

## AFRICAN HERP NEWS

No. 29 June 1999

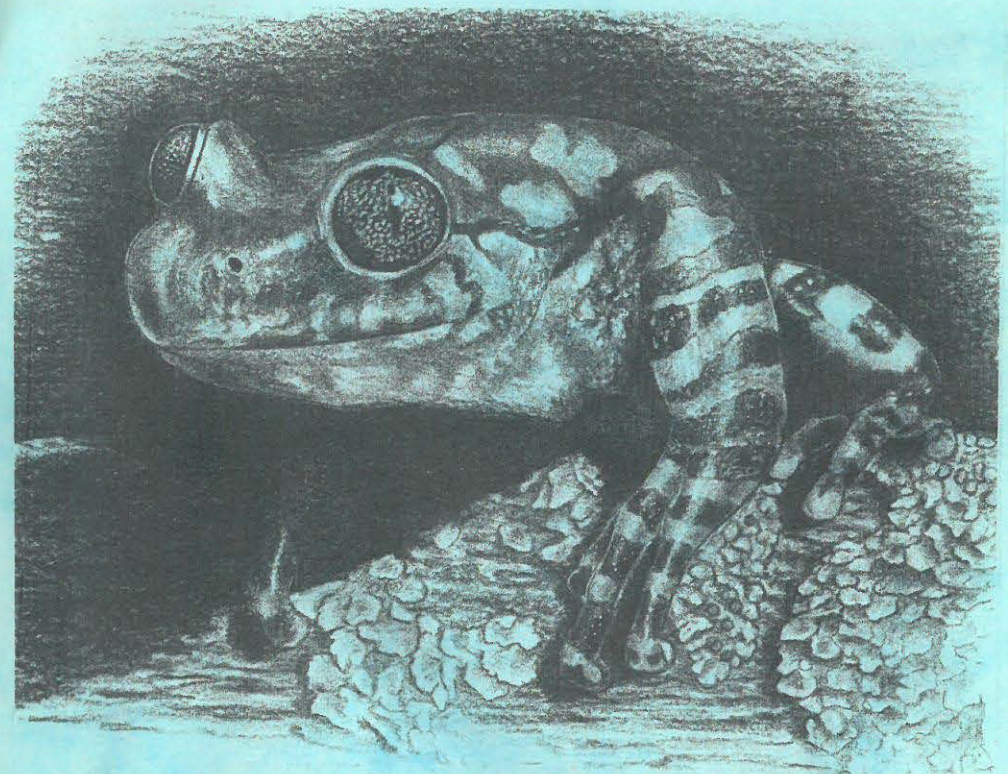
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# African Herp News

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## HERPETOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION OF AFRICA

### FOUNDED 1965

The HAA is dedicated to the study and conservation of African reptiles and amphibians. Membership is open to anyone with an interest in the African herpetofauna. Members receive the Association's journal, *African Journal of Herpetology* (which publishes review papers, research articles, short communications and book reviews - subject to peer review) and newsletter, *African Herp News* (which includes short communications, life history notes, geographical distribution notes, venom and snakebite notes, short book reviews, bibliographies, husbandry hints, announcements and news items).

### NEWSLETTER EDITOR'S NOTE:

Articles will be considered for publication provided they are original and have not been published elsewhere.

Articles may be submitted for peer review (at least two reviewers) at the Editor's discretion.

Lists of reviewers will be published in the newsletter from time to time.

Authors are requested to submit long manuscripts on disc or by e-mail in Word 6.0 format.

The views and opinions expressed in articles are not necessarily those of the Editor.

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## EDITORIAL

This issue sees the welcome return of the series "Recent African Herpetological Literature", an invaluable aid to those of us who do not have access to major reference libraries when trying to keep up to date with the ever increasing flood of literature that appears each year. Tracking down titles is a formidable task in itself, and to prepare a bibliographic list of this kind over and above other demands on the compilers' time is truly heroic. Professional and non-professional members of the Association will all benefit immensely from the sterling efforts of Marius Burger, Bill Branch and Gerald Haagner.

We have also, unfortunately, a less happy matter to address in this issue of the Newsletter - the controversial subject of privately owned collections.

One of our members wishes to sell his collection of preserved amphibians and reptiles to an overseas museum, and applied to the relevant provincial nature conservation authority for an export permit. Two professional herpetologists, both formerly with the conservation authority in question, recommended that export of the collection be allowed and the official concerned appeared to agree with this opinion. However, the applicant was subsequently informed that he would not be allowed to export any species occurring in the province in which he is presently resident, and that these would have to be deposited in a South African museum. No mention of compensation for the loss of personal property seems to have been made. While there is no question that conservation authorities must prevent unauthorised and uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources, it must also be recognised that there are limits beyond which their jurisdiction does not extend, and this includes arbitrarily abridging the rights of anyone who lawfully possesses legally acquired biological materials. An article outlining the legal rights of owners of preserved herpetological collections as the law currently stands, originally intended for the South African Law Journal, is instead published here for the benefit of concerned members who I feel are a more immediately appropriate audience. (References have been cited in the form appropriate to a law journal, since zoological conventions would have been unnecessarily cumbersome.)

### COVER ILLUSTRATION

Natal Ghost Frog *Heleophryne natalensis* Hewitt, 1913. Krantzklouf Nature Reserve, KwaZulu Natal. (A.J.L. Lambiris)

## RECENT AFRICAN HERPETOLOGICAL LITERATURE: 18

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For various reasons, occasioned by our different fates during the last few years, the publication of this list of recent African herpetological literature has been delayed. As a consequence it has become very large. It was thus decided for this issue to only include references up until 1996. For brevity no articles in any of the HAA publications are listed. In addition, peripheral publications on basic developmental, physiological and biochemical studies, that use *Xenopus laevis* or any other African species as a model, are not included. In cases where we know of new taxa descriptions where the distribution date of a publication is known to be different from the volume year, the former is included in brackets. Where not obvious from the title, notes in brackets indicate the articles relevance.

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- Al-Johany, A.M.** 1995. The ecology of *Agama yemensis* Klausewitz (Lacertilia: Agamidae) in south-western Arabia. *J. Arid. Environ.* **29**(4): 495-506.
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- Bartlett, D.** 1996. Notes on a Selection of Arboreal Vipers in Captivity. *Reptiles* **4**(2): 48-60, 62-67, 70-71. [Includes *Atheris* spp.]
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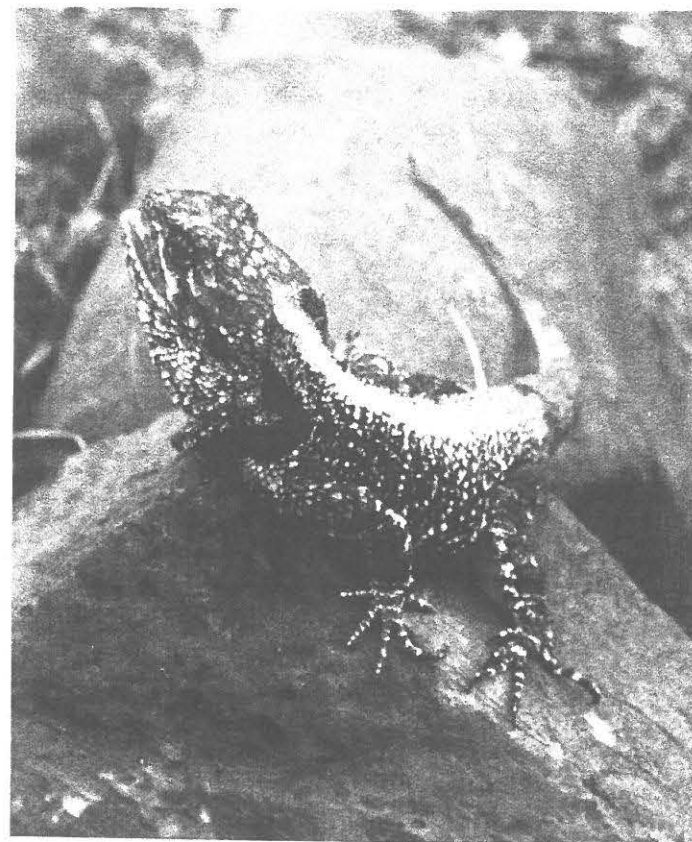
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*Agama atricollis*. Bambela Farm, KwaZulu Natal. Photo: Alex Wood.

## USING THE ROAD AS A MEANS OF CONDUCTING HERPETOLOGICAL SURVEYS: AN EXAMPLE FROM WARMBATHS

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### INTRODUCTION

During the period December 1994 to October 1997, 23 trips were made to the Warmbaths region, Northern Province, South Africa (2428CC, 2428CD), to study snake behaviour, among other relaxing activities. A total of 170 individual snakes was found on the road; 73.5% were D.O.R. (dead on road).

### METHOD

Our method was to drive a car at 40 km/h up and down selected roads, from 18h00 to 02h00. When a snake was sighted, where possible we recorded the temperature, humidity, atmospheric pressure, previous and present rainfall, location, time, date, sex, length, and phase of moon. Selected snakes were photographed and certain road killed specimens of several species were deposited in the wet collection of the Transvaal Museum.

Three inter-linking roads were used during our study:

84 km R516, tarred road: 161 snakes recorded

30 km Mabula-Rooiberg, sand road: 5 snakes recorded

24 km Rooiberg, tarred road: 4 snakes recorded.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 170 snakes was recorded. 125 (73.5%) were found D.O.R. A total of 27 species was recorded (Table 1).

This study demonstrates the high mortality of reptiles killed on southern African roads. It also demonstrates the viability of "road-cruising" as an option in conducting herpetological surveys in certain regions. (Let the other motorists do the collecting for you!)

Road-cruising is a popular method of collecting in the United States, but very little research has been conducted in South Africa.

This method is more suited to certain geographical regions than to others. We have had better results in bushveld and desert regions than in highveld grassland or coastal bush areas. As a general rule, busy roads will yield a higher number of specimens as a result of road kills, and a road with little or no traffic will yield fewer specimens, but most of which will be alive.

Table 1: List of snakes found dead or alive on the three roads studied.

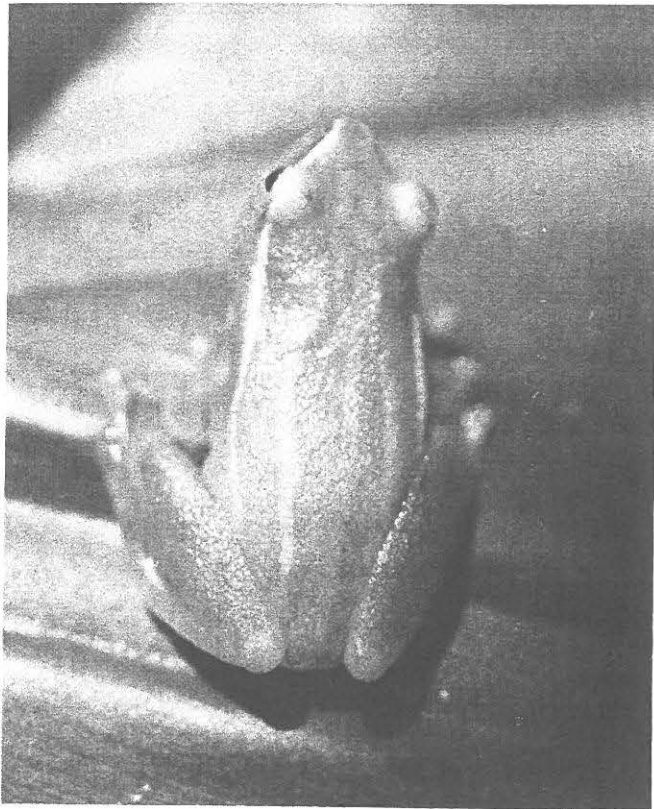
SPECIES	ALIVE	D.O.R.
<i>Rhinotyphlops lalandei</i>	1	-
<i>Python sebae natalensis</i>	-	3
<i>Amblyodipsas p. polylepis</i>	1	-
<i>Aparallactus capensis</i>	3	-
<i>Atractaspis bibroni</i>	5	6
<i>Atractaspis duerdeni</i>	2	-
<i>Xenocalamus bicolor australis</i>	-	2
<i>Lamprophis fuliginosus</i>	8	14
<i>Lycophidion c. capense</i>	-	1
<i>Mehelya c. capensis</i>	-	4
<i>Pseudaspis cana</i>	1	1
<i>Crotaphopeltis hotamboeia</i>	6	10
<i>Telescopus s. semiannulatus</i>	-	3
<i>Dispholidus t. typus</i>	-	4
<i>Thelotornis c. capensis</i>	-	1
<i>Dasypeltis scabra</i>	7	18
<i>Psammophis sibilans brevirostris</i>	1	7
<i>Psammophis s. subtaeniatus</i>	-	1
<i>Psammophylax tritaeniatus</i>	-	1
<i>Prosymna bivittata</i>	2	-
<i>Aspidelaps s. scutatus</i>	1	-
<i>Naja a. annulifera</i>	-	5
<i>Naja mossambica</i>	3	11
<i>Dendroaspis polylepis</i>	-	1
<i>Causus defilippii</i>	-	2
<i>Bitis a. arietans</i>	-	29
<i>Bitis caudalis</i>	1	-
Snake, unknown species	1	-
TOTAL	45	125

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*Hyperolius pusillus*. Hillcrest, KwaZulu Natal. Photo: Angelo Lambiris.

**PRIVATELY OWNED BIOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS:  
AN ASSESSMENT OF PRINCIPAL ISSUES AND  
APPROPRIATE LEGAL PRINCIPLES**

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## INTRODUCTION

Many museum curators and other professional biologists appear strongly to disapprove of individuals possessing privately owned biological study or reference collections, and often actively discourage the establishment and possession of such collections<sup>1</sup>.

The arguments urged against private collections are generally founded on the following premises:

- (i) That private collections are usually inadequately curated.
- (ii) That a national or state museum has properly qualified staff and adequate resources for the permanent curation of such collections.
- (iii) That when the owner of a private collection dies or loses interest in the collection it is likely to be lost or dispersed, and be no longer available to the scientific community.
- (iv) That when material in a private collection is published, it must be made available to the scientific community at large, on demand, for further study.

Although the establishment of a good private study collection of preserved biological specimens (referred to hereafter as "biological collections" for the sake of brevity) involves the expenditure of much time, effort and money on the part of the collector, considerable pressure may be exerted on him to donate his collection to a recognised institution on the grounds that it is in some way improper or unethical for him to keep it once his immediate need for such specimens is over, and it is frequently said by those opposed to private collections that the sale of private collections to public institutions is offensive and objectionable.

<sup>1</sup> For an example of this attitude see Lambert, M.K., 1990, *British Herpetological Society Bulletin*, **34**:9, where a motion put before the First World Congress of Herpetology to recognise the work done by amateur herpetologists was not ratified.

The proximal aim of this paper is not to expatiate upon any fallacies and inconsistencies inherent in the arguments outlined above, but to demonstrate that the objections propounded by antagonists are irrelevant and immaterial in law, and constitute an unjustifiable attempt to encroach upon the rights of the individual. The arguments presented below are founded upon a consideration of study collections of preserved examples of extant zoological species only, although the principals probably apply to other kinds of biological collections as well.

### WILD ANIMALS AND COLLECTOR'S RIGHTS

Wild animals are *res intra commercium*<sup>2</sup>, things which can be the subject of real rights or which can be owned by private persons. They are, generally, *res nullius*<sup>3</sup>, not owned by anyone in this general state. (The ownership of game as defined in the Game Theft Act of 1991<sup>4</sup> does not appear to apply to vertebrates other than game as defined in that Act.) This presumably includes the State also, although the State may pass legislation controlling the actions of people over or in relation to wild animals. Furthermore, animals are corporeal moveable things<sup>5</sup>, in which ownership and other real rights are acquired by possession<sup>6</sup>.

A private person may obtain *dominium plenum*<sup>7</sup>, absolute ownership, of a wild animal; such ownership being the right to possess it, to use it and to enjoy its fruits, to alienate it or to destroy it.

*Dominium plenum* is a *jus in propria*, a real right which entitles the holder to enforce his right in a thing for his own benefit against all other persons<sup>8</sup> and to prevent all other persons from interfering with or destroying his benefit<sup>9</sup>.

In general, there is a rule that a right belonging to a person in respect of a thing is binding on any person who knows of that right<sup>10</sup>. Such public knowledge is implied when a right has been established by a continuing act

<sup>2</sup> *Digest* 18.1.6; 44.7.1.9. Voet 45.1.6. Wessels §295.

<sup>3</sup> Grotius 2.1.50, 52. Voet 1.8.3.

<sup>4</sup> Game Theft Act 105 of 1991.

<sup>5</sup> Gibson, J.T.R., Wille's *Principles of South African Law*, 6th ed., 1970, 163.

<sup>6</sup> Gibson, *op. cit.*, 165.

<sup>7</sup> Grotius 2.3.9; Voet 6.1.1; Van der Linden 1.7.1; Holland, *Jurisprudence*, 10th ed., 210.

<sup>8</sup> Gibson, *op. cit.*, 168.

<sup>9</sup> Gibson, *op. cit.*, 168. *United Building Society v Smookler's Trustees*, 1906 T.S. 632.

<sup>10</sup> Gibson, *op. cit.*, 169.

which sufficiently indicates that a thing is subject to the right of a particular person<sup>11</sup>.

A person who possesses a corporeal movable is presumed to be the owner of it<sup>12</sup>, and this must be true of any wild animal of which a person has *detentio*<sup>13</sup>, or lawful ownership.

Provided that he does not do so unlawfully, a person who kills or captures a wild animal becomes the owner of it<sup>14</sup> irrespective of whose land it was on<sup>15</sup>.

### POSSESSION, OWNERSHIP AND PRIVATE BIOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS

The owner of a private biological collection who has physical control of it with the intention of keeping such control for his own benefit, satisfies the definition of possession<sup>16</sup>. The essential elements of *detentio*<sup>17</sup>, physical control or custody of the thing and *animus possidendi*<sup>18</sup>, intention to hold and exercise control of the thing for his own benefit, are clearly present. *Detentio* in this case is *possessio civilis*<sup>19</sup>, possession by an individual for ownership by himself.

The possessor of a thing may resist the attempts of others to deprive him of such possession<sup>20</sup>, for the law presumes the possessor of a movable thing to be the owner of that thing<sup>21</sup> and affords him every possible protection and assistance<sup>22</sup>. The owner of a collection lawfully constituted can be deprived of his ownership only by an act done with his consent<sup>23</sup>.

11 Gibson, *op. cit.*, 170.

12 Gibson, *op. cit.*, 170. *Zandberg v Van Zijl*, 1910 A.D. 308

13 *Digest* 41.1.1.1; Grotius 2.4.1; Voet 41.1.2.

14 Grotius 2.4.5; Voet 41.1.7.

15 Voet 41.1.4.

16 Gibson, *op. cit.*, 192; *Digest* 41.1.3.1; Grotius 2.2.2; Voet 41.2.1; van der Linden 1.13.1,

17 Voet 42.2.1; van der Linden 1.13.1.

18 Grotius 2.2.2; Voet 41.2.1

19 Voet 41.2.3

20 Grotius 2.2.6; Voet 41.2.10.

21 Grotius 2.2.7; Voet 41.2.16; Pothier *Possession*, Art. Prelim.

22 Gibson, *op. cit.*, 195.

23 Voet 6.1.24.



## CONCLUSION

Provided that a private individual has not infringed or does not contemplate infringing any legislation pertaining to the hunting, capture, killing or possession of wild life, and provided that he has obtained the material for a privately owned collection lawfully, no other person may:

(i) compel or attempt to compel him to alienate such a collection;

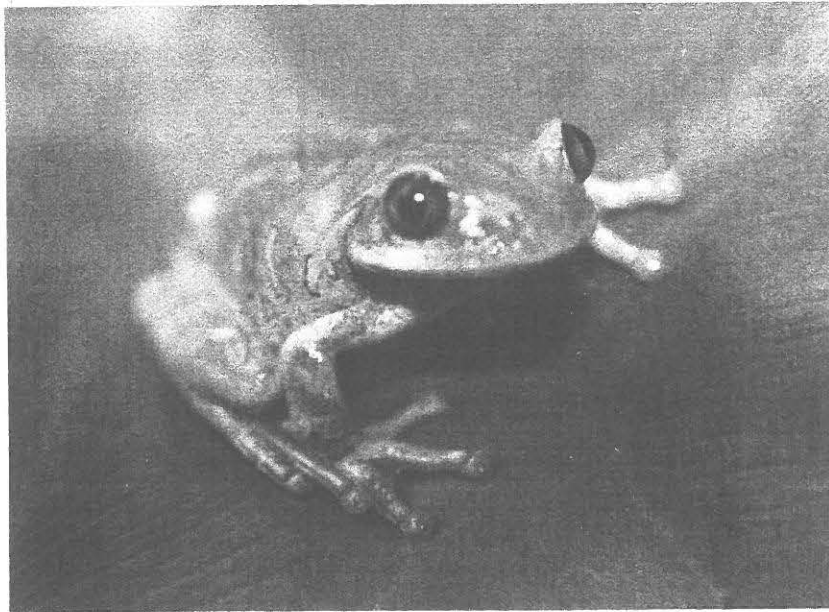
(ii) dictate or attempt to dictate how such a collection be disposed of should the owner wish to alienate it in whole or in part; or

(iii) prevent or attempt to prevent him from enjoying the fruits of the collection in any way that he deems fit.

These rights which vest in a private owner tolerate no intervention, no dictatorial warnings and no sanctions by any third party.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank Mr. Terry Juul and Mr. Andrew Mellamphy for critically reviewing a draft of this paper. I am grateful to two anonymous referees for further comments.



*Leptopelis natalensis*. Hillcrest, KwaZulu Natal. Photo: Angelo Lambiris.

THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN PYTHON, *PYTHON NATALENSIS* A. SMITH 1840, IS A VALID SPECIES

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Geographical variation in *Python sebae* (Gmelin, 1789) was reviewed 15 years ago (Broadley, 1984), following the description of *P. saxuloides* on the basis of three live specimens (Miller & Smith, 1979). At that time I was perhaps over cautious in reviving *P. natalensis* only as a subspecies of *P. sebae*, because there was evidence of sympatry at Nguni, Kenya, 40 km northwest of Mwingi, type locality of *P. saxuloides*, which was considered to be based on a somewhat aberrant peripheral population of *P. s. natalensis*. Only one specimen from Morogoro seemed to be an intergrade or hybrid.

Some python heads recently received from Tanzania confirm an extensive overlap of distributions of the two forms by about 900 km, with no further evidence of hybridisation, so *P. natalensis* will now be treated as a valid species. Two heads of large *P. sebae* were received from Frontier-Tanzania (a collaboration between the University of Dar es Salaam and the Society for Environmental Exploration in the U.K.), NMZB 16148 from Amani, Eastern Usambara Mts (0538BA) and NMZB 16088 from the Kilombero Valley, Morogoro Region (0836CB). Both agree with the specimen from Guinea previously illustrated (Broadley, 1984, right) in retaining paired frontal shields and a distinctive lateral head pattern, with the exception of the subnasal pale stripe, which is absent in both (it is poorly defined in the Rwanda specimen illustrated by Fischer & Hinkel, 1992, pl. 270). They also have the underside of the head immaculate white except for black blotches on the infralabials, a character illustrated by Miller & Smith (1979, fig. 7). The Kilombero specimen represents a southwestern range extension for *P. sebae* in Tanzania of ca. 200 km. Steven Spawls has provided 35 mm colour slides of *P. sebae* from Malindi and Watamu, confirming the presence of this species on the Kenya coast.

The head of a *P. natalensis* (NMZB 7191), collected by Sherwood Smith at Kibondo, Kigoma Region, Tanzania (0330DA) in 1993, has the frontal area completely fragmented, so that the supraoculars are separated by seven small shields, while the lateral head markings resemble those of the Botswana specimen previously illustrated (Broadley, 1984, fig. 1, left), except that the postocular dark stripe is narrower, the underside of the head has a few scattered black flecks. This specimen supports previous records of *P. natalensis* extending north along the rift valley to Burundi and the east of Kivu Province in the D.R.C. In 1984 I was doubtful about two reports of *P.*

*natalensis* from the D.R.C. (IRSNB 11035 Parc Nat. Garamba and MRAC 136 Mayumbe), but these may represent relict populations of that species in areas where *P. sebae* is the common large python. Colour slides of *P. natalensis* provided by Steven Spawls confirm the presence of this species at relatively high altitudes in Kenya and northern Tanzania (Arusha, Nairobi and Voi).

With regard to the English names for the large pythons, I am unhappy about the use of "African Rock Python" as these snakes show no particular association with rocky habitats, so I propose the use of "Northern African Python" for *P. sebae* and "Southern African Python" for *P. natalensis*.

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*Breviceps v. verrucosus*. Hillcrest, KwaZulu Natal. Photo: Angelo Lambiris.

#### NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

*African Herp News* publishes brief notes concerning the biology of the herpetofauna of the African continent and adjacent regions, including the Arabian peninsula, Madagascar, and other islands in the Indian Ocean.

A standard format is to be used, as follows: **SCIENTIFIC NAME**; **Common name** (using Bill Branch's *Field Guide to Snakes and other Reptiles of Southern Africa*, third edn., 1998, for reptiles; and Passmore & Carruthers' *South African Frogs*, 1995, for amphibians, as far as possible); **KEYWORD** (this should be one or two words best describing the topic of the note, e.g. Reproduction, Avian predation, etc.); the **Text** (in concise English with only essential references quoted and in abbreviated form); **Locality** (country, province or state, location, quarter-degree unit, and latitude and longitude if available; elevation above sea level; use metric units); **Date** (day, month, year); **Collector(s)**; **Place of deposition and museum accession number** (required if specimens are preserved). Submitted by: **NAME**, Address (in parentheses).

New South African Province names must be used.

#### REPTILIA CHELONIA

##### *HOMOPUS SIGNATUS* Speckled Padloper NATURAL DIET

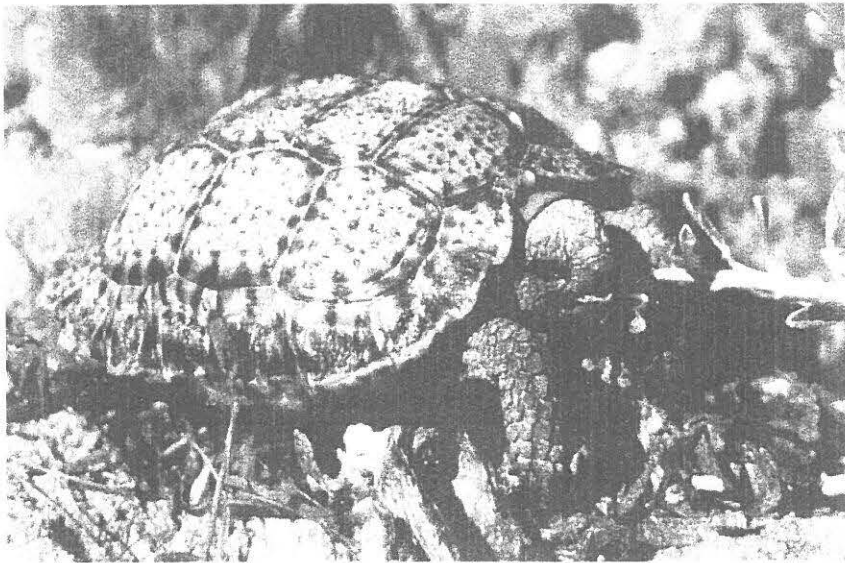
Much of the available ecological information on *Homopus signatus* results from captive observations. Although in many cases studying captive specimens can be extremely useful, it is not always clear how far results reflect the natural situation. Moreover, certain aspects can only be studied in wild populations. Composition of the natural diet is one of these.

A report containing speculative information on natural feeding of *Homopus s. signatus*, as deduced from a captive breeding group, is in press (Loehr, Chelonian Conservation and Biology). We have additionally recorded two observations of *Homopus s. signatus* feeding in nature.

On 22 September 1995, at 11:00, a juvenile *Homopus s. signatus* (no measurements recorded) was found in shade, feeding on flowers of an unidentified grass species along a tarred road a few hundred metres south-east of Springbok, Namaqualand (2917DB).

On 17 September 1998, at 15:45, a juvenile *Homopus signatus cafer* (CL 45.1 mm) was observed feeding on green leaves of a shrub of the genus

*Wiborgia* (family Leguminosae, subfamily Papilionoideae) along a dirt road near Clanwilliam (3219DB) (figure 1). At the time of observation, the sky was clear and the temperature and relative humidity at the site were 37°C and 26% respectively.



#### Acknowledgements

I thank Prof. Dr. P. Maas (Utrecht University) and Prof. Dr. J. van der Maessen (Wageningen Agricultural University) for their help in identifying the shrub in Clanwilliam.

#### Submitted by

V.J.T. LOEHR (Studbook Breeding Programme Homopus, Nipkowplein 24, 3402 EC IJsselstein, The Netherlands. e-mail loehr@kabelfoon.nl, [http://wwwserv.caiw.nl/abs/loehr/public\\_html/index.htm](http://wwwserv.caiw.nl/abs/loehr/public_html/index.htm)) and T.J. HARRIS (c/o 20 Suikerbosstreet, Blomtuin, 7530 Belville, South Africa).

## SAURIA

### *LYGODACTYLUS CAPENSIS* Cape Dwarf Gecko PREDATION BY BATS

On 18 December 1998, in my home at Game Valley Estates Hella Hella, in the Mkomazi River Valley, KwaZulu-Natal (29°54'46"S, 30°05'20"E; 2930CC, 710 m above sea level), part of the hind portion of a *Lygodactylus capensis* was discovered on the slate floor of the entrance hall amongst bat droppings and discarded insect remains.

*Lygodactylus capensis* is the most common gecko that frequents man-made structures in this area. They soon learn that insects trapped behind windowpanes become easy targets, and appear to live profitably using this hunting strategy. As diurnal predators they appear to be highly successful in domestic situations. Apart from birds that often have their attempts thwarted by the barrier of glass between them and the lizards, the most common predators around our home seem to be Spotted Bush Snakes *Philothamnus semivariatus*. The less frequently encountered Spotted House Snake *Lamprophis guttatus* also takes advantage of this "fast food" source.

At night, the isolated light emanating from our home, in a fairly extensive expanse of valley bushveld, attracts hordes of insects to the house. After the lights are switched off, bats often enter through fanlights and proceed to hunt the abundant insect prey on offer. Evidence of their activities is clearly visible on the floor below regularly used roosting sites. Normally one may expect to find bat droppings and arthropod remains at these sites. The presence of the hind portion of a *Lygodactylus capensis* however seems to indicate that the bat managed to capture and consume a part of the reptile. A close examination of the severed portion of the gecko revealed that an animal with minute teeth had chewed it.

Seven bat species have been reliably identified as occurring in the immediate vicinity by members of the Durban-based Bat Interest Group. The most likely species occurring here that is known to feed in this manner is the Common Slit-faced Bat, *Nycteris thebaica*. This bat is known to take stationary insects rather than those in flight, and it has also been recorded as eating scorpions and sun spiders which they take off the ground (Skinner, J.D. and R.H.N. Smithers, 1990: *The mammals of the southern African subregion*, University of Pretoria, Pretoria).

The *Lygodactylus capensis* frequenting my home are not active only during daylight hours. They continue to hunt insects inside the house for as long as the lights are left switched on. When the lights are extinguished they find themselves unexpectedly stranded in the dark. I have noticed that if the lights are switched on again later, most of the lizards seen earlier in the evening will be found in the open at the same spot, or very close to the point that they had reached before being plunged into darkness. I speculate that they either find

it difficult to return to their regular retreats, or feel safe clinging to the walls under the cover of darkness. This may explain how a diurnal lizard becomes available as a prey item for a bat.

As far as I am aware this is the first time that a bat has been recorded as a possible predator of a southern African lizard species.

**Acknowledgement:** I thank E.J. Richardson for commenting on the original draft of this paper.

**Submitted by:** B. W. PORTER (Game Valley Estates, P.O. Box 70, Richmond, 3780). E-mail: hella@mweb.co.za

## SERPENTES

### *PHILOTHAMNUS NATALENSIS OCCIDENTALIS* Western Green Snake

#### SIZE AND REPRODUCTION

In early September 1995, Dale Millard of the Swadini Reptile Park and I captured a large adult female 1282 mm long (SVL 943 mm, T 339 mm) at approximately 15h00, crossing a dirt road close to the summit of Mariespok (24°32'S, 30°52'E, 2430DB), Pilgrim's Rest district, Mpumalanga Province, South Africa.

The specimen was held captive at the Transvaal Museum until 12 December 1995, when it died and was preserved (TM 80291).

Previous maximum total lengths are given as 1120 mm by Branch (*Field Guide to the Snakes and other Reptiles of Southern Africa*, 1988, Struik, Cape Town) and 1106 mm by Broadley (*FitzSimons' Snakes of Southern Africa*, 1990, Jonathan Ball and A.D. Donker, Cape Town), respectively. This specimen exceeds the previous record by 163 mm.

During September 1995 the specimen ate a single mouse. On 3 October 1995 a number of bulges were noticed in the posterior part of the specimen and it was subsequently decided to discontinue feeding. The snake was supplied with a plastic egg deposition container half filled with vermiculite and water in a 1:1 ratio by mass. The water bowl was removed, and water was supplied only once weekly, in order to prevent eggs being laid in the water and drowning, as has happened before. Three eggs were found loose in the terrarium on 17 October 1995. The eggs were immediately removed and placed in a container with a 1:3 mixture of vermiculite and water. The eggs were then incubated in darkness at a constant temperature of 31°C.

During the evening of 19 October three additional eggs were laid inside the vermiculite container. These were immediately removed and placed in a

separate container, but incubated under the same conditions as the first batch.

Single eggs were laid on the evenings of 20 to 25 October, between 06h45 and 07h30 on 26 October, and on the evenings of 26 to 28 October, either in the hide box, the terrarium, or in the vermiculite container.

The eggs were thus deposited over 12 days, mostly during the evenings. All eggs were measured, using a digital caliper, to the nearest 0.01 mm and weighed with an electronic balance to the nearest 0.001 g. The measurements were: mean length 29.06 mm (S.D. 3.80 mm, range 25.70-33.30 mm); mean width 14.77 mm (S.D. 1.5 mm, range 13.50-15.60 mm), mean mass 3.861 g (S.D. 1.500 g, range 1.912-4.962 g).

All the eggs developed in mould and none hatched, despite good ventilation and the use of sterilised high water vermiculite as an incubation medium as described by Douglas (High Water Potential Vermiculite as an Incubation Medium for Reptile Eggs, 1993, *Brit. Herp. Soc. Bulletin* 45). During early February 1996 all the eggs were opened and found to have had a hard rubbery whitish texture. The eggs appeared to be infertile, as no embryos were discernible with the exception of a brownish stain in some of the eggs.

Jacobsen (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, 1989, University of Pretoria) reported a maximum of eight eggs for *Philothamnus natalensis occidentalis*. This instance exceeds the largest reported clutch size by six.

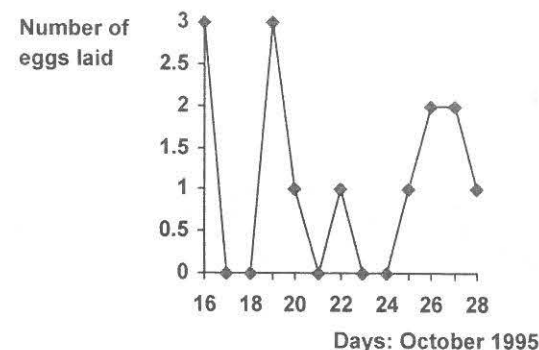


Figure 1. Oviposition by *Philothamnus natalensis occidentalis*.

#### Acknowledgement

Mr. W.D. Haacke and Dr. M.J. Whiting of the Transvaal Museum, for commenting on the text.

#### Submitted by

I. GREIFF (P.O. Box 67913, Bryanston 2021, South Africa.)

***CROTAPHOPELTIS HOTAMBOEIA* Herald Snake  
DIET**

On 2 December 1995 a dead female *Crotaphopeltis hotamboeia* was brought into the Transvaal Snake Park for identification. It had been killed on a smallholding in Halfway House, Midrand, Gauteng Province (26°00'30"S, 28°07'30"E, 2628AA).

On arrival it was noticed to have a distinct bulge in the stomach region. It was opened up and found to contain the digested remains of an agamid lizard (*Agama aculeata distanti*?) in the gut. The snake and agama were deposited in the Transvaal Museum collection (TM 80114).

The snake's measurements were: TL 510 (445+65) mm. Body masses of the snake and lizard were not recorded.

Amphibians are well documented in the diet of this common snake. Although lizards and small rodents are occasionally eaten (Broadley, 1990: *FitzSimons' Snakes of Southern Africa*, Jonathan Ball and A.D. Donker, Johannesburg), an agamid lizard is an unusual prey item for this species.

**Submitted by**

W.R. SCHMIDT (c/o Kwena Gardens, P.O. Box 234, Sun City 0316, N.W. Province, South Africa).

***HEMACHATUS HAEMACHATUS* Rinkhals  
LEUCISM**

On 7 November 1994 a leucistic *Hemachatus haemachatus* was brought into the Transvaal Snake Park by Mr. Lee Kritzinger for identification. The snake was captured on his property in Donovan Road, Glen Austin Agricultural Holdings, Midrand, Gauteng Province (25°58'S, 28°08' E; 2528CC). On arrival the snake was sexed as a female, measuring 445 (380+65) mm, and weighing 32g. The ventral colouration is light pink with three darker bands anteriorly, and several black patches on the belly. Dorsal colouration is light pink also with several black patches. The eyes and tongue are also pink in colour.

As I am no longer with Transvaal Snake Park I do not know whether the snake is still in the Park's collection or if it will be deposited in a museum collection. It is notable that the snake appeared to be at least a year old and avoided predation, as Branch (1998: *Field Guide to the Snakes and other Reptiles of southern Africa*, Struik, Cape Town) gives the new born length as 162-225.

Albinism has been recorded in several species of southern African snakes, including *Lamprophis inornatus* (De Villiers, 1983: *J. Herp. Ass. Afr.* 29:19-

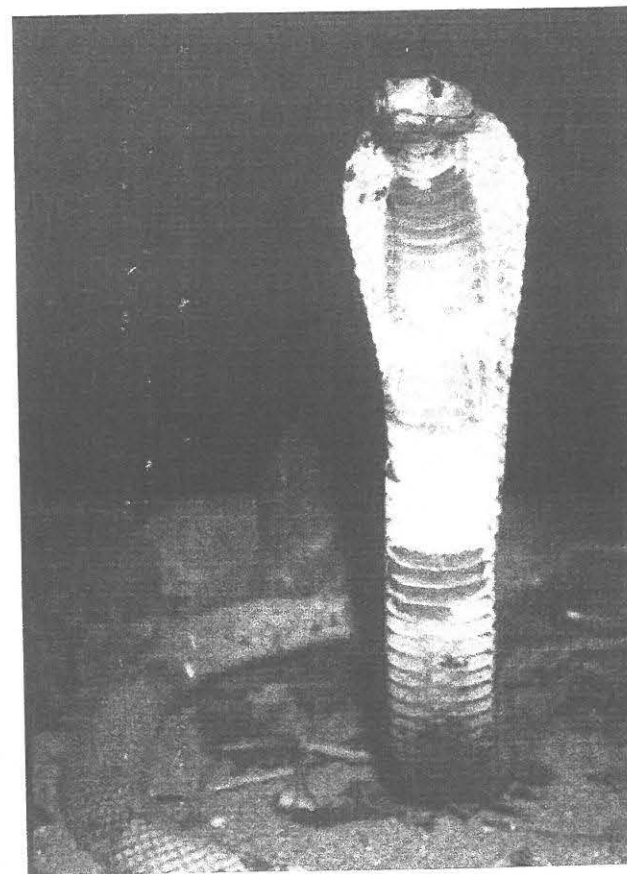
20), *Lamprophis fuliginosus* (Haagner & Tomsett, 1992: *J. Herp. Ass. Afr.* 41: 43), *Lamprophis aurora* and *Naja nivea* (FitzSimons, 1970: *Field Guide to the*

*Snakes of southern Africa*, Collins, London) and *Lycophidion capense* (Branch, 1976: *J. Herpetol.* 10(1):1-11).

This appears to be the first documented record of albinism in the Rinkhals, although there seems to be an unconfirmed and unsubstantiated report of an albino Rinkhals from the Lothair region, Mpumalanga, from many years back.

**Submitted by**

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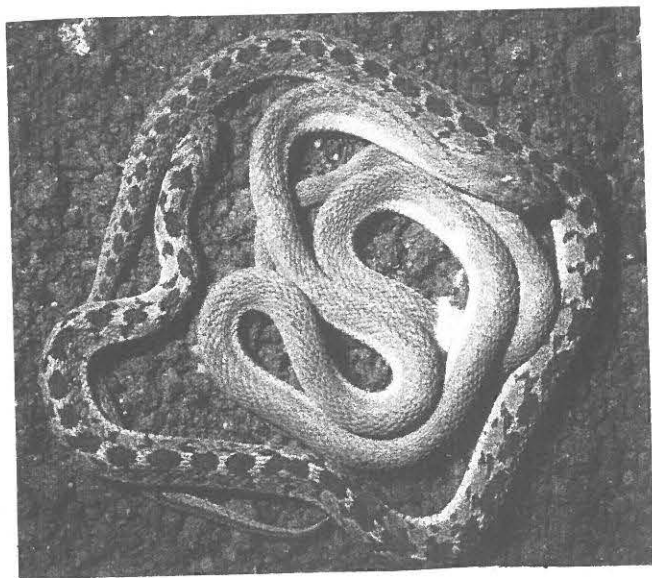
***DASYPELTIS SCABRA* Rhombic Egg Eater  
COLOURATION**

On 27 August 1996, two *Dasyveltis scabra* were found under building rubble (slasto) in Birch Acres, Kempton Park, Gauteng Province (26°02'30"S, 28°12'00"E, 2628AA). One of the snakes, a male, measuring 510 (450+60) mm, and with 219 ventrals, was dorsally uniform brown with a very faint stripe running down from the back of the neck for the first third of the body. Ventral colouration was greyish white, with each ventral edge tinted silver-grey. The second snake was of normal colouration. The snakes were photographed and ventral scales photocopied, and they were then released back into their locality.

Although patternless *Dasyveltis scabra* have been recorded (FitzSimons, 1970: *Field Guide to the Snakes of southern Africa*, Collins, London; Broadley, 1990: *FitzSimons' Snakes of southern Africa*, Jonathan Ball and AD.Donker, Pretoria), little is known as to how common this occurrence is, and whether it is restricted to certain sexes and certain geographical regions.

**Submitted by**

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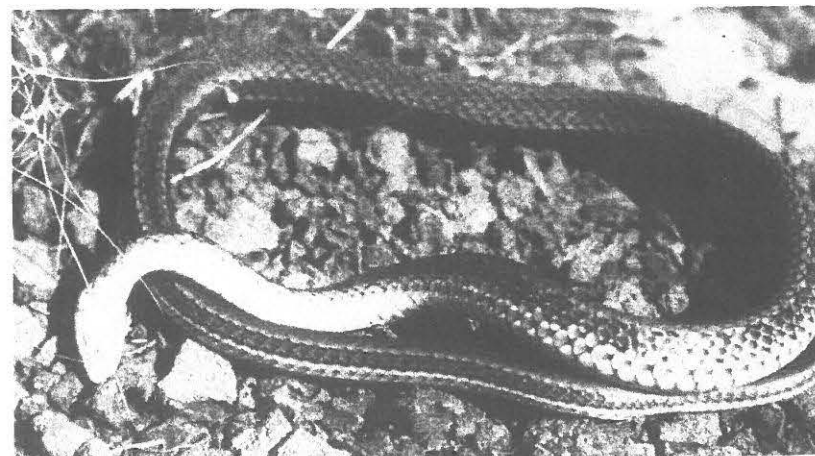
***PSAMMOPHYLAX RHOMBEATUS RHOMBEATUS*  
Rhombic Skaapstecker  
BEHAVIOUR**

During November 1996 an adult *Psammophylax r. rhombeatus* was collected for photography. It was from Kempton Park, Gauteng Province (2628AA). The snake was chased around the garden to tire it out, during which time the photographer was bitten several times! After a few minutes it was placed on the set, on which the snake voluntarily rolled the front part of its body upside down. The snake was lifted and replaced, on which it repeated this behaviour several times, effectively shamming death. The mouth was sometimes held slightly agape. The snake was photographed in this position. It was released one week later with no ill-effects.

"Playing dead" defensive behaviour is well known with the Rinkhals (*Hemachatus haemachatus*) and has been observed in the Snouted Cobra *Naja annulifera*, and in various exotic species including the Grass Snake *Natrix natrix* and Hognose Snakes (*Heterodon*) sp. This is the first time I have observed this behaviour in *Psammophylax rhombeatus*, despite having worked with numerous individuals of this species over the last ten years.

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**GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION**

*African Herp News* publishes brief notes of new geographical distributions (preferably at least 100 km from the nearest published record) of amphibians and reptiles on the African continent and adjacent regions, including the Arabian peninsula, Madagascar, and other islands in the Indian Ocean.

A standard format is to be used, as follows: **SCIENTIFIC NAME**; **Common name** (for sources, see Life History Notes); **Locality** (country, province or state, quarter-degree unit, location, and latitude and longitude if available; elevation above sea level; use metric units); **Date** (day, month, year); **Collector(s)**; **Place of deposition and museum accession number** (required); **Comments** (including data on size, colour and taxonomic characters, e.g. scalation, webbing, especially for taxonomically problematic taxa; and nearest published locality record(s) in km; references to be quoted in the text). Submitted by: **NAME**, Address (in parentheses).

Records submitted should be based on specimens deposited in a recognised collection. New South African province names must be used.

**Notes submitted in an incorrect format or style will be returned to the authors.**

**CHELONIA  
TESTUDINIDAE**

***HOMOPUS BOULENGERI* Duerden, 1906. Karroo Padloper**

South Africa, Free State Province; No. 14 Bauman Street, Frankfort, Frankfort district (2728BC; 27°16'S, 28°30'E; 1520 m a.s.l.); 25 November 1998; J.C.P. van Wyk; National Museum, Bloemfontein, South Africa; NMB R8043.

Female collected on a pavement at 10h30. Carapace length 91.1 mm, plastron length 75.8 mm, maximum shell height 45.7 mm, mass 140. Five claws on each front foot; 11 marginals on either side, unusual in that the outer margin of the third costal is shorter than the outer margin of the fourth (also of the first and second) costal, on both sides.

Almost undoubtedly an escaped pet as the species was not recorded from the Free State during De Waal's (1980, *Navors. nas. Mus., Bloemfontein* 4(3): 85-91) survey, and the nearest known natural population is over 500 km to the south-west in the Britstown area, Northern Cape Province (Boycott & Bourquin, 1988, *The South African Tortoise Book*, Southern Book Publishers, Johannesburg). Additional presumed tortoise translocations in the Free State were reported by Bates (1996, *Navors. nas. Mus. Bloemfontein*

12(1): 1-47): *Psammobates tentorius tentorius* (Rayton, near Bloemfontein, 1988); *P. t. verroxii* (Heuwelsig suburb, Bloemfontein, 1994); *P. t. trimeni* (Sasolburg, 1995).

**Submitted by**

J.C.P. VAN WYK (P.O. Box 16, Frankfort 9830, South Africa) & M.F. BATES (Department of Herpetology, National Museum, P.O. Box 266, Bloemfontein 9300, South Africa).

**SAURIA  
SCINCIDAE**

***ACONTIAS GRACILICAUDA GRACILICAUDA* ESSEX 1925: Thin-tailed Legless Skink**

One male (snout-vent length: 219.5 mm; tail length: 19.4 mm; Field Number 286) and one female (snout-vent length: 193.2 mm; tail length: 41.4 mm; Field Number 287), both collected on 17 October 1998 on the Farm Elandsnek (2728CD; 27°37'S; 28°37'E), Reitz district, Free State Province; about 100m apart, under rocks on the side of a grass covered hill. This is the most easterly locality for the species in the Free State. Collectors: S.R. Daniels, M.G.J. Hendricks, N.J.L. Heideman and B.A. Wilson.

The nearest locality plotted by Broadley & Greer (1969, *Arnoldia [Rhodesia]*, 4[26]: 1-29) is in locus 2728CA.

**Submitted by:** S.R. DANIELS and M.G.J. HENDRICKS (University of the Western Cape), N.J.L. HEIDEMAN (University of the North [Qwa-Qwa]) and B.A. WILSON (Western Cape Education Department, Worcester Region).

***SCELOTES ULUGURUENSIS* BARBOUR & LOVERIDGE, 1928. Uluguru Fossorial Skink.**

Tanzania, Tanga Region, Muheza District, East Usambara Mts., Amani (0538BA); 18 February 1999; Frontier-Tanzania (a collaboration between the University of Dar-Ès-Salaam and the Society for Environmental Exploration in the UK); Natural History Museum of Zimbabwe NMZB 16128. Taken in a pitfall trap set in leaf litter in the forest floor.

This specimen agrees well with the original description (Barbour & Loveridge, 1928, *Mem. Comp. Zool. Harv.*, 50: 167, pl. iv, fig. 6), except that there are only four toes on the hind limbs, apparently as a congenital aberration, the site of the fifth toe being covered by regular scalation.

This species has only previously been recorded from the Uluguru

Mountains, 250 km to the south-south-west. It may yet be found elsewhere in the Eastern Arc Mountains, the Udzungwas being particularly poorly known.

**Submitted by**

DONALD G. BROADLEY (Biodiversity Foundation for Africa, P.O. Box FM 730, Famona, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.)

**SERPENTES  
COLUBRIDAE**

***PROSYMNA AMBIGUA BOCAGII* BOULENGER, 1897 Bocage's  
Shovel-Snout**

Tanzania, Arusha Region, Mbulu District, Mangola (0335AD); 20 December 1994; D. Bygott; Natural History Museum of Zimbabwe, NMZB 16084.

Found dead. This large female measures 340+39 mm and has 155 ventrals, cloacal entire, subcaudals 25; there are 21 scale rows on the neck, reducing to 19 at v.16/17, 17 at v.37/35 and 15 at v.64/65, in each case by fusion of rows 4+5. This snake is light grey above, the scales dark-edged, the ventrals and subcaudals are dark grey bordered with white.

The only previous record of this species in Tanzania was from Bukoba, west of Lake Victoria (Sternfeld, 1910, *Fauna dt. Kolon.*, Ser. 3(2):21), so the range of the species is now extended by 500 km to the south-east, thus overlapping by 350 km the range of *P. stuhlmanni*, which is known from Bulyanhulu, Kahama District (0332AB), not far south of Lake Victoria (NMZB 15426).

**Submitted by**

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