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African Herp News

Newsletter of the Herpetological Association of Africa



HERPETOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION OF AFRICA

<http://www.wits.ac.za/haa>

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 *African Herp News*, the Newsletter (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 or 7.0, or Windows XP format. Shorter articles may be submitted as typescripts.

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

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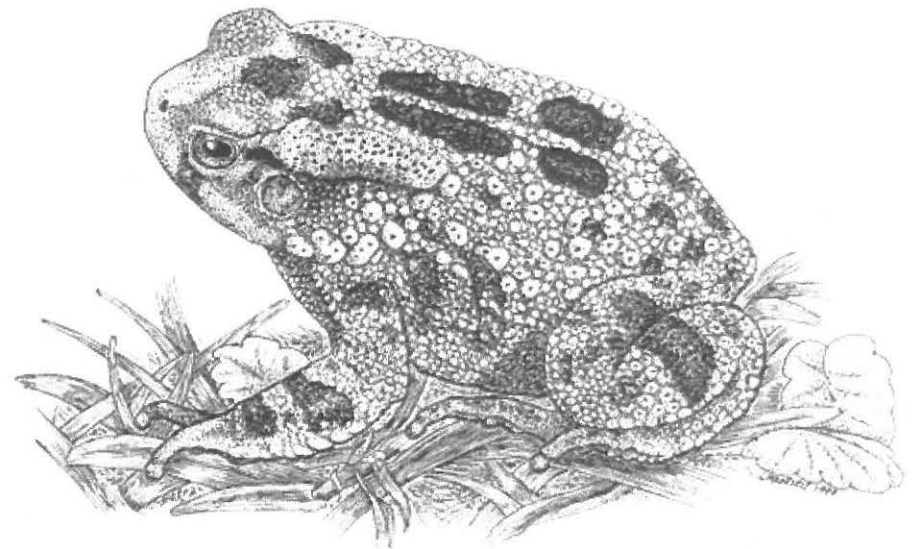
COVER PHOTO *Pyxicephalus edulis* Peters, 1854. Photo: Angelo Lambiris

EDITORIAL

Readers may be disconcerted to find neither longer articles nor Geographical Distributions in this edition of the Newsletter—this is probably due, at least in part, to a preoccupation with the forthcoming H.A.A. Symposium in November, of which more details appear in these pages. Hopefully contributions will start coming in again afterwards, for the Newsletter is entirely what the members of the Association make it! I extend my sincere thanks to those authors who have contributed to this issue.

Angelo Lambiris

Editor



Bufo garmani Meek, 1879

Drawing: Angelo Lambiris

ANNOUNCEMENT AND CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

**9th Conference of the Herpetological Association
of Africa**

26-30 November 2008
Sterkfontein Dam Nature Reserve
Free State
South Africa

Overview

The 9th Conference of the Herpetological Association of Africa will take place at Sterkfontein Dam Nature Reserve in the Free State Province, South Africa, from Wed 26th to Sun 30th November 2008. This conference is being jointly organized by the University of the Free State; the National Museum, Bloemfontein; and the HAA. The venue lies in the foothills of the Drakensberg mountains, 20km outside the town of Harrismith, mid-way between Johannesburg, Durban and Bloemfontein (approximately 4hrs drive from each). Accommodation in chalets or a campsite is available at the reserve. All meals will be catered for at the venue. The conference will be preceded, on Wed 26th Nov, by a full-day workshop on South African legislation governing the conservation, collection and keeping of reptile and amphibian species (both indigenous and exotic) and artifacts, such as tissue samples. Delegates for the workshop are expected to arrive on the evening of Tue 25th Nov. Delegates for the conference proper should arrive for registration and the ice-breaker on the evening of Wed 26th Nov. General conference sessions will take place from Thu 27th – Sat 29th Nov. Five keynote speakers, of high international standing, have been invited to lead the conference. On Sun 30th Nov we will conduct post-conference excursions to Golden Gate Highlands National Park and the Sentinel / Mont-aux-Sources plateau. Participants in the excursions will have accommodation and meals booked at the venue until the morning of Mon 1st Dec. Updates on conference planning will be regularly posted on the HAA web site (<http://www.wits.ac.za/haa>). Potential delegates should email the attached preliminary registration form to Kate Henderson (katelys@yahoo.com).

Additional Details

Workshop

Science, pets and permits: collecting and keeping herps in South Africa

This full-day workshop, 08:00 – 16:00, 26th Nov 2008 will address changes in South African legislation and permitting systems for collecting and keeping reptiles and amphibians. This includes the collection of specimens and samples for institutionally based research projects, along with the keeping of live herps for personal interest and husbandry. The workshop will be of broad interest to biodiversity policy makers, nature conservation managers, herp club members and herp keepers, herpetofaunal husbandry specialists, pet traders, wildlife forensics and policing officers, and scientists. Anticipated topics include a review of the national and provincial permitting systems, recent changes in legislation, risk assessments for the importation of exotic herps, sensitivity of indigenous species to collection, conservation and research of biodiversity and genetic resources, herpetofaunal collections in education, and, herp keeping as a hobby. The workshop will include an invited slide-show by Richard Boynton on reptile husbandry in South Africa. For workshop enquiries please email Johan (snakes@johanmarais.co.za) or Michael (cunninghammj@qwa.ufs.ac.za).

Compilation of taxonomic literature

As part of the conference package we are compiling a DVD of publications, comprising scanned copies of original species descriptions, other landmark papers and taxonomic documentation for Southern African reptiles and amphibians. We require your assistance to make this compilation as comprehensive as possible. Authors of recent taxonomic revisions and species descriptions are requested to assist us in seeking the permission of their publishers to include these works on this DVD. If you already have scanned copies or pdf files of relevant literature, in particular older publications, please email Kate (katelys@yahoo.com) or Michael (cunninghammj@qwa.ufs.ac.za).

Herpetophilia Auction

The 7th HAA conference, in Port Elizabeth, included an auction of herpetological desirables and paraphernalia, donated by conference delegates and others, to raise funds for the HAA (Herpetological Association of Africa). A similar auction will be held at this meeting. Please consider donating herpetological items for this auction (books, reprints, paintings, sculptures, knick-knacks, obscurata...). Contact Johan (snakes@johanmarais.co.za) to make donations.

Fees, Abstracts, Programme and Final Circular

At this stage the conference fees have not been finalized but, as in previous HAA conferences, we will ensure that these are low and structured to encourage student attendance (accommodation at Sterkfontein is very reasonably priced). All respondents to this announcement will receive a second circular in August calling for the submission of abstracts and payment. Conference fees will include HAA membership dues and will therefore be discounted for members in good standing. A discounted fee will be available for accompanying spouses / children. If you will need assistance with travel arrangements, getting to the conference venue from Johannesburg airport, and back again, please indicate this on the attached form. A final circular, including the programme, maps and detailed arrangements, will be distributed closer to the conference. Please visit the HAA website (<http://www.wits.ac.za/haa>) for updates. Enquiries concerning the academic programme should be directed to Mike Bates (herp@nasmus.ac.za) or Michael (CunninghamMJ@qwa.ufs.ac.za).

HAA Student Awards

As in recent meetings, Fascination Books will sponsor student awards. These awards will be presented for the two best presentations (oral or poster) given by a student. Delegates who wish to be considered for these awards should register for the meeting as a student.

Excursions

The conference offers a choice of two full-day excursions to some of the most scenic sites in South Africa. The less strenuous option will be to Golden Gate Highlands National Park. This will involve a return bus trip of around 140km, with stops in the park for game viewing, a visit to the vulture restaurant, a picnic at Glen Rheenen camp with time for short walks, and, potentially, visits to rock art or dinosaur fossil sites. The strenuous option will involve a similar bus trip through the former homeland area of Qwaqwa to the Sentinel car park at 2550m elevation. We will then walk the Sentinel Hiking Trail to the Phofung plateau and Tugela Falls in Royal Natal National Park (3000m). From this point the Tugela River drops vertically over 500m down "The Amphitheatre", and continues descending down to 1250m elevation as it leaves the mountains. The walk will take approximately 3hrs each way, at a leisurely pace, and involves a 30m climb up the summit cliffs, in two steps (~18m and 12m), using fixed chain ladders. An alternative route to the summit requires an extended scramble up the steep and rocky Sentinel Gully (3100m). Although this is no casual stroll, it is one of the easiest walks to the Drakensberg summit area and it is a popular day walk for local hostels and tour groups. For more information email Johann (vanasj@qwa.uovs.ac.za) or Michael (cunninghammj@qwa.ufs.ac.za).

Herpetofaunal Collecting

Please note that herpetological collecting will not be possible during the excursions. Collecting may only be conducted if the necessary permits have been obtained from the relevant conservation authorities (see below)

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Useful web sites

For more information on the venue and surrounding areas see the following sites:

Sterkfontein Dam Nature Reserve

<http://www.dteea.fs.gov.za/sterkfontein.htm>

Golden Gate Highlands National Park

http://www.sanparks.org/parks/golden_gate/

Royal Natal National Park

<http://www.kznwildlife.com/site/ecotourism/destinations/mountains/RoyalNatal/>

Sentinel Trail – Mont-aux-Sources plateau
http://www.drakensberg-tourist-map.com/sentinel-peak.html

Nature Conservation Agencies
Free State Department of Tourism, Environmental and Economic Affairs
(FS-DTEEA)
http://www.dteea.fs.gov.za/

Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife
http://www.kznwildlife.com/site

SANParks
http://www.sanparks.org/

HAA2008 PRELIMINARY REGISTRATION FORM

**9th Conference of the Herpetological Association
of Africa**

**26-30 November 2008
Sterkfontein Dam Nature Reserve
Free State
South Africa**

**Please complete the form opposite, electronically if possible, and re-
turn it by email to:**

Kate Henderson (katelys@yahoo.com) or Michael Cunningham
(CunninghamMJ@qwa.ufs.ac.za)

Faxed forms may be sent to Michael Cunningham: +27 58 7185444

PERSONAL DETAILS

TITLE: Prof / Dr / Mr / Mrs / Ms / Miss / - FIRST NAME

FAMILY NAME

DEPARTMENT, AFFILIATION AND ADDRESS

POSTAL/ZIP CODE

TELEPHONE Code () **FAX NUMBER** Code ()

E-MAIL

ACCOMPANYING PERSON(S) (spouse, children, etc.)

Title: First Name: Family Name:

Title: First Name: Family Name:

ACCOMMODATION & TRANSPORT REQUIREMENTS

I would like transport from Johannesburg Airport to the conference venue, and back, on the following dates (at an additional cost):

**JHB – Sterkfontein Dam: 25 Nov __, 26 Nov __ Sterkfontein
Dam - JHB: 30 Nov __, 1 Dec __**

Number of nights that accommodation at Sterkfontein Dam is needed: _____. Number of people (on this form): _____

Date of arrival: 25 Nov __, 26 Nov __, 27 Nov __, 28 Nov __, 29 Nov __

Date of departure: 26 Nov __, 27 Nov __, 28 Nov __, 29 Nov __, 30 Nov __, 1 Dec

Preferred accommodation at Sterkfontein Dam

5 person / 8 person shared chalets, approx. R75pppn. Please indicate the number of people and preferred housemates

Couples room (double bed) in a shared chalet _____

Double room (two single beds) in a shared chalet _____

Loft bunk (4 beds) in a shared chalet _____

I would like to share this chalet with...

Camping _____

Caravan _____

Alternative accommodation _____ (B&Bs available in Harrismith and at Oliviershoek – each 15km distant. Contact the organisers for information)

ATTENDANCE AND REQUIREMENTS

I will attend the Pets & Permits Workshop (Wed 26 Nov) Yes / No. #people:___ **Separate fee.**

I will attend the Ice-breaker (Wed evening 26 Nov) Yes / No. #people:___ **Included in reg. fee.**

I will attend the Conference Banquet (Friday evening 28 Nov) Yes /No #people:___ **Included in reg. fee.**

I have special dietary requirements: Yes / No If yes, please specify **Vegetarian Kosher Halaal**

I will join the excursion to Golden Gate NP (Sun 30 Nov) Yes / No. #people:___ **Separate fee.**

I will join the excursion to the Sentinel Trail (Sun 30 Nov) Yes / No. #people:___ **Separate fee.**

I want to buy an HAA2008 conference polo-shirt (approx. R130) Yes / No #shirts:___ Size: S
M L XL XXL +

I will deliver a poster presentation
YES NO Title:

I will deliver an oral presentation
YES NO Title:

IMPORTANT: Oral presentations must be in MS PowerPoint slideshow format and presented to the technician on a memory stick or CD.

Do you require a slide projector for your presentation? YES NO

Do you require data projector for your presentation? YES NO

NAME: _____

DATE: _____

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

REPTILIA: CHELONIA

Homopus signatus signatus (Gmelin, 1789)

Namaqualand Speckled Padloper

NATURAL OVIPOSITION AND INCUBATION

Although the literature on *Homopus signatus signatus* has expanded considerably in recent years, reports of oviposition and incubation are limited to observations in captivity (e.g., Loehr, V.J.T. 1999. Husbandry, behaviour and captive breeding of the Namaqualand Speckled Padloper [*Homopus s. signatus*]. *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* 3: 468-473). During a 5-year field study, I conducted annual field-work near Springbok, in the tortoises' egg-laying season (spring). Forty-four gravid females were tracked daily by means of telemetry and thread-trailing, totalling circa 487 observations. Nevertheless, only a single observation of nesting was made. Most females retained their calcified eggs for long periods (i.e., weeks).

On 30 September 2004 15:30 hrs, a female (SCL 95.1, SH 45.1, SW 76.2, PL 80.6 mm) was located approximately 6 m outside the normal activity range for this individual. The tortoise was in the process of excavating a 4.5 cm deep nest chamber, concealed by a dense, dead shrub, similar to captive nesting sites (i.e., no sunlight could penetrate to the nest). The nest was located at a levelled area on a steep slope, bordering a bare rock slab with scattered boulders and rocks. At 16:10 hrs, the female had produced an egg (35.7 x 26.5 mm, 14.2 g) and had closed the nest. At that time, nest temperature was 23.7°C.

The egg was exchanged for four Thermochron iButton temperature dataloggers (Dallas Semiconductors, Maxim Integrated Products, Inc., Sunnyvale, U.S.A.), set for different measurement frequencies and intervals. On 7 March 2006, the iButtons were recovered, but unfortunately all but one malfunctioned. The data from the functioning iButton, recording temperatures hourly, showed a nest temperature range from 14.0 – 36.0°C between 2 October and 24 December 2004 (Fig. 1). In addition, daily temperature fluctuation was 1.5 – 10.0°C. In captivity, the incubation period for *H. s. signatus* is 101 – 145 days (V.J.T. Loehr, unpublished data), 18 – 62 days longer than the number of days that temperatures were recorded in the natural nest.

This note confirms captive observations of *H. s. signatus* selecting concealed

sites for nesting, which may relate to the temperature regime required for successful incubation, or to the risk of predation for the egg or for the female. It also confirms that females may nest in the afternoon. Although it remains unknown if the temperatures recorded would result in successful incubation, they are similar to temperatures that produce healthy hatchlings in captivity (V.J.T. Loehr, personal observation), and enable captive breeders to select a natural incubation temperature regime.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Northern Cape Nature Conservation for granting permits to conduct the field study (permit numbers 137/99, 019/2001, 152/2002, 168/2003, 158/2003, and 633/2003). Furthermore, Dallas Semiconductors (U.S.A.) and R bke Agenturen (Netherlands) are thanked for the donation of research materials.

Submitted by

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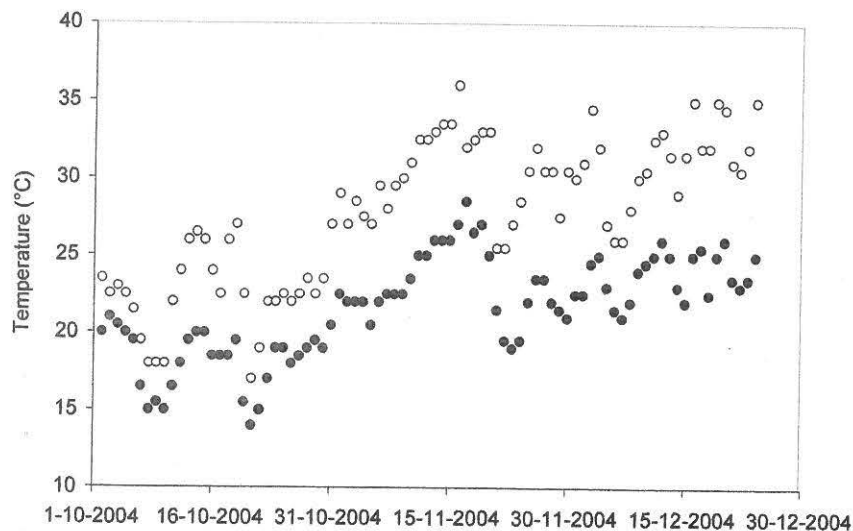


Figure 1. Daily minimum and maximum temperatures recorded in a natural nest of *H. s. signatus* near Springbok.

REPTILIA: SQUAMATA; SAURIA

GEKKONIDAE

Geckoes of the Olifants Camp, Kruger Park, with special mention of an *Afroedura* species

FIELD NOTES AND LOCALITY RECORD

In November 2000 and in mid February 2003, I stayed 2 nights at the Olifants Rest Camp, Kruger National Park, situated on a cliff overlooking the Olifants River. I found several geckos species, on which brief notes are given here.

Lygodactylus c. capensis (A. Smith, 1849)

Lygodactylus c. capensis is a small diurnal gecko common on tree trunks and on the walls of bungalows. In February, I spotted hatchlings and gravid females. They are active around the bungalows lights at night, hunting small insects, especially if *Hemidactylus mabouia* are not present.

Hemidactylus mabouia (de Jonnes, 1818)

Hemidactylus mabouia is a common nocturnal species living mainly in the bungalows or in the roofs of other buildings. At night they congregate around the lights, actively hunting insects. In February I spotted hatchlings and numerous gravid females. They can emit clearly audible sounds (Branch, 1998 and personal observations).

Pachydactylus turneri (Gray, 1864)

Pachydactylus turneri is also a common nocturnal species, found at night in buildings, in rocky areas and on the ground. In November, I spotted mainly adults specimens, but in February there was a wide range of sizes, from hatchlings to juveniles and subadults.

Pachydactylus punctatus Peters, 1854

Pachydactylus punctatus is a species which could possibly be found in this camp (Pienaar, Haacke & Jacobsen, 1983) and mapped in Branch, 1998, but I was not able to find any specimens during my visits. This small gecko perhaps occupies a very restricted area in the camp. It is also possible that gardening maintenance may also play some part in its apparent absence, since this species has a strong preference for dead leaf litter (pers. obs.).

Homopholis wahlbergii (A. Smith, 1849)

Homopholis wahlbergii is not indicated by Pienaar *et al.* as being present in this camp, but is mapped in Branch, 1998 (all the Kruger Park is covered). I was not able to find it here, despite attentive night walks and a good spotlight. These ani-

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mals can be very secretive and may be very localized in this camp, as I have found them to be in other Kruger camps.

***Afroedura* sp. cf. *langi* (FitzSimons, 1930)**

In February I spotted three geckos on tubular garden lights near the view-point, above the cliff. I caught one pair, which were been released after being measured). The morphology of the toe-tips is referable to that of the genus *Afroedura*. The dorsal pattern consists of wavy brown bands on a pinkish ground (Figs. 1 and 2). These geckoes are possibly *Afroedura langi*, which is known to occur along the western banks of the Olifants River in the Kruger Park (Pienaar *et al.*, 1983), but not recorded along the eastern banks, on which the Olifants Rest Camp is situated.

The male measured 45 mm SVL, 100 mm TL, and the female 50 mm SVL, 103 mm TL (tail partially regenerated; gravid, 2 eggs visible).

According Branch, 1998, *Afroedura langi* has an average SVL of 30 – 40 mm. Nevertheless, the sizes recorded for these two specimens exceed the maximum snout-vent lengths given by Branch, namely 44 mm for males and 45.5 mm for females. The third specimen found was of a similar size. It is possible, therefore, that these may be typical sizes for this population.

The *Afroedura* species in Northern Province need more investigation (Branch, 1998), and the Olifants Rest Camp may well be a profitable locality for further, more intensive, study.

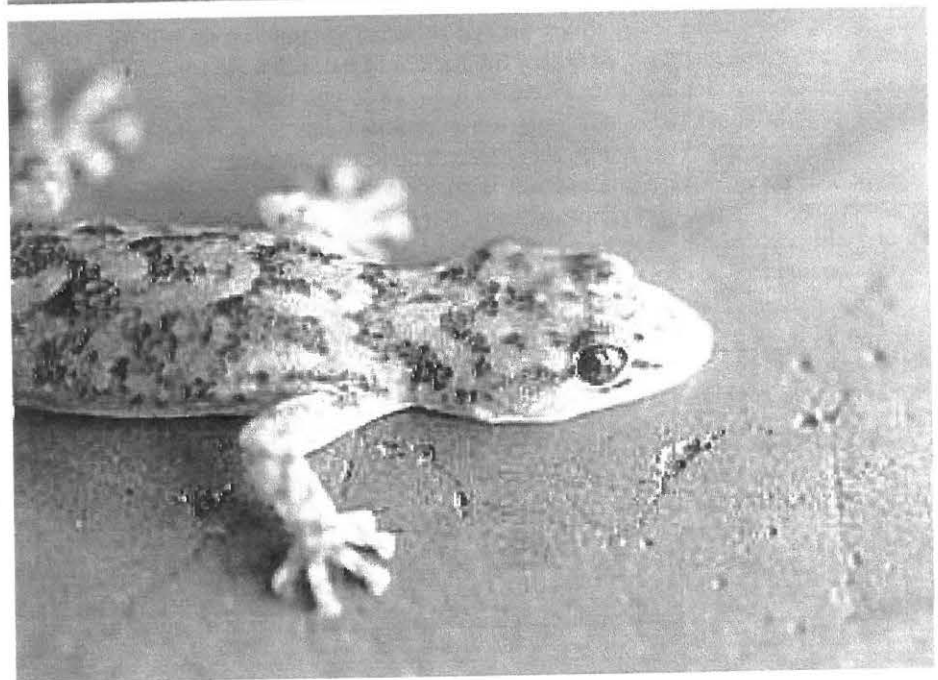
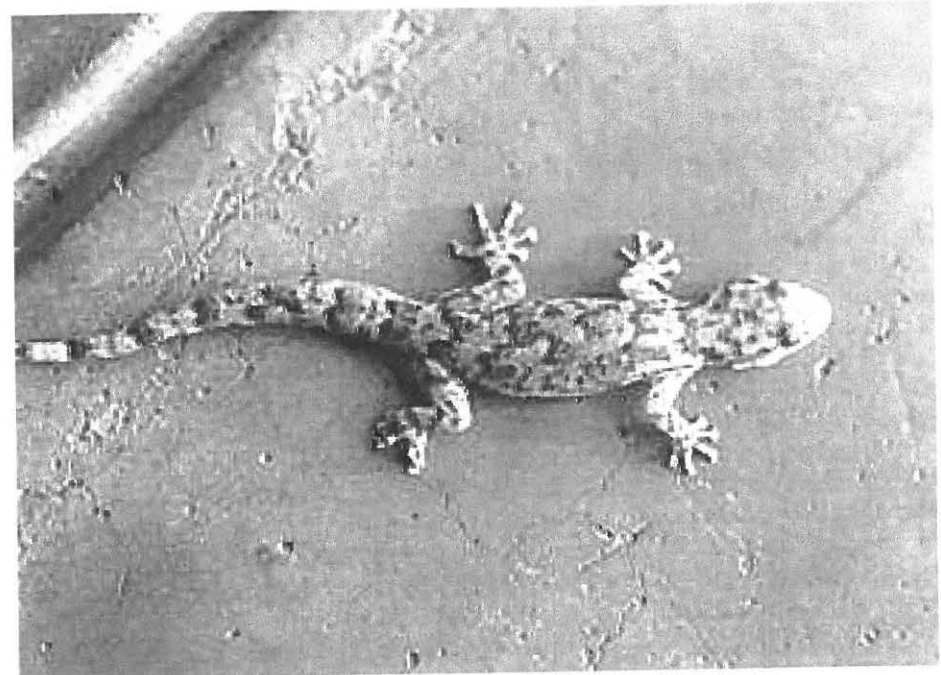
References

- BRANCH, W.R., 1998. *Field Guide to the Snakes and Other Reptiles of Southern Africa*. Third edition. Struik.
 PIENAAR, U.V., HAACKE, W.D., & JACOBSEN, N.H.G., 1983. *The Reptiles of the Kruger National Park*. Third edition. National Parks Board of South Africa.

Submitted by

Francis GIRARD, 167 Bd Vincent Auriol, 75013 Paris, France.

Figures 1 and 2 (Opposite page). *Afroedura langi* (FitzSimons, 1930). Photos: Francis Girard



Cordylosaurus subtessellatus (A. Smith, 1844)
Dwarf Plated Lizard

CAPTIVE REPRODUCTION AND LONGEVITY

The ecology of *Cordylosaurus subtessellatus* is poorly known, hence a captive study was initiated in January 2004 to gather information about (among other things) reproduction and longevity. One adult pair was collected and housed in a naturally decorated indoor enclosure in the Netherlands (Loehr, V.J.T. 2006. Captive husbandry of the Dwarf plated lizard, *Cordylosaurus subtessellatus* [Smith, 1844], with indications for ecological and behavioural characteristics. *Herpetological Bulletin* 96: 5-11). Although captive reproduction failed, a number of data could be recorded. On 17 February 2007, the female died (age > 3 years) from unknown causes so that further efforts to breed the species were aborted.

From January to June 2004, the lizards were gradually adjusted to a northern hemisphere climatic cycle. Regardless, annual variation in temperatures and photoperiod was similar to the site where the lizards had been captured. Egg production concentrated in spring and summer (Fig. 1). The female produced 2 – 6 eggs each year, usually as single-egg clutches ($N = 8$), but sometimes as two-egg clutches ($N = 2$). Ovipositioning behaviour was considered abnormal, because the female never made any attempts to construct a nest or to select a site that would benefit incubation of the soft-shelled eggs. Sites offered included ceramic boxes, plastic boxes, transparent or opaque, covered with a lid, rock or wood, substrate sand, Sphagnum, coco peat or Vermiculite, narrow entrance or large entrance, entrance through a PVC pipe, heated or unheated. Eggs were produced near a spotlight, where they dehydrated instantly. Eventually, the gravid female was transferred to a humid enclosure, but no eggs were produced. It is possible that the female produced single-egg clutches as part of its abnormal egg-laying behaviour, but the period of time among clutches within each egg-laying season was relatively long (29 – 95 days, but in one instance 11 days), indicating that single eggs may have been normal.

Concluding, *C. subtessellatus* appears to have seasonal reproduction. Its fecundity can be quite high, at least when the availability of food, water and heat is abundant, as it is in captivity. Since sites offered for egg-laying were not accepted, *C. subtessellatus* might use nest sites that do not resemble any of the sites provided.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Northern Cape Nature Conservation for permits to conduct this study (permit numbers 145/2003 and 7/2004).

Submitted by

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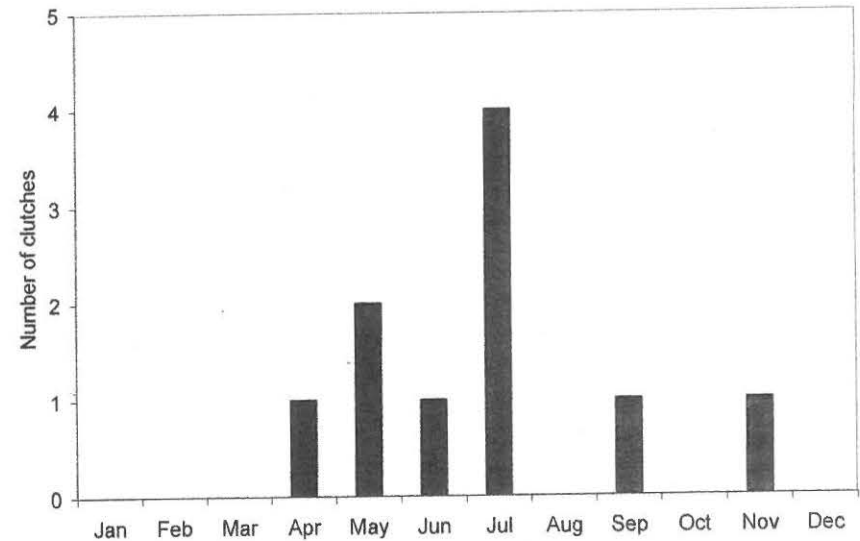


Figure 1. Clutch distribution in one captive *C. subtessellatus* from January 2004 to February 2007.

REPTILIA: SQUAMATA; SERPENTES

COLUBRIDAE

Psammophylax r. rhombeatus (Linnaeus, 1754)

Spotted Skaapsteker

REPRODUCTION

On 13 December 2005, 16 Spotted Skaapsteker eggs were discovered under a rock in the grassland of Suikerbosrand Nature Reserve, Gauteng (26°32'34" S, 28°13'38" E). The eggs had hatched and juvenile *P. rhombeatus* were found under the rock along with the discarded eggshells. There was no sign of an adult *P. rhombeatus*, although egg-guarding behaviour has been observed in this species (Branch, 1998; Marais, 2004; Jacobsen, 2005). At the time of discovery, 15 of the 16 eggs had hatched, with the last egg hatching on 14 December 2005. We were able to capture 10 juvenile *P. rhombeatus*, including one that hatched on 14 December 2005. Mean snout-vent length (SVL) for the 10 juveniles was 152.5 ± 6.2 mm, with an average tail length of 47.1 ± 2.7 mm. The total length (TL) of the juveniles fell within the range of 180 – 220 mm (Table 1), as reported by Branch (1998). During the measuring of the juvenile *P. rhombeatus*, one of the newly hatched individuals shammed death. This behaviour is well-known in snake species such as the Rinkhals (*Hemachatus haemachatus*) yet is rarely observed in *P. rhombeatus* (Marais, 2004).

References

- BRANCH, W.R., 1998: *Field guide to Snakes and Other Reptiles of Southern Africa*. Third edition. Struik, Cape Town.
- JACOBSEN, N., 2005: *Remarkable Reptiles of South Africa*. First edition. Briza Publications, Pretoria.
- MARAIS, J., 2004: *A Complete Guide to the Snakes of Southern Africa*. Second edition. Struik, Cape Town.

Submitted by

Gavin P.R. MASTERSON and Darian MACKAY, School of Animal, Plant and Environmental Sciences, University of the Witwatersrand, Private Bag 3, Wits, 2050.

Individual	Snout-Vent Length (mm)	Tail Length (mm)	Total Length (mm)
1	153	51	204
2	160	47	207
3	158	48	206
4	139	43	182
5	149	42	191
6	148	47	195
7	159	49	208
8	154	47	201
9	154	49	203
10*	151	48	199

* This individual hatched in captivity on 14 December 2005.

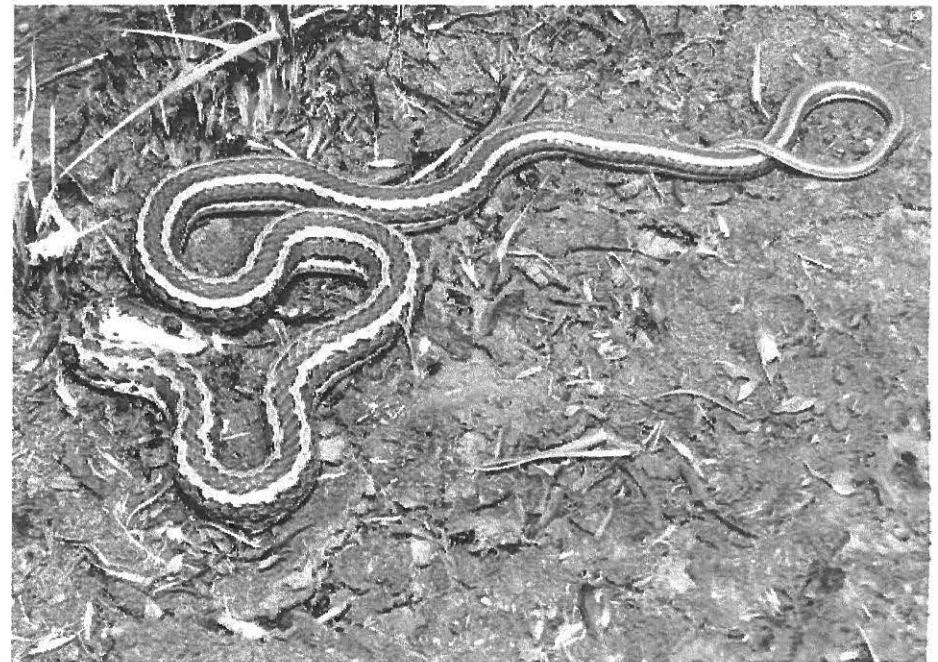


Figure 1. A young *Psammophylax rhombeatus* weakly shamming death. Photo: Gavin Masterson.

Psammophylax r. rhombeatus (Linnaeus, 1758) and *Psammophis* spp.
Rhombic Skaapsteker and Sand Snakes

TAIL AUTOTOMY

Psammophiids are among the most conspicuous diurnal snakes where they occur. Perhaps because their activities expose them to a range of predators, such as birds, mammals, and larger snakes (Branch, 1998; Marais, 2004), they are among the few snakes known to employ caudal autotomy as a defense mechanism (Arnold, 1988; Branch, 1998). The frequency of broken tails has previously been used as a measure of the risk of predation within a species or even as a measure of predator efficiency (Schall & Pianka, 1980; Jaksić & Greene, 1984; Medel et al., 1988). Autotomy frequency has previously been assessed in several species of sand snakes (e.g., Broadley, 1987). We took the opportunity, while examining snakes for reproductive and dietary studies, to augment these existing data. We recorded tail condition in 856 specimens of psammophiids from the collections of the United States National Museum of Natural History, California Academy of Sciences, Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, Field Museum of Natural History, Transvaal Museum, and Port Elizabeth Museum (Bayworld) (Table 1). Autotomy was determined based on the presence of rounding of the tail tip and/or abnormal subcaudal counts. Freshly broken tails, which may reflect either autotomy or postmortem damage, were separately categorized. Our estimates of autotomy frequencies are thus conservative, particularly since truncation of just the tail tip, especially early in life, may result in externally indistinguishable tail tips, complete with a terminal point (Loveridge, 1940).

For *Psammophis crucifer*, *P. biseriatus*, and *P. schokari* we found autotomy frequencies to be much lower than those reported previously (Broadley, 1987; Table 1). This may, in part, reflect differences in defining autotomised versus broken tails, but our large sample sizes for *P. crucifer* and *P. schokari*, as well as for *Psammophylax r. rhombeatus*, suggest that autotomy may be somewhat less common in psammophiids than previously believed. Among the species examined there were no obvious phylogenetic correlates with respect to autotomy frequency (Kelly, 2005) but tail truncation frequencies were higher in psammophiids that are distributed at lower latitudes (*P. punctulatus* and *P. biseriatus* from East Africa and *P. condanarus* from South and Southeast Asia) than in the more temperate species (*P. crucifer*, *P. schokari*, *Psammophylax r. rhombeatus*). This pattern may point to a greater role for ecological rather than historical factors in the degree of expression of this escape strategy among psammophiids.

Species	N	Broken	Autotomised	Broadley (1987)
<i>Psammophis crucifer</i>	235	2.6%	4.3%	9.5% (n = 74)
<i>Psammophis schokari</i>	203	3.2%	6.4%	32.4% (n = 71)
<i>Psammophis punctulatus</i>	15	13.3%	6.7%	—
<i>Psammophis biseriatus</i>	31	19.4%	16.1%	63.8% (n = 69)
<i>Psammophis condanarus</i>	31	7.4%	11.1%	—
<i>Psammophylax r. rhombeatus</i>	341	3.5%	6.7%	—

Table 1. The frequencies of specimens examined with freshly broken and previously autotomised tails among several species of psammophiids.

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Submitted by

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Psammophylax r. rhombeatus (Linnaeus, 1758)

Rhombic Skaapsteker

BEHAVIOUR

As part of a larger radiotelemetric study investigating the spatial ecology of nine rhombic skaapstekers (*Psammophylax r. rhombeatus*) during early spring 2006, focal snake observations were made in order to document any unique behaviours exhibited in a natural setting on Farm Steenbokfontein Nature Reserve (32° 10'27.9"S 18°18'57.2"E), Western Cape Province, South Africa. At 0946 h on 22 October (ambient temperature 23.5°C; relative humidity 67%) snake 841 (female; SVL 44.3 cm; TL 14.4 cm) began rapidly rubbing the anterior half of its body over loose sand, displacing the sand away from a central area. When the snake twisted the anterior half of its body, it exposed its venter and was able to push sand out from the center of the excavation using its dorsum and head. This behaviour was repeated rapidly and lasted approximately 2 min before the base of a "sand crater" had been formed. The snake continued digging for an additional 4 min, using a flexure of the neck to scoop out ~5 cm³ of sand out and away from the crater on each upstroke (see Cottone & Bauer, in press for a more detailed description of similar digging motions used in prey capture). The snake subsequently moved approximately 20 m away from the excavated site over the next 20 min of observation. The maximum dimensions of the crater were 23.0 cm in width and 6.5 cm in depth. The crater was checked regularly over the following week, but it was not apparent that the snake had returned.

Although the excavation was abandoned (possibly as a result of observer presence) the same snake was frequently observed (28 October to 6 November) basking in a crater of similar dimensions in another location. These observations suggest that skaapstekers may excavate shallow craters or pits in order to thermoregulate and/or more effectively escape detection while basking. The utilization of such excavations may both increase surface area contact with a warm substrate and shield the snake from the cool spring sea breezes of the Western Cape coast. This type of behaviour, sometimes referred to as "crater basking" or "ditch basking" has been reported in a diversity of other snake species that inhabit sandy environments, including the Mojave Desert sidewinder (*Crotalus cerastes cerastes*) (Brown & Lillywhite, 1992), Old World viperids (*Cerastes cerastes*, Mosauer 1932; Saint Girons 1956), and colubrid bullsnakes (*Pituophis catenifer sayi*, Carpenter 1982). Because of the thermoregulatory disadvantages imposed by the elongate body shape of snakes (Lillywhite, 1987), it is likely that other species inhabiting similar environments may have also converged on such behaviour, but that "crater basking" is underreported because opportunities for observing undisturbed snakes in the field are relatively rare.

References

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Natural History Notes

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Submitted by

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Pseudaspis cana (Linnaeus, 1754)

Mole Snake

ARBOREAL BEHAVIOUR

In October 2007 a request to identify a snake from numerous digital photographs was sent to us by Terry-Ann Jacobs. The snake was spotted on a farm in Stellenbosch winelands. With the help of Wulf Haacke, the snake was positively identified as a Mole Snake, *Pseudaspis cana*. What appeared unusual though, was that some of the photographs showed the snake on a tree. Additional information was subsequently sought from the observer and is herein presented. The snake was spotted at about 14h30 on the branches of a bushy Bougainvillea tree, at a height of approximately three metres above ground. There was a wall approximately two metres high next to the tree and some other trees nearby. No birds nests were noticed in the immediate area but there were chickens and geese about 15 metres away from the tree where the snake was seen. Two goose eggs were earlier found to be missing, and the snake was suspected. The snake remained motionless on the tree until it was disturbed approximately three hours later.

Branch (1998) and Marais (2004) mention moles, rodents and other small mammals, eggs, birds and nestlings as common prey to Mole Snakes. Calf (2004) also made observations of Mole Snakes preying on African Black Oystercatchers' eggs, which are laid on the ground in the sand, on Robben Island. To our knowledge, no reports have been made of Mole Snakes climbing trees. Although it is not clear what prompted the snake to climb the tree, and how it did that, we presume that this unusual behaviour represents an added effort to hunt for eggs, birds or their nestlings when there are no food resources readily available on the ground.

References

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- CALF, K.M., 2004. Mole Snake *Pseudaspis cana* predation of African Black Oystercatcher *Haematopus moquini* eggs. *Wader Study Group Bulletin* **104**: 103-104.
- MARAIS, J., 2004. *A Complete Guide to the Snakes of Southern Africa*. Second edition. Struik, Cape Town.

Submitted by

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HERPETOLOGICAL SURVEYS

FROGS OF THE VREDEFORT DOME WORLD HERITAGE SITE

INTRODUCTION

A baseline amphibian monitoring study was carried out in the Vredefort Dome, North West/ Free State Province, South Africa. The dome is situated between 26° 45' and 27°00' south latitude and 27°10' and 27°25' east longitude and covers an area of 30,108 Ha (Figure 1). Monitoring started November 2004 and ended February 2006.

On 14 July 2005 the Vredefort Dome was declared the 7th World Heritage Site of South Africa. Today it is generally accepted to be the oldest and largest meteorite impact site in the world. It was formed about 2020 million years ago when a meteorite as big as Table Mountain struck the earth at great speed, creating a crater of about 250 km in diameter and 40 km deep. Today, only the eroded remnants are visible northwest of the impact site. The geology and geography of the area has been studied in great detail, but we know relatively little about the ecology and animal diversity of the Vredefort Dome area. Moreover, little is known about the diversity and life history of specifically amphibians that occur in the Vredefort Dome conservation area.

SPECIES LIST

Adult frogs were identified on the male chorus that occurred during the breeding season as well as through visual encounters along transects during fieldwork. Tadpoles (juveniles) were also surveyed and identified that may occur in the study area. Only representative sample of tadpoles and adults were sampled or captured to preserve the biodiversity of the Dome and deposited in the Amphibian Collection of the African Amphibian Conservation Research Group (AACRG) at the North-West University in Potchefstroom.

Class: **AMPHIBIA**

Order: **ANURA**

Family: **BREVICIPITIDAE** Bonaparte 1850

Genus: *Breviceps* Merrem, 1820

Species: *Breviceps adspersus* Peters, 1882

Family: **BUFONIDAE** Gray, 1825

Genus: *Amietophrynus* Frost et al., 2006

Species: *A. gutturalis* (Power, 1927)
A. poweri (Hewitt, 1935)
A. rangeri (Hewitt, 1935)

Genus: *Schismaderma* Smith, 1849
 Species: *S. carens* (Smith, 1848)

Family: **HYPEROLIIDAE** Laurent, 1943
 Genus: *Kassina* Girard, 1853
 Species: *Kassina senegalensis* (Duméril & Bibron, 1841)

Family: **PIPIDAE** Gray, 1825
 Genus: *Xenopus* Wagler, 1827
 Species: *X. laevis* (Daudin, 1802)

Family: **PYXICEPHALIDAE** Bonaparte, 1850
 Subfamily: **Cacosterninae** Noble, 1931
 Genus: *Ametia* Dubois, 1987
 Species: *A. angolensis* (Bocage, 1866)
A. fuscigula (Duméril and Bibron, 1841)

Genus: *Cacosternum* Boulenger, 1887
 Species: *Cacosternum boettgeri* (Boulenger, 1882)

Genus: *Strongylopus* Tschudi, 1838
 Species: *Strongylopus fasciatus* (Smith, 1849)

Genus: *Tomopterna* Duméril & Bibron, 1841
 Species: *T. cryptotis* (Boulenger, 1907)
T. natalensis (Smith, 1849)

DISCUSSION

Amphibians are very abundant within the Vredefort Dome. Thirteen species were collected or identified during this survey but a further four are known from the area. These include *Poyntonophrynus vertebralis*, *Semnodactylus wealii*, *Phrynobatrachus natalensis* and *Pyxicephalus adspersus*. This diversity is high for the central Highveld. Although only the Bullfrog is red listed in this area the Dome is a unique site and as World Heritage Site important to conservation. Based on the most recent biogeography of South African frogs (Minter *et al.*, 2004), three new records were made for the two quarter degree grid cells covering the study area. These are *Ametophrynus poweri*, *Strongylopus fasciatus* and *Tomopterna natalensis*. The variety of terrestrial and aquatic habitats that are present within the Dome area supports a diversity of amphibians, from species that occur only in water to

species that live underground. The establishment of the Vredefort Dome World Heritage Site will therefore benefit this area's amphibians by protecting the habitats in which they occur and the species themselves.

Submitted by:

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³Department of Biology, Washington University St. Louis, Box 1229, St. Louis, MO 63130, USA

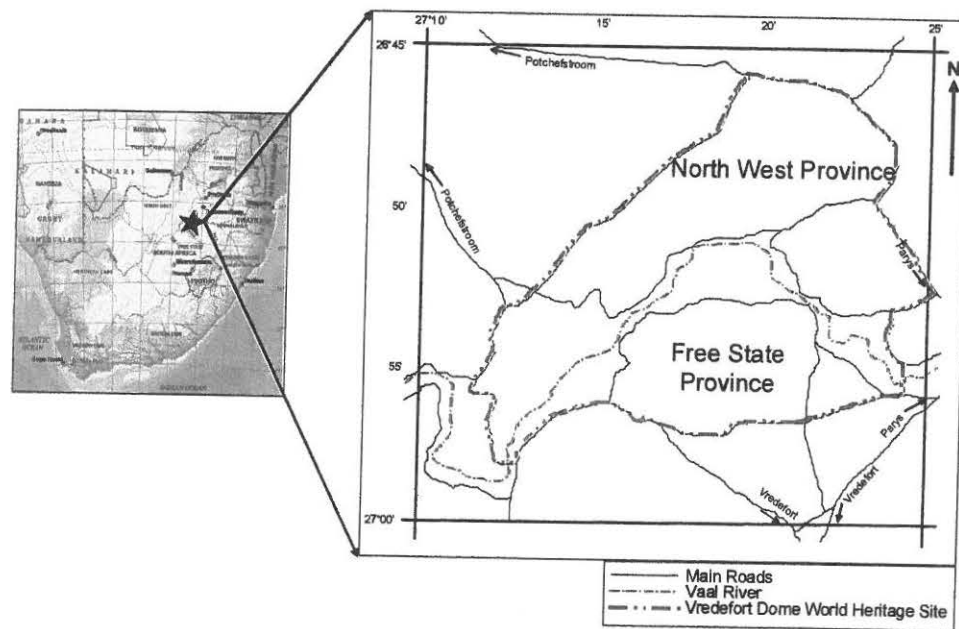


Figure 1: Map indicating the Vredefort Dome World Heritage Site and its position in South Africa.

HERPETOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION OF AFRICA

AUDITOR'S REPORT 2006-2007

HERPETOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION OF AFRICA

28 February 2007

CONTENTS	PAGE
Balance Sheet	1
Income Statement	2
Notes to the financial statements	3

The Financial statements set out on pages 2 to 5 are approved and signed by the board on their behalf by

Chairman 

Treasurer 

Auditor's Report

HERPETOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION OF AFRICA

BALANCE SHEET AS AT THE LAST DAY OF FEBRUARY 2007

	NOTES	2007 R	2006 R
ASSETS			
Non-current assets			
Current assets			
- Cash and cash equivalents	3	101266	61972
TOTAL ASSETS		101266	61972
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES			
Capital and reserves	2	114859	61972
- Member's contributions		61972	0
- Distributable reserves		52887	61972
Bank account 17936077		31245	
Bank account 120277227		19613	
Cash on Hand		2030	
Current liabilities		13504	0
- Trade and other payables		1500	0
- Creditors of 2006		12004	
TOTAL EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		101266	61972

HERPETOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION OF AFRICA CC

INCOME STATEMENT FOR THE PERIOD ENDED ON THE LAST DAY OF FEBRUARY 2007

	2007 R	2006 R
REVENUE	79653	47451
Gross Income	<u>79653</u>	<u>47451</u>
GROSS PROFIT	79653	47451
Administration expenses	<u>(41857)</u>	<u>(80320)</u>
(PROFIT)(LOSS) FROM OPERATIONS BEFORE FINANCE CHARGES	37796	(32869)
Interest Received	<u>1408</u>	<u>2638</u>
NET INCOME(LOSS) BEFORE TAXATION	39294	(30231)
Retained Profit(loss) for last year	81972	92200
Taxation		
NET PROFIT/(LOSS) FOR THE YEAR	<u>101266</u>	<u>81972</u>

Auditor's Report

HERPETOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION OF AFRICA

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE PERIOD ENDED ON THE LAST DAY OF FEBRUARY 2007

1. ACCOUNTING POLICY

The financial statements are prepared on the historical cost basis and incorporate the principal accounting policies as set out below which are consistent with those of the previous year.

1.3 REVENUE

Revenue comprises the invoiced value of work done, and excludes investment and other non-operating income and value added taxation.

2. CASH AND CASH EQUIVALENTS

Cash flows from operating activities

Bank	31245
Savings account	19613
Funds on call and cash	2030
Net cash from operating activities	<u>52887</u>
Increase in accounts payable	(13594)
Cash equivalents at beginning of the year	<u>61972</u>
Cash and cash equivalents at end to the year	<u>101266</u>

3. CAPITAL AND RESERVES

- Opening balance	61972
- Net profit/(loss) for the year	39294
	<u>101266</u>

HERPETOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION OF AFRICA

INCOME STATEMENT FOR THE PERIOD ENDED ON THE LAST DAY OF FEBRUARY 2007

	2007	2006
REVENUE		
Gross Income	79 653	47 451
Herpetological members Income	55 412	26 263
Conference Income	20 292	18 000
Donation Income	3 950	3 188
Other Income		
	79 653	47 451
Interest Received	1 498	2 638
Total Income	81 151	50 089
Administration expenses	41 857	60 320
General Expenses	50	14 756
Bank charges	1 092	138
Courier & Postage	13 238	-
Accountancy Fees	1 500	-
Stationery and Printing	25 977	65 426
Net Income(loss) before taxation	39 294	(30 231)
Retained Profit(loss) for last year	61 972	92 203
Taxation Payable	-	-
Net Profit(loss) for the year	101 266	61 972

Auditor's Report



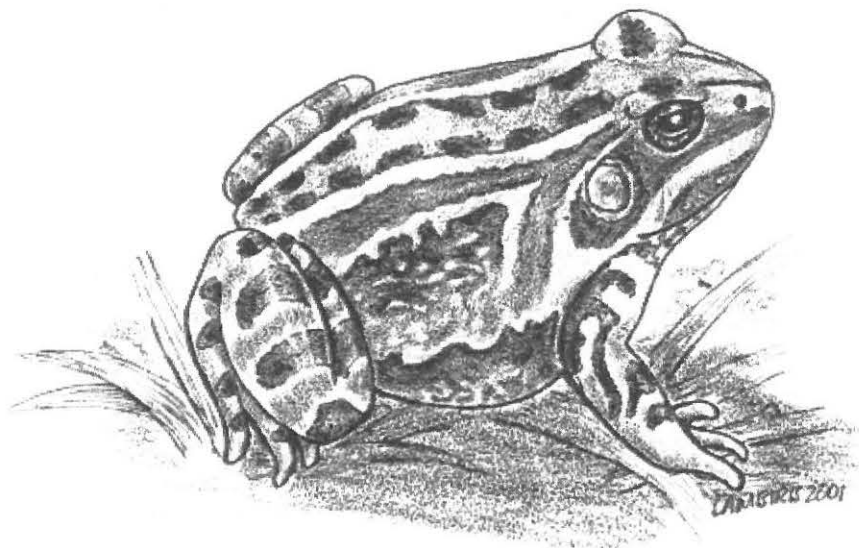
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ACCOUNTING OFFICER'S REPORT
TO THE MEMBERS OF
HERPETOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION OF AFRICA

We have performed the duties of Accounting Officers to HERPETOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION OF AFRICA as required by article 62 of the Law of Close Corporations 1984. No audit needs to be done as required by the law, and no audit was performed. The financial statements are the responsibility of the members. We have determined that the financial statements are in agreement with the accounting records and have books of account and record as we considered necessary in the circumstances. We have also reviewed the accounting policy which have been applied in the preparation of the annual financial statements and we consider that they are appropriate to the business.


J.C. VAN NIEKAMP
IM&D FINANSIËLE DIENSTE
ACCOUNTANTS



Hildebrandtia ornata ornata (Peters, 1878)

Drawing: Angelo Lambiris

HERPETOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION OF AFRICA
(Founded in 1965)



APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP 2008

Title: Initials: First name:

Surname:

Date: E-mail:

Postal address:

Postal code: Country:

Work tel. (inc. code): Fax No. (inc. code)

Occupation:

Institution, if not above address:

Herpetological interests (including organisms and general field)

Type of membership

Tick appropriate block and include payment with this application.
(African members should pay in ZAR, overseas members in US\$ equivalent rate)

African Membership	1 year	R200	<input type="checkbox"/>	Three years	R600	<input type="checkbox"/>
Overseas Membership	1 year	\$60	<input type="checkbox"/>	Three years	\$180	<input type="checkbox"/>

Year in which membership is to commence:

Signature of applicant:

Please post form to: Mrs. Mandi Alblas, Secretary HAA, Dept. of Biomedical Sciences,
P.O. Box 19063, Tygerberg 7505, South Africa.

OFFICE USE

Date received: Receipt No.:

Membership No.: Replied:

INSTRUCTIONS TO AUTHORS

Contributions (preferably in Word 6.0, 7.0 or Windows XP) submitted in an incorrect style (see guide-lines below) will be returned to the authors.

ARTICLES

African Herp News publishes longer contributions of general interest that would not be presented as either Natural History Notes or Geographical Distributions.

A standard format is to be used, as follows: **TITLE** (capitals, bold, centred); **AUTHOR(S)**^(1,2) (bold, centred); Author's address(es) (use superscripts with authors' names and addresses if more than one author); **HEADINGS** (bold, centred) and **SUB-HEADINGS** (bold, aligned left) as required; **REFERENCES**, following the formats given below:

BRANCH, W.R., 1998: *Field Guide to the Snakes and Other Reptiles of Southern Africa*. Third edition. Struik, Cape Town.

BROADLEY, D.G. 1994: The genus *Scelotes* Fitzinger (Reptilia: Scincidae) in Mozambique, Swaziland and Natal, South Africa. *Ann. Natal Mus.* **35**: 237-259.

COOK, C.L., & MINTER, L.R., 2004: *Pyxicephalus adspersus* Peters, 1854. pp. 303-305, in Minter, L.R., Burger, M., Harrison, J.A., Braack, H.H., Bishop, P.J., and Kloepfer, D. (eds.), *Atlas and Red Data Book of the Frogs of South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland*. SI/MAB Series #9. Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

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** (including author citation); **Common name** (using Bill Branch's *Field Guide to Snakes and Other Reptiles of Southern Africa*, third edition, 1998, for reptiles; and Passmore & Carruthers' *South African Frogs*, 1995, for amphibians as far as possible); **KEYWORD** (this should be one or two words best describing the topic of the note, e.g. Reproduction, Avian predation, etc.); the **Text** (in concise English with only essential references quoted and in abbreviated form); **Locality** (Country; Province; quarter-degree locus; location; latitude and longitude if available; elevation above sea level); **Date** (day, month, year); **Collector(s)**; **Place of deposition and museum accession number** (required if specimens are preserved). **References**, if only one or two, should be incorporated into the text; three or more references should be placed after the main text, as for Articles. **Submitted by:** NAME, Address.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION

Brief notes of new geographical distributions (preferably at least 100 km from the nearest published the nearest published record) of amphibians and reptiles on the Afri-

Instructions to Authors

can 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** (including author citation); **Common name** (for sources, see Natural History Notes); **Locality** (Country; Province; quarter-degree locus; location; latitude and longitude; elevation above sea level); **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**, if only one or two, should be incorporated into the text; three or more references should be placed after the main text, as for Articles. **Submitted by:** NAME, Address.

Records submitted should be based on specimens deposited in a recognised collection.

HERPETOLOGICAL SURVEYS

African Herp News publishes sparsely annotated species lists resulting from local surveys of amphibians and reptiles on the African continent and adjacent regions, including the Arabian peninsula, Madagascar, and other islands in the Indian Ocean. The area surveyed may be of any size but should be a defined geographic unit of especial relevance to the herpetological community. For example, surveys could address declared or proposed conservation reserves, poorly explored areas, biogeographically important localities or administrative zones. The relevance of survey results should be judged by the extent that these records fill distributional gaps or synthesise current knowledge.

Survey results should be presented in the following format: **TITLE, including an indication of the survey area or locality** (country, province or state, location, quarter-degree units, or bounding latitude and longitude); **AUTHOR(S)** (format as for long articles, above) **Dates** (day, month, year); **Statement of relevance**; and **SPECIES LIST**, in tabular form comprising **Scientific name** (including author citation), **Location / Habitat**; **Evidence** (including registration numbers and location of vouchers); and **Comments** (where required). The note should end with a **SUMMARY** statement and **REFERENCES**.

As far as possible survey records should be based on accessible and verifiable evidence (specimens deposited in public collections, photos submitted illustrating diagnostic features, call recordings and sonograms, or DNA sequences accessioned into international databases).

PHOTOGRAPHS AND FIGURES

Photographs and figures should be submitted as separate JPEG files, and not embedded in the text. The name of the photographer should be given, if not taken by the author or senior author of the article.

**HERPETOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION OF AFRICA
MEMBERSHIP FEES FROM 2008**

FEE STRUCTURE 2008 FOR AFRICAN RESIDENT MEMBERS
(Posting to addresses in Africa)

	1 year	3 years
Ordinary members	ZAR 200	ZAR 600
Scholars (attending high school)	ZAR 100	

FEE STRUCTURE 2008 FOR NON-AFRICAN RESIDENT MEMBERS
(Posting to addresses outside Africa)

Membership	1 year	3 years
	US\$60	US\$180

BANKING DETAILS

Account Name: Herpetological Association of Africa

Account Number: 1793 6077

Bank: ABSA

Branch: Eastgate

Swift Code: ABSAZAJJ

Clearing Code: 6356050

CREDIT CARD PAYMENTS

We only accept credit card payments in US \$, which are accepted by *Bibliomania* (<http://www.herplit.com>). Please contact Mr. Breck Bartholomew in the USA (Breck@herplit.com), if you would like to pay by credit card. When paying via *Bibliomania* please quote your **surname** and **HAA membership reference number** (obtainable from the Secretary, Mandi Alblas (aa2@sun.ac.za)) as the transaction reference, and state that it is an **HAA payment**. You may also pay electronically using the Bibliomania website: <http://www.herplit.com/HAA.html>

NOTICE REGARDING ELECTRONIC PAYMENTS

It is essential that your **membership reference number** (or initials and surname, if you are a new member) be used as a reference for electronic payments, and that you let the HAA Treasurer, Mandi Alblas (aa2@sun.ac.za), know when you authorize the payment, so that it can be traced.

NB: BANK FEES

Please note that **all bank fees for credit card and electronic payments** to the HAA must be **borne by you, the payee**. Thus, please ensure that you **add an extra 5%** to cover bank charges, or that these come **directly off your account** when electronically transferring money, and **NOT off the amount to be received by the HAA**.