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NOTES ON THE GENUS VARANUS (Monitor Lizards) BY WILLIAM IRVINE

SPECIES	Date of Capture	Length ft. ins. mm.	LOCALITY	SITUATION
Varanus varius	26/12/56	4 1½ 1258	Norah Hd., NSW	In Gum Tree

This specimen, a female, was first observed on sandy soil, approximately 50 yards from swamp No. 2 (Monitor Swamp), Pelican Point, Norah Head, in mid-afternoon. Specimen ascended tree when disturbed, and was captured by noose from a neighbouring tree and dropped to ground. She ascended another tree, breaking noose. The branch was chopped and the monitor ran into the swamp, catching trailing noose on an underwater branch, when she was caught and bagged.

The monitor was sent to the residence of Mr. Wal Lorking, for a period of 77 days, during which she laid nine eggs. Unfortunately, these were laid under a board and shrivelled up before discovery.

SPECIES	Date Received	Length ft. ins. mm.	LOCALITY	SITUATION
Varanus gouldii	4/5/57	3 10½ 1182	Unkown	

This Gould's Monitor was presented to me by Mr. David McPhee. It is one of the largest specimens of this species I have seen.

When placed in a pit, this lizard went straight to the water dish and stayed in it for a considerable period.

Owing to the pit having a hole dug through a side by Monitor No. 1, the gouldii was taken out and placed in a cage.

On Saturday, 16th November, 1957, I observed the lizard having a drink. The time was 2.45 p.m., the temperature being 78 degrees F. The monitors were fed and later on in the morning the meat had been eaten, and on examination, most of it appeared to be eaten by this specimen. Another reason why I think this lizard is eating, is its aggressive attitude when handled, and is normally very docile.

On Saturday morning, 21st December, this monitor ate all the meat thrown into the cage, and on the same night was placed in a vivarium specially built for monitors and next morning was found in the water dish.

The monitor is very wary of the two varius, as one accidentally bit it the night they were placed in the pit, and whenever one comes near the gouldii sways on its hind legs, with the front legs clasped together just brushing the ground, also hissing violently.

It has also dug a hole under a rock and earthen ware pipe for a shelter.

Articles of interest to Naturalists are welcomed by the Publications Committee. Manuscript should be typed if possible, double spaced, and written on one side of the paper only. Address all correspondence to The Secretary, Box 991, CAIRNS.

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SPECIES	Date Captured	Length ft. ins. mm.	LOCALITY	SITUATION
Varanus varius	6/10/57	4 4 1322	Norah Hd., NSW	In Paperbark Tree

The specimen, a male, was observed running along the sandy soil approximately 10 yards from the edge of swamp No. 2, at approximately 3 p.m. The monitor was heading for a large paperbark tree, which it climbed with no apparent effort.

Specimen noosed while lying on a branch about 30 feet above ground level, and was captured without much trouble for this species of lizard.

The monitor was kept in a canvas bag until the following Monday, when he was brought home and placed in an enclosure with a Gould's monitor (*V. gouldii*). The varius created quite a disturbance during the night.

On Friday, 11th October, he was heard hitting his tail against the steel side of the cage and on the 19th October, still had not settled down.

Sunday morning, 22nd December, at 7.25 a.m. this specimen was observed drinking, after which he went for a stroll along the sides of the large vivarium in which he was placed the night before.

SPECIES	Date Captured	Length ft. ins. mm.	LOCALITY	SITUATION
Varanus varius	7/10/57	4 7 1397	Norah Head	In Banksia Tree

This monitor, a well-marked male, was first seen on the eastern side of swamp No. 2, by Mr. Ronald Webber, who promptly "treed" the specimen, and called Mr. Frank Bower and myself, who were on the western side of the swamp, and informed us of the catch.

The monitor's position was noted and Mr. Bower ascended the tree, a Banksia, and slipped a noose over the head of the specimen, which immediately advanced down the tree and tried to attack Mr. Bower. I ascended the tree and secured a grip on the neck of the specimen, which was brought down by both Mr. Bower and myself, and placed in a canvas bag with another monitor caught the previous day.

The time of capture was approximately 10 a.m., the monitor's position being on a horizontal branch about 20 feet above ground level, the tree being roughly 20 yards from the edge of the swamp.

That night the monitor was placed in a cage with the other monitors.

He is still nervous, and hides in an earthenware pipe when anyone approaches, and on Sunday, 20th October, did this.

On Saturday, 7th December, whilst opening the cage to fill the water container, he came at me and tried to escape but did not succeed, so he went up the other end of the cage and turned to face me. He stood with his forelegs up as high as possible and arched his neck and hissed violently.

SPECIES	Date Captured	Length ft. ins. mm.	LOCALITY	SITUATION
Varanus varius	3/1/58	4 3	Norah Head	In Paperbark Tree

This male was observed ascending a paperbark tree, at 12.15, on the eastern side of swamp No. 2.

Three Sacred Kingfishers (*Halcyon sanctus*) drew my attention to him whilst I was still about 100 yards away, by giving warning calls.

The specimen was noosed about 25 feet up, and a few minutes after capture, while I was still descending the tree, he disgorged a rabbit kitten. He has a cut about threequarters of an inch long and about four inches in front of his off-side hind foot, which I am treating. He is very nervous, and if he notices anyone observing him he runs into a shelter hole.

NATIVE TREE CULTURE IN CAIRNS

S. E. STEPHENS, F.R.H.S.

Trees are a common natural feature of the greater part of the earth's surface, and in all parts of the world some species are outstandingly attractive. Many of these have been gathered and spread from country to country by lovers of botanical beauty. Thus in North Queensland we have many specimens of such beautiful exotics as *Delonix regia*, *Cassia fistula*, *C. javanica*, *C. nodosa*, *C. grandis*, *Peltophorum ferrugineum*, *Spathodea campanulata*, and many others. These all add much to the beauty of our surroundings and are rightly admired. However, there are many indigenous trees of high merit also, and it is pleasing to be able to record the use by the Cairns civic authorities of many of our best natives in the city beautification. The following brief notes list the more outstanding of these so used.

Wormia alata—To be seen in Anzac Park, the Esplanade and Mulgrave Road. A papery red barked tree, with large, dark green, handsome foliage, and large yellow flowers often in clusters, that shed their petals to display deep red carpels on those that set fruits. This tree grows very well in damp situations and flowers over an extended period.

Calophyllum inophyllum—Alexandrian Laurel. Planted as an avenue in parts of Sheridan and McLeod Streets and in the Esplanade Park. Has very glossy dark green leaves and white scented flowers in spring, followed by round green fruit of the size of ping pong balls. This is an excellent shade tree, particularly in water-front locations.

Sterculia acerifolia—Flame Tree. Several in Abbott Street, the remnants of a complete avenue donated some years ago by the late Mr. Whittick. The specific name of the tree refers to the shape of the leaves and means maple like leaves. The leaves are in fact of the shape and size of the English maple but are of more fleshy texture. The tree is usually deciduous in early spring, and then becomes completely covered during the period between October and December with dense panicles of bright red flowers. The tree is particularly effective when set against the dark green foliage of other jungle trees.

Castanospermum australe—Black Bean. Many specimens have been planted in Abbott Street and younger trees are now established in several other localities. The tree has dark green pinnate leaves, and dense clusters of orange and red pea flowers on the branches during early spring.

Adenanthera aprosperma—Bead Tree. In the water-front park at the end of Shields Street. The tree has feathery bi-pinnate foliage of pale green colour, with numerous orange or bright yellow flower spikes in December. These are followed by long, curled, reddish pods that split open to disgorge numerous hard, bright red, pill like seeds.

Barringtonia speciosa—Several trees in Shields Street. These have very large, broad, pale green leaves and large white flowers with numerous long filaments. The flowers open at night and fall early next morning, when the ground becomes littered with the fallen blooms. A large squared, box like fruit of woody texture follows.

Barringtonia calyptрата—A tall, rather narrow tree, represented by several street specimens on the Esplanade near the tennis courts, in Anzac Park and the water-front park. This species has long, dark green leaves, and the flowers are carried on long pendulous spikes during spring, and have a rather strong odour. A green plum-like fruit follows.

Brassiaea actinophylla—Umbrella Tree. Odd specimens in various street plots and in the water-front park. This is often an awkward looking tree but is attractive for its large palmate leaves arranged like an open umbrella, and for the very large, spiked inflorescence with red and pink flowers,

carried at the end of each branch. Its beauty is further enhanced by frequent visitations to the flowers by the Rainbow Lorikeet—*Trichoglossus moluccanus*.

Grevillea robusta—Silky Oak. This native of southern Queensland is thriving on the Lake Street side of the North Cairns Sports Reserve. It is one of the few native trees widely cultivated throughout the State over a long period. It's lacy foliage and orange flower heads in spring make it an attractive subject.

Pongamia pinnata—On part of the Sheridan Street frontage of the same sports reserve. The tree has bright green foliage that is reddish to yellowish coloured in the young stage. Lilac or mauve coloured flowers are borne in profusion in the spring but they are small and hence not very spectacular. The tree is a common one on well drained land in moist situations. It is almost deciduous in early spring.

Cupaniopsis anacardioides—The Lily Street frontage of the North Cairns Sports Reserve is planted with a full row of this tree. It has compound leaves of 6 to 10 leaflets, each of which is very broad and rounded at the apex and attenuated at the base. The tree bears seeds in capsules of three, and each seed, black or brown in colour is enveloped in a bright red arillus.

THE BANDY BANDY SNAKE

THE pretty little Snake known by the Vernacular name of Bandy Bandy or Black and White Ringed Snake, and by the Technical name of *Vermicella annulata*, is found in most Australian States, with the exception of Victoria and South Australia, it is in no areas very common, possibly owing to its nocturnal habits. Other terrestrial snakes marked similar include *Brachyurophis campbelli*, *Brachyurophis semifasciata*, *Rhynchoelaps bertholdi*, but in most cases the black rings do not circle the body like the Bandy Bandy, several Aquatic species are also similarly marked.

COLOURATION: The body of this snake is marked alternately with black and white rings which circle the body, the black rings being generally slightly wider than the white ones. The point of the snout is black then a white band over the nasals, top of the head is black from the supra labials only, with the infra labials and underneath the neck white. The first black ring on neck does not completely circle body but only goes as far as the ventrals on each side, all other black rings completely circle the body. A 22 inch specimen having 41 black rings around body.

SCALATION: The ventral scales number 226, sub-caudal scales 23 paired, anal scale usually divided, but one in the author's possession has a single anal scale, the scales around the body number 15, supra labials 6, infra labials 6, frontal scale is nearly twice as long as broad, and nearly twice as wide as the supra oculars. The snout is rounded, and the tail very short and pointed, being only 1½ inches in length on a 22 inch specimen. The species are nocturnal in habits, live mostly under rocks and rubbish, and feed on small frogs, insects, and small lizards, etc.

DENTITION: These snakes being in the poisonous group have fangs 2 mm. in length with an inter fang measurement of 7 mm. depending of course on the length of the particular specimen, all figures quoted are for a 22 inch specimen. The maximum length quoted by experts is 30 inches. Owing to the small fangs and small quantity of venom injected the snake can be classed as harmless being very docile when handled and in no way aggressive.

—VINCENT M. REILLY

RAVENALA MADAGASCARIENSIS

"TRAVELLERS' PALM"
(Scitamineae)

THE type of growth, usually referred to as the Travellers Palm, is a never failing source of interest to the southern visitor here in Cairns, and much, mostly misleading matter has been written about it, in Australian articles in many papers and magazines, which has prompted this scribe to submit his views from practical experience of the subject.

The name is indicative of the fact that it is a native of Madagascar, and it is not a palm, but a tree, as although its trunk with its fibrous content, is similar to the trunk of a palm, there its similarity ends. No palm sends up what are rightly termed suckers, as even the Clump varieties of palms sprout from at or above soil level, but the Travellers' sends up suckers from the trunk's base below the surface, as does the banana, which is a relative.

It is often assumed that propagation can be made from these suckers but the writer has never seen this method succeed, as the suckers, when detached from the trunk base leave little or no rootage. The seed pods, alternating from the seed stem, between the leaves, contain very few seeds which, the size of a small bean, black in colour, with a blue woolly covering, are not all successful in germinating.

The leaves alternating and overlapping at their base are ten to fifteen feet long when tree is full grown, the whole trunk and tree growing to a height of thirty feet, whereas some palms will attain double that height. The leaves split with the wind as also do the leaves of the banana, and the leaf base makes an excellent reservoir for rain and overhead moisture conducted down the leaf stems to irrigate the trunk, and when cut will usually disclose frogs and insects plus putrid water.

The general belief that the tree will at all times provide water for the thirsty traveller, is more or less a fallacy, for if there is no underground or overhead moisture in its vicinity, its water content will be scarce. If a seedling is planted in a dry area, and another in a moist area, the former will wither, whilst the latter will thrive, also a seedling dislikes constant moist rootage, though an older tree will not object.

Another misconception is that however a seedling is planted, its fan shape foliage will twist and point due north and south, reacting to the poles' magnetic influence. The plain fact is that the tree will on some occasions twist in sympathy with its root formation, which can strike an obstruction or reach out for moisture.

To allow the suckers to grow in clump form around the main trunk is to detract from the spectacular specimen of a single giant fan, the whole weight of foliage and seed pods resulting in much greater weight than the single trunked palm. These overlapping leaves give the tree great strength and resistance to winds of hurricane force that it withstands in its native habitat, from the Indian Ocean.

Palms may be snapped and broken by these winds, but unless the Travellers Tree is old or decayed, it may bow but not break from the wind's force.

For the tropics and sub-tropics this type of growth makes an attractive specimen, and in its younger growth will decorate a partially enclosed verandah.

—S. DEAN

CLUB ACTIVITIES

SINCE its Annual General Meeting the Club can summarise its activities in one word—PROGRESS. With the exception of the publications department—and this matter has been taken well in hand by our President, every branch of the Club can take a deep pride in the activities over the past three months.

At the Annual General Meeting the President urged all members to take over some part of the burden our Founder laid down, and with the willing team elected at that meeting, the results have exceeded expectations.

Amenities Officer Stan Dean has been busy. The Chillagoe trip was an outstanding success, and it was a pity that Stan had to withdraw at the last minute after so capably assisting with the arrangements. Despite two crashed cars, the inconvenience of sleeping on the floor (as one member reported), and the work involved in shaking Chillagoe dust from our vehicles for weeks after the event, our minerologists and geologists had a happy and educational time at Chillagoe. Botanists, and again geologists, had a field day when the Boulders trip was made, and a visit to a fine collection of orchids on the return trip was of value to the horticulturalists. Koombul Park (the last trip of the year) provided fun and games for young and old—thanks again to the efforts of the tireless Amenities Officer. These informal trips—valuable to the specialists, and entertaining to other Club members, are becoming a valuable social medium in the Club's work, and the definite "get-together" spirit is enhancing the Club's prospect of successful teamwork in the future.

The Club's main project, "Operation Chironex" has been well covered in the daily Press and represents the fulfilment of an unwritten pact that members would, on Dr. Flecker's death, continue his work on the sea-stinger until the Northern beaches were safe for bathers. This has meant a colossal amount of organisation, and to the President must go the credit of bringing the operation to the stage where we can confidently look forward to a successful fruition. The co-operation of Dr. A. V. Southcott, of Adelaide, has been invaluable, and the Club's heartiest thanks go out to this tireless researcher who is guiding our hands that we may achieve the ultimate success.

Mr. William Hosmer, F.Z.S., Club Member and now attached to the Department of Anthropology at Melbourne University, has identified a new species of frog sent from the Cairns area. Bill first became interested in Natural History through the N.Q.N.C., and we are proud to have fostered one of Australia's leading herpetologists.

Two Thompson Foundation Memorial Medals were awarded to members of the Club, the first being a posthumous award to the late Dr. Flecker, and the second to the Club's Secretary. Only two "Thompsons" have ever been awarded in N.Q., and both have been awarded to Club members.

The Club continues to exchange correspondence with all parts of the world, and recently the Smithsonian Institution sent for the Check List of N.Q. ferns, which is regarded as the authoritative publication in the U.S.A. The Secretary has had some trouble in deciphering Netherlands and German correspondence, but has been able to decipher the French and Belgian requests.

Financially the Club is sound, "breaking even" after heavy expense over the first quarter of the financial year, and membership continues to grow, but the Treasurer would like to see more members pay their dues on the due date.

In the matter of publicity the co-operation of the "Cairns Post" has been greatly appreciated, the Editor having placed a column at the disposal of the Club for a weekly article on Natural History. As this is a "paid effort," the Club benefits by space rates for approximately 90 inches per month.

Country members have shown an increased interest in the Club's activities, and Mr. Jim Bravery (Snr.), Ornithologist, of Atherton, has sent specimens of the Horsfield Bush Lark to Dr. McEvoy of the Melbourne Museum. A special permit had to be obtained before the specimens could be collected. They were sent to Cairns under refrigeration and the Club arranged refrigerated transport south.

Membership has shown an encouraging increase, and a Hawaiian member, Mr. H. Krauss, of Honolulu, recently made sure of obtaining the Club's publication by paying three years in advance!

Members elected to the date of the December meeting have been:—

Mr. Ambrose Trappes-Lomax	Mrs. Lucy Trappes-Lomax
Mr. K. Howarth	Mr. J. R. Collins
Mr. E. Hutchins	Mr. D. Fisher
Mrs. D. Fisher	Master Wally Fisher
Master Max Mathers	

Approximately twelve members will be balloted for at the February General Meeting.

The Club is now the holder of valuable property. With the advice of the Honorary Solicitor (Mr. H. Dann) the Herbarium and Library were valued and insured for a sum of £500 against fire, and cyclone damage.

Mr. Eric Fielders' work at the Library has to be seen to be appreciated. The Dewey-Decimal system of indexing is in use, and he is making the herbarium and library practically a full time job. When he went away for a well earned three months' rest in November, we were sorry to see him go but all agreed that he had earned a respite from his voluntary labours.

For the future we plan to have a meeting room organised adjacent to the Herbarium so that all the Club's activities and organisational and executive work can be centralised. An Executive office is being set up in the Herbarium and it is hoped that the Secretary will be able to have a stated time each week to be in attendance for the convenience of members.

The formation of a Publications Committee will ensure that the "Journal" is published on time, and the President and his officers look forward to a time of increased progress in the Club's activities.

We're all shouldering the burden—and with the enthusiasm shown by members to the present time, it's a pleasant, albeit a heavy one.

—JOHN ORRELL

THE THOMPSON FOUNDATION MEMORIAL MEDAL

TWICE AWARDED TO N.Q.N.C. MEMBERS

HIGHEST distinction of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia (Queensland Branch)—the Thompson Foundation Memorial Medal—has, since November last, been awarded to two members of the Club.

Established in 1900 in honour of the Founder of the R.G.S. in Queensland (Dr. John Park Thompson, C.B.E., L.L.D., F. R. G. S.), the medal which may, at the Council's discretion, be of gold, silver, or bronze, is awarded to such persons as have gratuitously rendered eminent services to the Society.

At the November meeting of the Club, the Secretary (Mr. John Orrell), representing the Royal Geographical Society, presented the Medal to Mrs. Flecker, who received it on behalf of her late husband, our Founder, first President and Patron. The medal was inscribed "Awarded posthumously to Dr. Hugo Flecker for outstanding services to Geographical Science."

Mr. Orrell said that the Doctor had been for many years an ordinary member of the Society, and his findings and contributions to the store of knowledge of geographical science gained him a Fellowship in 1951. He continued a very active association with the Society until the time of his death, and the recommendation for the Medal was actually tabled before his passing. This was the first time the "Thompson" had been awarded posthumously.

In his letter advising Mr. Orrell of the award, and appointing him the Society's representative, the Director-Secretary of the R.G.S. (Mr. D. A. O'Brien, F.R.G.S.A., F.R.E.S., C.D.) asked that the award be considered as a gold medal. He stated that the price of gold had risen so alarmingly since the institution of the honour in 1900 that it was now economically impossible to have gold medals struck.

Mrs. Flecker received the medal on behalf of her husband, and Dr. Patrick Flecker, in briefly outlining the basis of his father's contributions towards geography, stated that he was happy to know that the late Doctor's work had been recognised—albeit too late for him to know that the award had been conferred.

On December 28th Mr. Orrell received the advice that he had also been awarded the Thompson Medal. Mr. Orrell first became a member of the Society in 1942. In 1948 he began research into the life of the explorer Edmund Besley Court Kennedy, who was killed by blacks on the Escape River in 1848. His thesis, published in the proceedings of the society in 1948, gained him a Fellowship in 1949 (F.R.G.S.A.) and in October, 1950, he was admitted as a fellow of the parent body in London (F.R.G.S. (Lond.)). He continued research and discovered the "missing three years" of Kennedy's life—the period between his arrival in Port Fairy and his association with Sir Thomas Mitchell. He was elected a Life Fellow of the Australasian Society in 1952. Mr. Orrell is also a member of the Australian Geographic Society and the National Geographic Society of America.

Since the last Annual Meeting he has been Secretary-Treasurer of the North Queensland Naturalists' Club.

The granting of the Thompson Medal to two members of the Club must be looked upon as an outstanding achievement and worthy of recognition, not only of the ability of the recipients, but of the high standard of research work carried out by Naturalists' Club members.

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