

Little Snake, Big Stomach

by Chris Wiley

Like straight out of the most amazing documentary, this incredible sight was captured on film at one of Centenary's most used parks.

The snake involved is known as the **White-crowned Snake** (*Cacophis harriettae*) and at only 30cm in length poses no threat to people or their pets. In fact, it is people and our pets, namely cats, which are the main killers of these common backyard snakes.

White-crowned Snakes are typically nocturnal, and had it not been for its mammoth meal, this particular individual would've been sleeping quietly amongst fallen leaf litter, instead of in the middle of the walking track where it is exposed to hungry kookaburras.

The hapless skink, which was probably captured while it slept, is the common garden inhabitant, the **Eastern Striped Skink** (*Ctenotus robustus*). While small skinks typically make up the diet of White-crowned Snakes, this particular larger one proved quite a mouthful, taking some three hours to swallow!

Few people would be aware of the presence of this ubiquitous little snake, and when they are uncovered in compost heaps and garden beds, they often fall victim to the hands (or should I say the shovels) of gardeners in the mistaken belief they are 'baby' brown snakes. The fact is, the three most commonly encountered snakes in suburban backyards, the green tree snake, carpet python and white-crowned snake, are all non-venomous or virtually harmless. Not only is it illegal to kill any snake, but we should be proud to have these truly Australian wildlife living in our backyards.

The main dangerous snake to occur in Brisbane backyards is the Eastern Brown Snake, and this is only regularly seen in houses near remnant bushland.

If you have concerns about a snake which is potentially venomous inhabiting your backyard, give it time and it is sure to move on. If it doesn't, contact the nearest National Parks and Wildlife office for advice (tel. 3202 0200).



Overall view of the White-crowned Snake with the skink's head and front legs already swallowed.



Close-up showing the snake's dislocating jaw action which enables it to swallow such large prey.

Photographs by Noel Wilson

This regular Nature Watch column is contributed by your local Centenary bushland care groups.

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