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African Herp News

Newsletter of the Herpetological Association of Africa



EDITORIAL

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, herpetological survey reports, venom and snakebite notes, short book reviews, bibliographies, husbandry hints, announcements and news items).

NEWSLETTER EDITOR'S NOTE

Articles shall be considered for publication provided that they are original and have not been published elsewhere. Articles will be submitted for peer review at the Editor's discretion. Authors are requested to submit long manuscripts by e-mail or on disc in Word 6.0/7.0 format. Shorter articles may be submitted as typescripts.

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.

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2004 SYMPOSIUM ORGANIZER

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This issue of the Newsletter was produced under exceptionally difficult circumstances, but whatever defects you will assuredly find in these pages must be my responsibility alone.

However, the material that I did eventually receive for this edition was in a less than satisfactory form, and additional items, though repeatedly promised, were simply never delivered. This was, unfortunately, something completely beyond my control and I can only apologise most sincerely on behalf of the Committee to those contributors whose articles have not appeared, and ask you to re-submit them again. I can assure you that this sort of debacle will not happen again.

The 7th H.A.A. Symposium, held at Bayworld in October, was arguably the best that I have attended. Not only was the content remarkable for the depth and variety of topics covered, but the thoroughly friendly and relaxed spirit that pervaded the whole affair was not once marred by the slightest hint of professional jealousy and academic territoriality that seems, rather sadly, to be so common these days in some circles.

Mike Bates has made a suggestion that is well worth following up—a new section, “Herpetological Art”, to which members of the Association with an interest in drawing or painting reptiles and amphibians are invited to submit copies of their work. Ownership and copyright in work reproduced in the newsletter would of course remain with the artist. Artwork would also be welcomed as “fillers” for those empty spaces that always seem to crop up on some pages!

We wish you well over the festive season and may you all flourish next year!

Angelo Lambiris,
Interim Editor



Angelo Lambiris

Cover Photo: Natal Green Snake, *Philothamnus natalensis*

(Photo Angelo Lambiris)

7th HAA SYMPOSIUM AND ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 7th HAA Symposium and AGM were held at Bayworld, Port Elizabeth, from 6th-9th October 2004. A full account of the Symposium will be given in the next Newsletter, complete with pictures of herpetologists as they really are. For the moment, however, we must include three items of the highest priority from the AGM, together with one from the Banquet.

WILLIAM ROY BRANCH 2004 RECIPIENT OF THE EXCEPTIONAL CONTRIBUTION TO AFRICAN HERPETOLOGY AWARD

The Exceptional Contribution to African Herpetology Award is the highest honour that the Herpetological Association of Africa can bestow. The award recognizes a lifetime of achievement and contribution to the study and promotion of African herpetology. This year the HAA confers the award on William Roy Branch.

Like Walter Rose, Bill was born at an early age. More specifically, he entered the world on 12 May 1946 in London, England. He grew up in the vicinity of Gatwick Airport, receiving his primary and secondary education in Crawley, Sussex before entering the University of Southampton. There he received his B.Sc. (Hon.) in 1968 and finally the Ph.D. in 1971. His doctoral studies were decidedly non-herpetological. Bill's dissertation was entitled "Studies on a foetal-specific alpha-globulin (AFP) in the rabbit" giving little hint that he would ever amount to anything – or at least anything interesting. In 1972 Bill took up a post-doctoral position with the Atomic Energy Board in Pretoria, studying liver cancer and AFP synthesis in humans. While in Pretoria he used his spare time to indulge in herpetological pursuits and began studies on snake venom and the reproductive biology of reptiles, presaging his ultimate career path.

In 1976 Bill returned to the United Kingdom, continuing his mammalian liver work in Southampton. However, the lure of Africa was too great and in 1979 Bill abandoned England – the land of his birth, the land of Shakespeare, a herpetologically depauperate land – for the sunny, snakey shores of South Africa, where he took up the post of Curator of Herpetology at the Port Elizabeth Museum. For the last 25 years Bill Branch has ably filled this position and, although his Afrikaans is no better than when he arrived, he has been warmly accepted by the South African herpetological community, earning the respect and affection of his colleagues.

Bill's research interests in herpetology are diverse. Early in his career he focused on hemipenial structure, reproductive biology, chromosome morphology and venom research. In the late 1980s and into the 1990s he began a series of important faunal survey projects, documenting the herpetofauna of the Addo, Tsitsikamma and Karoo National Parks. He also studied the biology of tortoises and leguans. By mid-decade, Bill had begun to move into systematics and also made important contributions in snake ecology.

He eventually expanded his areas of interest to include first Namibia and more recently he remains as active as ever, collaborating on a variety of projects in molecular systematics and returning to some of his favourite taxa, such as tortoises and adders.

Bill's contributions have been significant. He has described five new genera and 11 new species and has been responsible for revisionary and phylogenetic work on viperids, gekkonids, cordylids and chameleons. His publication record is impressive. It includes at least 441 contributions (414 in herpetology). Of these 112 are peer-reviewed scientific papers. Many of the remainder have been popular or semi-popular and have served to generate interest in herpetology among hobbyists, amateur naturalists and the general public. Among Bill's book length works are the *South African Red Data Book* (1988), which he edited, *Everyone's Guide to Snakes of Southern Africa* (1991, 2001), *Southern African Snakes and Other Reptiles. A Photographic Guide* (1993), and the book – *Bill Branch's Field guide to Snakes and Other Reptiles of Southern Africa* (1988, 1998). As all HAA members know, the last of these titles is the Bible of southern African reptiles and an indispensable reference.

But Bill's contributions are not all iconic; some of his lesser known works include "Unseen danger in the garden: *Euphorbia* poisoning", "Hatched in thatch: social weavers, the pros and cons of communes", "Ag shame!", and "The adventures of Baron Willem Von Tak: being an account of travels among the primitive heathens of Europe and America and in the torrid jungles of the Lost continent." His literary ability and turn of phrase have also been applied to explicitly herpetological topics in papers such as: "Foul and loathsome creatures", "Lizards: endearing and endangered", "Beautiful and bizarre", and "A new toad from Paradise". Those familiar with Bill will recognize certain adjectives in these titles that might apply equally well to the author as to his subject.

Bill's contributions extend well beyond his own publications. He has served on many international boards and committees, including the IUCN, the American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquaria, the world Congress of Herpetology, and the International Congress of Chelonian Conservation. His work has been supported by both the NRF and the National Geographic Society and his achievements have been celebrated by the Herpetologists' League, who in 2001 recognized him with the title of Distinguished Herpetologist. And although Bill is museum-based, he has also had an impact on higher education, serving as an accredited lecturer at the University of Port Elizabeth and acting as a supervisor of 11 Honours, M.Sc. and Ph.D. theses and as external examiner of 19 theses both in South Africa and abroad.

Among Bill's professional accomplishments, one must also mention his service to the HAA. He published his first herpetological paper ["Birth in the mole snake (*Pseudaspis cana*)"] in the *JHAA* in 1971 and since that time has had 218 publications in HAA publication outlets. He served as editor of the *JHAA* from 1983 to 1993 and as an editorial board member of its successor, *African Journal of Herpetology* (1994-2003). He has also been an HAA committee member (1989-2002) and most recently he has hosted the 2004 HAA conference in Port Elizabeth.

No tribute to Bill Branch would be complete without touching on his life outside of

herpetology. Ever the consummate naturalist, Bill has a strong interest in African wild-life in general, and birds in particular. Perhaps as part of a mid-life crisis Bill took up binoculars and for a decade has infuriated his herpetological field companions by insisting on looking up as well as down when in the field. His life list is impressive and I suspect that his eagerness to do environmental impact assessments in tropical Africa are as much a reflection of his desire to add another tick to his list as it is anything else. A master of the beasts of the air and land, Bill is also an avid fisherman. His authorship of "Carp fishing in South Africa" parts I and II attest to his knowledge of his quarry and his passion for the activity. A staunch environmentalist in most regards – Bill's principles fail him when it comes to this alien fish. Above all, however, Bill is devoted to his family, including his wife Donvé, and his sons Robbie, Tom and Matthew, and to his friends. I am privileged to have known Bill Branch for 17 years and to have spent more time in the field, the museum, and his home than I care to remember. He has been a firm friend, an enjoyable companion, a supportive colleague, and an able mentor to me, my students and many colleagues, both in South Africa and around the world. Indeed, for these personal interactions alone Bill is deserving of this award. On behalf of the Herpetological Association of Africa and his many, many friends, colleagues and associates, it gives me great pleasure to present the HAA Award for Exceptional Contribution to African Herpetology to Bill Branch.

Aaron M. Bauer
8 October 2004

CERTIFICATE OF LOYAL SERVICE: FRANK FARQUHARSON

The HAA committee wishes to present a special award to someone who has been synonymous with the Association for well over a decade now. We take this opportunity to present to Frank Farquharson a Certificate of Loyal Service for 11 years of unwavering support and dedication as Secretary and Treasurer.

Frank took over from Rod Douglas in 1991 and completed three consecutive terms by the time he stood down in 2002. He was later elected onto the committee as an Additional Member and currently occupies the portfolio of Public Officer.

As some of you who have served on the committee with Frank can tell you, the man can really be a thorn in the side. He is a no-nonsense kind of guy who abides by the Association's constitution and does not waste any time before letting you know exactly how he feels about any particular issue. But Frank's hardline approach has often proved beneficial in keeping the Association going in the right direction. It should be noted that when Frank completed his term of office as Secretary and Treasurer, the Association's finances were very healthy indeed.

I must also mention that the Association is also in debt to Frank's late wife Joan, who not only put up with Frank, but sacrificed two of the bedrooms in her house and her double garage to allow Frank to store HAA newsletters, journals, receipts and other miscel-

laneous paraphernalia.

Frank, please come up and accept this certificate as a token of our appreciation to you for your time and dedication.

Mike Bates

HERPETOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION OF AFRICA SEVENTH H.A.A. SYMPOSIUM: MINUTES FOR GENERAL MEETING

Sue McConnachie

Venue: Bayworld, Port Elizabeth

Date: 7 October 2004

1. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS GENERAL MEETING

No minutes for the previous general meeting were available from the previous chair of the association.

2. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT (Mike Bates)

The last H.A.A. committee election took place at the end of 2002. There were so few candidates nominated to committee positions that the serving committee decided to simply accept five, rather than the usual four, additional committee members. This meant that the association would save hundreds of Rand on postage and avoid having to hold a round of voting simply to eliminate one name. The current committee took office at the beginning of 2003 and is now reaching the end of its term of office.

The committee has undergone many changes. Firstly, after only a few months, Dr Donald Bradley resigned as he felt he was not able to contribute satisfactorily. About a year after taking office, our Secretary, Elizabeth Scott, resigned as she was to be wed and would be translocating to New York. At about the same time, our Treasurer, Louis du Preez, also resigned as he was spending considerable periods of time doing research in America and felt that he would therefore not be able to function effectively as Treasurer. We were very fortunate in that Rose Sephton-Poultney at Wits University agreed to take up the Secretary position in a co-opted capacity, and Johan Marais accepted the role of co-opted Treasurer.

In the meantime it was decided that all additional committee members should be assigned portfolios. Richard Boycott became Newsletter Editorial Assistant, Ernst Baard is Nature Conservation Representative, Martin Whiting is Website Manager and Frank Farquharson is Public Officer. Bill Branch had been co-opted as Symposium Organizer from the beginning, as he was to plan and run this symposium, and Louis du Preez was co-opted as Public Relations Officer after he kindly offered to fulfill this function. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all committee members for their co-

operation over the past two years. I should also mention that virtually all committee affairs are dealt with via e-mail, including discussions on various issues as well as voting if necessary. Let me assure you that I have consulted the committee on a regular basis and all committee members play an active role in the running of the Association.

At the end of September our newsletter editor, Michael Cunningham, resigned as a result of work pressure and a recent move from the University of Pretoria to University of the Free State in Qwa-Qwa. Last year only one newsletter was produced, *African Herp News* no. 36, which appeared in December. We thank Michael for this excellent newsletter that introduced a new section for the publication of Herpetological Surveys. However, we aim for two issues of the newsletter per year, and none have appeared this year. I must therefore offer the committee's apologies for the scarcity and infrequency of the newsletter thus far. However, we wish to make up for it before the year is out by posting two issues to members. The first, issue no. 37, has been formatted by Michael Cunningham, is currently ready on CD and will hopefully be printed during this month. Dr Angelo Lambiris has kindly agreed to perform the role of co-opted newsletter editor until the next elections, due early next year. Angelo will produce newsletter no. 38 and have this, the second issue for 2004, circulated in December.

During the committee's term in office a few important changes and improvements were made to the general functioning of the Association. The membership database was modernized and streamlined, the membership fee structure was changed, a new format for membership statements was introduced, and mostly notably for overseas members, a new system for payment of membership fees was started which has proved very effective. All back-issues of the newsletter and journal were sorted, counted and priced. A poster was put together by Michael Cunningham and taken to the big herp meeting in Manaus, Brazil where it was displayed together with H.A.A. newsletters and journals. A similar display, using the same poster, was put up at the SSAR meeting in the United States earlier this year by Louis du Preez.

As mentioned by Ernst, the H.A.A. has offered its general support to the organizers of the Fifth World Congress of Herpetology, to be held in Stellenbosch next year. We have opened a bank account for the WCH and have provided a link to our website.

I would like to thank Aaron Bauer for donating the books for the student awards.

Finally, on behalf of the Association, I would like to thank Bill Branch for his excellent organization of this meeting.

I now wish to ask Graham Alexander to read the Secretary's report in her absence.

3. SECRETARY'S REPORT (Rose Sephton-Poultney)

As of the end of September 2004, the Association has a total membership of 344, which seems to reflect a reasonably stable state for the last 10 years (332 reflected in sec's report for 1993). Of these 33 are new members who have joined this year, with a fairly even spread between African and Overseas.

48% of the individual membership is African and 36% overseas. The balance is made up of libraries, exchanges, and institutions.

Using the fairly subjective assessment of titles, addresses & personal knowledge,

62% of the members have a professional interest in herpetology.

A breakdown of the African membership reveals the following:

South Africa	159
Namibia	4
Tanzania, Zimbabwe	4
Swaziland	2
Cameroon, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Nigeria and Zambia,	1 member each

The overseas membership is distributed as follows:

USA	74
UK	21
Germany	20
Australia	9
Netherlands	6
Switzerland	5
Belgium	4
Italy	4
France	4
Denmark, Sweden	3
Austria, Canada, Japan	2
Argentina, Finland, India, New Zealand and Spain,	1 each.

Due to non payment, membership privileges have been withdrawn from those whose payment has been in arrears since Dec 2002. This amounts to 59 members. I will correspond with those in arrears to see if they would like to continue their membership, otherwise they will be transferred to the ex members list.

Breck Bartholomew has made payment from overseas considerably easier, and I think we should encourage as many overseas members as possible to use his services. The system is working well and could be used to encourage more overseas members to join.

There are two niggling problems.

One is defunct email addresses - it would be great if people would notify us of changes of details.

The other is the exchange category of membership of which there are currently 11 registered on the database (this involves organizations overseas sending copies of their Journals to a museum here in return for a copy of *Afr. J. Herpetol.*, at no cost to either organization). Although there is correspondence indicating that Liz Scott, my predecessor, tried to sort out the problem during her tenure in office, I think the issue could bear further discussion.

4. TREASURER'S REPORT (Johan Marais)

I inherited the treasury post from Louis du Preez earlier this year and have been accounting for moneys received from members (new and existing). Rose has summarized

membership statistics in her Secretary's Report.

With regard to income / expenditure, the HAA had R22,310.48 and R51,818.60 in its accounts on 29/9/2004. Each journal costs in the region of R20,000-R25,000 to produce and mail whereas each newsletter costs in the region of R7,000 to produce and mail. Considering that our expected income for 2005 is in the region of R22,200-R27,00 and for 2006 R28,000-R35,300, depending on various variables, including the Rand/Dollar rate and bank charges, we will have to reconsider our membership fees, otherwise we are heading for serious financial problems, I will put together a three-year budget for the HAA.

At present we have three ABSA Bank Accounts: Acc. No. 120277227 which we use for all deposits and payments, Acc. No. 17936077 with a R51,818.60 balance which is dormant and Acc. No. 912560761, which is the World Conference Account, used by Ernst Baard only.

Rose is in the process of writing to all members who have fees outstanding.

5. JOURNAL EDITOR'S REPORT (Graham Alexander)

This report covers both of my terms as Editor of *African Journal of Herpetology*. My first term started in the latter half of 2000, and my second term comes to an end during the first half of 2005.

In the last four years, the *African Journal of Herpetology* has grown in both stature and size. Previously, only a single issue of the journal was published in most years, with second issues appearing only sporadically. In addition to this, issues were not published at a set time of the year, but rather, whenever sufficient material had been submitted to make publication worthwhile. I am thus happy to report that during my term, the journal has been published every six months, in June and December of each year, and has appeared timeously on every occasion.

At the start of my first term as editor, I undertook to improve the journal, especially in those attributes that are used by ISI (Thomson Scientific) in evaluating journals for inclusion into their international database. Inclusion of the journal into the ISI database is of fundamental importance since, among other things, this is the primary yardstick used by the Department of Education (DE) in South Africa for journal accreditation. Accreditation by the DE means that South African authors receive subsidy for papers published in the journal, which in turn, results in higher rates of manuscript submission from South African authors, and a consequent improvement of standards in the journal. (South African authors remain the main contributors to the journal, although this is starting to change.) One can view the accreditation route as the proverbial "high road". Thomson Scientific rates 'timeliness of publication', 'use of international editorial convention', 'adequate peer review processes' and 'international diversity' among the most important criteria for listing. I believe that *African Journal of Herpetology* has improved significantly in all of these areas.

At present, the journal is still under evaluation by ISI. (It is a lengthy and exasperating process – I submitted the original application on 17th April 2003.) Thomson Scientific has recently informed me that the result of the evaluation will be finalized during

the beginning of 2005 on condition, of course, that the December 2005 issue comes out on time. I am optimistic that the journal will pass this milestone and will receive a well-deserved listing in the database.

In its wisdom, the DE has published a supplementary list of South African-based journals that are accredited by it, regardless of their ISI status. The department has achieved this by instituting an additional evaluation system which was used to rate the *African Journal of Herpetology* in 2002, independently of the ISI process. I am extremely pleased to report that the journal has been included in the DE's supplementary list and so, manuscripts published in it by South African authors have already been attracting subsidy since 2003. However, this does not diminish the importance of the ISI rating – inclusion into this database significantly improves the exposure of the journal to the international scientific community.

Measuring trends in the submission rate of manuscripts over time is one of the best yardsticks for assessing 'how well a journal is doing'. In figure 1, I present measures of the submission rate to the *African Journal of Herpetology* for the duration of my term as editor. The journal has shown strong and sustained growth to the extent that publication is no-longer constrained by the number of submitted manuscripts. Thus, the most recently published issue, vol. 53 (1), represents the new standard that HAA members can expect in the future: a minimum of 100 pages of good quality herpetology every six months.

[A graph prepared by Dr. Alexander showing the number of manuscripts submitted in the last four years (rising from 6 in the second half of 2001 to 16 in 2004 including rejected papers, accounting for 33% of submissions, could not be reproduced here—Editor.]

Assistant Editor

I have implemented several changes to facilitate the publication of the journal. One of the most important of these has been to co-opt Rose Sephton-Poultney as an Assistant Editor for the journal. Rose has been invaluable for proofreading and the checking of typesetting. I would thus like to take this opportunity to thank Rose for providing her services so generously.

Electronic publication

Another change that has had a material impact on the journal is the production of Adobe pdf versions of the published manuscripts. These are provided free, together with 25 free hard copy reprints, to each of the primary authors, and I believe that this service does a great deal in attracting submissions. I also regularly email pdf files in response to requests from interested parties from all over the world.

Reviewers

The reviewers (referees) used for evaluating manuscripts continue to be drawn from a wider and more international base. The peer review system is fundamental in achieving

high standards in science (even if it is incredibly painful for some of us at times). Interestingly, many of the people whose only previous exposure to the journal was being asked to review are now submitting manuscripts themselves. I find this trend most gratifying.

Editorial Board

The *African Journal of Herpetology* is privileged in having a truly world-class Editorial Board. The board has, however, not been as proactive as it could have in the past, and in an attempt to promote the board's input to the functioning of the journal, I approached the HAA Chairperson with the idea of co-opting one of the current members of the board to the position of Chair for the Editorial Board. Bill Branch has agreed to our request and has taken on this responsibility. Bill has also suggested that membership to the board should be an elected position, renewed on a regular basis. (Currently, all the board members appear to be serving life memberships!) This idea of electing board members should be discussed at the AGM. I also believe that members of the board should be used as 'associate editors' in order to lighten the editorial load of the editor.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the HAA members, and the Editorial Board in particular, for the confidence they have placed in me as editor and for the support that they have provided. My two terms as editor certainly represent a steep part of my life's learning curve.

6. JOURNAL EDITOR FOR 2005

Graham Alexander has served as Journal Editor for four-and-a-half years, since the second half of 2000. He has done an exceptional job of making the Journal a truly excellent publication. Graham has decided not to stand for re-election next year.

It was noted that being editor was an onerous task and it was suggested that the editor's load be spread among associate editors and a production editor. There were no nominations for editor. Please will interested members contact Mike Bates, or send the name of any potentially interested party to Mike so that he may contact them.

7. VENUE AND DATE FOR NEXT H.A.A. SYMPOSIUM

Louis du Preez and Che Weldon have kindly offered to host the next H.A.A. symposium at the Potchefstroom campus of the University of the North-West. Apparently the University also has decent accommodation. There were no other nominations, and Louis and Che were thanked for their kind offer. It was decided that the next symposium would take place in 2006 and it was suggested that it take place at the end of September. Louis and Che will, however, investigate university holidays and decide on a common time since September/October is usually a bad time for many people.

8. FUTURE OF THE ASSOCIATION

As Chairman, Mike Bates expressed concern about the number of members nominated or volunteering for the committee and that, on occasion, there has been no need to

vote because there have been so few candidates. He suggested that the committee needed new blood and that members should play a more active role in the affairs of the association. In addition he raised the question of whether or not the constitution be changed to allow overseas members to serve on the committee and to have voting rights. Aaron Bauer indicated that he would be interested in serving on the committee if this is the case.

It was decided that, in principle, the constitution should be changed to accommodate overseas members on the committee and that they have voting rights. Frank Farquharson will investigate the consequences with the SARS.

Any interested parties should please contact Mike Bates.

10. GENERAL

Membership fee increase

The committee will discuss an increase in membership fees for 2005. There decision will be put out in the newsletter. In principle, an increase to R150 was agreed upon. Should the committee decide that the fees should exceed this amount, the decision will be put to the membership.

Back issues

The repricing of back issues will decided on by the committee.

Editorial board

It was decided that the Editorial Board should be nominated for a period of three years and that they could serve a maximum of two terms on the Board.

Suggestions were made that information regarding nominees, possibly in the form of a CV, should be put out in the newsletter.

Journal page charges

It was agreed that, in principle, non-H.A.A. members pay page charges for papers published in the journal. It has been suggested that these be R100 per page.

11. PRESENTATION OF AWARD

The H.A.A. Committee presented Frank Farquharson with a Certificate of Loyal Service for 11 years of unwavering support and dedication as Secretary and Treasurer.

Frank took over from Rod Douglas in 1991 and completed three consecutive terms by the time he stood down in 2002. He was later elected onto the committee as an Additional Member and currently occupies the portfolio of Public Officer.

SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

ALTITUDINAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE SHORT-TAILED PYGMY CHAMAELEON (*Rhampholeon brevicaudatus*) AND THE USAMBARA PITTED PYGMY CHAMAELEON (*R. temporalis*) IN TANZANIA

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Between June 2000 and March 2001, Frontier-Tanzania conducted a biological survey of Nilo Forest Reserve (04° 50' – 59'S, 38° 37' – 41'N) in the East Usambara Mountains, Tanzania, as part of the East Usambara Conservation Area Management Programme (EUCAMP). Nilo Forest Reserve covers approximately 6,025 ha with an altitudinal range of 400 m – 1,506 m, encompassing lowland, submontane and montane forest. The reserve consists of a forked mountain ridge, aligned roughly north – south.

Two species of pygmy chameleons, *Rhampholeon brevicaudatus* (IUCN: Vulnerable) and *R. temporalis* (IUCN: Endangered) were surveyed at night in a range of habitats and altitudes. In total, approximately 180 individuals of both species were observed, about 80% of which were *R. brevicaudatus*. All individuals were found roosting within 50cm of the ground, on low vegetation or in the leaf litter.

Voucher specimens were taken for both species (KMH23210, KHM23211, KMH23399, and KMH23007), and deposited at the University of Dar es Salaam.

Differences were observed in the distributions of the two species throughout the reserve. *R. brevicaudatus* was typically observed at altitudes up to 950 m on east-facing slopes, but was observed at altitudes up to almost 1,200 m on west-facing slopes. Conversely, *R. temporalis* was observed at altitudes above 930 m on east-facing slopes, but was only observed at altitudes above 1,100 m on west-facing slopes. The transition between the distributions of the two chameleon species occurred over a narrow altitudinal range, and the two species were very rarely seen in the same localities.

In a study of pygmy chameleons in Madagascar, Raxworthy & Nussbaum (1995) found similarly narrow altitudinal transitions between *Brookesia* species at high altitudes in the rainforests of northern Madagascar, and stated that the factors limiting the altitudinal range of *Brookesia* species may be directly related to a combination of climate and forest type. However, in Nilo Forest Reserve, on both on the east-facing and west-facing slopes, the transition occurred within an apparently homogenous habitat. No differences were observed in the forest composition or structure above or below the transition zone. *R. brevicaudatus* has adapted to a variety of different habitats, from coastal thicket to evergreen forest, so it is unlikely that subtle habitat changes limit the distribution of this species. Indeed, this species is commonly found in the tea plantations that surround Nilo

Forest Reserve, a fact that also has important ramifications for the status and conservation of this species.

Taking into account the higher altitude of the transition between species on west-facing slopes than on east-facing slopes, it therefore appears that the altitudinal distribution of *R. brevicaudatus* in Nilo Forest Reserve is linked to climatic factors such as temperature, rainfall, and humidity, rather than changes in habitat. The narrowness of the transition zone also suggests that competition may occur between species. Further studies are therefore needed to identify whether the distribution of *R. temporalis* is affected by climatic factors, forest type, competition with *R. brevicaudatus*, or a combination of the three. Information relating to the distribution of *R. temporalis* is necessary for the conservation of this rare species, and for the management of the habitats where it is found. In addition, further studies of other *Rhampholeon* species are necessary, throughout the Eastern Arc range, to assess the factors affecting the altitudinal distributions of other threatened pygmy chameleons.

Acknowledgements

Frontier-Tanzania is a collaboration between the Society for Environmental Exploration (SEE) and the University of Dar es Salaam. The research was financially and logistically supported through FINNIDA and SEE. Many thanks go to Mr Simon Loader for his support with the fieldwork.

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ADDITIONAL HERPETOLOGICAL RECORDS FOR THE RICHTERSVELD REGION

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In a recent review of the herpetofauna of the Richtersveld National Park (RNP) and adjacent regions, Bauer and Branch (2001) confirmed the presence of seven amphibian and 57 reptile species in the region. However, a number of species were poorly documented or of rare occurrence in the RNP. Western Cape Nature Conservation, Jonker-

shoek, recently donated a number of additional specimens from the Richtersveld region to the Bayword (PEM) collection. They include a number of interesting specimens that amplify our knowledge of the regional herpetofauna. They are described below.

Phrynomantis annectans (Werner, 1910)
Frog

Three metamorphosing froglets (PEM A7536), 15-16 mm snout-urostyle length, collected in rainwater pools in the gorge of the Ganakouriep River, Vanderster Mountains east of Khubus (28°28'S, 17°09'E; 2817AC), 22 October 1981, collector unknown. Found in association with metamorphosing toadlets of *Bufo robinsoni*, which was previously recorded from the Ganakouriep River (Bauer and Branch, 2001).

Although a number of authors had noted the presence of this unusual frog in the Richtersveld (Branch and Braack, 1995; Passmore and Carruthers, 1995), no voucher specimens were previously available. Baard (2000) recorded specimens from Gamsberg, Aggeneys (2918BD), and a population at Augrabies National Park is also known (PEM A1605, 1606).

Meroles knoxii (Milne-Edwards, 1829)

Knox's Desert Lizard

An adult male (PEM R5784; SVL 53 mm) collected on the top of the Remhoogte, approximately 12 km NNE of Cornellskop, Richtersveld (28°19'S, 16°56'E; 2816BD), 9 August 1979, coll. E. van Jaarsveld. Although the dorsum lacks obvious stripes, the specimen conforms in scale counts (keeled dorsal scales, nine scales in collar, 23-24 subdigital lamellae under 4th toe) with typical *M. knoxii*.

Most previous specimens from the park (Bauer and Branch, 2001) were associated with sandy regions to the west and south of the RNP. The present record supports the validity of a northern record from Jakkalsputs (also 2816BD), on the western boundary of the RNP.

Rhinotyphlops lalandei (Schlegel, 1844)

Delalande's Beaked Blind Snake

A very large adult female (PEM R5807; 380 mm SVL + 5 mm TailL) collected at Daberas, approximately 23 km ESE of Vioolsdrift, Richtersveld (28°52'30"S, 17°49'22"E; 2817DD), 2 December 1981, coll. P.M. van der Westhuizen.

Few records (e.g., Helskloof, 2816BD) of this small blind snake are known from the Richtersveld region, and none were obtained during the extensive survey of Bauer and Branch (2001). The Daberas specimen considerably exceeds in length the previously largest known specimen (333 mm total length; Broadley, 1990).

Acknowledgements

We thank Western Cape Nature Conservation for the donation of herpetological material from the Richtersveld

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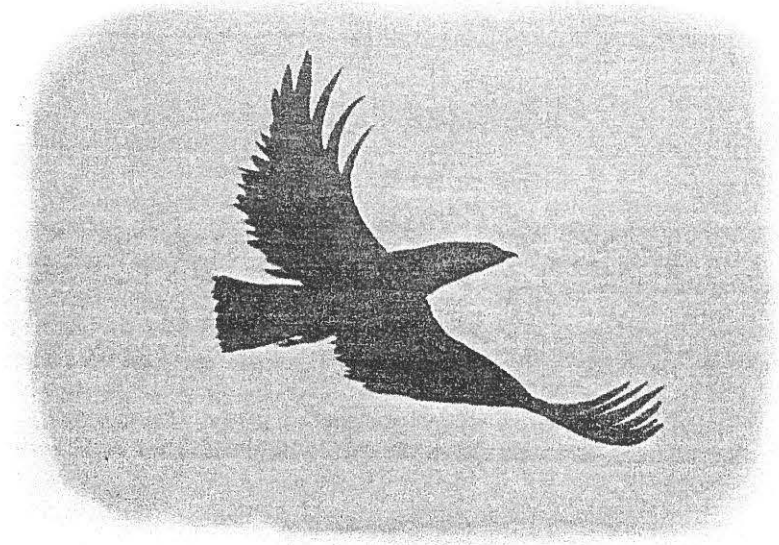
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Angelo Lambiris

Some herpetologists are also known to look upwards!

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).

AMPHIBIA : ANURA

BUFONIDAE

Schismaderma carens

Red Toad

PREDATION ON ADULTS, AND BREEDING BEHAVIOUR

On the 10th & 11th December 2002 we visited the game farm Thaba Pulani, in the Thabazimbi district Limpopo Province. The previous day (9th), 30mm rain had fallen (Deon Nieuwoudt, *pers. comm.*). During a game drive on the 10th, at 15h00, we heard the loud calling of frogs at a man-made temporary dam about 900m² in area (24°34' 57"S; 27°36' 259 E; 1031m a.s.l.). When we approached the dam we noticed three Hamerkops (*Scopus umbretta*) walking at the edge of the dam or in the shallow fringes. One was picking at an object, which was lying at the edge of the dam. The Hamerkops flew away when we approached. On inspection we found that most of the frogs were Red Toads (*Schismaderma carens*) and the males, many floating, were calling loudly during daytime. There were also some Garman's Toads (*Bufo garmani*) present and, we found one Garman's Toad with three male Red Toads trying to mate with it. Several pairs of Red Toads and at least two Guttural Toads (*Bufo gutturalis*) were in amplexus. Some authors say that if the Red Toad breeds, it is normally the only species of bufonid that breeds in that particular pond. (Pienaar U.de V. Passmore N.I. & Carruthers V.C.

1976. *The Frogs of the Kruger National Park*. National Parks Board of South Africa. Pretoria. p. 91.) No characteristic schools of Red Toad tadpoles were observed at the dam, which indicates breeding had just started because the dam had filled up the previous day. Earlier the same day, we saw a Red Toad tadpole school in a small round cement built pond (2.5 diameter), which contains permanent water for game.

The object which one of the hamerkops was picking at when we disturbed them proved to be an injured male Red Toad, still alive. It could not move and its vocal sac was permanently inflated. We took a couple of pictures of the injured frog and also of the Red Toads in amplexus. We visited the same site again at 20h00. The Red Toads were still calling loudly, with a few Guttural Toads, but no Hamerkops were present as they are a diurnal species. We found some Anchieta's Ridged Frog (*Ptychadena anchietae*) in the grass embankment next to the dam as well as calling males of the Senegal Kassina (*Kassina senegalensis*) and Red-banded Rubber Frog (*Phrynomantis bifasciatus*) at the dam. On the 11th we visited the dam at 10h00 and found four Hamerkops in and around the dam, presumably looking for frogs. They flew away when we approached. In the standard literature for birds (Maclean, G.L. 1993. *Roberts' Birds of Southern Africa*. 6nd.ed. John Voelcker Bird Book Fund, Cape Town. p. 871.) mention is made that mainly Platannas, *Xenopus laevis* (adults and tadpoles), fish, some invertebrates and rarely small mammals form part of the Hamerkops' diet. In three of the standard works published on frogs in Southern Africa in the past twenty years (Wager V.A. 1986. *Frogs of South Africa*; 2nd ed. Delta Books, Craighall. p. 183., Channing, A. 2001. *Amphibians of Central and Southern Africa*, Protea Book house, Pretoria. p. 470. Passmore, N.I. & Carruthers, V.C. 1995. *South African Frogs*, 2nd ed. Southern Book Publishers & Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg. p. 322.) the predators of adult and tadpole Red Toads vary. Dragonfly nymphs, fishes, Hamerkops and terrapins, presumably *Pelomedusa subrufa*, may prey upon the schools of tadpoles. Young toads are eaten by the Vine Snake *Thelotornis*. Adults are known to be eaten by Red-lipped Snakes (*Crotaphopeltis hotamboeia*) and the Giant Eagle Owl (*Bubo lacteus*). Apparently Red Toads are also the preferred prey of Night Adders (*Causus rhombeatus*).

This is the first documented instance where Hamerkops have fed on the adult Red Toads. Hamerkops are diurnal birds and will probably feed only a few days a year on the Red Toad, when the latter are active during daylight in the breeding season. Red Toads can be found in amplexus with other Bufonidae and can breed in temporary and permanent water in the same breeding season and in the same vicinity.

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RANIDAE***Pyxicephalus adspersus*
African Bullfrog****EMERGENCE BEHAVIOUR**

On the 29th October 2002, during a night drive at Rietvlei Nature Reserve (25°52'S; 28°17'E; 1493m a.s.l.) on the Acacia route, we saw an adult male African Bullfrog on the tar road at 19:30. We stopped and picked it up and found its body covered with wet soil, which indicated that it had emerged the same day. After examination of the frog, it was released. No other African Bullfrogs were observed on the tar road for the duration of the drive. October 2002 was a relatively dry month at Rietvlei Nature Reserve, with only 18.5mm (7th and 8th October) rain until the 25th October. On the 26th 10.5mm fell, none on 27th October and 7.5mm on the 28th (Riaan Marais, *pers. comm.*). This indicates only 18mm of rain had fallen in the preceding time before the bullfrog emerged. All the temporary ponds were still dry and no breeding could have taken place. Two more bullfrogs were found on separate occasions in December 2002, but there were no recorded attempts of breeding at all at Rietvlei Nature Reserve for the 2002/2003 breeding season for African Bullfrogs (Riaan Marais, *pers. comm.*). Rietvlei Nature Reserve is the only protected area in the Gauteng province where the African Bullfrog is known to breed. In other areas of Pretoria successful breeding did take place during 2002/2003. The standard literature states that African Bullfrogs need 65mm of rain or more to emerge and to breed (Channing, A. 2001. *Amphibians of Central and Southern Africa*, Protea Book house, Pretoria, p.470. It seems far less rain can cause some bullfrogs to emerge. For successful breeding much more rain is required in order for temporary ponds to fill up. African Bullfrogs can also emerge in any particular season and without not necessarily breeding.

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REPTILIA : CHELONIA**TESTUDINIDAE*****Homopus signatus signatus*
Namaqualand speckled padloper****AGGRESSIVE COURTSHIP BEHAVIOUR**

Courtship behaviour in captive *Homopus signatus signatus* has been described to consist of a male constantly following a female, and head-bobbing prior to mounting attempts (Loehr, 1999, *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* 3:468-473). Within the stud-book on this species at the Homopus Research Foundation (to date six mating pairs or groups), no aggressive courtship behaviour was observed between 1995 and 2004.

A female (SCL 99.0 mm) that had been housed in a wild-caught group consisting of a male and another female died on 14 May 2004. The group had been kept together since 1995, and the male had always shown typical courtship behaviour towards both females. The enclosure had a surface of app. 150 x 150 cm and contained many hiding places and visual barriers. On 16 May 2004 the dead female was replaced by a reproductively active captive-bred daughter born on 30 November 1996 (SCL 98.5 mm) (note: eggs would not be incubated as they would result in inbred specimens). Courtship behaviour of the male was extended to this female, but became aggressive, including biting of the marginal scutes and the hind and front limbs, before mounting. On 4 June 2004 the female was separated from the wild-caught couple, as wounds started to form on the front limbs. To date, no aggressive courtship behaviour has been shown towards the remaining female.

It is unclear why the male showed different courtship behaviour towards the captive-bred female, and why it differed from all other courtship behaviour observed in the stud-book population. There are no accounts of courtship behaviour in the wild, but both wild and captive males can be aggressive amongst each other (Loehr, 2002, *Bulletin of the Chicago Herpetological Society* 37:1). It is recommended to closely observe mating pairs in captivity, and to separate them timeously when necessary to prevent stress and wounds.

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TESTUDINIDAE***Psammobates tentorius verroxii*
Bushmanland Tent Tortoise****CLUTCH SIZE**

According to Boycott & Bourquin (2000. *The Southern African Tortoise Book*, Rus-sel Friedman Books, Halfway House, South Africa) the clutch size for all *P. tentorius* subspecies varies from 1 to 3 eggs although it "appears that only one egg is produced at a time during spring or summer" for *P. t. verroxii*. Branch (1998. *Field Guide to the Snakes and Other Reptiles of Southern Africa*, Struik Publishers, Cape Town) mentions that the western races – i.e. *P. t. verroxii* and *P. t. trimeni* – lay 1 or 2 eggs during summer. The egg size as described by above mentioned authors falls within the range of 21-28 x 27-35 mm.

During early February 2004 an old carcass of an adult female *P. t. verroxii* was collected by Nico Straus on 5 February 2004, on the farm Velloor approximately 80km south of Karasburg, Namibia (28°34'S, 19°11'E, 804m). Located inside the carapace were two eggs, one of which was broken. The size of the complete egg was 40x26mm. It is uncertain if the size of the egg could have resulted in the death of the individual. Clutches of 2 eggs each were also observed for *P. t. verroxii* in the vicinity of the Tiras Mountains in southwestern Namibia (Helmeringhausen area) where four nests, each containing a clutch of 2 eggs, were found after being excavated by mongooses during May 2003 (Schleicher pers.obs.).

From these observations it is clear that *P. t. verroxii* lay up to two eggs in Namibia with the egg size being slightly larger than previously recorded.

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REPTILIA : SAURIA

AGAMIDAE

Agama agama (Linnaeus, 1758)

Red-headed Rock Agama

NOCTURNAL ACTIVITY

On April 9, 2003 at 21h25, three of us (MB, SG and OSGP) observed a night-active adult female *Agama agama* in Tchibanga (02°55'05''S, 10°59'47''E), Mougoutsi Dpt, Nyanga Province, Gabon. The specimen (PEM R 5512, SVL 102 mm, total L 267 mm, 69 midbody scale rows) was in close proximity a neon light, three meters above the ground on the wall of a hotel-restaurant in the city center, in syntopy with a few *Hemidactylus mabouia* (voucher IRSNB 16658). Its stomach was full and contained insects of various orders (notably Coleoptera, Hymenoptera Formicidae and Orthoptera) and four small berries (about 6 mm diameter) with a proportionally big seed. This is the second record of nighttime activity by *A. agama*, the first being reported by Pauwels et al. (2003. Herp. Rev., 34, in press) from Mouila city in Ngounié Province, 115 km N of Tchibanga, along the same main road. The geographical restriction of this nocturnal activity by such a widely distributed species is remarkable, and a behavior as far as we know still recorded only from Gabon. Moreover, numerous citizens of Libreville explained to us that this species appeared in Libreville only at the end of the 1970s, and that it has since progressively invaded the interior of the country, inadvertently being translocated by vehicles. According to our informants, the species apparently arrived on

boats coming from western West Africa.

Acknowledgements

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CHAMAELEONIDAE

Chamaeleo dilepis

Flap-necked Chamaeleon

PREDATION

On 9th September 2002 an adult Little Banded Goshawk (*Accipiter badius*) was observed, catching and eating an adult Flap-necked Chamaeleon, *Chamaeleo dilepis*, at Bon Accord, on Plot 92 (25°38'S; 28°12'E 2528CA), near Bon-Accord Dam, north of Pretoria. The chameleon's total length was about 20-25cm. The chameleon was in a white stinkwood tree (*Celtis africana*) at 11:00, when the bird attacked it. The goshawk grasped the chameleon by the body with its claws. The chameleon then wrapped its tail around a branch, opened its mouth, made noises to try to intimidate the bird, and tried to bite the bird. After more than half an hour the bird succeeded in killing the chameleon. While killing the chameleon, the bird never let go of it and maintained balance with its wings. During the attack, the bird did not notice, or did not care about, the presence of humans. After it had killed the chameleon it only flew to the next tree when we approached it while it was eating.

According to the literature, about 70% of the diet of the Little Banded Goshawk consists of different species of lizards (W.R. Tarboton 1978, Breeding of the Little Banded Goshawk. *Ostrich* 49:132-143), but no mention was made of the Flap-necked Chamaeleon. In the standard literature mention is made of different enemies of this chameleon such as the Vine Snake (*Thelotornis capensis*), Spotted Bush Snake (*Philothamnus semivariegatus*) and African Grey Hornbill (*Tockus nasutus*) (Pienaar, U.deV., Haacke W.D. & Jacobson. N.H.G., 1983. *The Reptiles of the Kruger National Park*. National

Parks Board. p 236), and mainly snakes particularly the Boomslang (*Dispholidus typus*) and Twig Snakes (*Thelotornis capensis*), but also includes monkeys and birds e.g. the Crowned Hornbill (*Tockus alboterminatus*) (Branch W.R., 1998. *Field Guide to Snakes and Other Reptiles of Southern Africa*, Struik Publishers, Cape Town. p. 399). This incident seems to be the first recorded observation of a Little Banded Goshawk preying upon a Flap-necked Chameleon.

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CORDYLIDAE

***Chamaesaura anguina*
Cape Grass Lizard**

FIRE, POPULATION SIZE AND DENSITY

The following observation records the effect of a fire on a lizard species, *Chamaesaura anguina*, and gives an indication of the population density and abundance of this species at a specific locality.

On 15 January 2003, a fire swept through thousands of hectares of natural fynbos vegetation between Gansbaai and Agulhas on the southern Cape coast, Western Cape Province, South Africa. The following day (16 January 2003 - late afternoon), while driving through the burnt area, dead *C. anguina* specimens were noticed along a gravel road passing through hilly terrain. At one point, the vehicle was stopped and a more intensive search was carried out on foot along a one kilometre stretch of the road. A total of 68 *C. anguina* specimens, of adult to sub-adult size, were counted along this (five metre wide) stretch of road. All of them were dead, except for one adult, and appeared to be fire casualties. One of the dead, a gravid female, was found to contain three fully formed babies. Extensive expanses of burnt Mountain Fynbos covered both sides of the road at this locality. The locality was situated from 3,8 to 4,8 kilometres WNW of Wolvengat settlement (formerly Viljoenshof) on the road to Pearly Beach: ¼° grid map 3419DA: coordinates 34°39'40,9"S/19°39'35,6"E to 34°39'53,6"S/19°39'01,5"E: altitude 144 to 120 metres.

In conclusion, this observation provides further evidence that *C. anguina* attempts to flee fires; in contrast to most other fynbos lizards which seek shelter in rock crevices or underground. Furthermore, the relatively high number of individuals encountered, indicates a high population density which is a possible survival strategy of this species. The only other animals noted at this locality were two dead and one live *Chersina angulata* (Angulate Tortoise), one dead *Bitis arietans* (Puff Adder), and three dead and one live *Otomys irroratus* (Vlei Rat). The dead animals were all fire casualties.

Acknowledgements: Our children, Barry and Marie-Adèle, are thanked for their assistance in the field.

Submitted by

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GERRHOSAURIDAE

***Cordylosaurus subtessellatus*
Dwarf Plated Lizard**

BIMODAL ACTIVITY PATTERN

The biology of *Cordylosaurus subtessellatus* is poorly known, and the available information appears to be limited to some general comments on its habitat, behaviour, diet, and reproduction (e.g., Branch, 1998, *Field Guide to the Snakes and Other Reptiles of Southern Africa*, Struik Publishers). While collecting the species for a captive study, I was able to make some observations on the species' behaviour and activity cycle in the wild. These observations were made between 10 and 15 January 2004, near Springbok, South Africa.

Three adult *C. subtessellatus* (one male, one female, and one specimen of unknown sex) were observed daily on an approximately 12 x 12 m fairly levelled, south-easterly facing rock slab, with large boulders and scattered rocks, and few sandy sites. Hardly any vegetation was present. The specimens typically basked close to rock shelters between 08:00-09:00 hrs, and showed some movement. After this activity episode, all specimens disappeared until a second activity period between 17:00-18:00 hrs. The sun disappeared from the site at 18:00 hrs, after which all activity ceased. The lizards were much more active during the afternoon activity episode, when the entire rock slab was crossed, mostly running from rock to rock, with brief basking in between. No feeding was observed. When two specimens (male and female) ran into the same shelter, one quickly ran away, but no aggression (e.g., biting, fighting, chasing) was noted. Upon disturbing a specimen, it would typically run into a rock shelter and dig into dry sandy substrate beneath, or it would attempt to dig into the substrate at the spot, when no suitable shelter was nearby.

The rock slab and the area around it were searched for reptiles throughout the day, but the activity of all seven *C. subtessellatus* found was strictly bimodal within the abovementioned timeframes. In contrast, many *Agama atra*, *Mabuya variegata*, and *M. sulcata* (including hatchlings and juveniles of all three species) were found to be active throughout the day.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Northern Cape Nature Conservation for issuing permits (NNO 1/10/2 145/2003, and NNO 1/10/3 7/2004) to initiate a captive study on *C. subtessellatus*.

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REPTILIA : SERPENTES

COLUBRIDAE *Lamprophis fuliginosus* Brown House Snake

HIBERNATION

On 14th July 2003 three adult Brown House Snake (*Lamprophis fuliginosus*) females were found hibernating together in a stone wall. The snakes were found at Labrie Kennels, Irene (25°53'42"S; 28°15'09"E; 1536m asl) south of Pretoria, Gauteng; South Africa. The stone wall is 2m x 0.3m. The females were found 0.5m from the ground in a crevice. The females were 83cm, 86cm and 98cm long respectively. The snakes were released at the nearby Rietvlei Nature Reserve. In the standard literature there is no mention of hibernation, single or in groups for Brown House Snakes. (Pienaar, U.deV., Haacke W.D. & Jacobson. N.H.G., 1983. *The Reptiles of the Kruger National Park*, National Parks Board. p 236, Broadley D.G. 1990. *Fitzimons' Snakes of Southern Africa*, Jonathan Ball and AD. Donker Publishers. p387 & Branch, W.R. 1998. *Field Guide to Snakes and Other Reptiles of Southern Africa*, Struik Publishers, Cape Town. p399).

Broadley mentioned that most species hibernate solo and some appear to be gregarious, particularly the Cape Centipede-eaters (*Aparallactus capensis*), which are often found in large numbers in old termite nests; such group hibernation would certainly appear to be advantageous in providing a good supply of breeding pairs in early spring when emerging from their retreat. Because three females were found together, breeding pairs were not the aim in this case. W.D. Haacke (pers. comm.) thinks that because males are territorial, only females were found together.

This incident seems to be the first recorded incident of group hibernation in adult brown house snakes.

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COLUBRIDAE *Mehelya poensis* and *Mehelya stenophthalmus* (No common names)

DIET

Mehelya poensis is known to eat mainly snakes and also lizards, *M. stenophthalmus* consumes snakes (Chippaux 2001, *Les serpentes d'Afrique occidentale et centrale. Faune et Flore tropicales* 35. Editions d'IRD). A series of 109 *Mehelya* (including *M. capensis* (n=24), *M. crossi* (n=1), *M. guirali* (n=12), *M. poensis* (n=64) and *M. stenophthalmus* (n=8) collected in Cameroon between October 1999 and May 2002 were examined and dissected where palpation or body form indicated ingested prey. *Mehelya poensis* specimens from Beyo, Kribi contained an adult *Mabuya affinis* (Scincidae); from Ketté (north of Batouri) and Malantouen (near Foumban) each contained an adult *M. maculilabris* (Scincidae); from Atok (west of Abong-Mbang) contained a subadult *Agama* sp. (Agamidae); and from Bafang (south-west of Bafoussam) contained a *Mabuya* sp. and an *Agama* sp. A specimen of *Mehelya stenophthalmus* from Takamanda village, north of Mamfe, contained a medium *Natriciteres fuliginoides* (Colubridae). No items were found in the stomachs of the *M. capensis*, *M. crossi* or *M. guirali*.

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COLUBRIDAE *Crotaphopeltis hotamboeia* Herald Snake

AQUATIC FEEDING

We were busy with an electrofishing survey on the Noordhoeks stream not far from the town of Citrusdal (September 1998), when we noticed a *Crotaphopeltis hotamboeia* in the stream with an adult Clanwilliam Rock Catfish (*Austroglanis gilli*) in its mouth. The fish was still alive at this stage. The vertical pupils, iridescent bluish sheen of the head and characteristic orange-red upper lip (Branch, 1998) confirms its identity as *C. hotamboeia*. The observation is significant since fish has never been recorded to be part of the diet of *C. hotamboeia* (Keogh et al., 2000). Keogh et al. (2000) noted that not even tadpoles have been recorded in cut contents of *C. hotamboeia*, which suggested to them that the snake is not an aquatic hunter, but rather forages in mesic habitats on mostly adult amphibians (97% of the gut contents in the analysis done by Keogh et al. (2000)). The only non-amphibians that have been recorded in the diet of the *C. hotamboeia* are a single rodent and reptiles from the families Gekkonidae, Scincidae, Chamaeleonidae and Agamidae (see Keogh et al. 2000) for specific references). The present ob-

ervation therefore seems to be the first record that the *C. hotamboeia* will hunt aquatic prey and certainly suggests that *C. hotamboeia* is aware of potential prey under water. It also raises the possibility that certain populations of this snake may use aquatic hunting more than others if they occur in areas where suitable hunting conditions exists, e.g. good visibility. When taking the pictures, the snake was disturbed and it fled into boulders leaving the now dead fish behind. It is therefore unsure if the snake would have swallowed the fish, but it certainly appeared to be attempting just that before it fled (Picture 2). When electrofishing, rock catfish that are several metres away from the shocker can be disturbed and they often move slowly with the current away from the shocker. The snake certainly caught one of these rock catfish. The fact that both *C. hotamboeia* and *A. gilli* are more active nocturnally (Branch, 1998; personal observations in the case of *A. gilli*) makes this scenario even more unusual.

Submitted by

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VIPERIDAE
Bitis arietans
Puff Adder

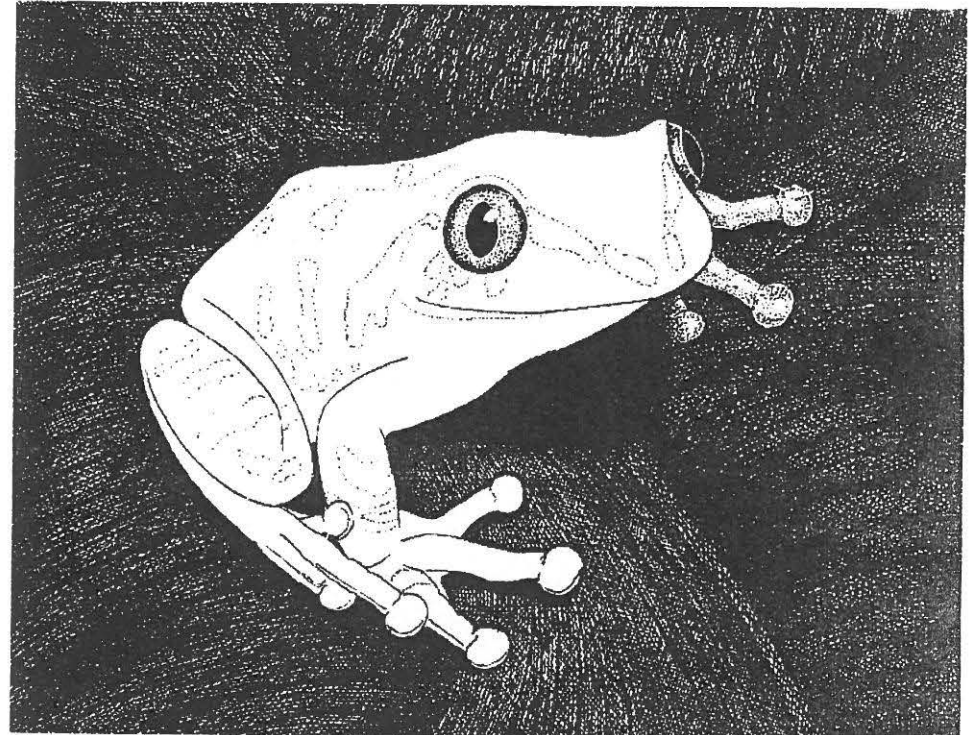
ARBOREAL BEHAVIOUR

On May 20, 2003 at 14h25, a juvenile male Puff Adder (approx. TL 400 mm) was observed basking 4.1m above the ground in the uppermost branches of a *Duranta erecta*, an exotic garden tree, in a suburban garden in Linkside, Port Elizabeth. Weather conditions were still and warm (31°C) at the time. The snake was spotted due to the attention of numerous birds, including Speckled Mousebirds, Sombre Bulbuls, Cape White-eye and Cape Batis, which were mobbing it. For several weeks birds had been attracted to the tree, which bore profuse fruit. The Puff Adder had an empty gut. It is unlikely that it was trying to ambush birds from the flimsy branches on which it rested, but it may initially have been attracted to the area by rodents feeding on fallen fruit on the ground below. The snake was captured and relocated to the adjacent Barkens Valley. Although captive Puff Adders in snake pits often climb into low scrub (Broadley, D.G., *FitzSimons' Snakes of Southern Africa*, Delta Books, Johannesburg, 1983) the height of the present observation seems exceptional. It confirms an earlier report (Sweeney, R.C.H.,

Snake of Nyasaland, Asher and Co., Amsterdam, 1971) of a Puff Adder (unspecified sex or size) basking "15 feet above ground in a much-branched tree."

Submitted by

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Angelo Lambiris

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. Scallation, 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 author.

AMPHIBIA : ANURA

RHACOPHORIDAE

***Chiromantis xerampelina* Peters 1854**

Foam Nest Frog

South Africa, North-West Province, Brits District, Farm: Vlakplaats (74), about 10 km NNE of Vaalkop Dam (2527BA, 25°14'S, 27°30'30"E, about 1000 m a.s.l.); 28 December 2002; G.R. Bates & M.F. Bates.

An adult frog was found in firewood at a camp near a building in bushveld. It was examined in detail and released the next day. The species is very distinct in appearance and difficult to confuse with any other South African frog (see Passmore & Carruthers 1995, *South African Frogs: A Complete Guide*, Southern Book Publishers, Halfway House & Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg). This is apparently only the second locality for *C. xerampelina* in North-West Province and the nearest locality to Gauteng Province to the south and east where the species has not yet been recorded (Jacobsen 1990, *A herpetological survey of the Transvaal*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg). It represents a small (40-70 km) southward range extension in the cen-

tral part of the species' range (west of 31°E longitude) and is the first record south of 25°S latitude; the nearest other records are to the N and NNW at loci 2427DA and 2427CB respectively (cf. Jacobsen *op cit.*).

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REPTILIA: SERPENTES

TYPHLOPIDAE

***Letheobia unitaeniata* (Peters 1878)**

Yellow-striped Cryptic Blind-Snake

Tanzania, Namanga Border Post (SE 0236 D2); June 2003; C.M.R. Kelly; Natural History Museum of Zimbabwe (NMZB 17116). Collected beneath a stone in open *Acacia* savanna – woodland.

This specimen represents a western range extension of 130 km from Kibwezi in the Eastern Province of Kenya (Boulenger 1896, *Cat. Snakes* 3: 590).

This species was transferred from *Typhlops* to *Rhinotyphlops* by Roux-Estève (1974, *Mem. Mus. natn. Hist. nat. Paris (N.S.) Sér. A (Zool.)* 87: 1-313), but is now to be included in the revived genus *Letheobia* Cope 1869 (Broadley & Wallach, in prep.).

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REPTILIA : SAURIA

CHAMAELEONIDAE

***Bradypodion gutturale* (A. Smith 1849)**

Robertson Dwarf Chameleon

Western Cape Province, South Africa; 3219CA (AY569806), 3219CC (AY289887, AY289915, AY289831, AY289857) 3319AA (AY569796-AY569798, AY569819-AY569821), 3319CB (AY289854, AY289912), 3319CD (AY569799-AY569802, AY569822-AY569825), 3319DA (AY569790, AY289811, AY569813, AY289855,

AY289867, AY289913), 3319DB (AY569784, AY569785, AY569807, AY569808), 3319DC (observation), 3319DD (observation), 3320BC (observation), 3320CB (AY569804, AY569827), 3320DA (AY569803, AY569826), 3320DD (AY569783, AY569805), 3321AD (AY569791-AY569794, AY569814-AY569817), 3321DA (AY570757, AY570758), 3322CC (observation), 3322CD (AY289806, AY289862) 3322DB (AY555235, AY569789, AY555218, AY569812), 3323CA (AY569787, AY569810), 3419BA (observation), 3419BB (observation), 3420AD (AY569786, AY569795, AY569809, AY569818).

Since its original description, the Robertson Dwarf Chameleon (*Bradypodion gutturale*) was thought to have a rather limited distribution within the Western Cape Province, South Africa. FitzSimons (1943) and Baard (1988) described this chameleon as being restricted to the area near the towns of Worcester (3319CB) and Robertson (3319DD). Conradie (1992) recorded the species from Wolseley (3319AC), and later, Burger (1993) recorded it from the Anysberg (3320DA), extending its distribution approximately 120 km northwards. Several more locality records for *B. gutturale* were acquired during an atlas of dwarf chameleons (Raw 1995), but these were never formally published. These additional localities were: Mont Rochelle Nature Reserve (3319BB), Pat Busch Private Nature Reserve (3319DD/3320CC); Grootvadersbosch (3320CD); Grootvadersbosch Forest Reserve, Warmwaterberg (3320DD); Perdekamp, near Bredasdorp (3420CA); Potberg, De Hoop Nature Reserve (3420BC); Riversdale (3421AB). The grid cell for Mont Rochelle was given incorrectly and should be 3319CC. Raw (1995) further presented records of *B. karrooicum* which in all likelihood should have been allocated to *B. gutturale*: Boosmanbos Wilderness Area, Langeberg (3320CD), Matjiesfontein (3222AB), Gamka Mountain Nature Reserve (3321DB), and Groot Winterhoek Wilderness Area (3219CC).

Other *Bradypodion* of uncertain taxonomic status have been collected in renosterveld and fynbos vegetation throughout the Cape Fold Mountains as well as in the Little Karoo, as far east as Uniondale (Branch & Bauer 1995). These have been registered as *Bradypodion* sp. in museum collections. In fact, because of morphological variation, Raw (1995) was of the opinion that *B. gutturale* may be comprised of four taxa.

Recent field surveys followed by genetic analyses of two mitochondrial genes (ND2 and ribosomal 16S) have demonstrated that the distribution of *B. gutturale* is more extensive than previously recognised. During these surveys, a total of 45 observations of this species were made, covering 22 QDS (Fig. 1). Tissue samples were collected from all 45 chameleons observed. To date, 30 individuals (from 16 QDS) have been sequenced. Phylogenetic analyses (not shown) show that all 27 individuals form a monophyletic group (0.99 Bayesian posterior probability, and 81% parsimony bootstrap support) exclusive of all other *Bradypodion* species, confirming the identity of these individuals as *B. gutturale*. The sequence divergence between *B. gutturale* and other *Bradypodion* species ranges between 2.5-11.1% for ND2 and 0.8 to 3.4% for 16S (Tolley *et al.* 2004). Within species sequence divergence for *B. gutturale* is lower, approximately 1.6% for ND2 and 0.3% for 16S (Tolley *et al.* 2004).

Currently, this species is found as far east as Uniondale (3323CA) in the Klein Karoo, and as far south as De Hoop Nature Reserve (3420AD) on the Agulhas Plain. Although surveys in the Great Karoo have been limited, it is found north of the Klein Swartberg (3321AD). Despite several surveys, this species has not been found on the Klein Swartberg itself. It has not yet been recorded to the north of the Anysberg, although it has been found on and around the Anysberg (3320CB, 3320BC, 3320DA). To the north-west, it occurs in the Witsenberg at the Groot Winterhoek Wilderness Area (3319AA, 3219CC) and the southern Cederberg outside the town of Citrusdal (3219CA).

These observations extend the known species range from the Anysberg 150 km westward to Witsenberg, and 160 km north-west to Citrusdal. The range is also extended from Robertson 300 km eastward to Uniondale, and 80 km southwards to De Hoop Nature Reserve.

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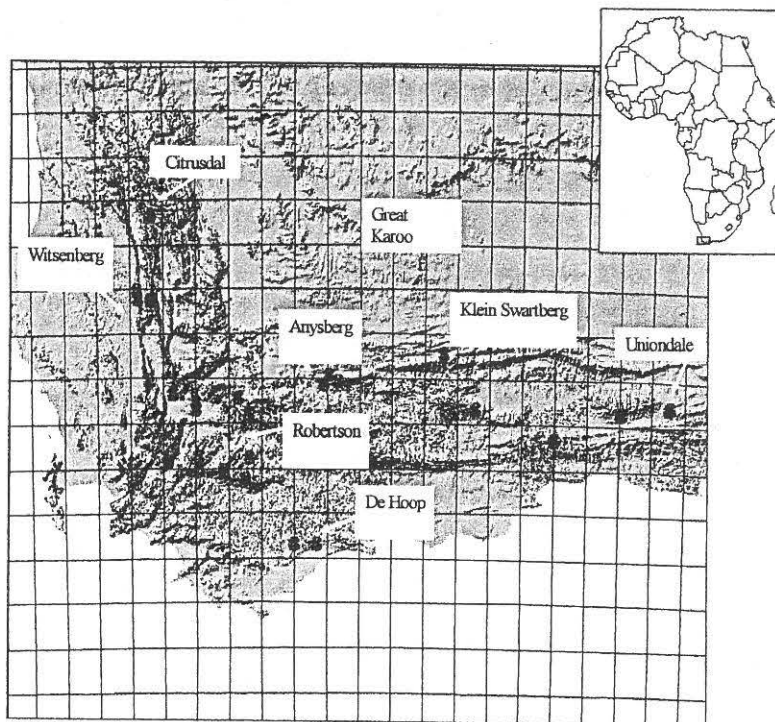
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[Editor's note: Figure 1 below could not be reproduced exactly as submitted by the authors, apparently because of computer programme incompatibilities, for which I apologise sincerely.]

Figure 1. The sampling/observation locations for *Bradypodion gutturale* shown by black dots. At some localities, more than one chamaeleon was collected/observed.



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