and Fauna but have based this article on my own experiences and readings on the subject.

So as part of the Bingi Landcare newsletter, with each publication, I aim to contribute an article on a species of either fauna or flora which is indigenous to our area to stimulate interest in our native flora and fauna.

In addition I also invite everyone to forward their own experiences and photographs so these can be shared with other members by including them in the newsletter.

Your contributions can be emailed direct to me at jd@incitegraphics.com.au or to Kaye Proudley at katbingi@harboursat.com.au

(Author John McClumpha, Hedley Range Road, September 2011)