James G (1979) The Little Whip snake in the Melbourne area (*Unechis flagellum*). *Victorian Herpetological Society Newsletter* (13) 11–12.

Keogh JS, Webb JK and Shine R (2006) Spatial genetic analysis and long-term mark-recapture data demonstrate male-biased dispersal in a snake. *Biology Letters* **3, 33-35.**

McDougall K and Kirkpatrick JB (eds.) (1994) *Conservation of the Lowland Native Grasslands in South-eastern Australia.* (Worldwide Fund for Nature: Sydney)

Turner G (1989) Observations of *Unechis flagellum* (Elapidae). *Herpetofauna* **19**(1), 1–7.

Turner G (1992) Courtship behavior and male combat in the Little Whip snake *Rhinoplocephalus flagellum* (Elapidae). *Herpetofauna* **22**(1), 14–21.

Turner G (1998) Evidence of diurnal mate-searching in male Little Whip snakes, *Suta flagellum* (Elapidae). *Herpetofauna* **28**(1), 46–50.

Turner G (2001) Aggregations and basking in gravid female Little Whip snakes *Suta flagellum* (Elapidae). *Herpetofauna* **31**(1), 37–47.

Shine R (1988) Food habits and reproductive biology of small Australian snakes of the genera *Unechis* and *Suta* (Elapidae). *Journal of Herpetology* **22**(3), 307–315.

Webb JK, Brook BW and Shine R (2003) Does foraging mode influence life history traits? A comparative study of growth, maturation and survival of two species of sympatric snakes from southeastern Australia. *Austral Ecology* **28,** 601–610.

Webb JK and Shine R (1997) A field study of spatial ecology and movements of a threatened snake species, *Hoplocephalus bungaroides*. *Biological Conservation* **82,** 203–217.

Whitaker PB and Shine R (2003) A radiotelemetric study of movements and shelter-site selection by free-ranging Brownsnakes (*Pseudonaja textilis*, Elapidae). *Herpetological Monographs* **17**, 130–144.

Wilson SK and Knowles DG (1988) *Australia's Reptiles – A Photographic Reference to the Terrestrial Reptiles of Australia.* (Collins: Sydney)

Received 5 May 2011; accepted 11 August 2011

One Hundred and twenty-seven Years Ago

Notes on Victorian venomous snakes

by

D. LE SOUEF

Assistant Director of the Zoological and Acclimatisation Society's Gardens.

(Read 21st April, 1884)

Venomous snakes destroy their prey by poison. Some, such as the Copper-headed, when they have caught and bitten an animal, commence swallowing it at once, while yet alive, but the Tiger Snake does not touch its prey after it has bitten it until life is quite extinct. When swallowing, the jaws are moved alternately. This is possible from the freedom of movement which is obtained by all the bones of the head being united by elastic ligaments, so that the head and jaws can stretch considerably. Hence also snakes can swallow prey apparently larger than themselves. Occasionally two snakes will seize upon the same prey, and as neither will give way, the larger swallows the lesser, until the latter is compelled to relax its hold on the prey and withdraw from the contest. I lately heard of a case where a large snake had swallowed a smaller one in the manner described, but the latter had gone too far down to be able to recede, and died, and when the larger snake was opened, it was found to have partially digested its opponent, only the tail remaining uninjured. The Tiger Snakes and Death-adders generally prefer mice and rats. Rats do not succumb readily to the poison, and take a long time to die. Lately I saw a small native cat bitten severely by three large Tiger Snakes, with about five minutes' interval between each bite, and it took an hour and a half to die. The other snakes prefer frogs as an article of diet ...

Snakes shed their teeth, new ones being rapidly produced. There are always a number of immature fangs behind the two in use, and if these are destroyed by any accident, another pair will be fully developed and ready for use in about six days. The point of the fang is extremely fine and solid, the tooth being perforated in its lower three-fourths. The channel is enamelled. The fangs of all our snakes are permanently erect, and when the mouth is closed, fit into a depression in the lower jaw. The jaws do not close on each other, but also fit into depressions.

If frightened during a meal, snakes sometimes disgorge. I once saw a Tiger Snake kill and swallow five mice in succession. Finding that they were more than could be managed, it retained only three. The digestion is good, and probably assisted by the venom injected, as it has been shown recently that it possesses peptic qualities.

From *The Victorian Naturalist* **I**, pp 27, 28, April, 1884