

# Members astounded by gecko find

## Julimar Conservation and Forest Alliance

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TOODYAY'S Julimar State Forest encompasses a diversity of ecosystems and landscapes.

Within this diversity there is a variety of herpetofauna including species of lizard, python, monitor, snake, gecko, goanna, dragon and turtle, all important as part of the food chain in the Australian environment.

The Julimar Forest has an amazing variety of landscapes.

Sandy soils, rocky outcrops, moist areas, low heath, ancient, smooth-barked wandoo together with rough-barked marri and the smaller, many-stemmed jarrah provide homes for the inhabitants of the forest.

A well-known resident of the area is the southern carpet python (*Morelia spilota*).

This beautiful reptile can climb high into the wandoo canopy to catch birds such as ravens and green parrots, using its phenomenal speed to ambush its prey.

Hollows in large, broken-off branches of the 300 to 400-year-old powderbark wandoos provide habitat for the carpet python.

Look up and you may see the shiny body of this exceptional creature.

A second python found in the area was the woma or sand python (*Aspidites ramsayi*), but it has not been sighted in these areas since the 1950s.

There have been two suspected sightings but without a photo to make a definite identification.

The woma is very occasionally sighted around the Monkey Mia area.

The woma may yet be re-discovered within the large acreage of Julimar Forest.

It is a large species, soft brown in colour with darker brown irregular bandings.

The same species in the north of the state is a golden colour with brown bandings.

Its preys on rabbits and small mammals but it is primarily a reptile-feeder.

The woma does not have the heat-sensing lip pits of the carpet python.

When Toodyay Naturalists Club members were on an excursion in the forest, club patron John Dell mentioned that geckos lived in crevices in the bark of trees, especially in powderbark wandoo.

As he made this statement he moved to a tree, pulled back a small piece of bark from the tree trunk and resting there was a tree dtella gecko (*Gehyra variegata*).

The members were astounded.

The southern shovel-nosed snake (*Brachyuophis semifasciata*) is a small, stout reptile of up to 33cm from snout to vent with a stout 3cm tail.

It has brownish-red colouring with darker bandings that do not encircle its body.

It feeds exclusively on reptile eggs, using flat, blade-like teeth to penetrate the shells before consuming the collapsed egg.

The egg matter is digested, and the shell passed as waste.

This beautifully coloured, harmless little snake is found in cracks in the soil, beneath rocks, stumps and rubbish or among leaf litter in sandy Banksia woodland.

The southern blind snake (*Ramphotyphlops australis*) favours leaf litter in areas of sandy soil.

It can disappear amazingly quickly into soft sand with a few quick wriggles.

Its second means of protection are its body glands which produce a nasty odour.

This quaint creature has bullet-shaped ends but does not appear to have a head.

Close inspection reveals two tiny black eyes and a tiny flicking forked tongue which denotes it as a snake.

The southern blind snake also lives in termite mounds.

Not much is known about this snake as it spends much of its time underground.

Burton's legless lizard (*Lialis burtonis*) is a great favourite.

This handsome creature has a snout-vent length of up to 30cm but its slender tail can be one to one-and-a-half times this length.

Its long-pointed snout and squared-off tongue are decisive indicators, as it lacks the forked tongue of most snake species.

Colouration may be rusty brown, pale grey or cream.

The pale grey specimen has a black stripe from its head through its eye, running the length of the body and tail.

The western bearded dragon (*Pogona minor*) favours rocky outcrops on which it rests in the sun.

This reptile, with a snout-to-vent length of 5.5cm, has a long slender tail and is quite agile in climbing trees and shrubbery.

Three monitor species are found within Julimar: the large, heavily built Gould's monitor (*Varanus gouldii*); the slender, dark-coloured black-tailed monitor (*Varanus tristis*); and the southern heath monitor (*Varanus rosenbergii*).

Gould's monitor loses its bands as it ages but is recognisable from its white or yellow tail tip.

It favours sand areas with litter and digs burrows with a series of entrances.

The main prey of all three species is vermin.

The skink is represented by the bobtail (*Tiliqua rugosa*) and the smooth, shiny-scaled and broad-banded sandswimmer (*Eremiascincus richardsonii*).

This nocturnal skink escapes predation by diving into loose sand, moving rapidly as if through water.

There are at least 37 species of reptile in the Julimar Forest – there are possibly many more.

It would be a wonderful surprise to re-discover the beautiful woma – with an accompanying photo for identification.



Carpet python. Photo: Lou Kidd.