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CHANGES OF ADDRESS

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JOTTINGS FROM COBRA CORNER

Dear Member,

The start of a new year sees a change in the Journal, which now comes into line with many other herpetological bulletins with a reduction in size from fooscap to quarto.

This quarter has seen a big increase in the number of American Associate Members, following a report on the H.A.R. in the Philadelphia Herpetological Society Bulletin.

I have included a rather detailed account of a short collecting trip to Kariba Lake in order to give some idea of the conditions a herpetologist may expect to find there. Anyone possessing his own boat would be able to make a marvellous haul by cruising round the tops of submerged trees and gathering the marooned herptiles.

As I gained a lot of interesting data on the Rhodesian Plated Lizards I have compiled an article on this interesting group, our largest lizards with the exception of the two varanids.

I am afraid I must appeal once more for subscriptions for 1959-60 due at the beginning of last month - £1 for full members, 10/- for associates.

Good Hunting,

Donald G. Broadley

Hon. Secretary/ Treasurer,
Herpetological Association of Rhodesia.

Hon. Keeper of Herpetology,
National Museums of Southern Rhodesia.

P.O. Bembesi, Southern Rhodesia.

FURTHER AMENDMENTS TO THE CHECKLIST OF THE SNAKES OF SOUTHERN RHODESIA. By D.G. Broadley, May, 1959.

Leptotyphlops longicauda Largest 234 (212-22) mm. from Kariba Lake.

Lycodonomorphus rufulus mlanjensis
Largest: 700 (575-125) from Nyamaropa.

Meizodon semiornata semiornata (Peters) Semiornate Snake,
Midbody scale rows 21; ventrals 177-187; subcaudals 74-80.
Largest: 465 (357-108) mm. from Kariba Lake.

Thelotornis kirtlandii oatesii
Largest: 1535 (975-560) from Kariba Lake.

Psammophis subtaeniatus subtaeniatus
Largest: 1229 (805-424) mm. from Kariba Lake.

Aparallactus lunulatus lunulatus
Largest: 462 (372-90) mm. from Banket.

KARIBA LAKE - APRIL, 1959....By D.G.Broadley.

On Good Friday, 27th March, I left Bembesi for a short collecting trip to Kariba. I called on Dave Rider at Darwendale. He had recently taken Duberria lutrix rhodesiana there, thus extending the range of this Slug-eater 30 miles further to the west.

On the 28th I reached Sinoia, where I spent three days with Terry Crow. My main objective in the Sinoia area was topotypes of Latastia kidwelli (a synonym of L. johnstoni). Boulenger described this Long-tailed Sand-lizard from Eldorado, 5 miles east of Sinoia, in 1919. This is the only record of the genus south of the Zambezi. We investigated the Eldorado Mine, but drew a blank; a Mozambique Rough-scaled Sand-lizard, shot by Terry, being the only lacertid seen. We also collected along the Hunyani River, where we caught a fine Philothamnus i. irregularis and also encountered Naja nigricollis mossambica. A Vine-Snake (Thelotornis k. oatesii) was found dead. Among the lizards Mabuya g. margaritifer was plentiful, and we also collected Agama kirkii fitzsimonsi, but there was no sign of the equally rupicolous Flat-lizards (Platysaurus). One crevice contained a colony of "House" geckos (Hemidactylus mabouia). Amphibians collected were Fana f. angolensis and Phrynobatrachus natalensis, which we also got at Sinoia Caves. A solitary Phrynobatrachus u. mababiensis was taken on the Hunyani.

On 31st March I arrived at Kariba, where I stayed at the Game Department Camp, sleeping in my Volkswagen Van. Within an hour of my arrival I had two remarkable finds on a small rock outcrop at the edge of the camp. I had seen three of the usual rupicolous lizards - Agama k. fitzsimonsi, Mabuya g. margaritifer and Gerrhosaurus v. validus, when I suddenly spotted in a crevice a specimen of Mabuya damarana, an elegant little bronze skink which I had previously taken only on the Changadzi and Devuli Rivers, over 300 miles to the south-east! I stalked the skink and got a perfect specimen with a noose of fishing line. Then I examined the same fissure further along its length and received a second surprise in the form of a large gecko which I had never seen before! I noosed it and soon got a second. These geckos proved to be Pachydactylus tettensis, described by Loveridge in 1953 from Tete, 350 miles further down the Zambezi. The species was known from only two specimens, the holotype from Tete and a paratype from Lungsole River, S.E.Tanganyika. It differs from all other species of Pachydactylus (except tuberculosis of East Africa) in the preanal pores possessed by the males. I found these geckos to be quite plentiful on small rock outcrops round the Game Camp, but they were very shy of the noose and more difficult to catch than Pachydactylus bibronii, which usually prefers narrower crevices than tettensis.

The next day I worked over the mica-strewn hillsides west of the camp, the undergrowth was very dense and all I got was an Agama hispida armata and a Gerrhosaurus v. validus. The only snake seen was a Stripe-bellied Sand-Snake (Psammophis s. subtaeniatus).

On the morning of 2nd April, Rex Bean, who was in charge of the Game Camp, took me out in his boat and dropped me on Sanyati Island, formerly a large island at the Sanyati-Zambezi confluence, but now reduced to a rocky islet about 80 yards by 40. The place was alive with Water Leguans (Varanus niloticus); from the top of a small rocky hill I looked down on a glade, where two big fellows of 5 or 6 feet prowled stealthily around with flickering tongues, like something left over from the age of dinosaurs. There were probably 20 Varanus on that islet, often several entered the water at once when disturbed.

There were a number of Pachydactylus tettensis among the fissured rocks and as they were doomed I set out to collect the whole colony. They were too wary to noose, so I had to use my .22 revolver with great care at extreme range, in order to hit the geckos with the minimum amount of dust shot required to kill. I got eight geckos and also a series of Mabuya g. margaritifera.

As I approached one end of the island I was just in time to see the blackish tail of a mamba vanish between the rocks. By the time I had followed it up the mamba was several feet up the trunk of a huge tree and I was too late to grab its tail. Sanyati Island was notorious for its mambas, but most of them were probably high up in the many dense trees growing on the islet.

At noon Rex picked me up and dropped me again on a small flat Mopani island. I saw half a dozen Stripe-bellied Sand Snakes and caught one after following it into waist-deep water. Under an overhanging rock I discovered a three-foot puffadder (Bitis a. arietans), which was bagged not without protest! A more interesting find was two Leptotyphlops longicauda found under a log, the larger being a new record for S. Rhodesia, measuring 234 (212-22) mm.

I shot a couple of Gerrhosaurus f. flavigularis, which was plentiful; I also saw a Gerrhosaurus n. nigrolineatus. Sand-lizards were conspicuous by their absence, in fact I failed to get a single lacertid at Kariba.

Tortoises were plentiful in rock crevices close to the waters edge, where they sheltered after swimming ashore. Altogether I collected 14 Kinyxs b. belliana and 4 Testudo pardalis babcocki on the various islands I visited. Most of these I released on the mainland. Rex picked up a large Leopard Tortoise swimming in open water miles from land.

When Rex picked me up he suggested a quick look at a rocky islet nearby. As I landed a 4 foot Spitting Cobra (Naja nigricollis mossambica) glided away, but I siezed it by the tail as it went down a hole and soon bagged it. As I put the bag in the boat I disturbed a Psammophis s. subtaeniatus, which took to the water and climbed a bush at the waters edge. Having lost sight of it we shook the bush and to my surprise a Vine Snake (Thelotornis k. oatesii) appeared a few feet from me. It was soon noosed, followed by the Sand-Snake. As we left the islet a mamba, resting on a branch at water level, raised its head, but as Rex turned the boat for me to noose it the snake dived and vanished among the submerged trees.

On the 3rd I landed on a medium sized island, very flat Mopani with occasional low rock outcrops. I got a series of Gerrhosaurus

v. validus and then I peered under a rock and recognised the yellow-spotted black tail of my first G. major grandis, which I managed to pull out after a struggle and at the cost of much of the skin on my knuckles; I later shot another as it swam across an inlet, this proved to be a record specimen.

I shot a couple of Psammophis s. subtaeniatus, one snake having the upper labials, chin and throat bright vermillion, a colour variant I had not come across before. Then as I stalked a frog there was a swirl in the shallow water, giving me a glimpse of a thick black body, then the head of a six foot Egyptian Cobra (Naja h. haje) appeared above the surface a few yards away. I entered the water with a noose, but every time I got within range the cobra dived and then raised its head further away. It finally swam under a bush in 4 feet of water and I managed to get the noose over its head, but as I tightened the noose the cobra drew back slightly and the rope slid off the snakes snout. The cobra was now really disturbed and headed off for deep water. I saw the head of a large Bush Snake (Philothamnus s. semivariegatus) peering out of a hollow Mopani tree, but it withdrew when approached and could not be reached.

I caught half-grown Tree Leguans (Varanus e. albigularis), one in a hollow tree, the other as it searched for cover on the ground. The only amphibians encountered were Sharp-snouted Frogs (Rana o. oxyrhynchus), a common species in dry country, and numerous juvenile Leopard Toads (Bufo i. regularis) found under stones at the waters edge.

The following day Rex dropped me on a recently formed island two miles west of the Game Camp which was separated from the mainland by a narrow channel a foot deep. I got three more Tete Geckos and this was the only place apart from the Game Camp where I got Mabuya damarana. I also collected Lygodactylus angolensis and Mabuya v. varia.

Rex had seen a couple of mambas here previously, but I only saw the tail of one vanishing into a jumble of rocks. I spent an interesting five minutes stalking a huge Psammophis s. subtaeniatus, resisting the temptation to play safe and make sure of it with a round of dust shot. Eventually it glided between two rocks and I was able to close in unobserved and seize it. It is a new Rhodesian record, just over 4 feet in length.

On Sunday Rex had to take provisions to the main Game Department party, who were engaged on game rescue operations 70 miles up the Lake. I spent the day cataloguing the Game Dept. reptile collection. The most interesting find was a Meizodon s. semiornata, only the second specimen from S. Rhodesia. I also examined another record specimen in the form of a magnificent Thelotornis k. oatesi.

On Monday I was accompanied by Mary Paterson, who was collecting birds and mammals for the National Museum. We landed on a large Mopani island which proved to be the least profitable I had been on. I shot a Sand-Snake and saw only one other snake all day, a half-grown python swimming in deep water.

I caught two more Gerrhosaurus m. grandis as a section of the island went under water and collected a couple of Pachydactylus p. punctatus under logs.

When Rex arrived at 4 o'clock to pick us up he spotted a Thelotornis in a tree at the waters edge and I eventually managed to

noose it. We then spent an hour cruising round isolated trees which had only their topmost branches above water. This yielded two more Stripe-bellied Sand-Snakes, one of which was 4 feet in length and lacked the usual light dorso-lateral stripes. Then came the great moment, coiled loosely in the top of almost submerged tree was a fine 4½ foot Brown Beaked-Snake (Rhamphiophis o. rostratus). When I tried to noose him he took to the water, swam a little way and then paused to watch us with head raised six inches out of the water and neck quite vertical, giving the appearance of a periscope! This was a perfect pose for me to use the noose and he was soon safely bagged. This beautiful snake measures a little over 1300 mm. in total length and is the largest yet recorded from S. Rhodesia. Two more Vine Snakes were next on the list and as we crept up to the second one Rex spotted a little Bark Snake (Hemirhagerrhis n. nototaenia) on a Mopani twig just beside me, this was another species I had not taken before.

The following day we tried another large island, very rocky at one end, but falling away to Mopani bush at the other. Soon after landing I spotted a huge Varanus e. albigularis about 5½ feet in length, but he got down a hole behind a rock before I could reach him. Although I could get a good grip of his tail I was unable to dislodge him, I did catch a small specimen later. Chattering Mopani squirrels failed to reveal any predator, but Mary later saw a fair sized python in the same rocky area. The only snakes I saw were a couple of the ubiquitous Sand-Snakes and a big Naja h. haje which was swimming strongly and heading for deep water.

Lizards were very scarce and I actually used mor ammunition on mammals, obtaining a Dwarf Mongoose, a Mopani Squirrel and an Elephant Shrew for the Museum collection.

Another spell of cruising round the treetops was less profitable than before, the only captures being another Thelotornis and a 7 foot Python sebae coiled in the fork of a big tree just off Sanyati Island.

On the 8th April I went out on a stocking trip up the flooded valley of the Sanyati with the Kariba Fisheries Officer, Rex Adams. We returned in the afternoon, picked up Mary Paterson, and set out on a trip to the Sibilabila Narrows, about 60 miles up the Lake. The hundreds of square miles of Mopani bush will be very interesting when the trees are almost submerged, for many reptiles and small mammals shelter in the numerous hollow Mopani trees. I examined the nearer trees with binoculars, but the only reptiles seen were a Thelotornis and a couple of small Varanus niloticus. We anchored for the night in the middle of the Lake and at sunset were attacked by massed squadrons of mosquitos!

At dawn we pressed on to the Sibilabila Narrows, where Rex gave me the dinghy to explore a couple of small islands. As I neared the shore, I heard a rustle in the grass and turned to see an enormous black Egyptian Cobra enter the water, then swim along the shore. It had to climb over a log and I then realised that it was about eight feet in length. I lost no time in landing and following it up, but I saw no more of this superb specimen. I missed a Psammophis and found the slough of a Dasypeltis scabra, but the only other reptiles seen were a couple of Varanus niloticus and a Leopard Tortoise.

I then rowed around the tops of isolated submerged Mopani trees between the two islands and collected 8 Grey Tree Frogs (Chiro-mantis xerampelina). One one twig I found two Lygodactylus p. picturatus, one a male similar to specimens collected by B.L. Mitchell at Livingstone and the first definite record of this Dwarf Gecko in S.Rhodesia.

On the way back to Kariba I spotted a Philothamnus hoplogaster in the top of a submerged tree and Rex brought the "Sampa" alongside for me to noose it. The snake decided to swim for it and we chased it round the Lake for some time before it attempted to climb up the side of the boat and I was able to noose it.

The next morning I packed up and bid farewell to the Game Dept. staff before setting off for Chirundu. I reached the Otto Beit Bridge in mid-afternoon and crossed into Northern Rhodesia. I shot a male Mabuya g. margaritifer on a sandstone outcrop, but saw no other reptiles except a few Mabuya v. varia.

I recrossed the Zambezi and walked along the south bank, where I collected a couple of Rana o. oxyrhynchus, another male Mabuya g. margaritifer and a Mabuya striata on the base of one of the bridge piers. I spent the night beside a sandstone ridge 5 miles east of Chirundu, where I disturbed a Psammophis s. subtaeniatus the next morning.

On my way back to Sinoia I noted two Bitis a. arietans D.O.R. near Karoi and a number of Gerrhosaurus nigrolineatus basking on the road. I left Sinoia late on Sunday morning and the only reptile seen on the way back to Bembesi was a Causus rhombeatus Darwendale.

THE PLATED LIZARDS OF RHODESIA AND NYASALAND. By D.G.Broadley.

Key to the species of Gerrhosaurus found in Rhodesia and Nyasaland.

- 1. Ventrals transversely at midbody 12-20.....G.v.validus
 Ventrals transversely at midbody 10.....G.major grandis
 Ventrals transversely at midbody 8.....2
- 2. Supraciliaries 4; prefrontals broadly in contact; head large and general form robust.....G.n.nigrolineatus
 Supraciliaries 5; prefrontals separated or narrowly in contact; head small and general form slender.....G.f.flavigularis

The Rock or Giant Plated-Lizard (Gerrhosaurus v. validus) is the largest of the African gerrhosaurids. It is restricted to fissured rock outcrops (usually granite) and is abundant throughout the granitic areas of Southern Rhodesia. It occurs in southern Nyasaland, but the only record from Northern Rhodesia is a specimen collected by B.L.Mitchell at Gwembe in the Zambezi valley.

Variation: supraciliaries 5 (rarely 6); dorsal scale rows transversely 28-34, longitudinally 50-58; ventral scale rows transversely 14-18 (rarely 12 or 20), longitudinally 36-45; femoral pores 14-25; lamellae under fourth toe 18-22.

This big lizard is black, with a broad citron yellow dorso-lateral stripe extending from the back of the head towards the base of the tail, often fading out after midbody. The head is speckled

