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NEWSLETTER OF THE
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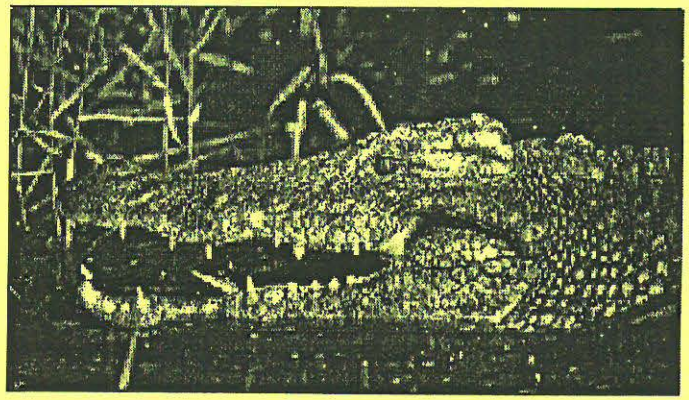

No. 35 October 2002

AFRICAN HERP NEWS

No. 35 OCTOBER 2002

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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 (al 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 6.0/7.0 format.

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

Articles and news items appearing in *African Herp News* may be reprinted, provided the author's name and newsletter reference are given.

TYPING AND PRODUCTION:

Alison Leslie, Department of Conservation Ecology, University of Stellenbosch.

COVER ILLUSTRATION: Nile Crocodile, *Crocodylus niloticus*, with hatchling Photo: Alison Leslie

EDITORIAL

As the summer draws closer in the southern hemisphere it is time once again to elect a new H.A.A. Committee. African members have already submitted nomination forms. Within this issue, African members will also receive a voting slip/ ballot paper. Members have unfortunately shown little interest in the H.A.A. elections in the past. I urge you all to play an active role in this year's elections. Please take the time to fill in the ballot paper and to submit it to the relevant party. Remember that as members you are all very welcome to submit comments and any suggestions you may have concerning the running of the Association, including comments about the journal or newsletter. Many thanks in advance for your participation.

Please also take note of the short communication section on page 2. If you are a South African or working in South Africa, Che Weldon requires your assistance in identifying a possible new threat to the country's anuran biodiversity. A leaflet entitled "Frog submission form" is provided within this issue. If you can assist Che in any way, please do so.

This issue contains a number of exciting Natural History notes, new Geographical distributions and #23 of the "Recent African Herpetological Literature" series. Thanks to all those who submitted articles and news items for this issue of *African Herp News*. Keep them coming!

Alison Leslie
Chair and Newsletter Editor.

SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

A possible new threat to South African anuran biodiversity

Ché Weldon

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Introduction

Frogs on several continents and subcontinents, particularly Australia, North America, Central America, South America, New Zealand, and Europe have suffered sudden high morality rates, resulting in some species becoming extinct and many others undergoing massive population reductions. Chytridiomycosis was identified as the most likely cause of these massive population declines in Australia, New Zealand, Spain and Central America (Berger et al., 1998; Bosch et al., 2000; Bishop, 2000). The causative agent, a member of the Chytridiomycota or chytrid fungus, was subsequently described as a new genus and species, *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis* (Longcore et al., 1999). Four records of the amphibian chytrid have emerged from Africa since 1999. In 1999 a batch of *Xenopus tropicalis* imported from West Africa into USA was also found to be infected with chytridiomycosis (Reed et al., 2000), and 2 specimens of *Ptychadena anchietae*, from Kenya were infected (Speare and Berger, 2000). The third occurrence was in a sample of *Xenopus laevis* from the Western Cape (Speare pers com, 2002), and the most recent in a ranid from Gauteng (Lane pers com, 2002). The chytrid has low host specificity and is likely to infect any species of amphibian as infections have been detected globally in 15 amphibian families that include 94 species (Speare et al., 2001).

Project summary

As part of a Ph.D. study, tissue samples are being collected from *Xenopus laevis* and other frogs across South Africa to determine the current distribution of the fungus. These are processed and examined histologically at Potchefstroom University to identify whether the fungus is present.
Archived material from Southern African museums and private collections are also being examined to determine if and when the fungus was introduced.

It is important to find out whether the scientific trade in *X. laevis* is disseminating the fungus internationally. Findings of this investigation will be included in a protocol, in collaboration with nature conservation authorities, for companies and individuals who sell *Xenopus* to decrease the risk of infection with chytridiomycosis before sale and export to other countries.
Successful isolation and culture of the fungus will provide the tissue needed to extract DNA for comparison with South American and Australian isolates. Studying the genetic variation between South African isolates might provide answers to the one question still eluding scientists around the world – the origin of the chytrid.

How can you help?

Little is known about chytridiomycosis in South African frogs and therefore any additional specimens are of great value. If you find sick or dead frogs, collect them and allow them to be used in the effort to learn more about diseases of South African frogs.
Terminally sick frogs should be euthanased by immersion in 0.1% benzocaine solution (ethyl 4-aminobenzoate) or 0.1% MS222 (tricaine methane sulphonale). Frogs and tissue can be fixed in 10% neutral buffered formalin or alternatively in 70% alcohol. Fixing of a removed digit and piece of webbing (if present) is all the tissue that is needed from non-terminal sick frogs (ill, but not likely to die within 48 hours) to diagnose chytridiomycosis. After a frog dies, postmortem degeneration sets in rapidly that decreases the amount of histological information. It is therefore important that specimens should be fixed as soon as possible when found dead on collection or when sick frogs die in captivity. Fixed specimens can be dispatched in any sealed container.
Please see loose leaflet entitled 'Frog submission form" included in this issue

Symptoms to look out for

Any one or a combination of the following symptoms is characteristic of amphibians severely infected with chytridiomycosis:
Change in behavior, e.g. nocturnal frogs sitting in exposed positions during the day.
Legs held loosely instead of tucked in close to the body.
Frogs start fitting when handled.
Difficulty to correct itself when turned on its back.
Excessive shedding of skin, especially the hind legs and feet.

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Unusual colour variation in the legless skink, *Feylinia currori* (Scincidae: Feylininae)

Kate Jackson

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The Feylininae are semi-fossorial, legless members of the Family Scincidae found in the tropical forests of Central Africa. This note deals with the unusual colour variation found in some specimens of *Feylinia currori* collected in the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville) in 1997.

From 14-19 June 1997, I collected nine specimens of *F. currori* while working on the Ndoki Forest Project, in the extreme north of the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville) near the borders of Cameroon and the Cnetral African Republic. Specimens were collected by digging in the mud on the steep banks of the Sangha River (a tributary of the Congo River) at the village of Bomassa (2° 12' N; 16° 11' E), during rainstorms. According to the map provided by Brygoo and Roux-Esteve (1983), *Feylinia currori* had not previously been collected in the Republic of Congo except for four localities in the southern end of the country. I was assisted by the villagers of Bomassa who, through believing the skinks to be snakes, and as such afraid of them, turned over logs and dug with shovels and machetes to reveal the lizards. All specimens were found within an area approximately 3.0^2 m and at an average depth of 10-40 cm. It is interesting to note that the Bomassa villagers led me to the feylinines in response to my showing them photographs of the caecilians.

The nine specimens collected included three males and six females. The mean snout-vent length (SVL) was 144 mm, with a mean of 128 mm for females and 174 mm for males.The range of SVL's was from 59 mm to 200 mm. The total body length was difficult to determine since most of the specimens had lost part of their tails at some point. The number of scale rows at mid-body ranged from 22 to 26, with a mean of 24. The total number of scales from vent to chin ranged from 122 to 139, with a mean of 128. The most striking feature however was their colouration. While five of the specimens were dark in colour, the other four were a pale, periwinkle blue. A colour image of a live blue specimen may be viewed at:
http://www.mcz.harvard.edu/Departments/Herpetology/kjackson.html

None of the specimens collected showed an intermediate colour between brown and blue. Colouration and scale counts did not correlate with size or sex.

The genus *Feylinia* was first described by Gray (1845). Since then feylinines have been collected in the Democratic republic of Congo (formerly the Belgian Congo) [Schmidt and Noble, 1919-1924] and in other parts of Central Africa. The genus *Feylinia* is reviewed by Brygoo and Roux-Esteve (1983). The genus is defined (de Witte and Laurent, 1943; Schmidt and Noble, 1919-1924) as lacking limbs, having eyes greatly reduced and covered by scales, and the nostril pierced in the rostral scale. *Feylinia currori* is defined as having an ocular scale in contact with the third upper labial and 22-28 rows of scales at mid-body. It is said to reach lengths of up to 340 mm (Brygoo and Roux-Esteve, 1983). The latter authors describe the colouration of *Feylinia currori* as ranging from light beige to blackish brown and suggest that this variation is related to the shedding cycle. All of the specimens collected key out to *Feylinia currori*, but the pale periwinkle blue colouration of four specimens has not been previously described.

Acknowledgements

I thank the staff and scientists of Wildlife Conservation International at the Ndoki Forest Project for logistical support during June and July of 1997. I thank the villagers of Bomassa who helped with the locating and collecting of the skinks. I thank D. Lawson who navigated a maze of red tape to bring my specimens back to the USA. J. Gross, K. Kavanaugh and R. Kerney provided helpful comments on the manuscript.

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Appendix

Catalogue numbers of specimens collected are as follows: MCZ R-182301; MCZ R-182303; MCZ R-182304; MCZ R-182305; MCZ R-182306; MCZ R-182307; MCZ R-182308; MCZ R-182309; MCZ R-182310.

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, eg. 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).

REPTILIA
SERPENTES

BOIDAE

Python anchietae

Angola or Anchieta's Dwarf Python

REPRODUCTION

Anchieta's Dwarf Python is poorly known with few specimens kept in captivity (Branch 1998). Marais (1992) states that this is one of the rarest snakes in Southern Africa with less than 50 individuals known to exist. They are seldom encountered and nocturnal in captivity (Marais 1992), factors which possibly account for their scarceness.

The distribution includes northern Namibia and southern Angola (Branch 1998, Broadley 1983, Marais 1992) with a preferred habitat stated as rugged, dry, rocky sandveld and riverine vegetation (Branch 1998).

Three adult *P. anchietae* specimens (2 ♀ & 1 ♂) are kept in a common enclosure (with a simulated photoperiod), which is open to public viewing throughout the year, at the Living Desert Snake Park in Swakopmund, Namibia. Although the enclosure does not receive direct sunlight, the room is well lit and supported by an under-floor heater. Total lengths of the adult snakes are as follows: ♂ - 1370 mm, ♀ - 1450 mm, ♀ - 1350 mm (egg laying female).

Mating was frequently observed during the months prior to the eggs being discovered, although mating was not as insistent as had previously been observed for the South African Pythons (*Python natalensis*) at the Living Desert Snake Park. A few weeks before the eggs were laid, it was noticed that the smaller female was very swollen, but no eggs could be felt.

On 20 November 2001, four large eggs were found in the enclosure and were immediately removed to an incubator where they were kept at approximately 28° C, partly submerged in dampened vermiculite. The egg sizes were as follows: 95 x 42 mm; 90 x 40 mm; 90 x 40 mm & 73 x 34 mm (87 ± 8 mm & 39 ± 3 mm). According to Patterson & Erasmus (1978) five eggs were laid by a captive female. Egg size is markedly different to that of 62 x 37mm as mentioned by Branch (1998) and Marais (1992). After 81 days (9th February) one egg was snipped to determine the status of the eggs (the smallest egg was infertile). The baby python was fully formed and alive although there was still much egg yolk evident. After a week, the yolk had all been ingested, but the

baby died, still in the egg (this could have been due to an infection as a result of the fact that a blood vessel had been cut when the shell was snipped). The other eggs had also been snipped, as the shells were extremely tough (possibly under natural conditions, they would have been much less robust after this time, due to the actions of various outside agents). The first hatchling appeared on the 20th of February 2002, the other emerging two days later (i.e. 92-94 days). Branch (1998) indicated incubation to be between 60-70 days while Marais (1992) states between 72 and 75 days. Total lengths of the hatchlings were 490 mm and 510 mm, respectively. This is similar to total length of young measured by Branch (1998) and Marais (1992). The hatchlings were force-fed 'fuzzy' mice for the first time in June 2002 as they still had not shown any interest in eating small mice offered to them. They do not need much more than the head of the mouse inserted into their mouths, to get them eating. Currently, both juveniles are healthy, albeit very delicate and timid creatures. Both sloughed for the first time during June 2002.

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Submitted by

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* Corresponding author

COLUBRIDAE

Pseudohaje goldii (Boulenger, 1895)
Goldie's Tree Cobra

HABITAT

On 30 October 2001, we collected the specimen IRSNB 16398 (field number P775) (male; 1 preventral + 198 ventrals; anal single; 94 divided subcaudals; 15-15-11 smooth dorsal scale rows) in the city of Ntoum (0°23'25"N 9°45'35"E), Komo-Mondah Dpt, Estuaire Province, Gabon.

It was a traffic victim, still dying when we found it on the road in the afternoon, obviously hit by a car a few minutes before, as confirmed by locals. Ntoum is a city situated 42 km east of the capital city Libreville, and is far from the nearest forest patch. On 15 October 2001 we also examined another dead specimen (not collected; male; ? ventrals; anal single; ?3 divided subcaudals; 17-15-11 smooth dorsal scale rows) at Mandilou (1°16'37"S 10°36'38"E, alt. 100 m. a.s.l., Tsamba-Magotsi Dpt, Ngounié Province, Gabon) in a highly cultivated area. It had been beheaded by a farmer in a nearby field, then thrown onto the road; its approximate total length was 1.8 m. This second locality was also far from any forest. *Pseudohaje goldii* is reputedly a typical sylvicolous species. For instance, Chippaux (1999. Les serpents d'Afrique occidentale et centrale. IRD Editions, Paris, pp 1-278) noted that the species is found in primary or secondary forest, but still close to water. Spawls & Branch (1995. The dangerous snakes of Africa. Natural history. Species directory. Venoms and snakebite. Blandford, London: 1-192) indicated that its biotope is forest or thick woodland.

In the same way we have shown (Pauwels *et al.*, 1999. *Afr. Herp News* 30: 32-33) that the diet of *P. goldii* is much more eclectic than generally reported in the literature. The habitat of *P. goldii* seems to encompass many kinds of biotopes, from dense primary forests to urbanized areas. *P. goldii* thus seems to be at least as eclectic and ubiquitous as the sympatric cobra *Naja melanoleuca.*

We take this opportunity to mention that the specimen MNHN 3964, from Gabon, collected by A. Lecomte and entered as a *Pseudohaje goldii* in the Paris Museum collections register, has been re-identified by us as a *Naja melanoleuca.* The main scalation characters of this female are: 1 preventral, 221 ventrals, anal single, 64 divided subcaudals, 19 scale rows around midbody.

Acknowledgements

These new records are part of the results of extensive field surveys in Gabon sponsored by WWF Ecoregion Program. We thank Dr Ivan Ineich for having given us access to the MNHN specimen. We are grateful to Emile Mamfoumbi Kombila and Marc Mpami (Direction de la Faune et de la Chasse, Libreville), Joseph Mayombo, Rufin Mikala-Mussavu and Alexandre Pepy Boutolini (WWF-CARPO), and Dr Georges Lenglet and Georges Coulon (IRSNB) for their kind help.

Submitted by

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COLUBRIDAE

Lamprophis fuliginosus
Brown House Snake

DIET

An adult female Brown House Snake was accidentally injured at a compost heap with a fork and was captured. It happened on the 19th January 2002 at about 10h00 at 23 Gouws Avenue, Ras Louw Centurion, Pretoria, (25°50'S;28°13'E; 2528AD) Gauteng Province, South Africa. She regurgitated a rodent about two days (9h00) later on 21st January. The rodent was later identified as an adult stripe mouse, *Rhabdomys pumilio* (T. Kearney, Transvaal Museum, Pers. comm.). The female had a total length of 77.5cm and died on 24 January from its injuries. The snake was deposited in the Transvaal Museum with TM 83875 as the catalogue number. In the standard literature (Broadley, D.G. 1990. Fitzsimons' Snakes of Southern Africa, Jonathan Ball and AD. Donker Publishers, Parklands. p.387. ; Branch, W.R. 1998. Field guide to snakes and other reptiles of Southern Africa, Struik Publishers, Cape Town. p. 399.) rodents are reported to be eaten by Brown House Snakes, but no specific species are mentioned. De Waal (1978, The Squamata (Reptilia) of the Orange Free State, South Africa. Mem. Nas. Mus., Bloemfontein 11:1-160.) mention among other things that *Suncas* sp. (shrew) form part of the house snakes diet in the Free State. Jacobsen (1989, A herpetological survey of the Transvaal. Unpublished Ph.D thesis University of Natal, Durban) state

that *Steatomys* sp. (fat mouse) and Mus minutoides (pygmy mouse) form part of the house snakes diet in the then Transvaal. There is no detailed study about the diet of the brown house snake (Dr W.R. Eranch, Port Elizabeth, pers. comm). Although there are no literature records of the stripe mouse, *Rhabdomys pumilio*, being part of the diet of the brown house snake, *Lamprophis fuliginosus*, it probably happens often according to Dr W.R. Branch (Port Elizabeth, pers. comm) who also witnessed such a event.

Submitted by

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ELAPIDAE

Naja nigricollis nigrIcincta

Western Barred Spitting Cobra or Zebra Snake

DIET

The Western Barred Spitting Cobra, or commonly known as the Zebra Snake (*Naja nigricollis nigricincta*) occurs in central and northern Namibia, extending into southern Angola (Branch 1998, Broadley 1983, Marais 1992). It is mainly nocturnal and favours rocky arid regions (Branch 1998, Marais 1992).

The diet of *N.n.nigricincta* is varied and includes reptiles, amphibians and small mammals (Branch 1998, Marais 1992). According to Branch (1998) the diet is similar to that of *Naja mossambica* (Mozambique Spitting Cobra) which also includes arthropods such as grasshoppers. On 6 May 2002 an adult *N.n.nigricincta* was observed in the northwest Kunene Region in Namibia, close to the village of Omunuandjai (due south of Opuwu) at approximately 14h00. This area is classified as Mopane Savanna by Giess (1971). The specimen – unaware that it was being observed – was foraging amongst Mopane (*Colophospermum mopane*) trees. During this observation it was seen preying on Mopane worms (*Imbrasia belina*), which it gently took from leaves close to the ground. Mopane worms are common in this area during autumn and frequently utilized as a source of food by humans.

As far as we could determine this is the first record of *N.n.nigricincta* preying on Mopane worms throughout its range. It is however not clear to what extent Mopane worms are included in the diet of *N.n.nigricincta.*

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COLUBRIDAE

Mehelya nyassae

Black File Snake

DIET AND DEFENSE

On 2 January 2002, a single specimen was caught on the tarred road, 2 km east of Klaserie (at the Hoedspruit-Klaserie junction, 2431CA, Northern Province, South Africa), on a rainy evening. The specimen was placed in a material bag and taken home to be identified.

While handling the snake it excreted an extremely pungent fluid froM its cloaca, which was colourless. A tingling, burning sensation was experienced by one of the authors. This could probably have been due to an allergic reaction. The fluid stuck to the skin and could only be removed after washing many times with detergents, soap and water. This holds true for a specimen caught on 12 December 2000 at Kingfisherspruit ranger station in the Kruger National Park, South Africa. The specimen was found while it was consuming a Sundevall's Writhing Skink (*Lygosoma sundevallii sundevallii*) a day after a

rainstorm. This particular specimen also excreted the same pungent fluid when handled.
The only literature found that mentions anything about this foul odour was Jacobsen 1989 (A herpetological survey of the Transvaal). He omitted to comment on the stickiness of the substance and the difficulty in removing it.
Both specimens mentioned above had very long tails and red tongues. The specimen that was caught at Kingfisherspruit had black ventral scales with the latter half of each scale being pale edged. The specimen that was caught at Klaserie had brown ventral scales with the latter half being pale edged. Both specimens bellies had a black and white striped appearance. Neither of the two specimens were aggressive, both preferring to retreat rather than attack. Both specimens were released at the site of capture.

Submitted by
Errol and Darren Pietersen (P. O. Box 483, Hoedspruit, 1380, South Africa).

Amblyodipsas polylepis
Common Purple-Glossed Snake

SIZE
A large female was found dead on the road leading towards the Kruger National Park, at the Sandringham Private Game Reserve gate, Northern Province, South Africa (2431CA), on the 7th March 2002.
The specimen was identified using the illustrations of the head scales shown in FitzSimons Snakes of Southern Africa (1983). The specimen was a large female, with a total length of 900 mm and a snout-vent length of 483 mm. She had 22 subcaudals that were arranged in two rows. The ventrals numbered 204. The specimen was very thick-bodied with the tail ending abruptly. There was a fang present under each eye. Another specimen was caught on the Fleur de Lys farm near Klaserie (2431AC). This specimen was a large female with a total length of 711 mm and a snout-vent length of 669 mm.
Broadley (1983) reports that the largest specimen measured had a snout-vent length of 1050 mm, while Jacobsen (1989) reports that the largest specimen measured alive in the Transvaal had a snout-vent length of 542 mm. The latter record increases the maximum size of a live specimen measured in the old Transvaal Province by 127 mm.

Submitted by
Errol and Darren Pieterson (P. O. Box 483, Hoedspruit, 1380, South Africa).

Crotaphopeltis hotamboeia
Red-Lipped or Herald Snake

DIET
I have lived in Mpumalanga, South Africa all my life and I have a number of indigenous snakes all under a license. Amongst them I have a pair of Red-Lipped or Herald snakes (*Crotaphopeltis hotamboeia*) which I have had for a number of years and from which I have obtained and hatched a number of eggs. Hatchlings were all placed together in a glass terrarium.
Due to the specialized diet of these snakes, specifically frogs, at times it can be difficult to obtain food for the hatchlings. All the hatchlings were fed on dwarf and snoring puddle frogs (*Phrynobatrachus mababiensis* and *P. natalensis*). Despite the hatchlings being fed at regular intervals of approximately one week, the majority of them turned to cannibalism. One snake would attempt to swallow another, either completely or only partially, and die as a result. Cannibalism was the main cause of death within the clutches. Of a clutch of 10 hatchlings, only 2 survived. This cannibalistic behaviour was usually observed just before or after a feeding period and may be attributed to the fact that all the snakes were fed in the same terrarium. However, the snakes were not observed attacking one another when going for the same frog. It was interesting to note that one of the remaining hatchlings that had eaten another of its sort, was much larger than the hatchling that had only fed on frogs.
Due to a lack of space and terraria, all subsequent clutches of captive bred snakes (including *Crotaphopeltis hotamboeia*, *Dasypeltis scabra* and *Lamprophis fuliginosus*) hatchlings were housed in the same terrarium. One of the two remaining *Crotaphopeltis* juveniles, that ate one of its kin in the first year, now in its third year, also consumed a two year old *Lamprophis fuliginosus* hatchling that was housed in the same terrarium. This occurred after the *Crotaphopeltis* juvenile had not been fed for 2 months, due to a lack of food and directly after I had fed the *Lamprophis* hatchling a Cape dwarf gecko (*Lygodactylus capensis capensis*) in a separate container.
It is unusual to see that other snakes are also possibly included in this snakes very specialized diet, although these may be regarded as exceptional circumstances. This kind of behaviour may be triggered by the smell of food

and also perhaps by the fact that so many juveniles were living in a confined area.

Submitted by

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REPTILIA
SAURIA

CORDYLIDAE
Cordylus giganteus
Giant Girdled Lizard or Sungazer

BEHAVIOUR

While driving a vehicle during routine farm work on the farm, Heine, in the Free State, an adult *Cordylus giganteus* (sungazer) individual was spotted moving towards its burrow. It happened at 16h00 on the 26 December 2001. The farm Heine (27°20'S, 28°21'E; 2728AD and 1594 m asl) is +/_ 20 km west of the town of Frankfort, in the Free State Province, South Africa. Sungazers have occurred on the farm since living memory, but only in very small numbers. This sungazer was probably disturbed due to the sound of the vehicle's diesel engine. Unlike other times when they normally disappear in their holes, this one stayed in front of its hole. Closer inspection revealed that its burrow was flooded with water. The latter part of 2001 was an above average rainy season with 55 mm of rain recorded on the 23 December and 28 mm of rain on the 25 December. We could probably have caught it as it remained motionless in front of its burrow, making it vulnerable. We watched it for two minutes before we moved off. Two days later, on the 28th we visited the hole, but did not spot the sungazer. The water had drained and the burrow seemed to be active as there were fresh marks at the entrance. We looked in the vicinity for more burrows of sugazers, but could not find any. De Waal (1978, The Squamata (Reptilia) of the Orange Free State, South Africa. Mem. Nas. Mus., Bloemfontein 11:1-160.) found that in times of prolonged rains, burrows of sungazers were found to be flooded with their occupant(s) still alive and well inside. According to De Waal, the end of the burrow is usually a little nearer to the ground surface than its deepest (vertical) part and it appears that during flooding air is trapped here, supplying the

lizard(s) with oxygen until the water drains away. This incident indicated that at least some sungazers can be driven out of their burrows when excessive rains has fallen and the burrows have been flooded. This behaviour will obviously increase the risk of predation.

Submitted by

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AMPHIBIA
ANURA

BUFONIDAE
Bufo vertebralis Smith, 1848
Southern Pigmy Toad

DIET

Most anuran species are highly opportunistic and unselective feeders (Passmore & Carruthers, 1995, South African Frogs: A Complete Guide, Southern Book Publishers, Halfway House & Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg). Toads reportedly feed on beetles, caterpillars, grubs, crickets, moths and flying ants (Wager, 1986, Frogs of South Africa: their fascinating life *stories*, Delta Books, Craighall), but nothing appears to have been recorded specifically on the diet of *Bufo vertebralis*. In order to obtain some information on the diet of this species, the stomach and intestinal contents of two ethanol-preserved adult specimens in the herpetological collection of the National Museum, Bloemfontein (NMB) – which appeared to have consumed a fair quantity of prey - were examined in detail. Both toads were collected during summer in South Africa. Only positively identifiable (usually whole) items are listed. NMB A10 (28.0 mm snout-vent length) from Krugersdrift Dam, Bloemfontein district, Free State (2825DD), collected on 27 February 1972, contained a beetle (Coleoptera: Tenebrionidae) measuring 7.7 mm in length, whereas NMB A2304 (28.0 mm SVL) from the farm Wellwood, Graaff Reinet district, Eastern Cape (3124DC), collected 13-15 December 1983 in a monoethyleneglycol pit trap in rocky, grassy karroid veld, contained five

worker termites (Isoptera), nine ants (Hymenoptera: Formicidae) of two different species, three aphids (Homoptera: Aphididae), two fly larvae (Diptera), one ladybird beetle larva (Coleoptera: Coccinellidae) and two rake-legged mites (Prostigmata: Caeculidae). It is possible that some items, such as the mites, were ingested accidentally, e.g. captured while securing or attempting to secure an intended prey item, although a few ants found in the gut were of similar size to the mites.

Acknowledgements
We thank Louise Coetzee (Department of Acarology, National Museum) for identifying the mites.

Submitted by
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Hemisus marmoratus
Mottled Shovel-nosed Frog

TOXICITY

South Africa, Mpumalanga Province, Jeppe's Reef Medicinal Plant Centre, (2531 DA) South of Malelane.

A specimen was caught on 10 November 2001 during a school environmental outing by Penryn College. The specimen was caught around a large dam and was placed in a glass bottle together with five other frogs, namely *Breviceps adspersus, Tomopterna cryptotis, Phrynobatrachus mababiensis, Phrynobatrachus natalensis, Ptychadena mossambica* and *Afrixalus delicates,* to be identified at the cottage where we were staying.

The *Hemisus marmoratus* was observed to excrete a white substance approximately two minutes after placing it in the bottle, and within five minutes of excreting the substance all the frogs in the bottle, including the *Hemisus* had died. It is uncertain from which part of the body the substance was excreted. The bottle that the frogs were placed in did not have any holes for air, but as I have kept many frogs in bottles without holes overnight

without any adverse effects, including *Hemisus marmoratus*, and as oxygen would have entered the bottle when I placed the *Hemisus* in the bottle, I do not think that it was a lack of oxygen that caused the death of the frogs.

The substance that was excreted was presumably acidic as it caused a slight loss of colour in all the specimens. I was surprised that the *Hemisus marmoratus* also died, as I expected that it would be immune to its own chemical defense. I also wonder whether the *Hemisus* only excretes this substance in times of extreme stress, or only at certain times of the year, as I have seen red-lipped or herald snakes (*Crotaphopeltis hotamboeia*), amongst other species, readily feeding on *Hemisus marmoratus.*

None of the frog guides that I have consulted mentioned anything about the *Hemisus* genus being toxic and I am also unaware of any published articles mentioning this. All the specimens that died were placed in formalin and can be viewed at Penryn College, Nelspruit, Mpumalanga.

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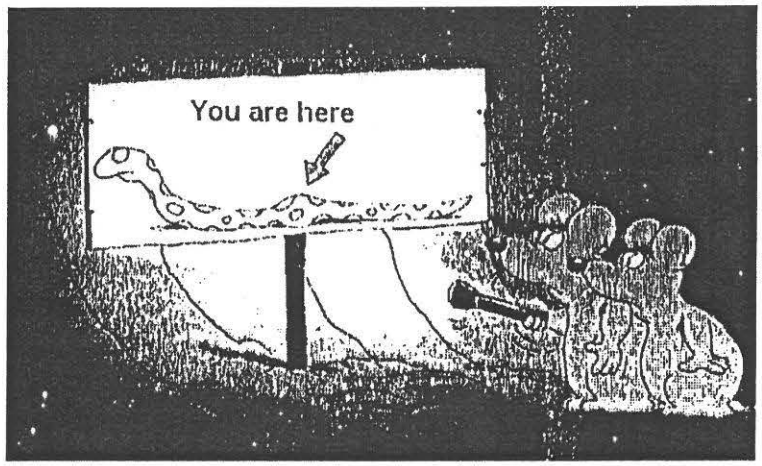

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION

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 Natural History Notes); **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); **Comments** (including data on the size, colour and taxonomic characters, eg. 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.

REPTILIA
CHELONIDAE

PELOMEDUSIDAE

Pelusios marani Bour, 2000.

Maran's mud turtle.

Gabon, Ngounié Province, Douya-Onoy Dpt., Dibotsa River at Dibotsa village, 2°2'29"S 11°7'55"E; alt. 70 m. asl; collected by Dibotsa fishermen; 15 November 2001. IRSNB 16236 (field number P801).

This juvenile specimen is the first mentioned since the series listed in the original description of the species. It was found 90 km southeast of the type locality Yombi, Ngounié Prov., Tsamba-Magotsi Dpt. Dibotsa is approximately 60 km from the border of the Congo-Brazzaville; the presence of *P. marani* in this latter country is thus highly predictible. This specimen (total length of carapace 108 mm, maximal width of carapace 79.5 mm) has been found in the muddy banks of the river, in strict syntopy with numerous *Xenopus sp.* (coll. IRSNB). Fishermen say the species is locally abundant, and it is a regular food item for the Dibotsa villagers, who call it *ibongh-i-moussirou* (*ibongh* = turtle, *i* = in, *moussirou* = forest) in Pounou language because it is mainly found during the dry season in the forest, or *ibongh ibengh* (*ibengh* = dark brown). Although *P. marani*, like every chelonian everywhere in Gabon, undergoes a high human predation pressure (see also Bour, 2000. *Manouria* 3 (8): 23-24), its discovery in a new locality, reasonably extending its known range, is a very positive and encouraging news.

Acknowledgements

This interesting record is part of the results of field surveys sponsored by the WWF Ecoregion Program. We thank Emile Mamfoumbi Kombila and Marc Mpami (Direction de la Faune et de la Chasse, Libreville), Dr Sébastien Lavoué (MNHN, Paris), Alexandre Pepy Boutolini (WWF-CARPO), and Dr Georges Lenglet and Georges Coulon (IRSNB) for their kind help.

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REPTILIA
SERPENTES

COLUBRIDAE

Philothamnus carinatus Andersson, 1901

Thirteen-scaled Green Snake

Tanzania, Kigoma District, Mahali Peninsula, two specimens. 1. Mansanya Camp on the lake shore below 800 m (0629Ba) 06° 08'S: 29°44'E; September 2000; M.A. Huffman & N. Doggart (found dead); Natural History Museum of Zimbabwe, NMZB 16935. 2. Kasieha River at 1036 m; 20 July 1959; J.A. Cooke; Natural History Museum (London) BMNH 1970. 2179 (presented by second Oxford University Tanganyika Expedition); "coiled round low shrub on edge of steep-sided gorge at bottom one metre above ground".

These records confirm the extension of this west and central African forest species halfway down the eastern shore of Lake Tanganyika, as mapped by Spawls et al. (2002. Field Guide to the Reptiles of East Africa. Academic Press, Natural World Series), based on Spawls' examination of the BMNH specimen. The only Tanzanian locality mapped by Hughes (1985. Proc. Intern. Symp. Afr. Vertebr. Bonn: 514) was from Kigoma, 150 km to the north.

Submitted by
Donald G. Broadley (Biodiversity Foundation for Africa, P.O. Box FM 730, Famona, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe).

REPTILIA
SAURIA

AGAMIDAE

Agama kirkii Boulenger 1885

Kirk's Rock Agama

Botswana, Central District, Mmadinare, Letsibogo Dam (2127DC); 26 August 2001; W. & V. Goodwin (adult male found dead); Natural History Museum of Zimbabwe (NMZB 16930).

This represents a southwestern range extension for the species, the only previous Botswana record being from 5 km east of Zelu hill on the edge of the Tuli Circle, which is 130 km to the east of Mmadinare.

Submitted by
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AGAMIDAE

Agama armata

Peter's Ground Agama

A suingle specimen was caught in Mozambique, Vilanculos Province, Sao Sabastiao Peninsula on 16 March 2002. It was caught in sandy Miombo dominated sananna, 30 m above sea level at around midday. The specimen was examined and photographed before being released.

The specimen was a juvenile with an approximate length of 6.0 cm. The back was yellowish-grey. There were 5 dark blotches bordering a broken series of paler blotches that ran along the backbone. The head was a pale blue colour and the tail had alternating dark and pale rings. This specimen seemed to be primarily terrestrial and even when persued, it preferred to run along the ground rather than to the nearest tree. This specimen was differentiated from *Agama mossambica* by the markings on the back, as well as by habitat. The latter species prefers lowland savanna and forest fringe and is both terrestrial and aboreal.

The nearest recorded locality (Field guide to snakes and other replties of Southern Africa, Branch 1998) seems to be around Quissico, Mozambique. This record extends the current distribution by approximately 310 km northeast.

Submitted by
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CORDYLIDAE

Chamaesaura macrolepis macrolepis

Large Scaled Grass Lizard

South Africa, Northern province, Fleur-de-Lys Estates, 2431CA
A single specimen was found in the garden on 17 October 2001. It was first seen while clearing away rank grass next to a reservoir.
It was identified as *Chamaesaura macrolepis macrolepis* and was distinguished from *Chamaesaura anguina* by having two dark stripes down its back and a pair of very reduced hind limbs were present. It was fed crickets and grasshoppers during its time in captivity and was photographed before it was released at the site of capture on 3 November 2001.
This record is a new locality record and extends current distribution by 85 km. The nearest recorded location (according to N.H.G. Jacobsen: A Herptological survey of the Transvaal, December 1989) is at White River (2531AC). What is also strange about this record is that these specimens usually occur in montane rocky hillsides covered by grass. This specimen was collected in a garden on the Lowveld, 10 km from the base of the nearest mountain (namely Mariepskop), with virtually no grass cover around as the lawn and the surrounding grass was all burnt.

Submitted by

Errol and Darren Pietersen (P. O. Box 483, Hoedspruit, 1380, South Africa).

AMPHIBIA
ANURA

Afrixalus delicatus

Delicate Leaf-folding Frog

South Africa, Northern Province, Jeppe's Reef Medicinal Plant Centre, 2531DA.
A single specimen was collected by Janine Manders on 10 November 2001, while on a school environmental tour. The specimen was collected on open mud next to a large dam. There was very little vegetation surrounding the dam with the nearest vegetation at the point of capture being 3 m away from the

waters edge. The specimen wsa placed in a bottle together with a *Hemisus marmoratus*, which later excreted a white substance which killed all the frogs in the bottle. The specimen was identified as an *Afrixalus delicates* and was distinguished from *Afrixalus aureus* by having light brown flanks and the lower back being slighty browner and not yellow like the rest of the back.
The specimen was placed in formalin after it had died and can be viewed at Penryn College (Nelspruit, Mpumalanga, South Africa).
This location extends the current distribution by approximately 40-50 km. It is also surprising that the specimen was found on open ground next to water.

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RECENT AFRICAN HERPETOLOGICAL LITERATURE: 23

W.R. Branch
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This survey covers the period 2001 to present, with a few earlier, overlooked papers. For brevity, no articles in any HAA publication are included, neither are peripheral publications using *Xenopus laevis* (or any other African species) as a model in biochemical or developmental studies, etc. To assist members, and where known, the following annotations are given: the distribution date (in brackets) if known to differ from the volume year; an English title for papers published in a foreign language; relevant African details from general articles; and the names of new taxa. Where given in the original article an email address for an author is retained here.

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Anon, 2001. Alarm bells ring for West Africa's sea turtles. *Tortuga Gaz.* **37(8):** 6-7.

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NEW MILLENIUM BOOKS

The following reptile journals were recently acquired by Andrew Isles Natural History Books. The sets are complete, in very good condition and bound. For further information try their website at: www.AndrewIsles.com/search.htm

[17046] Copeia, volumes 1-59. Ann Arbor: 19132001. Octavo, 59 volumes. Binder's dark blue cloth, minor fading and rubbing to some of the early volumes, the first 54 volumes with the owner's name Ruthven (Alexander G. Ruthven), a very good set. AU$8000.00

[17047] Herpetologica, volumes 1-22. Chicago: 1936-2001. Octavo, 21 volumes. Binders dark green cloth (except volume 22), a very good set AU$4500.00

[17048] Journal of Herpetology, volumes 1-17. Athens: 1968-2001. Octavo, 17 volumes. Binder's royal blue cloth and gilt lettering, a fine set AU$4000.00

[13361] Henderson, Robert W. Neotropical treeboas: natural history of the *Corallus hortulanus* complex. Melbourne FL: 2002. Octavo, dustwrapper, 197 pp., colour photographs, other illustrations. AU$110.00. An overview of the biology of a single species of neotropical tree boa.

RECENTLY RELEASED AND SOON TO BE RELEASED TITLES
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TADPOLES OF SOUTH-EASTERN AUSTRALIA: A Guide With Keys
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Orig. Ed. 2002 281 pp. ISBN 1-876334-63-0 Cloth $44.50
This groundbreaking work on the identification of tadpoles represents an ideal synthesis of science and natural history that will encourage both amateur and professional to observe and monitor declining frog fauna. The book is designed for use both in the field and the laboratory for the identification of tadpoles and frog eggs. It describes 84 species, including 30 species never described elsewhere. The first part of the book provides brief overviews of frog classification, developmental stages and conservation issues. Part 2 includes an identification key for tadpoles and another for eggs and embryos. It includes a section on collecting tadpoles and raising them in captivity to confirm identity. Part 3 provides detailed, illustrated species descriptions of tadpoles and adult frogs, with distribution maps for each species. The book includes 268 full-color photographs and more than 300 line drawings. *Tadpoles of South-eastern Australia* sets a new benchmark for rigorous taxonomic work. Published by New Holland Publishers, Australia. *(Available through Krieger Publishing Company.)*

LIFE, LOVE, AND REPTILES: An Autobiography of Sherman A. Minton, Jr., M.D.
by Sherman A. Minton, Jr.
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Orig. Ed. 2001 236 pp. ISBN 1-57524-172-2 Cloth $24.50
In this book, Minton shares some of his many experiences, from being on a navy ship when it was hit by a Kamikaze plane, to diving with sea snakes in the South Pacific; chasing geckos in the Sind Desert and treating people with tropical diseases in Central America. This is a modest account of the full and exciting life of this gifted man, a physician; father of modern Indiana herpetology; expert in toxinology, sea snakes, and snake bite; and devoted husband and father. The life and career of this unusual man were fascinating. Growing up in New Albany, a small town in his beloved southern Indiana, he decided to become a herpetologist. His father, a U.S. Senator, disapproved of his career choice and gave his son the option of becoming a lawyer or a medical doctor—Minton chose the latter. Throughout all of his travels, Minton collected information about amphibians and reptiles, and published more than 150 herpetological papers and books. Two popular books, *Venomous Reptiles* and *Giant Reptiles*, coauthored by his wife and lifelong assistant, Madge Rutherford Minton, have been staples for the younger generation of herpetologists. He also wrote *A Contribution to the Herpetology of West Pakistan*, which remains the most definitive book on the subject to date.

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PRESS RELEASES

Russian rat snakes hatch at the Pretoria Zoo

Five Russian rat snakes hatched at the National Zoo, Pretoria, South Africa on 15 January 2002. They are a welcome addition to the reptile collection at the zoo.

The Russian rat snake has often been called the friendliest of the larger snakes. It is native to the wetlands and farmlands where small rodents abound.

They are commonly found in Russia, especially in the areas aroundrivers, as well as in Korea, China and Mongolia. These snakes lay between six and 14 eggs per year and can attain a total length of 2.5m.

Frogs, frogs.....everywhere!

6 March 2002

The National Zoological Gardens of South Africa had added eight new dart-poison arrow to the collection already housed at the zoo.

What makes these small frogs so extraordinary is the fact that their skin' secrete such a strong poison as to cause rapid death! Dart-poison arrow frogs are only found in Central and South America where the Indians have extracted poison from their bodies for use on the tips of theor blow-darts for many years. The newest arrivals include blue dart-poison frogs, two yellow and black dart-poison frogs and two green and black dart-poison frogs. These frogs were brought to South Africa from Europe.

Blue-dart-poison frogs are extinct in their natural habitat due to rapid deforestation in the Amazon.

Basilisk hatches at Pretoria Zoo, South Africa

6 March 2002

Another splendid reptile to be hatched at the Pretoria zoological gardens is a basilisk. All species of basilisk live in tropical America. These iguana lizards always live among shrubs and tress near water onto which they drop the moment they are disturbed. The animal may go straight to the bottom of the water and stay there for a while, surfacing only when the intruder or disturbance has had time to move away.

It may also run across the surface of the water with its body held semi-erect. There can be little doubt that the basilisk's lightweight bidy, as well as the spread of the mong-fringed toes, is important in this act of running across the water. In certain parts they are referred to as the Jesus Christ lizard!

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