

Python - a tale worth telling

John Mengersen (Patsy Springs Station) kept birds and in March one year in the early to mid-70s he found an unusual snake in his bird cage. He suspected that it was a Death Adder but sought confirmation as "everyone knew" they were not found in the Flinders Ranges area.

The snake was short - less than 1 metre long, had a triangular head and striking blotchy markings across its body.

The name that was suggested for the snake was Children's Python, but it was actually a Stimson's Python. It was put into a vivarium in the laboratory and was popular (with the boys particularly).

The school had introduced a Year 12 Geology class held at night. The vivarium was next to the box of rock samples and on March 31st the Geology class was held.

The following morning as students arrived at school, many went into the laboratory where I was working at my desk. They went to the vivarium and told me that it was empty, the snake had gone.

I remained unmoved, thanked each for their news, determined not to be fooled, and more students, mostly boys, came and went. Each claimed that the vivarium was empty.

Finally, I stood up, announced that I was doing so, was going to the back of the laboratory, and was looking into the vivarium which was empty!

The Geology teacher and students couldn't say if the snake was in the right place when they left the previous night.

Soon after, Jeanette Henty-Smith arrived to begin her work on the rock samples but was sent to the Junior Primary building (the furthest away from the lab) to work.

With so many volunteers to look for the python it didn't take long to find it curled up among the rock samples.

It was transferred to another vivarium and John Mengersen took it back out to the wild to a place that he hoped was far enough away that it could not return to the bird cage.

Some years later he did find either it, or another one, in his bird cage. That one was kept by the school on a Rescue Permit and moved to the Leigh Creek South Area School. It too was very popular with the students.

Another escape

A student from Copley brought into the school a female marsupial mouse, *Sminthopsis crassicaudata*, with her young. It is known as the Fat-tailed Dunnart.

Brenton Arnold, National Parks and Wildlife Ranger, allowed the school to keep them for a short time to ensure that the young had the best chance of survival. Students caught grasshoppers etc. to feed them and I was responsible for their care.

I went away for school holidays and Brenton cared for the family at the school. One of the young escaped and notices were put up to not close any doors that were open so that there was a chance of finding it alive again.

The following Saturday was Election Day and the Polling Booth was in the same building. The missing marsupial was spotted and recaptured.

The theory was that the building had been quiet all the time the escapee was at large but the hustle and bustle of Election Day disoriented it.

It was returned to the family which killed it and ate it!

Now, the theory was either that its smell had changed while it had been away and it was seen as an intruder, or that the family being all female, and the returnee male, the male was rejected. Perhaps life was too hot for him and that was why he had left home. He may have been rejected before he escaped.

The females of the family were released with no further drama.

Alex and Enid Pengilly

An identification was made of another marsupial mouse, the Larapinta, *Sminthopsis macroura*. This was a particularly delicate looking creature with a face with fine features and a long nose. Its head had a dark line down the centre from its ears to its nose. Its tail was thin and much longer than its body. It was a little beauty.

Alex Pengilly found it in the pit at the Northfield mechanical workshop. In the early 1970s the Larapinta was thought to inhabit the centre of Australia and not be found much south of the Northern Territory border.

Its range is now known to extend down into South Australia and into the northern Flinders Ranges.

Farina school bus trip with an extra passenger

A school art teacher boarded at Farina and drove the school bus.

One morning he saw a different looking snake, and being prepared, stopped the bus and caught the snake which he put into a cloth bag.

The bus continued to school and the snake was identified as a version of the venomous Brown Snake!

It stayed in the bag for the day and travelled back on the bus to be released where it had been caught!

Fire at 2 Second Avenue

It was a Wednesday in 1977 or early 1978 and Jim, myself and Alan were just finishing tea so Jim could go to show the pictures for the night.

Television had come to Leigh Creek and "The Ghost and Mrs Muir" was being broadcast.

There were a couple of zitting noises, some flashes and the power went off, accompanied by the smell of burning as the power feed outside the house shorted out.

Fortunately, Jim was now on call as part of his work duties and ETSA had connected the telephone.

I was able to call the manual exchange where Rosie Whitely could connect the Fire Alarm and call the Lines Gang at the same time (also fortunate).

As the Fire Alarm sounded, so too did that on the TV program.

Dick Ellis rushed across to offer to help get furniture out of the house if necessary.

I took toddler Alan next door to Karl and Jackie (nee Bansemer) Brand to keep him safe. When he was collected later, he was still holding his spoon and dish.

It was not the electrical feed to 2 Second Avenue that was the major problem, but the feed for Number 4 (Ron Morgan's) which was linked to the side of the house.

The power was cut to both houses and the Firemen arrived to control the smouldering exterior. They checked the roof space for sparks and one put his foot through the ceiling.

Dick Ellis was also a projectionist so he went off to show the pictures.

Ron and Christa Morgan did not eat their roast that night as it wasn't cooked properly.

Drama over, the power was restored.

The small amount of damage to the building and ceiling was repaired next day and a new feed installed to Number 4.

Both houses had been ETSA staff quarters so the linkage could have been thought to be acceptable when installed.

Motorbikes at Farina

The Leigh Creek Motorcycle Club occasionally held meetings at the Farina claypan, out to the northwest of the station homestead.

At one of these a rider crashed and was suspected of having spinal injuries. A volunteer left to go to Lyndhurst to telephone for the ambulance. It would not be possible for the ambulance to get to the claypan, so the patient had to get to it.

He was very carefully loaded onto a mattress and placed on the back of a tray top 4WD for the trip to the Farina homestead and towards Leigh Creek to meet the ambulance. His girlfriend was also on board, travelling in the cabin.

The driver of the 4WD deserves a medal for his care and skill in driving back along the bush track with the patient. He came to every bump and ditch so carefully that there was no possibility of further damage. The trip took so long but seemed over in a flash as the ambulance light was seen just as the tray top got to the homestead area.

The time taken was equal to that of the volunteer getting to the Farina homestead, driving to Lyndhurst, making the call, the ambos responding to the call and travelling all the way to Farina, before the 4WD got to the road.

The helpers on the 4WD were very relieved to hand their patient over to the ambulance crew.

He fortunately did not have a serious back injury but was probably somewhat annoyed at having to buy another set of leathers after the hospital staff cut them off. This was the first time many of us had heard of spinal shock or concussion.

So many people assisted on the day, from summoning the ambulance to getting the motorbike and gear back to Leigh Creek.

This is just one example of the ways that outback residents support each other.