

GENERAL MEETING

The last meeting was held on the 27th October 2006.

We would like to welcome you back. We trust you had a good rest during the festive season and hope that the upcoming year is a good one.

We had our annual Beauty Pageant. Once again there was a good turnout and there were a number of reptiles on display. For the first time Tarantulas were allowed to strut their stuff, and it was very successful with the most entries being of the 8 legged kind. Congratulations to all the winners, and their owners.

The next meeting is to be held on the 23rd February 2007. The time will be 19h30 for 20h00 as usual. We will have a friendly "baby competition" which will be run similar to the Beauty Pageant, with no entry fees or prizes. There will be certificates for the winners.



TRANSVAAL HERPETOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION
TRANSVAAL HERPETOLOGIESE VERENIGING

NEWS FROM SOUTH AFRICA

Frickie saved after boomslang bite

Helen Bamford - January 20 2007

A dog, bitten by a 1,2m boomslang in the garden of its Camps Bay home, nearly bled to death before being saved by an anti-venom from Tygerberg Hospital.

The Labrador, called Frickie, was bitten on the ear by the snake which slithered into the garden of owner Kurt Pershak's Theresa Avenue home, which backs on to the mountain.

Frickie had killed the snake but Pershak only noticed the bite on the dog's ear the following day when the wound would not stop bleeding. City Bowl vet Cathy Wahl contacted ecologist Braam Malherbe to positively identify the snake before performing a blood transfusion with blood she took from her own dog.

The following day Frickie's ear was still bleeding, despite being covered in pressure bandages. Wahl got hold of Dr Gerbus Muller, head of the Poison Information Unit at Tygerberg Hospital, to try to secure one of the only vials of boomslang anti-venom in the Western Cape. She said a boomslang's venom was haemotoxic, which meant it stopped the blood from clotting.

But the anti-venom, given intravenously to Frickie, worked beautifully. Wahl said by the third day the bleeding had stopped and Frickie appeared to have made a full recovery, much to the relief of his owner.

She said the boomslang, *Dispholidus typus*, had its fangs far back in its mouth which made it quite difficult for it to bite - which is why it probably went for the dog's ear.

Muller said Tygerberg Hospital saw about one boomslang bite a year in humans and occasionally in animals. "Boomslangs don't bite readily - they need a lot of provocation," he said. He said the anti-venom was difficult to manufacture as it was hard to milk boomslange because their fangs were so far back and they had small venom glands.

Muller added that the anti-venom was usually kept in Johannesburg and flown here when necessary. "We keep a small emergency supply in Cape Town - enough for one treatment." Symptoms normally take between 12 and 24 hours to set in and can include bleeding not only from the puncture wound but from other orifices, as well as on the brain.

Christmas babies hatch at Snake Park

Sharlene Packree - January 02 2007

There were festive celebrations of a different kind at the Fitzsimons Snake Park when dozens of baby snakes made their appearance recently. Staff had their hands full as the baby cottonmouths, Burmese pythons and boa constrictors hatched on Christmas Day, making it baby-boom time at the park. No one knew that the babies had hatched because the park was closed on Christmas Day, so when staff arrived the next day, they found the tiny babies squirming in their incubators.

In total 30 babies have hatched with 70 more expected in the next few days. The newborns have been taken away from their mothers and placed in a glass tank. Park manager Rob Moore said the new arrivals were a "big surprise" and they were keeping everyone at the park busy.

"They were the best Christmas presents ever. We knew the female snakes were pregnant, but didn't expect the babies to be this early," he said. Moore said they were expecting more babies and staff were constantly monitoring |the eggs, which were kept in the incubator.

"The snakes mated in late October and the gestation period is 90 days. Even though these babies are early, it's great to have them in the park," Moore said. Three albino babies were born - their mother is a normal Burmese python while their father is an albino python. The albinos will be kept at the park, but the others will be sold.

Snake slithers into boy's bed

Christel Raubenheimer - 02/11/2006

Johannesburg - A seven-year-old boy died after a Mozambican spitting cobra slithered into his bed at the weekend and apparently bit him twice on the arm. Leendert Bornman died in a hospital in Rustenburg two days later after the poison apparently affected his heart.

"I was woken up early on Sunday morning by my child's terrible screaming. I saw two bite marks on his arm. The snake's tooth apparently got caught and it bit my child twice," said Mariana Bornman, Leendert's mother. Bornman, who lives about 20km from Thabazimbi in Limpopo, rushed Leendert to hospital.

"He was nauseous and his body was contorted - I could see my child was in terrible pain." Doctors administered antivenin. "They said they needed to give him a second serum, but first had to know what type of snake it was." Bornman and a friend returned home to search for the snake. They found the cobra behind the freezer in the kitchen.

Bornman's friend shot and killed the snake and returned to the hospital with it.

Leendert was later transferred to a hospital in Rustenburg, but his condition continued to deteriorate. He was put on a ventilator on Monday afternoon. Some time later his heart stopped and he died shortly after midnight.

"At one stage the colour returned to his skin, and I hoped that he would make it," said Bornman. "I want to warn parents with small children against snakes. "It somehow entered our home, but I don't know how. People should realise that snakes should be taken seriously and they must be extra careful. I don't want anybody else to suffer the pain I'm in now - it is indescribable."

The family found a black mamba in the house on Saturday morning. They searched the house for more snakes, but found none. "I am speechless. There are so many questions I still want to ask him. It happened to my baby, and not to me. If one only knew why, it would have been easier," said Bornman. She also has an 11-year-old son, William.

Pet python saved from a fiery death

Poloko Tau - January 08 2007

For the Johannesburg Emergency Management Services, it was a fire rescue with a difference. When they responded to a burning building in the inner city's Eloff Street Extension on Sunday night, it wasn't a human being needing to be rescued, but a 3m-long python.

Firefighters had to send a rescue party into the burning building after they were told that the owners kept two snakes there. One of the missing pets was located minutes after the search party went in, and the owner emerged from the smoky building with a yellow python wrapped around his waist.

It was immediately bundled into a box and taken to a place of safety. The python apparently was found in a part of the warehouse untouched by the fire. There were no visible signs of injury to the snake. "We could only find one snake. The other one could be dead," said emergency services spokesperson Malcolm Midgley.

While the owners of the toner-cartridge recycling company were happy to be reunited with their snake, the fire caused a lot of damage to their factory. Two bakkies, a forklift and a large amount of stock were damaged. Staff could be seen leaving the building holding computer equipment. "There was a lot of stock inside there and most of it has been damaged in the flames" Midgley said. The cause of the fire, believed to have started at about 6pm, could not be determined. "Our fire safety officers will look into that. Right now we don't know what could have happened," Midgley said.

NEWS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Turtles saved from smugglers in India

January 09 2007

Lucknow - More than 2 000 freshwater turtles were recovered from poachers who were planning to smuggle them into Southeast Asia, police in northern India said on Monday.

Nine people were arrested in Etawah district, 200km south-west of Lucknow, the capital of Uttar Pradesh state, police spokesperson Surendra Srivastava told reporters.

The turtles, which are protected under India's Wildlife Protection Act, were returned to their natural habitat.

"The meat of the turtle is in big demand because it is believed to be a good aphrodisiac," said Srivastava.

Wildlife expert Jayan Chaudhry said that turtle meat sells for around 1 000 rupees a kilogram in the Indian market, but can draw up to 10 000 rupees a kilogram abroad.

"Turtles are also much in demand for their skin, used for making leather products," said Chaudhry. - Sapa-AFP

Webcam + snakes = early warning system?

December 28 2006

Beijing - China has come up with an earthquake prediction system which relies on the behaviour of snakes, state media said on Thursday, two days after two quakes struck off neighbouring Taiwan.

The earthquake bureau in Nanning, capital of the Guangxi autonomous region in southern China, had developed its system using a combination of natural instinct and modern technology, the China Daily newspaper said.

Experts at the bureau monitor snakes at local snake farms via video cameras linked to a broadband Internet connection. The video feed runs 24 hours per day.

"Of all the creatures on Earth, snakes are perhaps the most sensitive to earthquakes," bureau director Jiang Weisong was quoted as saying. Jiang said snakes, a popular restaurant dish in the south in the winter, could sense an earthquake from 120km away, three to five days before it happens. They respond by behaving strangely.

"When an earthquake is about to occur, snakes will move out of their nests,

even in the cold of winter," Jiang was quoted as saying.

"If the earthquake is a big one, the snakes will even smash into walls while trying to escape."

China is struck by frequent earthquakes, with most hitting remote rural areas.

Two people were killed and 42 injured on Tuesday when three buildings collapsed in earthquakes that shook southern Taiwan.

While a tsunami warning came to nothing, the quake damaged undersea telecommunication cables, affecting users across Asia.

EVENTS DIARY

Baby Competition:

Date : 23rd February 2007
Venue : Old Transvaal Museum
Time : 19:30 for 20:00pm
Costs : Members enter free of charge
Non Members R10 entry fee.

Bring along your hatchlings and new born's of the season, only the cold blooded kind.

Reptile Expo's:

Date : 31st March 2007 & 1st April 2007
Venue : Emperors Palace, Kempton Park, Gauteng
Time : 10:00am – 16:00pm
Costs : R20 per adult, R10 per child.
Parking R10 per vehicle.

For more info: 0833747087 Heidi

Please do not bring along your pet snakes.

SARCA VIRTUAL MUSEUM COMPETITION

Dear SARCAalites

Here is an important announcement that will also go onto the SARCA website. PARTICIPATE AND ENJOY!!

SARCA VIRTUAL MUSEUM COMPETITION

Start: 1 September 2006

End: 15 March 2007

Draw: 31 March 2007

It's simple! Submit records of southern African reptiles photographed in the period 1 September 2006 to 15 March 2007, as per the instructions in the SARCA website (www.reptiles.sanbi.org). Each record will count as one entry into the competition. The more records you submit, the better your chances of winning one of the following prizes:

- R500 for the person who submits the most records during the competition period.
- R500 for a lucky SARCA number drawn from all the records in the period.
- "A Complete Guide to the Snakes of Southern Africa" by Johan Marais – two books to be won by two lucky SARCA numbers, drawn from the period.
- "Field Guide to Snakes and other Reptiles of Southern Africa" by Bill Branch - two books to be won by two lucky SARCA numbers, drawn from the period.
- "Atlas and Red Data Book of the Frogs of South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland" – two books to be won by the two observers who submit the greatest variety of different species.
- Gerber Suspension multitool – for a lucky SARCA number drawn from the period.

SPONSORS:

The R1000 prize money was donated by SA Reptiles (www.sareptiles.co.za).

The two frog atlases were donated by the Avian Demography Unit, (www.aviandemographyunit.org), and the other books by SARCA

(www.reptiles.sanbi.org). The Gerber multitool was kindly donated by Dave Honiball, "Python Man" of Naboomspruit.

The records that you submit to the SARCA Virtual Museum are an important resource for improving our knowledge of the distributions of southern African reptiles. The winning recipe is to get records of as many species from as many localities in the SARCA region (South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland), as possible. All records will be plotted in the new Red Data Book for reptiles, scheduled for publication in 2009. So this is your opportunity to make a real contribution to the conservation of our reptile fauna.

GO FOR IT!!

The SARCA Team

MEMBERSHIP FEES

This is a reminder to please pay your membership fees. This is R160 per year. This fee can cover you and your whole family.

As from the 1st of January 2007, all visitors will be allowed one visit free of charge, and thereafter will be required to pay R10 per person per evening attended.

Membership fees go towards the use of the venue, security for the parking area, tea, coffee, snacks, newsletters, etc.

BIRTHDAYS

On behalf of the THA we would like to wish you all a happy birthday, and happy belated birthday.

NOVEMBER

7 – Chanelle De Beer
21 – David Field
22 – Ina van Rensburg

DECEMBER

6 – Michiel van Niekerk
15 – Wulf Haacke
16 – Geraldine Pieterse
17 – Jacques Coleman
18 – Amanda Gorlt
21 – Arno Naude
21 – Dirkie van Niekerk

JANUARY

6 – Genevieve Reid
12 – Maurits Pieterse
19 – Eduard Hill
22 – Chante Gorlt

EDITORS NOTE

Thank you to those who submitted articles. We would like to request original articles, which have been written by members.

Please visit our website www.tha.co.za. We are open to any suggestions to improve the website. There will be some exciting changes in the near future, which will include a discussion forum and a news page.

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