

# ***Acanthophis lancasteri* Wells and Wellington, 1985 gets hit with a dose of *Crypto!* ... this is not the last word on Death Adder taxonomy and nomenclature.**

RAYMOND T. HOSER

488 Park Road, Park Orchards, Victoria, 3134, Australia.

Phone: +61 3 9812 3322 Fax: 9812 3355 E-mail: snakeman (at) snakeman.com.au  
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## ABSTRACT

On the evening of Friday 28 August 2015 (East Australian time), social media was hit with a SPAM attack in the form of wide cross-posting of a PRINO (peer reviewed in name only) *Zootaxa* paper by a group known as the Wüster gang. Their online paper alleged that the taxon name *Acanthophis lancasteri* Wells and Wellington, 1985 for the Kimberley Death Adder was a *nomen nudem* and therefore not available. The paper redescribed the same species as *Acanthophis cryptamydros* Maddock *et al.*, 2015.

This paper argues that Maddock *et al.* are incorrect and that the authors have engaged in an illegal and creative interpretation of the rules of the *International Code of Zoological Nomenclature* in order to market their illegal junior synonym.

This they have reinforced by hijacking key journals and internet properties for the express purpose of peddling their warped world view on others and without allowing any dissenting views to be aired.

In fact less than six days later, a "Google" search for the term "*Acanthophis cryptamydros*" showed that the group had cross-posted their new name on no less than 3,530 different websites to cement the perception that theirs was the only correct name for the taxon.

Furthermore, other fraudulent practices by the same authors in terms of their alleged interpretations of the taxonomy and nomenclature of Death Adders (Genus *Acanthophis*: Serpentes: Elapidae) are detailed.

It is shown that similar acts of taxonomic vandalism by the same group of people with respect to the genus *Acanthophis* are almost certain.

This paper, formally accepts the division of the genus *Acanthophis* as first proposed by Wells (2002) and in turn names the third major as yet unnamed clade at the subgenus level.

There is also a note herein affirming that the name *Acanthophis groenveldi* Hoser, 2002 is in fact a junior synonym for *Acanthophis ceramensis* Günther, 1863 and the latter name is the one that should be used. Also noted is that the spellings for the species *Acanthophis cummingi* Hoser, 1998 and *Acanthophis wellsei* as first proposed by Hoser in 1998 are correct and intentional name formations.

**Keywords:** Taxonomy; snakes; nomenclature; taxonomic vandalism; *nomen nudem*; Death Adder; Elapid; *Acanthophis*; *Aggressiserpens*; *lancasteri*; *ceramensis*; *groenveldi*; *cryptamydros*; taxonomic vandalism; Wüster; Günther; Wells; Wellington; Hoser; Maddock; Gower; new subgenus; *platyelapid*.

## INTRODUCTION

As iconic Australian snakes, the Death Adders (Genus *Acanthophis* Daudin, 1803) are well known to herpetologists globally.

A detailed account of the genus of the snakes, including life history and the like can be found in Hoser (1995) and is not repeated here.

The taxonomic status of various forms have been scrutinized intensely by herpetologists in Australia ever since the genus was first described.

Numerous species have been formally described, named, and at times redescribed and renamed.

Significant recent papers on the genus and the taxonomy include those listed by Hoser (2014) and sources cited therein and they are not relisted herein.

The paper of Hoser (2014) effectively resolved the taxonomy and nomenclature of known extant species and subspecies of Death Adders, including those forms described by Hoser (1998, 2002 and 2014) as well as those of Wells and Wellington (1985) and this paper makes no alteration to that. That paper (Hoser 2014) should be read before proceeding with this paper.

However there are matters relevant to the taxonomy and nomenclature of the group not covered in that paper that are dealt with herein.

1/ The species name *Acanthophis groenveldi* Hoser, 2002 is in fact a junior synonym for *Acanthophis ceramensis* Günther, 1863 (Günther 1863) and the latter name is the one that should be used. It is most important that the correct nomenclature is used and not who is the "name authority". Unlike members of a group of thieves known as the Wüster gang (see Hoser 2012a, 2012b, 2013, 2015a-f and sources cited therein), I will not break the rules of the *International Code of Zoological Nomenclature* (Codes 2-4 as cited and referenced herein) to impose my name authority over a rightful one for personal self-gratification.

I also note herein that the spellings for the species *Acanthophis cummingi* Hoser, 1998 and *Acanthophis wellsei* as first proposed by Hoser in 1998 are correct and intentional name formations. They should not be amended in any way by any author unless absolutely mandatory under provisions of the relevant zoological code.

The two names were formed intentionally and to factor in relevant issues such as to avoid potential formation of non-homonym names.

The name *cummingi* is in honour of a female person (Fia Cumming), but her courageous actions in exposing corruption in the NSW, Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) took what in Australian slang was "balls" to do this, a male-type attribute. With this in mind the suffix to the name was masculinised.

For the species name *wellsei*, in honour of Richard Wells, the choice of the strict form "*wellsi*" was considered, but rejected on the basis most people would say it as "wellsey" and so a spelling broadly equating that was chosen.

In any event, I hereby act as "first reviser" as per the *International Code of Zoological Nomenclature* (Ride *et al.* 1999), and affirm the correct spellings of those names.

Beyond these statements, nothing further needs to be done within this paper in terms of these issues.

2/ Wells (2002), proposed a division of the genus *Acanthophis* along obvious morphological lines, this being the removal of the *Acanthophis pyrrhus* group and placement within a new genus he erected called *Aggressiserpens* Wells, 2002. Based on the deep phylogenetic divergence of the group from the other *Acanthophis*, the judgement of Wells has merit. However it is my considered opinion that the relevant group would be better treated as a subgenus and so this is the case herein.

This conservative judgement is made noting that to date there has been no comprehensive molecular phylogeny of *Acanthophis* as widely recognized with a comparison to other elapid genera and subgenera in order to best ascertain whether or not *Aggressiserpens* should be treated as a subgenus or full genus.

This is the same position and contention made in Hoser (2014), at page 24, where I further note that at one point in the discussion a typographical error led to *Aggressiserpens* being identified as a subspecies and not a subgenus, although elsewhere in the paper, the correct status of the name was given.

Within the ambit of a subgeneric break-up of *Acanthophis* as presently recognized, the third major lineage of Death Adders, this being the New Guinea / Indonesian group with smooth scales and reduced ventral count need also to be placed within their own subgenus and so this is done within this paper.

3/ On the evening of Friday 28 August 2015 (East Australian time), social media was hit with a SPAM attack in the form of wide cross-posting of a PRINO (peer reviewed in name only) *Zootaxa* paper by a group known as the Wüster gang. Their online paper alleged that the taxon name *Acanthophis lancasteri* Wells and Wellington, 1985 for the Kimberley Death Adder was a *nomen nudum* and therefore not available. The paper redescribed the same species as *Acanthophis cryptamydros* Maddock *et al.*, 2015.

Herein I argue that Maddock *et al.* are incorrect and that the authors have engaged in an illegal and creative interpretation of the rules of the *International Code of Zoological Nomenclature* (Ride *et al.* 1999) in order to market their junior synonym.

This recent publication and relevant issues are discussed after the formal description of the subgenus *Platyelapid subgen. nov.* for the smooth-scaled New Guinea Death Adders.

#### SUBGENUS PLATYELAPID SUBGEN. NOV.

**Type species:** *Acanthophis laevis* Macleay, 1877.

**Diagnosis:** The genus *Acanthophis* Daudin, 1803 are readily separated from all other elapid snakes by the fact that the tail ends in a soft terminal spine used for the purpose of caudal luring.

The subgenus *Platyelapid subgen. nov.* are readily separated from all other *Acanthophis* by the following suite of characters: Generally smooth scalation, including on the head and neck (except for some island forms which have some rugosity around the head and neck), either an absence of markings on the labials, or if present, only as spots, blotches or peppering, or alternatively the labials are mainly black; ventrals are dark at the front (near black) and light (near white) at the rear giving a distinct banded appearance, versus immaculate, peppered or only slightly (indistinctly banded in appearance) in the other two subgenera.

Most if not all *Platyelapid subgen. nov.* have a prominently raised supraciliary scale, but this trait is also seen to a lesser degree in other subgenera. While a low subcaudal count (below 115) appears to be the main character state for *Platyelapid subgen. nov.* species this is not always so.

**Distribution:** Most of island New Guinea and Islands to the west of there to Ceram and Obi, but not including the Halmahera Island complex.

**Content:** *Acanthophis (Platyelapid) laevis* Macleay, 1877 (type for the subgenus); *A. (Platyelapid) barnetti* Hoser, 1998; *A. (Platyelapid) ceramensis* Günther, 1863; *A. (Platyelapid) crotalusei* Hoser 1998; *A. (Platyelapid) macgregori* Hoser, 2002; *A. (Platyelapid) yuwoni* Hoser, 2002.

#### ACANTHOPHIS LANCASTERI WELLS AND WELLINGTON, 1985 GETS HIT WITH A DOSE OF CRYPTO!

"Crypto" is shorthand or slang among reptile keepers for the *Cryptosporidium*, a genus of protozoans that cause gastrointestinal disease and often death in snakes.

Hence the poetic license in the statement "*Acanthophis lancasteri* Wells and Wellington, 1985 gets hit with a dose of Crypto!" in view of the fact that the species name "*Acanthophis lancasteri*" has been attacked and perhaps fatally so.

That is at least the hope of the proponents of the new name.

Coincidentally the newly proposed name to replace *Acanthophis lancasteri* Wells and Wellington, 1985 is "*Acanthophis cryptamydros* Maddock *et al.* 2015".

Hence the "Crypto" line.

The sequence of events relating to the taxon, *Acanthophis lancasteri*, better known as the species of Death Adder from the Kimberley Ranges of north-west Western Australia can be summarised by the following dateline.

1985 - Wells and Wellington published the name for the species taxon in *Australian Journal of Herpetology* via what appeared to be a fairly standard, albeit brief species description.

1987 - Richard Shine as "The President, Australian Society of Herpetologists" attempted to suppress the entire contents of the relevant journal by a petition to the International Commission of Zoological Nomenclature or ICZN.

1991 - The ICZN rejected the petition by Shine and over a hundred other supporters and ruled in favour of the Wells and Wellington journal stating that the names were nomenclaturally available.

1998 - Hoser published a genus-wide revision of the Death

Adders (*Acanthophis*) and used the name *Acanthophis lancasteri* Wells and Wellington, 1985 for the relevant taxon. 1999 - Without giving a proper reason, Ken Aplin (Aplin 1999) and Aplin and Donnellan (1999) stated that *Acanthophis lancasteri* Wells and Wellington, 1985 was a *nomen nudum* and therefore not available to be used for the relevant taxon. This he repeated, but at no stage explained his position.

2001 - ICZN again ruled in favour of the Wells and Wellington journals following a second suppression attempt by Robert Sprackland, Pete Strimple and Hobart Smith.

2002 - Shea repeated the *nomen nudum* claim in an email and this was published by Hoser (2002), who while publishing the comments in a further revision of *Acanthophis*, did not take a definitive position one way or other and chose not to rename the relevant taxon (or others similarly alleged to be *nomen nudum*).

2012 - Wüster and associates circulated a petition globally (Kaiser 2012, Kaiser *et al.* 2012) seeking that herpetologists ignore the rules of the *International Code of Zoological Nomenclature* and rename taxa properly named by Hoser and Wells. This claim has been amended in 2013 (Kaiser 2013), Kaiser *et al.* 2013) and again in 2014 (Kaiser 2014a, 2014b) and most recently in 2015 (Rhodin *et al.* 2015), as detailed by Hoser (2015).

2013 - Following the urging of Wüster and associates, their friends start renaming dozens of taxa properly named by Hoser and Wells and Wellington in breach of the rules of the *International Code of Zoological Nomenclature*, usually merely citing the Kaiser *et al.* (2013) "point of view" as a veto to enable them to step outside the rules (e.g. Schleich 2014, who after recognizing *Leiopython hoseræ* Hoser, 2014 as valid for some six years chose to rename it *L. meridionalis* Schleich, 2014) in one of the most blatant attempts to steal name authority in all the history of Zoology.

2014 - Hoser published an updated revision of *Acanthophis*, naming new taxa, but following cross referencing the Wells and Wellington description/s of 1985 with the relevant parts and definitions in the *International Code of Zoological Nomenclature* (as also done in this paper), this time took the position that *Acanthophis lancasteri* Wells and Wellington, 1985 was not a *nomen nudum* according to any of editions 2-4 of the *International Code of Zoological Nomenclature* (cited herein).

2015 - On the evening of 28 August, Wolfgang Wüster and co-authors launched an internet blitz promoting their new paper in PRINO (peer reviewed in name only) *Journal Zootaxa* that alleged (without proper explanation) that *Acanthophis lancasteri* Wells and Wellington, 1985 was *nomen nudum* and that they had renamed the same taxon as *Acanthophis cryptamydros* Maddock *et al.* 2015.

While the preceding timeline sets out the sequence of events relevant to the naming and use of the taxon name *Acanthophis lancasteri*, and the associated issue of Wüster and associates seeking to steal name authority for other people's taxa, the only relevant issue in terms of *Acanthophis lancasteri* is whether or not the Wells and Wellington description of 1985 is valid according to the rules of the *International Code of Zoological Nomenclature*.

The paper Maddock *et al.* (2015) in summary remanufactured well known information about *Acanthophis* as "new" research with the simple objective of renaming *A. lancasteri*.

The relevant passage in their paper read as follows:

"The consistent differences between the Kimberley death adders and all other *Acanthophis* across three independent genetic loci, morphology, and color pattern lead us to conclude that these populations represent a separate species from all other Australian *Acanthophis*. Since the only existing name applicable to this taxon, *Acanthophis lancasteri* Wells and Wellington, 1985, is a *nomen nudum* (Aplin and Donnellan 1999), we describe it as a new species below, diagnosing it from its congeners and all other currently recognized Australian

*Acanthophis* species."

This leads one directly to the paper of Aplin and Donnellan (1999), which clearly most readers of Maddock *et al.* (2015) would not do, but I in fact did.

The relevant passage in Aplin and Donnellan (1999) read as follows:

"The nomenclature of *Acanthophis* has been impacted by two works published by 'amateur' herpetologists in unrefereed contexts. Wells and Wellington (1985) proposed four additional species of *Acanthophis* in their essentially self-published "Classification of the Amphibia and Reptilia of Australia". Three of these proposed taxa (*armstrongi*, *lancasteri*, *schistos*) were based solely on Storr's (1981) figures and descriptions of each of the three Western Australian populations; these are *nomina nuda* because they do not include or point to previously published differential diagnoses. The fourth Wells and Wellington name, *A. hawkei*, proposed for the 'Barkly Adder', minimally satisfies the conditions for 'availability' as set out by the *International Code of Zoological Nomenclature* (1985). However, the taxon has not been adequately diagnosed and for the present is best treated as a junior synonym of *A. antarcticus*."

The relevant statement herein is:

"these are *nomina nuda* because they do not include or point to previously published differential diagnoses."

This brings us to the "*International Code of Zoological Nomenclature* (1985)" as cited by Aplin for an explanation, which I might add is highly unlikely to be consulted by a casual reader of Maddock *et al.* (2015).

The terms *nomen nudum*, or the plural *nomina nuda* are defined in the relevant codes, and in the current, fourth edition the following is written:

"The provisions of this Code supersede those of the previous editions with effect from 1 January 2000 ...

*nomen nudum* (pl. *nomina nuda*), n.

A Latin term referring to a name that, if published before 1931, fails to conform to Article 12; or, if published after 1930, fails to conform to Article 13. A *nomen nudum* is not an available name, and therefore the same name may be made available later for the same or a different concept; in such a case it would take authorship and date [Arts. 50, 21] from that act of establishment, not from any earlier publication as a *nomen nudum*."

The preceding leads us to Article 13 of the Code, and here the audit becomes more interesting as there are potentially three issues of the Code to deal with.

At the time of the publication of the Wells and Wellington paper, the second edition of the code was in force. The third edition carried a publication date of February 1985, but it was not actually printed until 1988 based on date stamps on library copies, including that posted online by the Smithsonian in the USA.

The fourth edition, published in 1999, has an explicit statement that it supersedes the rest in any event.

However Article 13 is much the same in each code.

So there can be no doubt as to what is said in each edition, I copy them in full below:

#### Code 2nd Edition 1964

"Article 13

Article 13. Names published after 1930.

(a) Names in general.

In addition to satisfying the provisions of Article 11, a name published after 1930 must either be:

(i) accompanied by a statement that purports to give characters differentiating the taxon; or

(ii) accompanied by a definite bibliographic reference to such a statement; or

(iii) proposed expressly as a replacement for a pre-existing available name.

(b) Genus-group names. A genus-group name published after 1930 must, in addition to satisfying the provisions of Section (a), be accompanied by the definite fixation of a type-species [Art. 68].”

#### Code 3rd Edition 1985 (1988)

“Article 13. Names published after 1930.

(a) Requirements.

To be available, every new scientific name published after 1930 must satisfy the provisions of Article 11, and must be:

(i) **accompanied by a description or definition that states in words characters that are purported to differentiate the taxon**, or

(ii) accompanied by a bibliographic reference to such a published statement even if contained in a work published before 1758 or that is not consistently binominal (for information excluded for reasons of anonymity after 1950 see Article 14), or

(iii) proposed expressly as a new replacement name (*nomen novum*) for an available name.

**Recommendation 13A. Comparisons.**—In describing a new nominal taxon, an author should make his intention to differentiate clear to others by giving a summary of characters that in the author’s opinion differentiate the taxon from other named taxa of the same rank as the new taxon.

(b) Genus-group names.—Every new genus-group name published after 1930 (but not a name published at any time for a collective group or an ichnotaxon [Art. 66]) must, in addition to satisfying the provisions of Section a of this Article, be accompanied by the fixation of a type species for that nominal genus-group taxon by original designation [Art. 68b] or by indication [Arts 67h, 68c-e].

(i) If the name of a genus-group taxon established before 1931 is replaced after 1930, the type species of that nominal taxon must then be designated, if that has not already been done.”

#### Code 4th Edition 1999 (2000)

“Article 13. Names published after 1930.

13.1. Requirements. To be available, every new name published after 1930 must satisfy the provisions of Article 11 and must

13.1.1. **be accompanied by a description or definition that states in words characters that are purported to differentiate the taxon**, or

13.1.2. be accompanied by a bibliographic reference to such a published statement, even if the statement is contained in a work published before 1758, or in one that is not consistently binominal, or in one that has been suppressed by the Commission (unless the Commission has ruled that the work is to be treated as not having been published [Art. 8.7]), or

13.1.3. be proposed expressly as a new replacement name (*nomen novum*) for an available name, whether required by any provision of the Code or not.

**Recommendation 13A. Intent to differentiate.** When describing a new nominal taxon, an author should make clear his or her purpose to differentiate the taxon by including with it a diagnosis, that is to say, a summary of the characters that differentiate the new nominal taxon from related or similar taxa.

**Recommendation 13B. Language.** Authors should publish diagnoses of new taxa in languages widely used internationally in zoology. The diagnoses should also be given in languages used in the regions relevant to the taxa diagnosed.”

#### ICZN Code Edition

##### Proposed New Name Requirements

##### Code 2nd Edition 1964

“accompanied by a statement that purports to give characters differentiating the taxon”

##### Code 3rd Edition 1985 (1988)

“accompanied by a description or definition that states in

words characters that are purported to differentiate the taxon”

##### Code 4th Edition 1999 (2000)

“accompanied by a description or definition that states in words characters that are purported to differentiate the taxon”

The significant part of each section, never quoted by either Aplin and Donnellan (1991) or of course Maddock *et al.* (2015), summarised in the table immediately above is the use of the word “purports” or “purported”.

The word purport is not defined in any edition of the code, but it is in most dictionaries and online as well, where on 3 September 2015 Google defined it as follows:

“appear to be or do something, especially falsely.”

In other words, even if the Wells and Wellington description for *Acanthophis lancasteri* pointed to a document that did not carry a description or diagnosis, the mere fact their description purported this, means that it is valid under any of the three relevant editions of the code.

Now just to remove any doubt at all as to the nomenclatural availability of *Acanthophis lancasteri* and that the original description did “purport” to “differentiate the taxon” (Code edition 3), I copy the description in its entirety within this paper.

Elsewhere within a separate as yet unpublished paper, Ross Wellington summed up the situation when he wrote:

“By any reasonable objective interpretation of the Code Rule in relation to the description of *Acanthophis lancasteri* Wells and Wellington 1985, it is described. The ICZN (1991) has ruled that Wells and Wellington 1984 and 1985 are publications and are available for nomenclatural purposes. The description for *Acanthophis lancasteri* does provide a Holotype WAM R70690 from a Type locality of 45 km NNE of Halls Creek, WA. Also in accordance with the above Article 13 and in contradiction to Aplin (1999); Aplin and Donnellan (1999) and by implication also Maddock, Ellis, Doughty, Smith, and Wüster (2015) who relied upon Aplin’s (and Donnellan) incorrect assertions, the description of *Acanthophis lancasteri* in fact does provide a statement that purports to show difference between the then new species and other species in the *Acanthophis* complex, it also provides further information, other references and to defined published source information in support of the purported difference statement. For example it also provides further interpolative information in the description of *Acanthophis hawkei* (same paper) as well as in the references section. The W&W description demonstrates, unequivocally the entity to which the description applies. As with any description additional information could have been provided but the description, although brief, as it stands did conform to the minimum requirements (then required) of a valid description and hence is available.”

Wells and Wellington (1999) also published a direct rebuttal to Aplin (1999) and his claims against their taxon *Acanthophis lancasteri*, but this was evidently deliberately ignored by Wüster and his gang.

In other words *Acanthophis lancasteri* is available for the taxon and is the name that must be used.

*Acanthophis cryptamydros* Maddock *et al.* 2015 is merely a junior synonym of the former and should not be used.

#### BAD MOTIVE ON THE PART OF MADDOCK AND WÜSTER.

Of course one needs evidence to assert such a thing. After all, one may assume for a moment that Maddock *et al.* published their incorrect assessment of the nomenclatural validity of *Acanthophis lancasteri* due to a human error or inadvertent failure to check the relevant parts of the *International Code of Zoological Nomenclature*.

That we know this is not the case and that they have acted at all times with improper motive comes from the mouth of Maddock himself (Proud 2015).

On the website at:

<http://www.nhm.ac.uk/our-science/science-news/2015/august/new-highly-venomous-snake-species-discovered-in-australia.html>

with a posting date of 28 August 2015, is the statement:

"A team led by a Natural History Museum scientist has discovered a new species of highly venomous Australian death adder in the Kimberley region of the country."

and

"The team, which included researchers from Bangor University and the Western Australian Museum, identified the new species while researching the genetics and ecological characteristics of snakes living in the Kimberley region."

We know these statements to be false because even back in 1985 when Wells and Wellington first formally named (discovered?) the same species, it was well known in Australia and I had also caught and kept them for some years prior to that date!

Now noting I had confirmed the existence of the species "discovered" by Wells and Wellington in 1985 in my papers in 1998, 2002 and again in 2014, (not that Wells and Wellington ever had the audacity to claim they were the ones who first discovered them), the claim by Maddock, Wüster and their gang to have discovered this species must be patently false!

So not only have Maddock *et al.* misrepresented the provisions of the *International Code of Zoological Nomenclature* to steal "name authority" for a species of snake, but then they have publicly lied about their claim to have "discovered a new species of highly venomous Australian death adder in the Kimberley region of the country".

#### HOW THEN DID THE PAPER OF MADDOCK ET AL. (2015) GET PUBLISHED?

*Zootaxa* alleges it is a "peer reviewed" scientific journal.

Hoser (2015d) and sources cited therein give numerous examples of evidence to show that *Zootaxa* has never had anything resembling a proper peer review quality control system in place.

In fact *Zootaxa* is a holotype PRINO (peer reviewed in name only) journal.

However this paper deals specifically with Maddock *et al.* (2015) and it is here I point out the obvious failings.

Had there been proper quality control, the reviewers would have followed the simple intellectual exercise I have now done several times in order to ascertain the legal availability of the name *Acanthophis lancasteri*.

With the entire substantive basis of Maddock *et al.* (2015) being to rename the taxon (the rest of the paper's text is effective padding for that), had a reviewer done the relevant exercise of cross-checking they'd have found that the name *Acanthophis lancasteri* was nomenclaturally available and rejected the Maddock *et al.* paper.

So it becomes relevant as to who actually edited and reviewed the paper at *Zootaxa*.

First we deal with the listed authors.

Maddock, until now effectively unknown in herpetology, turns out to be a recently graduated student of University lecturer Wolfgang Wüster at Bangor University, Wales, UK.

He now has a position at the Natural History Museum in London, UK.

We know all this from his website at:

<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/~ucbtjtd/Site/Simon.html>

On that webpage he states:

"Simon graduated from the University of Wales, Bangor with a Master of Zoology in 2011."

That confirms Wüster was his teacher and a close associate.

The webpage further states:

"Currently Simon is working towards his PhD, which is joint between UCL and the Natural History Museum, London

(supervisor Dr David Gower)"

Now who is David Gower?

A quick search on "Google" shows he is listed as an editor at the PRINO journal *Zootaxa*!

So there you have it!

Wüster and an ex-student conspire to steal name rights for a species and then have their paper published in a journal where a co-worker Gower, who works with Maddock is able to bypass any credible quality control.

Nowhere in the relevant Maddock *et al.* paper is this critically important conflict of interest disclosed.

Now this of course doesn't explain the role of the other listed co-authors, but this is easily ascertained.

Ryan J. Ellis works with Wüster at Bangor University and plays a key role in creating the spiffy looking graphics you see in his papers, so in gratitude, Wüster has him listed as a co-author.

The other two authors, Paul Doughty and Laurie Smith, employed at the Western Australian Museum have long been at loggerheads with Wells and Wellington, including in the failed attempt to have the relevant publication suppressed by the ICZN in the 1980's and 1990's.

Smith also described a species of python from Western Australia calling it "*Liasis stimsoni*". The problem for him was that it was a junior synonym for *Antaresia saxacola* Wells and Wellington, 1985, named some months earlier.

In order to discourage usage of the correct Wells and Wellington name, Smith and others at the Western Australian Museum actively supported the push to suppress the Wells and Wellington publications of 1984 and 1985 while simultaneously aggressively marketing his own name on the basis that the attempted suppression of Wells and Wellington's would succeed.

By the time this suppression attempt failed in 1991, Smith's name was already in widespread usage, while the Wells and Wellington one effectively unused.

After I corrected this anomaly in Hoser (2000), and expecting others to follow the logical and correct course of using the correct senior synonym, a new claim was erected to allege that the Wells and Wellington name "*saxacola*" was "*nomen nudum*", which from any cross referencing of the description with any edition of the *International Code of Zoological Nomenclature* (editions 2-4) is clearly not the case.

I also note that it is obvious that few if any lay people would have the inclination or capacity to do this, noting that in year 2000, the Code was not available online and hard copies relatively rare outside of natural history museums.

Hence it would not come as a surprise to find that these men would jump at the chance to be listed as coauthors in a paper that had them steal yet another west Australian species name from Wells and Wellington.

Plus of course they supplied the holotype for the allegedly "new" species.

#### WHY THIS IS NOT THE LAST WORD ON DEATH ADDER TAXONOMY AND NOMENCLATURE!

Wüster and his gang have access to modern molecular methods to assist in ascertaining relationships between taxa. Maddock *et al.* (2015) has used molecular data to "validate" their taxonomic conclusion that they are naming a new species (ignoring the fact that buried in the text of their paper is an oblique statement to the effect they are stealing "name authority" from Wells and Wellington.

However there are some key facts worth noting in all this.

Large charismatic vertebrates, including Death Adders do not need the services of molecular biologists to work out which species is which.

They are easily delineated by simply looking at the snakes themselves.

The same is the case for other species such as White-lipped Pythons (genus *Leiopython*), which is another group the Wüster gang have tackled with their taxonomic vandalism and nomenclatural misconduct along with selective use and non-use of molecular data (see Hoser 2009).

In the molecular results published by Maddock *et al.*, the authors have conveniently omitted to show any molecular data that validated taxa named by myself, even though they had such material available. This included specimen data for either described subspecies of *Acanthophis wellsei*, namely *A. wellsei hoserae* Hoser, 2014 and *A. wellsei donnellani* Hoser, 2002, or the northern New Guinea taxa, *Acanthophis barnetti* Hoser, 1998 and *A. crotalusei* Hoser, 1998.

Of course there has been published molecular data for species groups with parallel distributions to these taxa and all have validated the obvious species divisions.

Wüster of course has been playing mental gymnastics for years to avoid having to recognize any taxa formally named by myself and this involves some ridiculous propositions, including that *A. barnetti* and *A. crotalusei* are merely variants of *A. laevis*. As of 3 September 2015, on Peter Uetz's "The Reptile Database" which Wüster effectively controls in materially relevant ways, one sees for the entry for "*Acanthophis wellsi* Hoser, 1998" (sic), the following text: "Synonymy: Not listed by COGGER 2000. The name was emended to *wellsi* as the species was described in honor of Richard Wells. *Acanthophis wellsi donnellani* HOSER 2002 may be a synonym of *A. wellsi* (WÜSTER, pers. comm. 15 Dec 2010)."

Of course material Wüster and co-authors themselves had on hand that they should have published in Maddock *et al.* could have easily refuted his bogus claim that "*Acanthophis wellsi donnellani* HOSER 2002 may be a synonym of *A. wellsi*".

It is also worth mentioning that Cogger (2014) did in fact recognize *A. wellsei* (spelt properly I might add) a fact Wüster and sidekick Uetz have conveniently chosen to ignore.

Significant however is that without so much as a statement that he had been lying about *Acanthophis wellsei* and its alleged synonymy with *A. pyrrhus* Boulenger, 1898 for the previous 17 years, the coauthor Wüster accepts and uses the name "*A. wellsi*" (sic) for a taxon he (now) regards as valid in Maddock *et al.* (2015).

There is also the issue of the molecular data Maddock *et al.* present for *A. wellsei* in their paper on page 306. Data from snakes from three different locations is shown, implying all are the same species and with minimal divergence between the samples.

The number of course matches the three forms I have described (in 1998, 2002 and 2014).

What is not readily disclosed and only becomes clear when the named localities are plotted against a map is that all come from the main range of the nominate subspecies of *A. wellsei* and that none of the samples include the more recently described subspecies.

Wüster assisted his mate Wulf Schleip in 2008 when he published his paper on *Leiopython* which produced molecular evidence to confirm the obvious fact that those from south of the New Guinea central range were a different species to those from the north.

(Significant that time was that they did not publish molecular data they had obtained showing all the brown *Leiopython* from north of the central range were one and the same species, with Schleip claiming in the paper and ever since to have "discovered" several new species).

Noting that the barrier affecting those snakes is the same as for Death Adders, even before one inspects the very different snakes from north and south of the range, it is clear that the *Acanthophis* from each side are different species.

Rather than producing material and data that they had available to them, that confirms the validity of the species *Acanthophis barnetti* Hoser, 1998, and using the correct nomenclature, Maddock *et al.* chose to withhold such information.

However it was posted on Facebook in the week following the publication of Maddock *et al.*, that the same authors were plotting ways they could try to steal name authority for that taxon as well.

Hence we know that Maddock *et al.* is not the last word from the Wüster gang on Death Adder taxonomy.

#### DEALING WITH THE CRYPTO INFECTION!

Within hours of Wüster and his gang posting and promoting links to his co-authored paper on "Facebook" on Friday 28 August 2015 (east Australian time), Wells had published an extensive rebuttal of the claims in the 2015 paper on Facebook which was read and answered by both Maddock and Wüster.

They ignored this and continued to peddle their new name and paper, as if it were the unimpeachable gospel.

However the reach of Wüster and his gang in peddling their lies and falsehoods was best demonstrated when less than six days later in the morning of 3 September 2015 (east Australian time), I did a "Google" search for *Acanthophis cryptamydros*.

It showed that the group had cross-posted their new name on no less than 3,530 different websites to cement the perception that theirs was the only correct name for the taxon and that they had discovered the species themselves.

By contrast the valid name (*lancasteri*) was shown on only half that number of webpages, even though it had been around for 30 years!

This is perhaps the most stark example of extremist taxonomic vandalism and nomenclatural misconduct and the power of reach by those who engage in these activities, seen to date in the age of internet and rapid dissemination of information, both incorrect and correct.

It shows how by use of social media including via the dark art of Search Engine Optimisation (SEO), hijacking sites like Wikipedia (also attacked by Wüster's gang within hours of their paper coming out) altered to reflect their warped dreams of total hegemony in terms of reptile taxonomy and nomenclature, the group can and does dupe people into believing that their illegal minority view is in fact correct and consensus in methods accurately detailed by Dubois (2015).

Contrary to various claims made, I have no vested interest in Wells, Wellington or their taxonomy and nomenclature.

My only concerns are with the science and the rules of engagement, these being published in the *International Code of Zoological Nomenclature*.

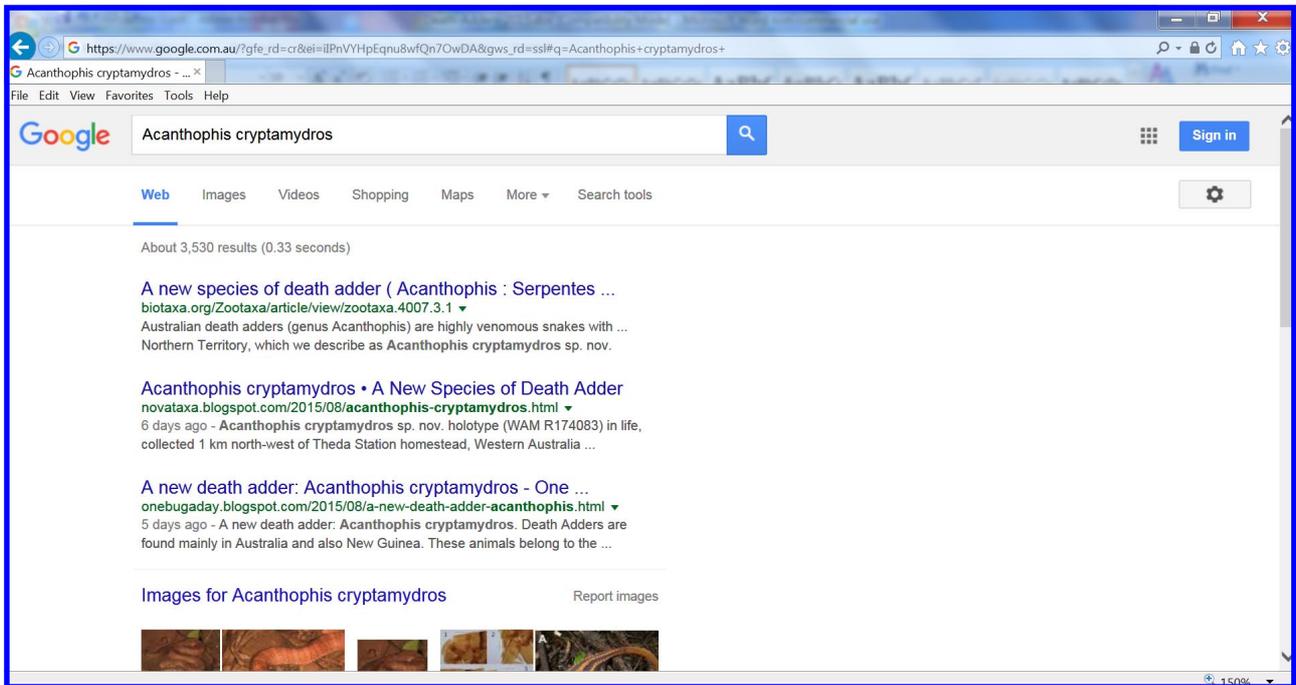
If and when Wells and Wellington get things right, I support them. If they get it wrong I condemn them, or I don't agree with them, I deal with that appropriately.

While it is easy to identify defects in the description *Acanthophis lancasteri*, (my view is it is lousy), the fact remains it complied with the rules of the Code and also was typical of others of the time (1980's and earlier), and in fairness to the authors should be viewed in that context.

As seen many times past, Wüster and his gang have more time and internet savvy than their opponents.

They have hijacked control of key internet properties such as "Wikipedia" and "The Reptile Database" to peddle their distorted world views. In the offline world, their group has hijacked editorial influence in several formerly well-regarded scientific journals in order to bypass proper peer review to get their material published as fast as they write it.

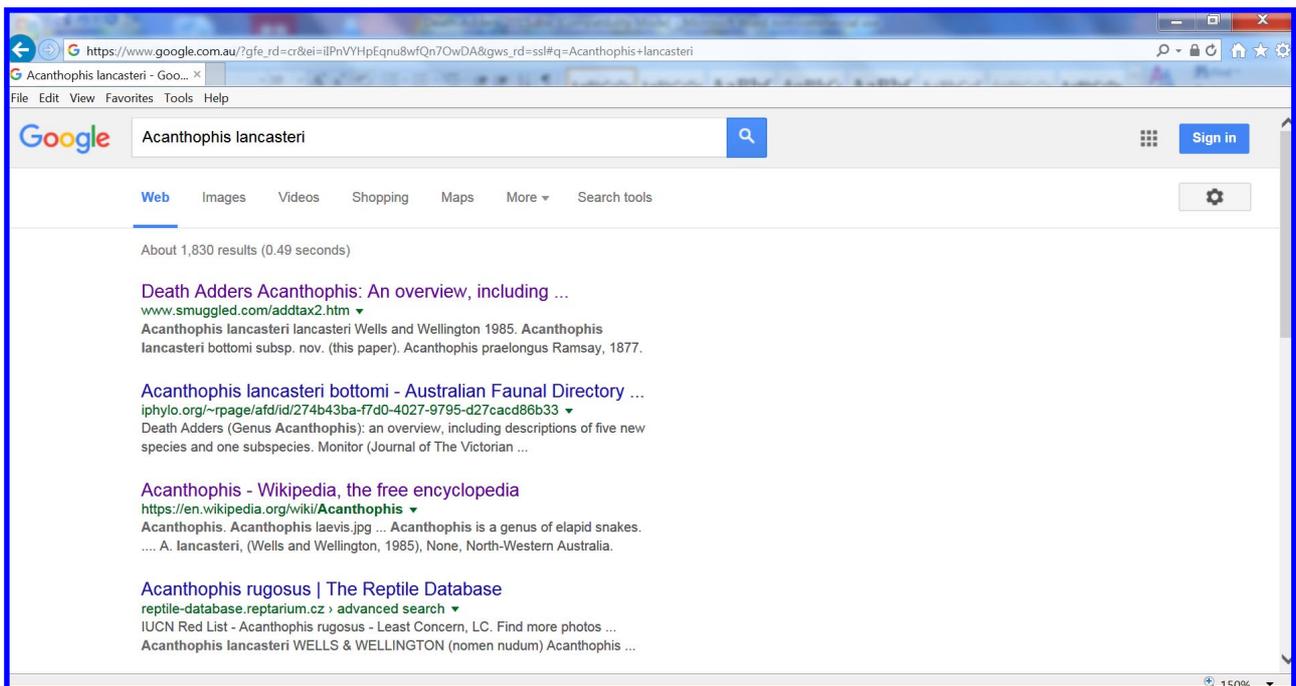
As seen by the many examples published in Hoser (2012a, 2012b, 2013, 2015a-f) and sources cited therein, Wüster and his gang of thieves will not voluntarily stop their attack on the rules of the *International code of Zoological Nomenclature* in order to



**Never letting the truth get in the way of their lie ...**

Within days, Wolfgang Wüster and his band of thieves had plastered their illegal name *Acanthophis cryptamydros* all over the internet to swamp the correct name *Acanthophis lancesteri*. This was in order to convince the world that they had indeed discovered a new species and that their name was the correct one. This is seen by the number of online uses via a Google search on 3 September 2015.

Hoser 2016 - Australasian Journal of Herpetology 31:3-11.



steal name authority for names from authors everywhere. Perhaps the best to make this potentially happen is via a strongly worded ruling by the ICZN against nomenclatural misconduct by the Wüster gang or like-minded individuals.

Victims of the gang include myself, who have been falsely accused of stealing the work of others (only they have done that) and this problem, real or perceived needs to be dealt with.

In fact the actions of the Wüster gang and like-minded individuals has created a ridiculous situation whereby scientists are wasting an inordinate amount of time arguing over name authority for taxa that was properly named long ago, while thieves try to creatively interpret the rules and steal yet more validly named taxon "name authority" from others. This is all happening when scientists should be more properly dealing with the science of taxonomy and describing biodiversity before it is killed off by the human population explosion.

However the problem of name authority disputes can in fact be easily solved via a revamped system of establishing availability of names in Zoological Nomenclature.

New names could be registered in a similar manner to that used worldwide for trademark registration.

Via an automated online system, new names could be submitted (at the time the scientist first seeks to potentially name taxa) with a time limit imposed to publish a paper formally describing the taxon or taxa and satisfy the relevant code requirements (the code currently recommends a year and that could be made mandatory). The publication is then also submitted and checked for form by an examiner against the rules of the Code as is done for trademarks.

They check against a trademarks registration manual.

In line with the current rules, the ICZN would restrict its ambit to nomenclature and not taxonomy.

A fee could be imposed to cover the costs of the system, with fee waiver provisions for those unable to pay.

In fact the ICZN could even run the system at a profit to cover the ongoing administration costs of the entity.

As with trademark registrations, there could be an "opposition" period, whereby people opposing registration could lodge objections (subject to the rules) and argue their cases, with the ICZN making a decision one way or other and before the name even becomes "legal".

As with trademarks, the names can be used pending registration or non-registration, with registration back-dated to application or other specified date after registration takes place.

In line with trademarks, non registration of a name would mean it could not be used as intended.

All this would limit the ongoing instability created by the use or non-use of names some people assert are not code-compliant and would have prevented or resolved such issues like the validity of *Acanthophis lancasteri*, at the time it was proposed and not 30 years later and with the full-blown intervention of the ICZN commissioners themselves.

If necessary a limit system could be used to prevent persons or groups monopolizing taxa, making ambit claims or in any way unfairly preventing others from using the system.

Such a system would accurately identify who first publicly identified themselves as working on given taxa, thereby enabling accusations of theft of work or ideas to be easily checked and refuted or accepted.

A system of name registration similar to that employed by trademarks offices worldwide, including those nations signatory to the Madrid protocol would not only significantly improve the nomenclature system for new names of taxa, but also reduce the unnecessary dispute resolving workload of scientists and ICZN Commissioners alike.

In fact, the ICZN would no longer have to regularly deal with cases of thieves trying to steal the work of others as has become common in recent years due to the actions of Wüster

and his gang of thieves. Then the ICZN commissioners themselves could spend more time dealing with their real passion, that being taxonomy!

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#### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author has no relevant conflicts of interest.

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