

## NMHS Draft Meeting Minutes

Volume 53 Number 12

New Mexico Herpetological Society

December 12, 2015

We enjoyed our Social Hour from 5:30 to 6:30 PM at the American International Rattlesnake Museum in Old Town Albuquerque hosted by Bob and Lorraine Meyers.

We then strolled two blocks north to the Church Street Café in Old Town Albuquerque for our annual December Banquet starting at 7 PM. 52 guests came for the dinner of chips and salsa, dinner salad, cheese enchiladas, chicken enchiladas, chicken fajitas, pinto beans, rice, sopapillas, honey, natilla for dessert and non-alcoholic drinks and stayed on for the evening's program.

Rebecca Bulgrin completed the paperwork needed for the evening's silent auction while Scott Bulgrin readied the computer and slide projector.

Scott introduced our presenter Richard Reams, Curator of Herpetology at our Albuquerque BioPark Zoo. Richard had been Curator of the Aquarium and Kids Zoo at BREC's Baton Rouge Zoo, Area manager of Deserts Biome at Indianapolis Zoo and Senior Keeper of Herpetology. He graduated from The University of Texas at Arlington. His PowerPoint presentation started off with a slide showing: "a short overview of Australia, my travel experiences, some natural history, pretty pictures of habitat and wildlife, lots of photos of reptiles and amphibians, gratuitous mammal and bird photos."

Richard's map showed the six states of Australia: New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia and two major mainland territories: Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory. This island continent covers 2,969,907 square miles.

Australia has more than 378 species of mammals, 828 of birds, 4000 of fish, 300 [617] of lizards, 140 of snakes, two of crocodiles, around 50 species of marine mammals and 24,000 of plants.

The reptiles of Australia are a diverse group of animals, widely distributed across the continent. Three of the four orders of reptiles are native to Australia: Testudines, Squamata and Crocodylia. The only missing extant order is Sphenodontia, containing the tuataras which are endemic to New Zealand. Australia has a large diversity of reptiles, with over 860 species. This is rich in comparison to other continents. For example, North America has approximately 280 species of reptiles. The most diverse group is Squamata, the snakes and lizards. The snakes and lizards are especially diverse in the arid areas of Australia, where diversity of other fauna is generally low. Spinifex grass is a major habitat which allows them to remain in a relatively cool, moist area.

The most diverse group of Australian reptiles are the lizards. There are 617 species commonly known as goannas, skinks, geckos, dragon lizards, and flap-footed lizards (also called snake-lizards or legless lizards). There are 28 species of goannas and 300 species of skinks in Australia. This is more species of

skinks than in any other country.

At 6' long, the goanna Perentie (*Varanus giganteus*) is Australia's largest lizard

The world's largest reptile, the saltwater crocodile (*Crocodylus porosus*), is native to Australia and has a maximum length of 17 feet.

Australia has some 140 species of land snakes, and around 32 species of sea snakes. Some 100 species of Australian snakes are venomous, although only 12 are likely to inflict a wound that could kill a human

Amphibians of Australia are limited to members of the order Anura, commonly known as frogs. All Australian frogs are in the suborder Neobatrachia, also known as the modern frogs, which make up the largest proportion of extant frog species. About 230 of the world's 5,280 species of frogs are native to Australia with 93% of them endemic. Compared with other continents, species diversity is low, and may be related to the climate of most of the Australian continent. There is only one invasive amphibian, the Cane Toad (*Rhinella marina*).

There are at least 20 species of freshwater turtles in Australia and six species of marine turtles.

Australia is home to 828 species of birds. Richard showed us the Shovel-billed Kookaburra (*Clytoceyx rex*) which is a tree kingfisher

A total of 379 [386] species of mammals have been recorded in Australia and surrounding continental waters; 357 indigenous and 22 introduced. The list includes 2 monotremes, 159 marsupials, 76 bats, 69 rodents (5 introduced), 10 pinnipeds, 3 terrestrial carnivores (2 recent and 1 sub-recent introductions), 13 introduced ungulates, 2 introduced lagomorphs, 44 cetaceans and 1 sirenian.

The Eastern Grey Kangaroo (*Macropus giganteus*) is a marsupial found in southern and eastern Australia, with a population of several million. It is also known as the Great Grey Kangaroo and the Forester Kangaroo.

Although the red is better known, the eastern grey is the kangaroo most often encountered in Australia.

The Red Kangaroo (*Macropus rufus*) is the largest of all kangaroos, the largest terrestrial mammal native to Australia and the largest extant marsupial. It is found across mainland Australia avoiding only the more fertile areas in the south, the east coast, and the northern rainforests.

Australia has 24,000 species of native plants including 2800 species of eucalyptus (gum trees), and 1000 species of acacia.

Spinifex grasslands are the single most extensive vegetation type in Australia, covering 22% of the continent and thriving in poor, arid soils. Their roots go down as far as 10 feet. The plants are tough and indigestible to most animals except termites which feed on the litter. Spinifex is used as a common name referring to grasses in the genus *Triodia* as well as those in the genus *Spinifex*. *Triodia* is native to inland Australia and refers to a group of spiny-leaved, tussock-forming grasses that dominate much of the red sand desert and rocky ranges. Genus *Spinifex* is comprised of perennial coastal grasses that

are important in dune ecosystems where they stabilize shifting sands. There are 64 (70) species of Spinifex in Australia, 34 are found in the Northern Territory.

Richard's last slide, "The End," included a roadside sign in the Northern Territory put up by the Bushfires Council and read: "We like our lizards frilled not grilled."

Richard concluded his presentation at 9:45 PM whereupon Bob Meyers took charge of moving along the silent auction which raked in some dollars to benefit our Society. After those monies came into NMHS hands we dispersed into the winter night, leaving Scott Bulgrin to put away the slide projector and deal in business matters with the manager of the Church Street Café.

These NMHS Draft Meeting Minutes of December 12th, 2015 are submitted by Secretary Cosmos