

# The Wildlife Response Unit

The QPS Wildlife Response Unit, formerly known as the Fauna Protection Squad, was established on 17 April, 1978. In its two and a half decades existence, a significant number of offenders were prosecuted and millions of dollars of illegal revenue was seized. The exotic species of reptiles and birds, which made up the profit, did not always survive. The poachers entrapped the animals in thousands. Queensland Police Annual reports from the later years showed that in 2001 alone, thirteen persons were charged who were responsible for trapping over five and a half thousand birds and nearly a hundred reptiles, which were confiscated in the process. This amounted to just short of \$8 million in revenue.

In November 2001, a German national residing in Samsonville, who gave his occupation as an 'invalid pensioner' was charged under the Nature Conservation and Wildlife Protection Acts. The invalid pensioner had poached a total of 96 reptiles. Only 3 snakes (broad headed snakes, endangered reptiles native to NSW) were recovered, while 28 black headed pythons and 65 common and desert death Adders had already been exported. A total conservation value of these reptiles amounted to approximately \$135,000.

During the same month the Detectives of the Wildlife Response Unit charged a group of individuals under the Nature Conservation Act Use of Protected Animals. There were over five thousand birds seized during the course of the investigation, which were later released into the wild. These included vulnerable or endangered species each valued at \$6,600 and \$8,800 respectively.

One of the offenders apprehended in November, 2001 was a known re-offender, a nearly seventy year old man from Neurum who appeared in earlier reports. The man owned and operated a large wholesale bird and pet shop business at New Farm called 'Living Garden', and was suspected of selling birds at illegal markets in the southern states. He was also the target of a major operation in 1991.

As a rule, the age of offenders varied between forty-five and seventy years old. Unfortunately, age did not slow down avid collectors and enthusiasts. In 2002, an 80 year-old-man was cautioned for entrapping rainbow lorikeets.

