



## GIANTS AND MIDGETS

### SCRUB PYTHON

My personal introduction to Australia's largest snake species was as painful as it was exciting. One morning in 1972, a friend and I came across nine scrub pythons in Tully Gorge in north Queensland. The first one I picked up bit me on the back of my hand. The large head of a 16-foot python armed with rows of sharp teeth remained firmly attached to my bleeding hand until my friend and I managed to unhook its curved teeth. My hand later swelled up to the size of a boxing glove – an unforgettable experience!

The maximum size of this giant species, nonchalantly known simply as the scrub python, has always been the subject of controversy. Some north Queenslanders claim that individuals over 6 or even 7 metres exist in remote parts of the north's dense rainforests, but a specimen of such a size has never been officially recorded. In the early 1950s, Eric Worrell provided a second-hand account of an 8.5 metre individual killed in Cairns, but this record cannot be verified. A specimen caught at Palm Cove in 1999 measuring 5.65 metres and weighing 20 kilograms is the largest reliable measurement to date.