

Snakes Alive!

by Ed Parker

So goes the old exclamation, but yes its true, snakes are alive and well in the Centenary Suburbs. That's a worry I hear you say? The mere thought of a snake seems to send a shudder up many a spine, but is that fear always justified?

Certainly there are venomous species, and if in doubt about the identity of a snake, caution is obviously recommended. But killing the snake is not necessarily the answer, and attempting to do so is often more dangerous than simply letting the reptile go on its way.

Snakes, the reptile that people love to hate, are much maligned. They are protected wildlife and before you jump to the worst conclusion, take the time to observe. The snake that you see before you may well be one of the various relatively harmless ones that inhabit the Centenary Suburbs.

Included in this category are tree snakes such as the Green Tree Snake and the Brown Tree Snake which can be seen gracefully gliding amongst branches in your backyard trees... or with acrobatic skill, manoeuvring swiftly along the top of a paling fence!

But perhaps more about those fine, graceful snakes in a future article.

This month I want to profile the Carpet Python (*Morelia spilota variegata*), one of the more common pythons. The carpet python is the larger of the two types that occur in Brisbane, growing to a length of about 3 metres. The other python species, the Spotted Python, grows to about 1 metre.

The Carpet Python is recognised by the dark-edged fawn blotches and stripes on a background olive green colour. These distinctive markings are visible in the photograph. It has been observed in Westlake riverfront bushland both on the ground and draped in trees, and both during the day and at night. It feeds on small mammals and birds.

While non-venomous, it can sometimes appear aggressive, particularly if it is a female protecting its nest.



A Carpet Python (*Morelia spilota variegata*) as photographed at a riverfront bushcare working bee in Westlake in February 1998. (Photo by Ed Parker)

If you are troubled by a snake in your home or yard, the Department of Environment and Heritage's wildlife line can advise on snake catchers (tel 3202 0200).

This Nature Watch article is the first in a planned regular column contributed by your local Centenary bushland care groups. Enquiries: Westlake/Riverhills: Ed 3376 1389, Maree 3376 5803; Jindalee: Noel 3376 1412.

Reader feedback to Centenary News is welcomed.