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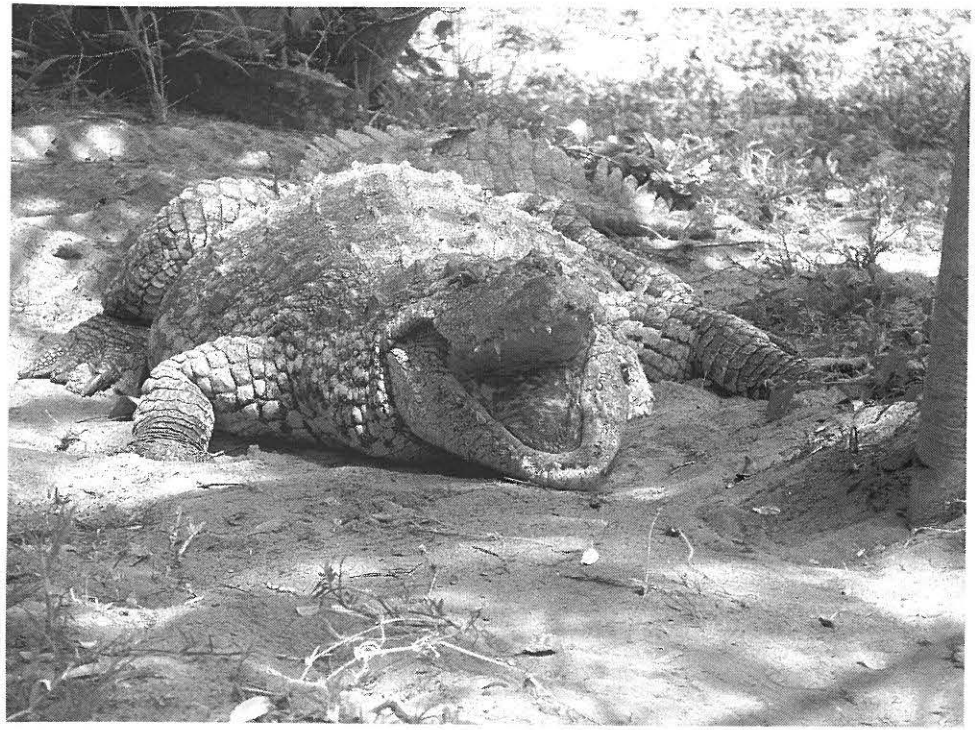
Newsletter of the Herpetological Association of Africa



Number 45 **JULY 2008**

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 may be submitted as typescripts.

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

COVER PHOTO *Crocodylus niloticus* Laurenti, 1768. Photo: Angelo Lambiris

HERPETOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION OF AFRICA

EDITORIAL

Following a query if the use of the genus name *Bufo* Laurenti, 1768 in the caption to the illustration accompanying the editorial in the last issue of the Newsletter, and the name *Amietophrynus* Frost *et al.*, 2007 for the same taxon in the text of an article by Conradie *et al.* was an editorial lapse, it is perhaps desirable to express editorial policy for *African Herp News* clearly to avoid any possible misunderstandings. The opinions expressed here are my own, and do not necessarily reflect those of other members of the Committee of the H.A.A., nor those of the Editor, Associate Editors, and the Editorial Committee of the *African Journal of Herpetology*.

I believe that any paper published in a reputable peer-reviewed journal should be taken seriously and accorded careful, mature consideration with respect to the issues addressed, the content of the research, and the conclusions reached. Whether the reader accepts or rejects the conclusions expressed will naturally depend largely on his own knowledge and understanding of the subject, and if there is any uncertainty or doubt then the objective opinions of colleagues considered to be more knowledgeable should be sought as an adjunct to further reflection.

There is a somewhat paradoxical situation in that it appears to be widely agreed that nomenclatural stability is necessary for effective, unambiguous communication. It also appears to be generally agreed that any system of classification should serve both to express the natural relationships of the taxa concerned, and to contain a certain amount of information pertaining to those taxa. However, neither taxonomy nor systematics are – or ever can be – immutable; our perceptions change as our knowledge and understanding grow in the light of further studies, and to this extent there must necessarily be some element of change as our systems of naming and expressing relationships develop in the light of new discoveries. Some sort of compromise is clearly necessary, and there will always be some measure of disagreement about the nature and extent of the compromise according to the beliefs of each worker.

A recent reappraisal of amphibian systematics (Frost *et al.*, 2006: The Amphibian Tree of Life. *Bull. Amer. Mus. Nat. Hist.* **249**: 1-240) has engendered a considerable amount of discussion expressing widely divergent opinions. Wiens (2007: Book Review – The Amphibian Tree of Life. *Quart. Rev. Biol.* **82**: 55-56) considered this monograph "a disaster" and suggested that students of amphibian systematics should "simply ignore this study". Wiens's views have not passed unchallenged – e.g. Frost *et al.*, 2007: Is *The Amphibian Tree of Life* really fatally flawed? (Cladistics Online Early Articles doi:10.1111/j/1096-0031.2007.00181.x).

After careful reflection I still feel that there is nevertheless much to be said in favour of maintaining the established names of many of the taxa used in amphibian systematics. Many of the new names used by Frost *et al.* are divorced from the im-

mense amount of published research on amphibians and the resulting instability will hinder, rather than enhance, communication.

Any publication expresses the opinions of the author(s), and while these must be accorded due consideration, there is nothing in the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature that requires or compels acceptance of the latest (or any other) taxonomic or systematic revision. As yet the ICZN contains no rules for the naming of supraspecific taxa (clades), and until such changes are made, some measure of tolerance and compromise must be made between the two systems of classification.

I do not find the arguments put forward by Frost *et al.* persuasive, and many of the taxa that they have created in this study appear to be ill-defined. Within the Bufonidae, for example, new genera lack any characterisation at all; elsewhere, all too often, characterisations include such remarks as "None of the morphological characters in our analysis optimise on this taxon and the decisive evidence for its recognition is purely molecular (see Appendix 5 for summary)." I therefore do not feel able to accept their nomenclature or their classification. However, contributors to the Newsletter who do agree with the proposals of Frost *et al.* will have their opinions respected, and readers are therefore asked to accept, with forbearance, the apparent inconsistencies that may appear in different articles appearing in these pages. Contributors to the Newsletter may feel that formulae such as *Amietophryne* (= *Bufo*) *garmani*, or *Bufo* (= *Amietophryne*) *garmani*, may be an acceptable compromise until such time as more data, broader sampling, and better analytical methods either confirm or refute the validity of the relationships postulated by Frost *et al.*

Angelo Lambiris,
Editor

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

AMPHIBIA: GYMNOPHIONA

CAECILIIDAE

***Scolecomorphus vittatus* (Boulenger, 1895)**
Ribbon caecilian

TASTE

Amphibian toxins are well recorded in the literature (e.g. Dendrobatid skin secretions: Saporito *et al.*, 2004, and among African Anura: Pantanowitz *et al.*, 1998), and although humans are known to consume amphibians on several continents (e.g. *Xenopus* in central Africa, *Rana* in Europe and almost all frogs in Thailand), most involves preparation removing toxic skin, or sun-drying prior to cooking. The effects of amphibian skin toxins on mammals are perhaps best known in Africa from dogs attacking toads, although few detailed descriptions are documented, toxic reactions include foaming at the mouth, irregular cardiac functions and occasional death (especially for small dogs Pantanowitz *et al.*, 1998). The limited available literature on human consumption of Bufonid parotid secretions suggests that they contain psychoactive alkaloids (*Ollotis alvaria* [formerly *Bufo alvarius*] is known for 'toad licking' although apparently more effective if smoked as in *Rhinella marina* [formerly *Bufo marinus*]; see Anon, 2007). Very little information exists on the toxic nature of caecilian (Amphibia; Gymnophiona) skins (Jared *et al.*, 1999, Toledo and Jared, 1995), and to our knowledge, there is no documentation of human ingestion of any caecilian toxins.

During a visit to the West Usambara Mountains, Tanga Region, Tanzania during April 2008, one of us (AT) caught a *Scolecomorphus vittatus* which was fleeing from an overturned log (S 04° 44' 53" E 38° 17' 52" 1671 m asl). In a merry jape to scare surrounding children and surprise companions, AT placed the caecilian in his mouth, gently restraining it with his lips. No visible damage was done to the caecilian, and no toxic secretions were noted. However, AT experienced a number of symptoms which we note here in the only known record of human experience of caecilian toxin.

AT immediately experienced a strong burning sensation on his lips not dissimilar to chilli, but not at all pleasant and with no perceptible raise in endorphin levels

although it did induce some anxiety about other potential effects such as those known from *Phrynomantis*. In addition, AT began to salivate excessively and uncontrollably. What was perhaps most surprising was the duration of these symptoms. For more than 30 minutes the burning was notably unpleasant while the salivation made AT spit continuously. While the burning sensation then subsided, the increased salivation levels continued for at least two hours (much to the mirth of his companions).

Very little is recorded on the natural history of caecilians, and their potential predators. Gower *et al* (2004b) reported the ingestion of a *Scolecomorphus vittatus* by a burrowing asp *Atractaspis aterrima* and commented on the bright colouration of this species (dorsally dark, but ventrally pink). There has been some speculation that colour of some caecilians might be aposematic and associated with skin toxins (e.g. Nussbaum, 1998), and this may be supported by a study on caecilian colouration and patterning which relates these to their ecology (Wollenberg & Measey, in press). Indeed, Jones *et al* (2006) relate the feeding ecology of *Scolecomorphus vittatus* compared to the more subterranean caecilian *Boulengerula boulengeri*, concluding that they have separate trophic niches, although their sampling methodology was biased in favour of this conclusion (see Gower *et al*., 2004a, Measey, 2004). Although caecilian predators certainly include vertebrates, invertebrate predators are likely to be more numerous for many subterranean species, especially driver ants in East Africa (Measey, 2004). Despite this research, the question remains: which potential predators are deterred by the skin toxins of *Scolecomorphus vittatus*?

In relating this anecdote to a larger audience, we hope to increase awareness of the toxic nature of this and other caecilian amphibians and stimulate further research in this direction. We would also hope to warn other would be pranksters to think twice before placing a potentially toxic amphibian into their mouth.

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REPTILIA: SQUAMATA; SAURIA

GEKKONIDAE

***Ptyodactylus hasselquistii* (Donndorff, 1789)**
Egyptian Fan-footed Gecko

TERMITE DIET

On 9 April 2008 after rain – the first substantial rain for the season, measuring 27 mm – in the Thumamah area (25°13.231'N; 46°36.574'E, elevation: 510 m, approximately 70 km northeast of Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia), ant and termite activity (probably *Heterotermes* sp.) was heavy during the afternoon with a variety of bird species – e.g. European Bee-eaters, kestrel, etc. – making use of this windfall.

At 18h30, just after sunset, I observed three *Ptyodactylus hasselquistii* individuals preying on the grounded termites – close to a puddle of water. This utilization of an abundant source of food is expected, but what made this observation interesting was that the *P. hasselquistii* individuals were 20 m away from any form of usually accepted habitat – i.e. rock overhangs, caves, boulders, houses, etc. Observations of *P. hasselquistii* away from preferred habitat are uncommon with the closest source of refuge in this case being a house where a number of them were known to reside. The individuals seemed ungainly on the level ground surface and attempted to use tufts of grass to hide on my approach.

On 18 April 2008 I again observed *Ptyodactylus hasselquistii* individuals preying on arthropods attracted to an artificial light 2-3 m away from accepted shelter shortly after sunset at the Hazzam rangers camp in the Mahazat as-Sayd Nature Reserve, approximately 700 km southwest of Riyadh in south central Saudi Arabia. Two other individuals were observed sheltering in a rain gauge approximately 500 m away from the closest generally accepted habitat in the vicinity of Jebel Shamali (also known as White Jebel, 22°13.836'N; 41°58.967'E, elevation: 1016 m) in the above mentioned reserve, having crossed a relatively open, sparsely vegetated, but rocky plain to reach the site.

P. hasselquistii are usually found on steep surfaces high above the ground (Baha el Din 1996) with daylight activity restricted to shaded areas under huge boulders, rock overhangs, crevasses, houses, etc. where they utilize their agility and cracks to escape potential predators (Disi *et al.*, 2001, Jongbloed 2000, Leviton *et al.*, 1992). Geckoes are known to forage on prey items from the safety of their shelters during daylight hours (Branch 1998) and Cunningham & Adank (2003) observed similar behaviour by *Pachydactylus turneri* feeding on termites during daylight hours' approximately 3 to 4 m from the closest suitable cover. According to Bauer *et al.*

(1989), termites (*Hodotermes mossambicus*) are known to be preyed on by a variety of geckoes in southern Africa, and probably even able to "predict" – via environmental cues – localized outbreaks of arthropod prey.

Although the observed *P. hasselquistii* individuals were conforming to their nocturnal habits, they were however actively foraging far away from normally accepted habitat albeit to utilise an easy or abundant source of food, in two of the cases observed. *P. hasselquistii,* is an opportunist active hunter not restricted to vertical surfaces when the opportunity arises, notwithstanding the costs related to such brazen activity. This potential cost was made obvious when a feral cat was spotted patrolling the same area after the rains presumably for the same reasons – i. e. preying on reptiles attracted to the termite activity.

Acknowledgements

My appreciation to Ernest Robinson (Director KKWRC, Thumamah) for commenting on a draft of this note.

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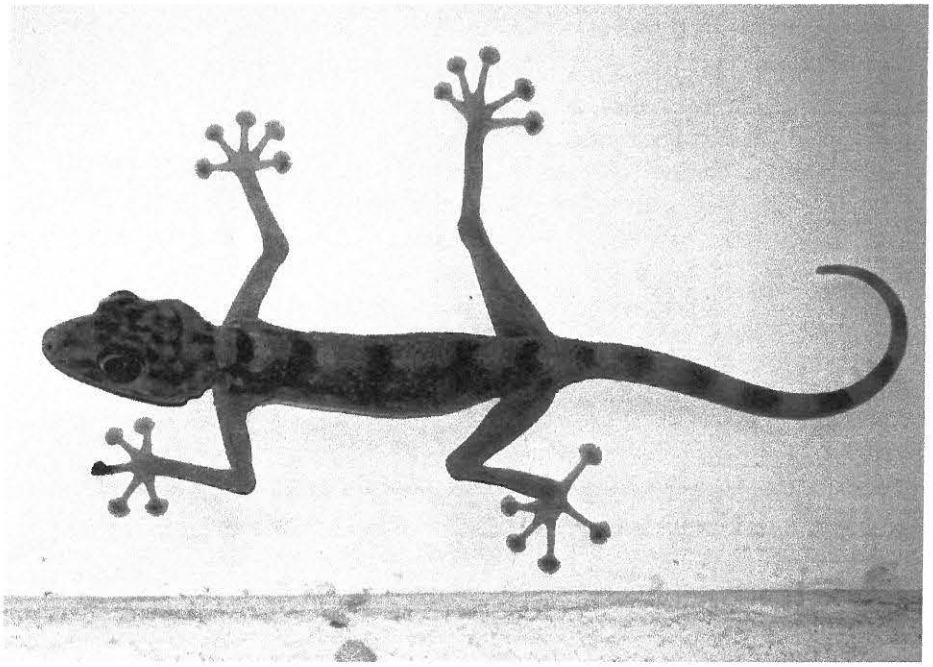

Ptyodactylus hasselquistii. Thumamah area, approx. 70 km NE of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. (Photo: Peter Cunningham)

***Lygodactylus picturatus* Peters, 1871**
Painted Dwarf Gecko

ENDOPARASITES

As part of an ongoing survey of endoparasites of African lizards, we examined eight male *Lygodactylus picturatus* (mean snout-vent length = 32.9 mm ± 2.0 SD, range = 30-35 mm) from Kenya (Rift Valley Province, Nakuru District) collected in 1967 that were deposited in the herpetology collection of the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County (LACM), Los Angeles, California, USA: LACM 62929, 62923, 62927, 621937, 62947, 62951, 62957, 62958. Lizards were opened with a mid-ventral incision. The digestive tract was removed, and the esophagus, stomach, small and large intestines were examined for endoparasites using a dissecting microscope. The body cavity was also searched. Two and five cestodes (mean = 3.5 ± 2.1 SD, range = 2-5) were found in the small intestines of LACM

62927 and 62947, respectively, which were regressively stained in hematoxylin, cleared in xylene, mounted in Canada balsam and identified as *Cylindrotaenia jaegerskioeldi*. Voucher specimens were deposited in the United States National Parasite Collection, USNPC, Beltsville, Maryland, USA as USNPC (100788).

Cylindrotaenia jaegerskioeldi is known from Africa where it has been reported from anurans: *Amietophrynus angolensis, A. regularis, Hyerolius puncticulatus, Nectophrynoides viviparus* (Jones, M. J. 1987. A taxonomic revision of the Nematotaeniidae Lühe, 1910 (Cestoda: Cyclophyllidea). *Systematic Parasitology,* **10:**165-245), *Afrixalus dorsalis, Amietophrynus maculatus, Arthrolepis* sp., *Hyperolius fusciventris, Phrynobatrachus ogoensis, Ptychadena aequiplicata, P. mascariensis* (Prudhoe, S. & Bray, R. A. 1982. *Platyhelminth Parasites of the Amphibia,* British Museum (Natural History), Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK) and also the chameleon *Rieppeleon brevicaudatus* (Jones 1987, *op. cit*). *Lygodactylus picturatus* represents a new host record for *Cylindrotaenia jaegerskioeldi*.

Acknowledgements

We thank C. Thacker (Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, Los Angeles, California) for permission to examine specimens and T. Doleck (Whittier College) for assistance with dissections.

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***Pachydactylus* spp.**
SPERM RETENTION

On two occasions (in 2005 and 2007) I have brought back to France several specimens of *Pachydactylus geitje* (Sparrman, 1778) from the Western Cape Province and *Pachydactylus vansoni* FitzSimons, 1933, collected during February and March. The geckoes were collected under permits MPB. 5188 (20 February 2007) and 001 506 00009 (11 February 2005).

Most *Pachydactylus* species generally complete oviposition in February (*pers. obs.*), a summer month in South Africa, but winter in France. In the room in which my geckoes are kept, the temperature begins to rise to about 23°C during the day, with a heating cable creating a hot spot of about 35°C for two to three hours. Temperatures at night fall to as low as 14°C.

Each gecko is kept in a plastic container measuring 28 x 18 x 12 cm. The females are isolated and I do not try to mate them until the following year.

Nevertheless, a female *Pachydactylus geitje* laid two fertile eggs in June 2005, of which one hatched; and a *Pachydactylus vansoni* laid four fertile eggs in July 2007, of which three hatched. In March 2008 the same *P. vansoni* laid several infertile eggs, which suggests that viable sperms are not retained for long, and that mating each year is necessary to produce fertile eggs.

Geckoes are not known to deposit eggs in the winter months in South Africa, and I believe that the progressive reheating from February to June in my holding room may have created something like a new "spring cycle" in those females which ovulated and were subsequently fertilised by stored sperms, producing a clutch of viable eggs.

I have never observed sperm retention in my animals in more than twelve years during which I have kept *Pachydactylus* in captivity. Is it possible that females in the wild could deposit the first clutch at the beginning of the laying period without mating, or is it only under particular artificial conditions that this phenomenon occurs, sperm normally being killed by low winter temperatures?

Sperm retention is known in places where animals are erratics (low densities) in marine turtles, snakes and lizards, and is documented on several Google web sites (key words: sperm retention in reptiles).

Acknowledgements :

I would like to thank the Western Province and the Mpumalanga authorities for granting me permits for these geckoes.

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REPTILIA: SQUAMATA; SERPENTES

COLUBRIDAE

***Lamprophis capense* Duméril & Bibron, 1854**
Brown House Snake

SUBCUTANEOUS EMPHYSEMA

Subcutaneous emphysema (also called surgical emphysema) occurs when a penetrating injury of the lung, usually caused by a fractured rib, allows air to accumulate in the subcutaneous tissues. In many instances the air is eventually reabsorbed without intervention, but occasionally it may progress enough to cause significant distress. Although rib fractures are quite frequently encountered in snakes, especially those that are road traffic casualties, the victims of assault, or careless capture by means of tongs, subcutaneous emphysema appears to be an unusual complication.

In June 2006 a young adult *Lamprophis capense* was referred to me after it had

been injured by a dog. Although there were no external injuries, extensive subcutaneous swellings had been noted soon afterwards. These grew rapidly larger during the following two or three days, then diminished to some extent and remained unchanged for about ten days, during which period the snake was becoming increasingly distressed.

On examination at referral, fractured ribs were noted on the left side, some four centimetres distal to the emphysematous swellings (Fig. 1) and the intervening skin was rather loose. The condition did not appear to be life-threatening, but the snake was clearly suffering appreciable discomfort.

In view of the fact that the emphysema had partly diminished, and because there was no evidence of significant haemorrhage into the lungs, no attempt was made to reduce the rib fractures – they were simply supported with adhesive strapping applied to the left side of the trunk. The entrapped air was aspirated with a sterile syringe (Fig. 2), and a light dressing applied to keep the skin gently but firmly apposed to the underlying tissues. The dressing was removed after four days, by which time the lesion had healed sufficiently to prevent recurrence of the emphysema.

The snake was fed Vamine (an intravenous feed containing amino-acids, electrolytes and glucose) orally while the ribs healed; within two weeks she was able to feed for herself.

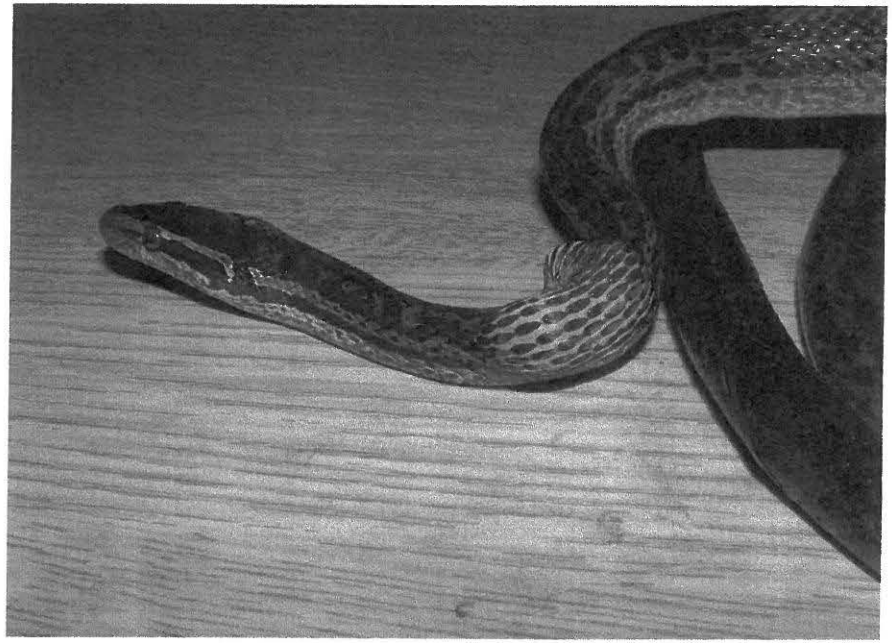

Fig. 1. *Lamprophis capense* with subcutaneous emphysema. Ribs were fractured at the point where the trunk lies over the tail. (Photo: Angelo Lambiris)

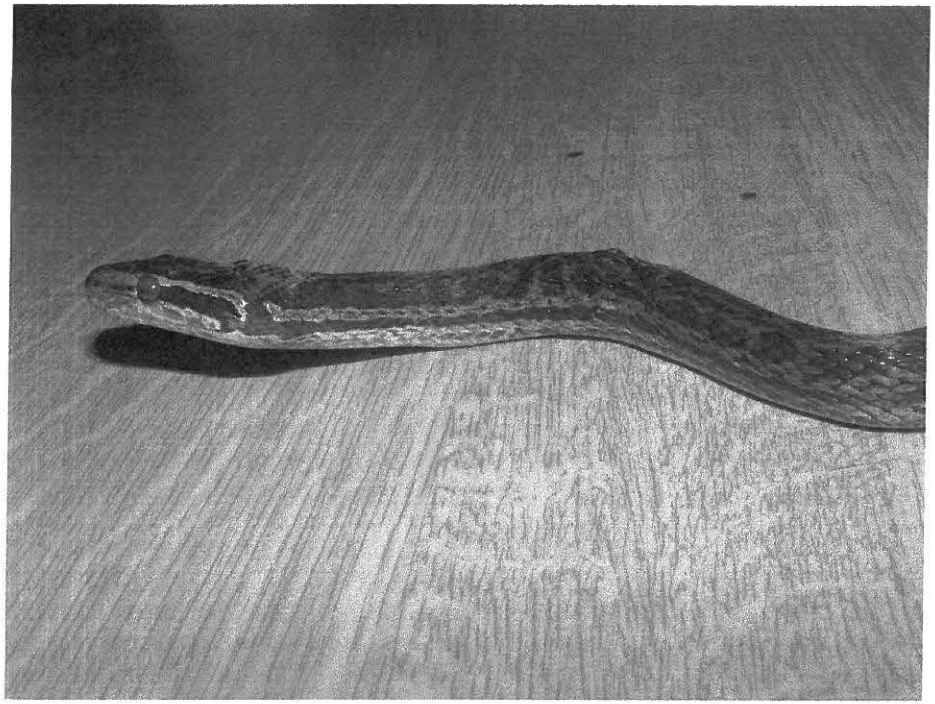

Fig. 2. The snake after aspiration of the emphysematous bullae. (Photo: Angelo Lambiris.)

ATRACTASPIDIDAE

***Atractaspis fallax* Peters, 1867**
Small-scaled Burrowing Asp

HOODING AND CORKSCREW BEHAVIOUR

The behaviour described here happened during a photo session with two snakes and does not appear to have been recorded before. Initially, the larger snake assumed the typical *Atractaspis* defence attitude (Branch, 1998, *Field Guide to the Snakes and Other Reptiles of Southern Africa.* Struik, Cape Town) of snout facing at a 90-degree angle to the ground, neck raised off the ground, arched and slightly flared. This behaviour continued for approximately 30 seconds. Upon further provocation, the animal lifted its head and neck, standing about 150mm perpendicular to the ground. The neck was flared and the head was held parallel to the ground, highly reminiscent of *Aspidelaps* (Fig. 1). This stance was held for about 90 seconds, after which the snake relaxed and started to drop back to the ground. As I tapped the animal lightly on the caudal part of its body near the tail, it immediately resumed the standing defence display. After this initial display, I set up a photo box to better document this behaviour. I started with the same snake, the larger male, and placed him in the box. He started with the arched-neck display, but after a tap on the body he stood up to a height of about 150mm to look in the direction of the disturbance. He maintained this position for about two minutes and then started to lower his forepart of his body. When touched, he rose up again and maintained the raised forepart of his body and narrow hood.

The second, smaller, male was put into the photo box. Once again, when tapped on the caudal part of the body, near the vent, he quickly raised the forepart of his body, about a quarter of his length to stand at about the same height as the first animal.

Another observation made in this species was when a third male was being cleaned. The sequence started with usual behaviour of downward nose pointing and hooding. Then the animal made a tight coil with its head in the centre and its body tightly coiled around it. The tail was left out of the coil, similar to the regular behaviour of *Prosymna*. This behaviour was maintained until the animal was left alone for a few minutes. Upon further harassment, the animal re-assumed the corkscrew position. This behaviour was repeated a few weeks later by the same animal during a photographic session by David Northcott.

Since these initial observations, all of my captive specimens of Atractaspis fallax have displayed both hooding and corkscrew behaviour. The standing display does not always appear to be in defense, as the snakes will do it with very little provocation.

These behavioural displays are believed not to have been previously documented. S. Spawls, D. Broadley and W. Wuster later confirmed that they had never seen or heard of this behaviour in this species (*pers.com*).

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(Fig. 1 overleaf)

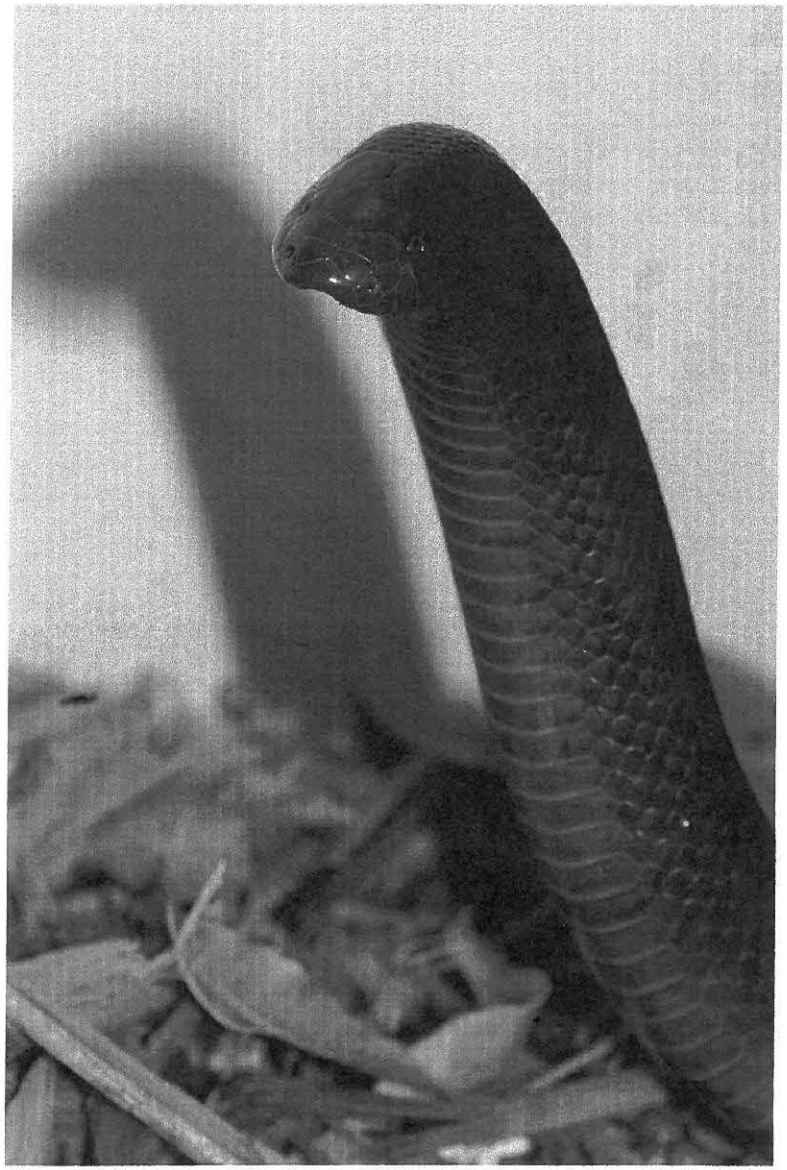

Fig. 1. *Atractaspis fallax* rearing and "hooding". (Photo: Donald Schultz)

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTIONS

AMPHIBIA: ANURA

ARTHROLEPTIDAE

***Arthroleptis francei* Loveridge 1953**

A juvenile (Natural History Museum of Zimbabwe, NMZB 17785) collected on Namuli Mountain (altitude approximately 900 m), north Mozambique (1537AC), by A.J. Gardiner on 23 April 2008, on leaf litter in moist lowland forest. This is the first record for Mozambique and represents a range extension of ca. 175 km north-east from the type locality, Mulanje Mountain in southern Malawi. This specimen was sympatric with an *Arthroleptis xenodactyloides* (NMZB 17786).

Submitted by
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HYPEROLIIDAE

***Hyperolius quinquevittatus* Bocage 1866**

A juvenile (Natural History Museum of Zimbabwe, NMZB 17789) collected on Namuli Mountain (altitude approximately 1270 m), north Mozambique (1537AC), by A.J. Gardiner on 26 April 2008. This is the first record for Mozambique and represents a range extension of ca. 175 km north-east from the Mulanje District in southern Malawi. This specimen was sympatric with a male *Hyperolius marmoratus* of the juvenile phase, probably the subspecies *albofasciatus*.

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REPTILIA: SQUAMATA; SAURIA

GEKKONIDAE

***Pristurus gasperetti gasperettii* Arnold, 1986**
Gasperetti's Semaphore Gecko

DISTRIBUTION

On 18 March 2008 at 17h00 I observed a *Pristurus gasperetti gasperetti* individual on the trunk of an *Acacia tortilis* tree close to the Qarnayn ranger's camp in the Uruq Bani M'arid Protected Area on the western edge of the Empty Quarter (19°08.255'N, 45°09.826'E). Uruq Bani M'arid is approximately 750 km southwest of Riyadh, bordered on its west by the southernmost extension of the Tuwaiq Escarpment, a remnant limestone Jurassic massif, and to the east by the extensive sands of the Empty Quarter in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The *P. gasperetti gasperetti* individual was observed moving along the trunk of the *A. tortilis* and stopping for long periods, presumably waiting for prey objects to pass by. It remained for some time, which allowed me to photograph it to confirm its identity, before it moved under loose bark. The *A. tortilis* tree was approximately 1.5 m in height and located in an inter-dune, sparsely vegetated gravel plain with a few other Acacias in the immediate vicinity.

P. gasperetti gasperetti has previously been documented from Wadi Kharrar, near Makkah, in western Saudi Arabia from where the holotype also originates (Arnold 1986a, b). This specimen observed at Qarnayn indicates a range extension of approximately 600 km to the southeast of the general Makkah area. Very little is known about the overall distribution of *P. gasperetti gasperetti* due to under collecting of reptiles from this part of the Arabian Peninsula. The general ecology is unknown although specimens are known to occur on Acacias (Arnold 1986a). Some notes on the ecology of the subspecies *P. gasperetti gallagheri* from the Jebel Akhar massif in northern Oman have been published by Gardner (1994).

This sighting of *P. gasperetti gasperetti* indicates that they are more widely distributed than the Makkah region and that the known range would undoubtedly include suitable areas within the Acacia belt between Makkah and the Uruq Bani M'arid Protected Area although this would have to be confirmed.

Acknowledgements

My appreciation to Andrew Gardner for identifying the photographed specimen and providing me with relevant literature and Ernest Robinson (Director KKWRC, Thumamah) for commenting on a draft of this note.

References

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Submitted by

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Pristurus g. gasperettii. Uruq Bani M'arid, Saudi Arabia. (Photo: Peter Cunningham)

AGAMIDAE

***Trapelus pallidus agnetae* (Werner, 1929)**

Pale Agama

DISTRIBUTION

On three occasions – 28 March 2008 (22°16.260'N; 41°59.789E, elevation: 1000 m), 17 April 2008 (22°14.965'N; 41°59.367'E, elevation: 999 m) & 18 April 2008 (22°17.244'N; 42°08.972'E, elevation: 982 m) – I observed *Trapelus pallidus agnetae* individuals in the Mahazat as-Sayd Protected Area in western central Saudi Arabia. Mahazat as-Sayd Protected Area is a flat arid desert steppe located approximately 150 km northeast of Taif and 700 km west of Riyadh covering an area of 2 244 km^2. The climate is arid with annual rainfall – occurring mainly between March and May – highly variable ranging between 50-100 mm and the mean monthly minimum and maximum temperatures ranging between 2-21 °C and 29-40 °C. The general area is undulating sandy and/or gravel plains dominated by *Acacia tortilis* trees and shrubs and *Salsola spinosa* shrubs.

The published range for this species is unclear with "northern Saudi Arabia" being the most widely used (Arnold 1986, Disi et al. 2001, Leviton et al. 1992). Bordering northern Saudi Arabia, in neighbouring Jordan, *T. p. agnetae* is common in the dry habitats east of Amman and the black lava desert in the Azraq region in eastern Jordan – i.e. bordering northern Saudi Arabia (Disi et al. 2001).

All three observed individuals were associated with sparsely vegetated gravel plains and out in the heat of the day (10h12, 10h40 & 12h00) with two individuals perched inactive, one on a small *Acacia tortilis* shrub (approximately 30 cm above ground level) in a vehicle track, and the other on a dry branch (approximately 15 cm above ground level) on a gravel plain 45 m away from the closest vegetation cover. The third individual was actively foraging, also on exposed gravel plain. They are known from similar exposed habitat in Jordan (Disi et al. 2001). These *T. p. agnetae* specimens observed in the Mahazat as-Sayd Protected Area indicate a range extension of approximately 1000 km from the Jordanian border in northern Saudi Arabia. Specimens from "northern Saudi Arabia" would be a similar distance from then Mahazat as-Sayd Protected Area.

A further reference to an individual *T. p. agnetae* photographed from "Dahal Abu Marwah (26°25.750'N; 43°13.400'E), near Ma'aqala, Eastern Province, Saudi Arabia" (See Leviton et al. 1992) would result in a range extension of approximately 700 km towards the southwest. This specific site was located 200 km northeast of Riyadh (in the Eastern Province which extends from the Kuwait border south-eastwards to the Rub al Khali (Empty Quarter) – i.e. eastern Saudi Arabia) and is a well ("Dahal" refers to an old well) used extensively in the caravan trading

era immortalised in local poetry. According to local history, four centuries ago a famous poet hid his rifle in the well describing its hiding place in a short poem. His son, remembering the poem, eventually located this rifle replying to his father's poem in a one-liner referring to this specific well by name. Locating place names in Saudi Arabia is a difficult task as regional names are often lost in dialect or spontaneously given on request and not necessarily being correct (Tatwani pers com).

Due to under collecting, very little is known about the range of *T. p. agnetae* from the Arabian Peninsula although it is likely to be more widespread than what's currently accepted – i.e. "northern Saudi Arabia", "Eastern Province" and now the Mahazat as-Sayd Protected Area. Although being diurnal and not unduly cryptic, these sightings and range extension indicate the basic lack of baseline ecological information regarding reptiles from Saudi Arabia.

Acknowledgements

My appreciation to Yehudah Werner for confirming the identity of the photographed specimens from Mahazat as-Sayd, Hani Tatwani for his views on place names and the eventual location of "Dahal Abu Marwah" and Ernest Robinson (Director KKWRC, Thumamah) for commenting on a draft of this note.

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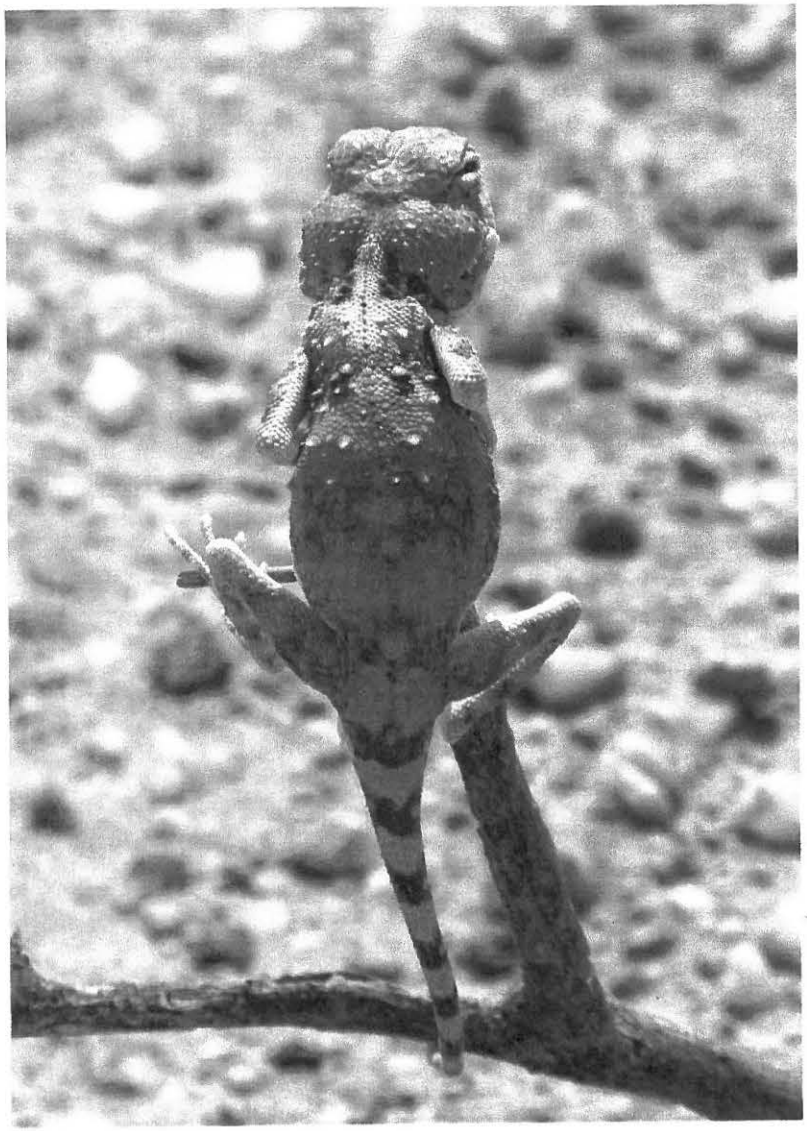
Submitted by

Peter L. CUNNINGHAM, King Khalid Wildlife Research Centre, Thumamah, P. O. Box 61681, Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Zoological Society of London. E-mail: pckkwrc@yahoo.co.uk



Trapelus pallidus agnetae. Mahazat as-Sayd Protected Area, Saudi Arabia. (Photo: Peter Cunningham)

SCINCIDAE

***Trachylepis septemtaeniata* (Reuss, 1834) [Formerly *Mabuya aurata* (Linnaeus,1758)]**
Golden Skink

DISTRIBUTION

Frequent sightings of *Trachylepis septemtaeniata* are made at the King Khalid Wildlife Research Centre at Thumamah approximately 70 km northeast of Riyadh (25°13.231'N; 46°36.574'E, elevation: 510 m) in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Sightings are most common at the "carnivore enclosure" housing Arabian Wolf, Striped Hyena, Sand Cat, Caracal and Honey Badger for educational purposes, where *M. aurata* use the rocks and adjacent shrubs with associated leaf litter as cover and basking places.

The distribution for *T. septemtaeniata* within Saudi Arabia is unclear with the published range stated as "Arabia" by Arnold (1986), "Saudi Arabia" by Moravec *et al.* (2006) and slightly more specific with "north-eastern Saudi Arabia – Al Hasa south to Hofuf" by Leviton et al. (1992). A photograph of a *T. septemtaeniata* from the Qatif Oasis in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia is published in Leviton *et al.* (1992). The closest other localities include Jordan, although according to Disi *et al.* (2001) *T. septemtaeniata* has not yet been confirmed from neighbouring Jordan although Leviton et al. (1992) refer to its existence there – seemingly erroneously, and Iraq (Leviton *et al.*, 1992). *T. septemtaeniata* are known from Qatar bordering Saudi Arabia to the east (El-Sherif & Al-Thani 2000) and recently confirmed by Soorae (2004) and Soorae & Al Hameiri (2005) from the Gulf Island of Jernain off the coast of the United Arab Emirates, to the southeast. They are also known from Oman, Iran and Eritrea (Leviton et al. 1992) although Arnold (1986) suggests that the isolated populations in Oman (Muscat) and Eritrea may be as a result of accidental human introduction.

This sighting of *T. septemtaeniata* from central Saudi Arabia – the Riyadh/Thumamah area – is a range extension of approximately 1000 km from the Jordanian/Iraq border area or 400 km from the Saudi Arabia/Iraq/Kuwait border area in north-eastern Saudi Arabia, as indicated by Leviton *et al.* (1992), or approximately 450 km from the Qatar border area in eastern Saudi Arabia as confirmed by El-Sherif & Al-Thani (2000). The closest known locality is Qatif Oasis approximately 380 km east of Riyadh just north of Damamm on the Gulf Coast and Hofuf approximately 350 km east of Riyadh. Very little else is known about their distribution throughout Saudi Arabia, but with populations known from Oman to the southeast and Eritrea to the southwest it may be more widely distributed.

Individuals are most often sighted during mid morning and late afternoon whilst basking or foraging in leaf litter in the Thumamah area. Very little is known about the ecology of this species from the Arabian Peninsula with some notes on their diet and habits presented by El-Sherif & Al-Thani (2000), Soorae (2004) and Soorae &

Al Hameiri (2005). This sighting and consequent range extension indicates the lack of basic baseline information regarding issues as mundane as the distribution of reptiles and the necessity of basic monitoring and biodiversity surveys all of which would enhance the future selection and management of Protected Areas in Saudi Arabia. General biodiversity surveys throughout Saudi Arabia, especially in the existing Protected Areas, are suggested.

Acknowledgements

My appreciation to Drew Gardner and Pitpal Soorae for assisting with literature and confirming the identity of the photographed specimen from Thumamah and Ernest Robinson (Director KKWRC, Thumamah) for commenting on a draft of this note.

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Submitted by

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Trachylepis septemtaeniata. King Khalid Wildlife Research Centre, Thumamah. (Photo: Peter Cunningham)

REPTILIA: SQUAMATA; SERPENTES

COLUBRIDAE

***Dipsadoboa underwoodi* Rasmussen, 1993**
Underwood's Rear-fanged Tree-Snake

Cameroon, South-West Province, Mt. Cameroon area, Bakingili, 4° 4' 54.2"N, 9° 1' 39.5"E; 140 m a.s.l.; 13 December 2005; V. Gvoždík.

Dipsadoboa underwoodi was described from Cameroon (type locality: Mukonjefarm, Mundame), where it predominantly occurs in lowland rain forests (Rasmussen 1993). The known distribution comprises the area from Guinea to Congo (Chippaux 2006). Recently, a comprehensive study of the reptile fauna of the Mt. Cameroon area was published (Gonwouo *et al.* 2007), and *Dipsadoboa v. viridis* was the only species of *Dipsadoboa* mentioned. However, Rasmussen

(1989) listed also *D. duchesnii* from a locality from the Mt. Cameroon area (Mukundange), and further Rasmussen (1993) even examined several museum specimens of *D. weileri* and *D. underwoodi* from the area within his taxonomic review of the genus (*D. weileri*: Bibundi, Buea, Idenau; *D. underwoodi*: Bibundi, Idenau, Victoria = Limbe). Herein, a further report confirming a recent occurrence of *D. underwoodi* on the foothill of Mt. Cameroon near Bakingili village is presented.

The snake, probably an adult male, was found after dusk on the ground in the leaf litter at the margin of disturbed lowland rain forest. It was photographed, morphologically investigated, and later determined according to the keys of Rasmussen (1993) and Chippaux (2006). Basic morphological characters were as follows: total length ca 520 mm (snout-vent length 400 mm, tail length 120 mm), 17 dorsal scale rows at mid-body, 195 ventrals, 87 subcaudals (single), anal shield single, frontal shield 1.3 times as long as broad (4 x 3 mm), large eyes – diameter of the eye 1.1 x the length of the snout (the latter was measured dorsally). The dorsal colour was brownish with fine yellow marbling or small dots, skin slightly opalescent. The belly was of bright yellow colour, the underside of the tail was grey.

Thus, *D. underwoodi*, *D. weileri* and *D. duchesnii* (cf. Rasmussen 1989, 1993; see also Chirio & LeBreton 2007) increase the number of known reptile species for the Mt. Cameroon area to at least 89 species (cf. Gonwouo *et al.* 2007, 86 species). However, the real number could be probably even higher, as a presence of *D. unicolor* is also of a high probability since the species has been reported from Bioko Island and several places in the Cameroon mountain range (Rasmussen 1993). The presence of all the five above mentioned species sympatrically was reported by Herrmann *et al.* (2005) from Mt. Nlonako, Cameroon, which may suggest a possible multi-species sympatry of *Dipsadoboa* also in the Mt. Cameroon area.

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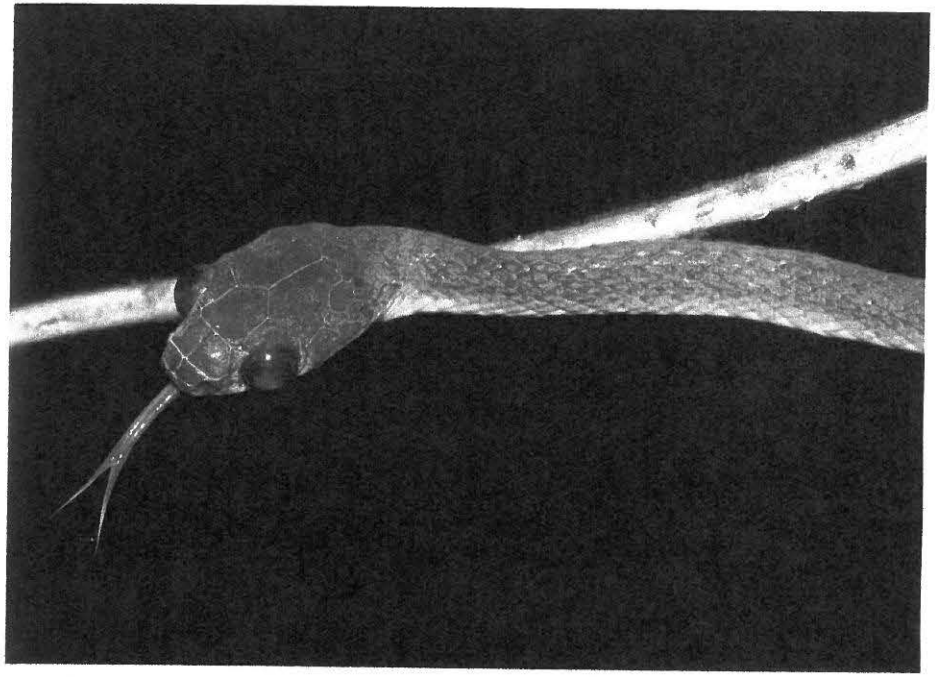

Dipsadoboa underwoodi. Bakingili village, Mt. Cameroon area, Cameroon. (Photo: Václav Gvoždík)

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-

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).

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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.

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