African Herp News

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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, and short communications – subject to peer review) and *African Herp News*, the Newsletter (which includes short communications, natural history notes, 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 manuscripts by e-mail in MS Word '.doc' or '.docx' format.

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

COVER PHOTOGRAPH: *Natalobatrachus bonebergi* Hewitt & Methuen, 1912, from the Crowned Eagle Estate, Gillits, KwaZulu-Natal. Photograph by: Nick Evans.

EDITORIAL

Welcome to *African Herp News* 60. This issue has been somewhat delayed, but I'm happy to announce that the new HAA committee have now taken up their functional roles. The official election results were released by our former Chairman, Prof Aaron Bauer, on 20 November, 2013. The new committee is listed on the adjacent inside front cover, as well as on the HAA website www.africanherpetology.org .

I would first and foremost like to express, on behalf of all HAA members, our appreciation and gratitude to the previous HAA committee. The Association has grown from strength to strength as a result of the dedicated efforts of our committee members. This is most evident at HAA conferences and the high academic standard of the Association's journal, *African Journal of Herpetology*.

Thank you to Aaron Bauer, who, as Chairman, kept the rest of the committee and Association affairs in check. Aaron remains on the committee, and we will no doubt rely on his experience and wisdom in the year ahead. Jeanne Tarrant went far beyond the call of duty as Secretary of the Association, keeping membership records updated and answering endless queries, and Abeda Dawood for handling the HAA finances. The Secretary and Treasurer positions are never easy roles to manage, but Jeanne and Abeda have done a sterling job. We would also like to thank William (Bill) Branch, who has served the Association over many decades and whose guidance has contributed tremendously.

John Measey remains as Journal Editor and Michael Bates, Andrew Turner and Graham Alexander will continue serving as Additional Committee Members, with the welcome addition of Aaron Bauer. We welcome back to the committee Le Fras Mouton, who fills the role of Chairman. Buyi Makhubo is the new Secretary and Johan Marais has filled the position of Treasurer.

African Herp News

Bryan Maritz served as Newsletter Editor, producing 11 issues of *African Herp News* (Numbers 49-59). During his term, Bryan raised the standard of *African Herp News* substantially. I'm honoured to take over this position and would like to thank Bryan for his dedicated effort in ensuring the publication of a regular, quality newsletter, filled with informative content.

African Herp News 60 is our first newsletter to be printed in colour. We have seen a substantial increase in photographic submissions and the committee felt it was time we did our amphibians and reptiles some justice, and show off their beauty and splendour in full colour.

I encourage all Association members to submit their herpetological observations, including herpetological surveys, natural history notes and geographical distributions, to *African Herp News*.

Warren Schmidt
Newsletter Editor

ANNOUNCEMENTS

TAXONOMIC PUBLISHING, VANDALISM AND BEST PRACTICE: AFRICAN JOURNAL OF HERPETOLOGY MAKES CHANGES THAT WILL SAFEGUARD AUTHORS

JOHN MEASEY

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If you haven't heard about taxonomic vandalism yet, then you've either had your head in a python's hole or you're not in the taxonomic loop. Taxonomic vandals steal evidence for new species, genera or other taxonomic units from scientists before they are regarded as "published" by the ICZN. Recent articles (Borrell 2007; Kaiser et al. 2013;Wallach et al. 2009) have highlighted the huge headache of stolen taxonomy that puts a serious spanner in the works for taxonomists.

Why are taxonomic vandals a problem?

Describing a new family, genus or species requires a published description with a list of features that make it different from other species along with a new name. This puts taxonomy within the realms of anyone (scientist and amateur, alike), and deliberately so (see Borrell 2007). The principle of taxonomic priority (Article 23: ICZN 1999) allows the publication that names and describes a taxon first to be the original description.

New taxa which are poorly described create problems for anyone that works with them and sometimes for the taxa themselves. For example, poor descriptions lead to taxonomic confusion, and because taxonomy underpins conservation and legal procedure, poor taxonomic practice can threaten species by preventing their legal protection. Clearly, as a journal editor, it is my responsibility to ensure that best taxonomic practices are upheld in *African Journal of Herpetology*. Thus, all articles published in *African Journal of Herpetology* (taxonomic or otherwise) have already undergone rigorous peer review, which is regarded as best practice in taxonomy and science in general. Further, to deal with many examples of bad taxonomy that affect African taxa, *African Journal of Herpetology* will not use names listed in Kaiser et al. (2013) Table 1. For more information on how unscrupulous and hazardous taxonomic vandals can be, we refer you to Kaiser et al.(2013).

The problems associated with taxonomic priority are almost as old as taxonomy itself and apparently caused concern for Darwin amongst others (see Borrell 2007). At that time, publishing only consisted of printed hard copy (i.e. on paper). Today we have seen an explosion of electronic publications (epubs), many of which only exist in virtual electronic format. These epubs represent a potential loophole for the vandals to exploit as until 2012, no taxonomic works in epubs were officially recognised by the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature (Dubois et al. in press). This would

have allowed taxonomic vandals, or anyone else, to claim priority by republishing any taxonomic descriptions on paper elsewhere.This loophole has now been closed with respect to epubs in an amendment of the Code (ICZN 2012).

An online database for taxonomy: ZooBank

African Journal of Herpetology will now adopt ZooBank registration numbers for taxonomic works. ZooBank is a recently developed (since 2007) taxonomic registration database that provides numbers for unique taxonomic treatments (much in the same way that GenBank or EMBL provides unique numbers for genetic sequences). Authors will be required to register their work with ZooBank after a manuscript has been accepted and enter the registration number at the proof stage (just as they would enter GenBank accession numbers for genetic sequences). Epubs with ZooBank numbers constitute taxonomic priority, and thus prevent them from being susceptible to vandals.

This is good news for taxonomists because they can now publish in online journals and be assured that the new taxa are safeguarded. However, many journals, including the *African Journal of Herpetology*, currently have a three stage publishing process whereby articles that are accepted have their proofs corrected and then appear under a section called "online early" or "early view". Once an issue is nearing completion, page numbers are given to articles that will appear in the issue and changes are made to these online articles accordingly. They then appear as electronic publications (epubs: exactly the same as the printed article, but electronic copies in pdf file format) at the same time as they are sent to the printers. These epubs then are the version protected by ZooBank registration numbers as they represent the final article. Unfortunately, this places the earlier versions of the article published online into a grey area – they are clearly almost identical to the epubs, but not considered officially published because of lacking finalised publication data (volume and page numbers).

To remove this potential hazard for taxonomic authors wanting to publish in *African Journal of Herpetology*, beginning January 2014 we are instigating new rules that will remove the need for online early articles. Instead of waiting for the editor to decide which articles belong in a given issue, each article will be issued page, issue, and volume numbers after proofs (a practice known in publishing as Build Issue Online). Each issue will then be sent to print once its page quota is filled. This new approach will also mean that authors in *African Journal of Herpetology* will not have to wait 6 months to receive the full citation of their publication because their epub will be available immediately. By removing the online early category, there will be no grey area that can be exploited by taxonomic vandals. For members and others who wish to read the contents of *African Journal of Herpetology*, there will be no change. Electronic versions of papers (epubs) will be available to HAA members free of charge online (at http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/ther), and the print copy will be sent by mail to members twice each year. The months of publication for hard copies will be moving to January and June (formerly they were published in April and October). Because page numbers will be issued in the order in which articles are copy-edited, articles will no longer be arranged into groupings as has been the tradition (i.e., original articles at the front followed by short communications). Consequently, we have decided to remove the short communication

category. The distinction between these two categories has become blurred over the years as original articles have become shorter and short communications longer. We will continue to consider review articles, but will remove the mini-review option.

African Journal of Herpetology should now prove a secure publication outlet for taxonomists, especially those who would like to share their results as soon as possible. While our actions detailed here may have come about as the result of reckless behaviour of a tiny minority, the consequence is an improved publishing service for members of the HAA, authors publishing in *African Journal of Herpetology*, and the ever-growing international readership of research on African herpetology. The increasing popularity of *African Journal of Herpetology* can be seen in our increasing Impact Factor (now at 0.81, and higher than most other herpetological specialty journals), and readership. We consider that the growing interest in the *African Journal of Herpetology* is in part due to the high quality of articles published there, and we assure readers that the changes discussed above will only serve to strengthen the quality of your journal.

In Summary

1. *African Journal of Herpetology* will require that taxonomic papers are registered with ZooBank, with ZooBank numbers added at proof stage.
2. To combat taxonomic theft of online early articles, *African Journal of Herpetology* will issue volume, issue, and page numbers immediately following proof stage. This eliminates online early articles (iFirst) for *African Journal of Herpetology* because all epubs will represent the final electronic publications.
3. To alleviate the problem of mixing short contributions with original articles, *African Journal of Herpetology* will no longer have separate categories. All articles submitted will be treated as original articles. While review articles will still be considered, we will no longer have a separate "short communications" category.
4. These changes will be effective beginning issue 1, volume 62 (Jan 2014).

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ARTICLES

A CASE OF DEATH-FEIGNING IN THE STRIPED GRASS SNAKE *PSAMMOPHYLAX TRITAENIATUS* (GüNTHER), WITH A REVIEW ON THE OCCURRENCE OF THIS PHENOMENON IN SOUTHERN AND EASTERN AFRICAN SNAKES

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INTRODUCTION

Death-feigning, also known as thanatosis, shamming dead, playing dead, or playing possum, is a form of defense behaviour exhibited by a variety of animals. It is usually employed as a last-resort anti-predatory measure (Gregory et al. 2007). Different types of death-feigning occur (see Vogel & Han-Yuen 2010), but the purpose is always to convince the pursuer that its prey is dead (as many predators prefer live prey) so that the pursuer loses interest and allows its intended prey to escape. Some snakes, like the North American hog-nosed snakes (e.g. *Heterodon platirhinus*) and European Grass Snake (*Natrix natrix*), also emit foul secretions (from the cloaca) which may signal to the predator that they are dead, and this may result in them being left alone to avoid infectious disease (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apparent_death; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grass_snake; viewed 16 August 2013). According to Vogel & Han-Yuen (2010) death-feigning behaviour occurs in at least 19 genera of snakes, most of which occur in North America. This kind of behaviour is not necessarily more common on the latter continent, but rather, it may reflect a preponderance of observers in the region.

We provide here the first detailed account of death-feigning by the Striped Grass Snake *Psammophylax tritaeniatus*, and follow this with a review of reported cases of death-feigning in southern and eastern African snakes.

AN ACCOUNT OF DEATH-FEIGNING BY THE STRIPED GRASS SNAKE *PSAMMOPHYLAX TRITAENIATUS*

At 09h20 on 29 January 2012, an adult *Psammophylax tritaeniatus* was observed by the second author in a garden at 10 Jan Venter Street, Langenhoven Park suburb, Bloemfontein, Free State Province, South Africa (29°06'12"S, 26°08'42"E). The snake was chased down and molested by the family's domestic cat, which 'played' with it in the well-known manner that cats often play with prey items, occasionally biting and pawing at it. Soon after the cat attacked it the snake turned on its back, belly-up, with mouth slightly open, and apparently feigned death. After a few minutes the snake righted itself and attempted to escape by crawling away, but the cat attacked it again almost immediately, and the snake again feigned death by turning onto its back (Figs 1 & 2), with its mouth half open. This belly-up death-feigning behaviour was observed

once more a short while later, but on this last occasion it was not clear whether or not the snake's mouth was open. Therefore, within a period of 5 mins the snake had feigned death on three occasions. Shortly thereafter, the cat disappeared from view with the snake and the fate of the latter was not determined.

Figure 1: Striped Grass Snake *Psammophylax tritaeniatus* in the process of 'twisting' after being attacked by a domestic cat.

Figure 2: The same Striped Grass Snake *Psammophylax tritaeniatus* as shown in Fig. 1, seconds later, belly-up and feigning death after being attacked by the domestic cat.

A REVIEW OF DEATH-FEIGNING IN SOUTHERN AND EASTERN AFRICAN SNAKES

In southern Africa, thanatosis is well known in the Rinkhals *Hemachatus haemachatus* (e.g. Broadley 1990), which twists the anterior portion of its body sideways (see images on pp. 114-115, Marais 2004) or belly upwards, often with its mouth open (e.g. fig. 6, pl. 35, Branch 1998), often with its tongue dangling out (Marais 2004). Death-feigning behaviour has also been recorded in a few additional snake species from the region, including other elapids such as the Snouted Cobra *Naja annulifera*, which may continue to feign death even when turned onto its back (Broadley 1990; Broadley & Blaylock 2013). Donald G. Broadley (in litt. 22 July 2013) relates having observed only two specimens of *N. annulifera*—out of many dozens that he collected over many years in southern Africa—that feigned death after capture. In one case, a specimen caught at Mount Hampden, Zimbabwe, in 1954, was tipped from its bag an hour after capture and appeared dead, only to make an attempt to escape a few minutes later. One incident of death-feigning is also known for the Mozambique Spitting Cobra *Naja mossambica* based on a specimen observed in Matabeleland, Zimbabwe by D.G. Broadley (in litt. 22 July 2013).

Death-feigning also occurs in two subspecies of the shield cobra *Aspidelaps scutatus*. Broadley (1990) recorded it in the Common Shield Cobra *A. scutatus scutatus*, and Bolnick (2012) later provided an image of a specimen of this subspecies from the Kalahari Desert in Botswana that feigned death after being dug up by a Suricate (*Suricata suricatta*) and which was then approached by several other members of the Suricate colony. When approached too closely the snake writhed or struck out, causing the mammals to retreat, but they soon approached it again, although eventually losing interest and moving away without having killed it. On another website an image is available showing the front part of the body of an Intermediate Shield Cobra *Aspidelaps scutatus intermedius* from Kruger National Park, shamming death while on its back with its head and neck pointed upwards (http://www.venomdoc.com/forums/viewtopic.php?t=3790, viewed 24 July 2013). The Coral Shield Cobra *Aspidelaps lubricus lubricus* is also known to sham death (Schultz & Massyn 2008). The latter authors noted that a juvenile, when pinned behind the head with a hook stick, attempted to roll 180° on its axis on its axis, and when the hook stick was removed, it "positioned itself in an upside down, corkscrew body posture" (p. 20). The snake remained belly-up for about 2 mins after the last time it was touched, and when left alone, it righted itself and attempted to escape.

Among psammophylid snakes, Schmidt (1999) documented a case of death-feigning by a wild-caught *Psammophylax rhombeatus rhombeatus* from Kempton Park in Gauteng Province, South Africa. In order to tire it out, the snake was chased around, during which time it bit its pursuer several times. When placed in position for photographic purposes, it twisted the anterior part of its body upside down (illustrated in a photograph) and shammed death. After being lifted and repositioned, it repeated this behavior several times, sometimes with the mouth partly open. The specimen was released a week later with no ill-effects. Spawls et al. (2002: 396) stated that when cornered or seized, the Kenyan Striped Grass Snake *Psammophylax multisquamis* may

sham death by "turning its head and neck over, opening its mouth and lolling in a lifeless fashion." A photograph on page 498 of this book illustrates a specimen of this species with its head and neck, and posterior body and tail, turned to the side and mouth partly open. Schmidt (2006) also noted that Striped Grass Snakes *Psammophylax tritaeniatus* may occasionally, when threatened, sham death by rolling over and contorting their bodies. This was based on discussions among staff members at the Transvaal Snake Park in the early 1990s, and the event occurred after a snake was held behind the head and examined (W.R. Schmidt in litt. 20 August 2013). Broadley & Blaylock (2013) provided an image (photo 171, p. 193) of a Dwarf Sand Snake *Psammophis angolensis* from South Luangwa National Park in Zambia feigning death while coiled upon itself in a belly-up position, with the anterior part of the body turned sideways.

There is only one known instance of death-feigning by a southern or eastern African atractaspid snake, namely the KwaZulu-Natal Black Snake *Macrelaps microlepidotus*. A captive specimen was filmed lying on its belly with only the head and neck region turned sideways, the mouth open and tongue flickering slowly in and out, but sometimes dangling all the way out (http://www.sareptiles.co.za/forum/viewtopic.php?f=7&t=17531&start=0; http://www.capesnakes.org.za/forum/viewtopic.php?f=13&t=509; www.youtube.com/watch?v=co6MKa7E3JI; all viewed 18 July 2013). The snake continued with this behaviour when touched.

Among colubrids, Broadley et al. (2003) provided an image (photo 144, p. 205) of a Red-lipped Snake *Crotaphopeltis hotamboeia* from South Luangwa National Park in Zambia, on its back shamming death with the entire belly turned upwards; and there is also video evidence of shamming death in captivity by a Boomslang (*Dispholidus typus*)—lying belly up—which later righted itself (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pOnADCHQ5h0; viewed 17 July 2013).

There are also additional claims on certain websites (http://www.sareptiles.co.za/forum/viewtopic.php?f=7&t=17531&start=0; http://www.capesnakes.org.za/forum/viewtopic.php?f=13&t=509; both viewed 17 July 2013) about 'shamming dead' behaviour by *Bitis caudalis*, *Naja annulifera*, *Crotaphopeltis hotamboeia* and *Psammophylax*.

SUMMARY

With the addition of the six genera of African snakes mentioned above for which good evidence is available, death-feigning is now known to occur in at least 25 genera of snakes worldwide. In southern and eastern Africa it occurs in 12 species, including two subspecies of *Aspidelaps scutatus*. Similar death-feigning behaviour may occur in several additional species of snakes, but as it may be used only as a last resort of defense and only in particular circumstances (e.g. following severe provocation and/or prolonged handling), it is apparently seldom witnessed. Researchers and reptile keepers are encouraged to report any observations of death-feigning behaviour by snakes, whether in the field or in captivity. The frequency and type of death-feigning exhibited by African snakes, and the possibility that this is sometimes coupled with the secretion of strong (predator-repelling) odours via the cloaca, will make for an interesting study. This regional review of observations of death-feigning in southern and eastern African snakes probably

reflects the breadth of observers in these areas, and it is likely that numerous additional snake species from these areas and elsewhere in Africa also display similar behaviour.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank Don Broadley for sharing his observations on death-feigning in *Naja annulifera* and *N. mossambica*, sourced in part from his unpublished autobiography; and Bill Branch for his comments on the manuscript.

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OBITUARY

ROGER S. M. BLAYLOCK, MBChB (UCT), FRCS (Edinburgh), FCS (SA)
1942-2013

Roger S. M. Blaylock was born in Leicester, England, on 14th June 1942. His Father was Ernest Blaylock, a Health Inspector, and his mother Margery. They were in Germany at the end of World War II, when his father was still in the army, then they spent 1948-50 in Bermuda, where Roger began his schooling. The family moved to Southern Rhodesia in 1952, and Roger completed his schooling at Milton Junior and Senior Schools in Bulawayo. His sister Lynn recalled that, while at Milton Senior School, Roger was bullied unmercifully because he was a 'pom' (English), so he took to the bush, where his interest in snakes and other wildlife developed.

On 8th October 1959 Roger was bitten on the right thumb by a 140 cm vine snake from Kariba. He was given 15 cc of polyvalent antivenene [useless for this snake] and returned to hospital the next day, when a blood sample confirmed that the blood would not clot, while many scratches on his body were bleeding, so a blood transfusion was given. On the next day his kidneys and stomach were very painful, and there was a severe serum reaction. By the fourth day clotting was satisfactory and he was sent home the next day, but he was still passing blood in urine and had another bad serum reaction, He returned to hospital for a week to rest the injured kidneys. He then rested at home for another week before returning to school.

Roger joined the Herpetological Association of Rhodesia in 1959. On 13 November 1959 he accompanied me on a weekend field trip to Victoria Falls, and on the return journey after dark we caught the first specimen of Anchieta's Cobra to be taken in the country. A week later Roger and Luchi Balarin joined me on another weekend field trip along the Falls road as far as the Fatima Mission. Our collecting technique was to drive my VW Kombi with open windscreens at 20 mph. One passenger carried a small flour bag full of sand, which was dropped when we spotted a snake on the road. The driver pulled over and stopped, while the passengers jumped out and ran back to look for the snake at the spot marked by the white bag. In three nights we caught 14 out of the 15 live snakes seen on the tarred road. During the day we dug up a small limbless skink (*Typhlacontias*) new for the country, several other lizards, and a Jalla's Sand Snake near Lupane. On 19th December 1959 Roger collected the first Nyasaland specimen of the Flood-plain Viper (*Proatheris superciliaris*) on the bank of the Shire River north of Liwonde.

In Bulawayo at 1.20 pm on 12th October 1960, Roger was bitten on the left middle finger by a metre long puff adder. He was hospitalised 10 minutes later and injected with 20 cc of polyvalent serum, but by 9 pm the swelling had reached the shoulder. He was discharged from hospital with his arm in a sling four days later, but it was another five days before the hand was back to normal. There had been no sign of haemorrhage.

In November 1960 Roger made two more trips up to Lupane, and the 14 snakes

ROGER S. M. BLAYLOCK, MBChB (UCT), FRCS (Edinburgh), FCS (SA) 1942-2013.

collected included three specimens of the Elongate Quill-snout, a new snake for Rhodesia.

From 12 to19 December 1961 Roger accompanied me on a field trip to Mutoko District. This trip yielded 196 reptiles, including the type series of the giant Imperial Flat-lizard (*Platysaurus imperator*). Inspection of abandoned trial holes for gravel pits yielded a good selection of amphibians, including the first Rhodesian specimens of the attractively-marked smaller bullfrog, *Pyxicephalus edulis*. Later in December Roger joined Roy Owen on a field trip to southern Nyasaland and they set up camp on the Shire River upstream from Chiromo on the edge of the Elephant Marsh. With the assistance of the local people they caught, in 14 days, 163 snakes representing 14 species. In July 1962 they returned to this area but saw no snakes, so they moved downstream to Tengani and caught four snakes, the prize being another Flood-plain Viper.

In 1962 Roger began the first year of a B.Sc. at Rhodes University, but in 1963 switched to second year medicine at the University of Cape Town. He completed third and fourth years before asking for a year off in 1966. This was due to his widowed mother contracting brucelosis, being in and out of hospital and unable to work, so Roger returned to Bulawayo to earn some money to pay school fees for the three younger children and put food on the table. When he returned to UCT and asked if he could have his place back. The Dean said: 'Son, there was never any question of you not getting your place back, because what you did was so honourable.' So in 1968 Roger completed his MBChB (UCT).

From 1969 Roger did his housemanship at Mpilo Hospital in Bulawayo, but continued to catch snakes on the Falls road. He married Anne Bamber and they had four children, Mark, Heather, Johanne and Guy. In May 1973 he went on an Outward Bound School course in the Chimanimani Mountains.

In January 1975 the Blaylocks moved to Triangle in the south-eastern lowveld, but from January to May 1976 Roger was in Edinburgh on a surgical course, leading to the FRCS, and later in the year he also obtained a South African surgical degree.

In November 1976 Roger was bitten on the left thumb by a Stiletto Snake (*Atractaspis bibronii*) that he was handling. This bite gave him a hard time for two or three days, and after a week an abscess at the thumb tip was excised.

Roger's sister Lynn was working in the Chiredzi Casevac Unit during the war years, and was often scrub sister for Roger. She recalled that Roger would always explain to the team what he was doing, as he was paid a monthly retainer by the Rhodesian Government to operate on all war injuries. She was in the duty room one morning with Drs Canter and Skinstad, when the Minister of Health (touring all the Casevac Units) said 'Tell me, what is this Roger Blaylock like?' Dr Skinstad replied 'Put it this way Sir, if a man gets to Roger Blaylock alive, he will live.'

On 18th February 1980 at 19h30 Roger was called to catch a 2.2 metre Black Mamba in a corridor of Triangle Hospital. He caught it by the tail and swung it around, but it hit a wall, bounced back and bit him on the forearm. Roger applied a tourniquet and sent for Dr Colin Saunders, then went back to kill the mamba with a broom. Dr Saunders arrived 5 minutes later and immediately applied mouth suction to the fang punctures,

then administered 120 ml of polyvalent serum intravenously before removing the tourniquet. Adrenaline was then administered to stave off anaphylaxis. The patient then ate a hearty meal (mixed grill), had a bath, and was admitted to hospital for two-hourly observation overnight. Roger was back at work the next day.

In mid-1981, Roger moved to Groote Schuur Hospital in Cape Town, and went to Jwaneng in Botswana as a locum for a month in October 1983. He became a consultant surgeon at Somerset Hospital in 1984. In September of that year he presented a paper on 'Clinical aspects of snake bite in southern Africa' to the XI International Conference of Tropical Medicine and Malaria in Calgary, Canada. By 1991 Roger was at Eshowe Hospital in KwaZulu-Natal.

From 1994 Roger was Group General Surgeon with Gold Fields of South Africa at the Leslie Williams Memorial Hospital, Carletonville. Late in 1995 Roger was again bitten by a puff adder, but this resulted in the amputation of his right thumb in Cape Town, and the reconstruction of his thumb using tissue from his toes.

In 2000 was awarded a MMedSc cum laude, followed in 2003 by a MD (Natal) for his thesis on the management of snake bite in South Africa. In 2006 he retired from the Gold Fields Group. He then went to Potchefstroom Hospital, doing every type of surgery, cardiac, gynaecological, thoracic, orthopaedics, etc. His sister Lynn recalled 'I was staying with him once, and at midnight Roger woke me up and said "I have been called out to a stabbing in the heart. Do you want to come and watch?" I went and watched, and all I can say is Roger was a brilliant surgeon, he just never gave up. That man survived and is still alive today!'

Roger then built himself a retirement home on a hill in a game sanctuary near Howick in KZN. He continued with occasional surgery in Zambia, Ghana and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Roger's second marriage took place in 2012. After losing his daughter Johanne early in 2013, he made a final tour of Zimbabwe with his new wife. He then returned to KwaZulu-Natal where, tragically, his life came to an end.

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On 19th December 1959 Roger collected the first Nyasaland specimen of the Flood-plain Viper (*Proatheris superciliaris*) on the bank of the Shire River north of Liwonde. Photo of captive specimen by W. Schmidt.

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

AMPHIBIA: ANURA
PYXICEPHALIDAE

***Natalobatrachus bonebergi* Hewitt & Methuen, 1912**
Kloof Frog

EXTENDED BREEDING SEASON

The Kloof Frog (*Natalobatrachus bonebergi*) is an endangered frog restricted to coastal and gallery forests in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal (Minter et. al.,2004). Much of its specialised habitat has been destroyed. They lay their eggs in very distinguishable masses in a jelly-like substance attached to leaves or branches above water. Once the tadpoles have developed in the eggs, they hatch and make their way down the leaf or drop straight into the water. The female often urinates over the eggs to keep them moist during dry conditions (du Preez & Carruthers, 2009).

Towards the end of May I started visiting the Crowned Eagle Estate in Gillitts, KwaZulu-Natal, with the hope of seeing *N. bonebergi*. Records of the species had been posted to the website www.ispot.org.za and confirmed in April 2013 by Dr. Jeanne Tarrant, who put me in touch with the Georges' who are responsible for the conservancy. If I found the species, I planned on going back to the estate a few times to see when they would become less active.

The conservancy which joins the Estate is well maintained by two brothers, Clive and Mervyn George. The habitat in the Crowned Eagle Estate is fairly unusual for N. bonebergi. A stream runs through a bamboo forest at the top of the conservancy, and the habitat becomes more of a swamp forest further down. It leads to a small dam (known as the top dam), then another bigger one further downstream, eventually running off a waterfall. The bottom dam is relatively open, with little over-hanging canopy. It is not a very rocky area, apart from the waterfall. There's lots of rotting vegetation, so it is also a haven for millipedes, including the endangered Pink-footed Giant Black Millipede. *Natalobatrachus bonebergi* is usually found in dark, rocky streams with closed canopy (du Preez & Carruthers, 2009).

Clive and Mervyn gave me access to the estate. They also showed me around and told me about the conservancy and the Kloof Frogs in it. They had counted large numbers of *N. bonebergi* egg masses in the previous month. They believed there could easily have been one hundred masses present. They had not seen *N. bonebergi* in the bottom dam, which is probably because the habitat is too open. During my visits there, I successfully managed to find a both adults and nests of *N. bonebergi*.

The finds were as follows:
23 May 2013 - First visit to the Estate:
Number of frogs: 4
Number of nests: 2

26 May 2013 - A fairly warm night:
Number of frogs: 4, including one that was much smaller than normal.
Number of nests: 4
Tadpoles were seen breaking out of the egg, swimming off the leaf that the nest was on, and landing in the stream.

29 May 2013:
Number of frogs: 7, including a small juvenile and a pair that appeared to be mating.
Number of nests: 4

8 June 2013:
Number of frogs: 13, including two small juveniles.
Number of nests: 2

26 June 2013:
Number of frogs: 2, they were quite well hidden behind roots in the bank of the stream, but they were active.
No egg masses were seen.

The breeding season is recorded from October to May (du Preez, 2004 and du Preez & Curruthers, 2009). The above observations indicate an extended breeding season lasting until early June.

I didn't expect them see *N. bonebergi* into late June, particularly after a number of cold-fronts. Almost all of the frogs and egg masses I saw were in a section in the bamboo forest and in the top dam. On the 26 June 2013, I did not see any eggs, just some remains of the nest on the leaves that they were on. No one yet knows if the frogs occur downstream from the waterfall, although there is a good chance that they do. That discovery will have to wait till next season!

Additional frog species seen during the five visits to the Estate:
Bush Squeaker - *Arthroleptis wahlbergii*, 3 colour variations.
Natal Tree Frog - *Leptopelis natalensis*, all were juveniles.
Queckett's River Frogs - *Amietia quecketti.*
Common Platanna - *Xenopus laevis.*

Threats
Unfortunately, the Crowned Eagle Estate's conservancy could be destroyed for a proposed highway. This would mean more of this already diminished habitat will be lost. The Crowned Eagle Estate seems to be a hot-spot for this endangered frog. The area also supports a large diversity of wildlife. There are many different and uncommon birds found there, as well as Bush Pig, Blue Duiker, Genet, Water Mongoose and the Pink-footed Giant Black Millipede. The area by the waterfall looks like it could be suitable habitat for the Natal Cascade Frog, *Hadromophryne natalensis*, which is

currently listed as Least Concern. It is very important that this area is conserved, in order to protect threatened and endangered species.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:
Dr. Jeanne Tarrant is thanked for comments on drafts of the manuscript.

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Developing eggs of *Natalobatrachus bonebergi* observed on 23 May 2013. Photo: Nick Evans

Tadpoles were observed hatching from the eggs on 26 May 2013 and wriggling off the leaf that the nest was on and landing in the stream below. Photo: Nick Evans

On 29 May 2013, seven frogs were observed including a small juvenile and a pair that appeared to be mating. Photo: Nick Evans

GEKKONIDAE

***Pachydactylus vansoni* FitzSimons, 1933**
Van Son's Thick-toed Gecko

CAPTIVE BREEDING

Pachydactylus vansoni has a distribution range from northern KwaZulu-Natal and adjacent Free State (area of Harrismith) through Mpumalanga and Limpopo Provinces to south-eastern Zimbabwe and adjacent Mozambique. The colour pattern of this gecko can be variable in is variable within its range (pers. obs., Mirko Barts pers.comm.). The size of this species is given by Branch, 1998, as follows:

Snout to vent length (SVL): 40-50 mm, with max. SVL male: 55 mm and female: 59 mm.

I collected four specimens (3 males, 1 female) of *Pachydactylus vansoni* in Mpumalanga Province under rocks near the northern upper part of the Blyde River Canyon. These were brought back to France (collecting permit number MPB. 5188 (20/02/2007)).

Each animal was housed alone in a plastic box (28 x 18 x 12 cm, l x b x h) with sand on the ground and a plastic cup for shelter during daylight hours. A hot spot of 35°C is created during spring (2 to 4 hours), summer (5 to 8 hours) and autumn (7 to 2 hours), then off during winter (one month). The air temperature varies from 19° to 30°c during the day and 17° to 28°c at night.

The only female collected never accepted any mating attempts. Nevertheless, through sperm retention (Girard, 2008), it layed laid 4 eggs, which produced 3 hatchlings (F0). Among these 3 hatchlings, there were 2 males and one female. The female later produced several young.

The following data are based on the results from the two females (F0 and F1).

Sizes of the breeding animals (we have observed that the females are longer and broader than males):
Wild female: svl: 47 mm/tl: 80 mm (regenerated tail)
F0 female: svl: 45 mm/tl: 81 mm
F1 female: svl :45mm/tl: 90 mm
Wild male 1: svl:39 mm/tl: 80 mm
Wild male 2: svl: 39mm/tl: 80mm

The female is placed in the male's box for one night. Mating can occur quickly. The male emits a cry squeal like many other Pachydactylus species (Girard 2003, 2004), showing his interest in the female.
The first eggs are laid around 3 weeks after mating. Each female deposited 4 clutches of 2 eggs (sometimes a single one) by breeding period, what it is less than the results given by Rösler, 1993.
Sizes of the eggs (n = 10, all the eggs are not measured): 10-11mm (one record at 12

mm) x 7-8 mm.

Sizes of the hatchlings (n= 7): svl : 17-20 mm/ tl:35-41mm.

Incubation takes 53-61 days. These results are similar to those indicated by Rösler, 1993 and Branch 1998.

Dead embryos are often found in the eggs. The young born at home hatched in captivity have mainly produced males. I have also found malformation in hatchlings, mainly when the eggs have been incubated at a high temperature for a long time (more than 30°C during the day and 26/27°C at night). The juveniles have small eye and this element has been recorded by Rösler, 1993. The juveniles reach their adult size after 1 year and half. The females are ready to breed during the spring of their second year.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the Mpumalanga authorities for issuing the relevant collecting permits.

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Figure 1: Van Son's Thick-toed Gecko (*Pachydactylus vansoni*) from Lydenburg, Mpumalanga Province.

CORDYLIDAE

Platysaurus imperator **Broadley, 1962**
Emperor Flat Lizard

TAIL REGENERATION

Platysaurus imperator is the largest member of the genus *Platysaurus* Smith, 1844. It inhabits mesic savanna in north-eastern Zimbabwe and Mozambique (Branch 1998). Little has been published about the ecology of this impressive Flat Lizard. Broadley (1966, 1978) provides data on habitat and diet as well as rather general information on behaviour and reproduction, while Gray-Lovich (2005) reports on reproduction in captivity. However, beside a picture of *Platysaurus maculatus* with a regenerated tail in Schneider & Barts (2011), none of the literature known to me mentions the ability of *Platysaurus* to regenerate their tails, although it is known to occur in the family Cordylidae.

A pair of *Platysaurus imperator* is kept in captivity. The adult animals were purchased in Europe and are wild-caught specimens that have been in captivity since 2009 at least. They are kept together in a terrarium measuring 180 x 60 x 60 cm (l x w x h) that is equipped with eight 54W T5 fluorescent tubes with reflectors as well as a 30W and a 70W UV-emitting metal halide lamp. On 24 June 2012 both animals were caught in order to put them in a new enclosure. While doing so, the female dropped its tail approx. 2 cm behind the tail base after it was held at the tail by me for at least 30 seconds. Breakpoint of the tale is shown in Figure 1 and is similar to those of other reptiles capable of autotomy. The animal was monitored over the following weeks and regeneration of its tail was already noticeable one week later. When I examined the animal on 16 September 2012, the tail was regenerated to its full length and no further growth could be noticed since then. The regenerated tail is hardly distinguishable from the original one, but shows a lighter colouration.

Similar observations were made with a male *Platysaurus maculatus* from East Africa, but no data was taken (pers.obs.).

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Figure 1: Tail of a female *Platysaurus imperator* shortly after autotomy. Photo: Christian Schneider

LACERTIDAE

***Meroles ctenodactylus* (Smith, 1838)**
Smith's Desert Lizard

DIET

On 11 April 2013 at 15h00 (ambient temperature 24°C), I observed a large *Meroles ctenodactylus* (about 20 cm total length) attack and partially consume a large Armoured Darkling Beetle (*Gonopus tibialis*) (about 2 cm long). This observation was made about 50 km north of Oranjemund (28°05'39.3"S, 16°11'44.3"E, 350 m) in the Sperrgebied National Park, Namibia during a vertebrate fauna survey prior to proposed mining exploration activities. The substrate was sandy and the general area dominated by *Brownanthus arenosus* and *Salsola nollothensis* shrubs and tufts of *Cladoraphis spinosa* grass. The *M. ctenodactylus* initially bit and chewed into the harder parts of the thorax and abdomen of the beetle without much success. After various attempts, it eventually flicked the beetle over and commenced eviscerating its softer underparts (Fig. 1) which it consumed. After short spells of vigilance and thermoregulation alongside its prey, the lizard attempted to eat the head and thorax by chewing into these harder parts, but with little success. During this feeding bout the *M. ctenodactylus* was approached by a *Meroles cuneirostris* (Wedge-snouted Desert Lizard, about three-quarters its size, which resulted in the former picking up its prey and moving off, occasionally stopping and head-bobbing, until it was about 2 m away. This seemed

to dissuade the *M. cuneirostris* from approaching. After 20 mins (at 15h20) the prey remains were abandoned and the lizard resumed its foraging patrol.

According to Branch (1998) *M. ctenodactylus* are sit-and-wait hunters that prey on passing insects. Cooper & Whiting (1999) noted that *M. ctenodactylus* has a mixed foraging mode, i.e. it engages in both active and ambush foraging. Alexander & Marais (2008) stated that the diet of sand lizards (including *Meroles*) in general typically includes most invertebrates small enough to overpower (e.g. adult and larval beetles, termites, grasshoppers, cockroaches, scorpions and spiders), including other lizards and vegetable matter (e.g. grass seeds). The diet of other sympatric *Meroles* species comprises mainly coleopterans and hymenopterans (*M. cuneirostris*) and grass seeds (*M. anchietae*) (Murry & Schramm 1987).

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Figure 1. *Meroles ctenodactylus* eviscerating an adult Armoured Darkling Beetle in the Sperrgebied National Park, Namibia.

COLUBRIDAE

Psammophis namibensis **(Broadley, 1975)**
Namib Sand Snake

PREDATION

On 10 April 2013 at 11h00 (ambient temperature 22°C), I observed an adult *Psammophis namibensis* (about 100 cm total length) attack an adult desert lizard *Meroles knoxii*. This observation was made approximately 50 km north of Oranjemund (28°06'29.2"S, 16°10'45.6"E, [2816AA], 320 m) in the Sperrgebied National Park, Namibia during a vertebrate fauna survey prior to proposed mining exploration activities. The substrate was a sand/gravel combination and the area was dominated by the following shrubs: *Brownanthus arenosus*, *Euphorbia gummifera*, *Lycium tetrandrum* and *Salsola nollothensis*.

The *P. namibensis* captured the lacertid from an ambush position in a hole under a Euphorbia gummifera shrub while I was pursuing (and probably distracting) the lizard. Upon capture the lizard immediately shed its tail. The snake surrounded it with two coils and commenced constricting it while apparently observing me (Fig. 1). During this process the lizard also bit into the ventral side of the snake, seemingly with little effect. Constriction lasted at least 5 mins, after which time the snake started chewing into the flank of the lizard, probably in an attempt to further envenomate it. After 10 mins the snake became agitated with my continued presence and attempted to move off with the lizard held firmly in its mouth. At this time the lizard managed to escape, seemingly without any ill effects.

According to various authors (e.g. Broadley, 1983; Marais 1992; Branch 1998; Alexander & Marais 2008. Cottone & Bauer 2010), *P. leightoni* prey on small vertebrates, mainly rodents and lizards, especially lacertids and skinks, but also other snakes while Sine et al. (2006) states that *P. namibensis* predominantly prey on lacertid lizards. Although not confirmed during a survey conducted by Branch (1994) in the Sperrgebied, he states that *Meroles cuneirostris* probably forms part of the staple diet of *P. namibensis* in the general area. *Meroles* are known or expected in the diet of various snakes, although little has been published regarding actual prey species. *M. knoxii* is also prey to *Bitis schneideri*, a species that also accurs in the Sperrgebied and in Namaqualand, South Africa (Maritz 2012).

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Figure 1: *Psammophis namibensis* constricting an adult *Meroles knoxii* in the Sperrgebied National Park, Namibia. Photo: Peter Cunningham

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTIONS

LACERTIDAE

***Tropidosaura cottrelli* (Hewitt, 1925)**
Cottrell's Mountain Lizard

Three localities: i) Lesotho, Phofung district, Mothae River, Mothae (28º56'30"S, 28º47'30"E; 2828DD; 2900-3000 m. a.s.l.). An adult *Tropidosaura cottrelli* (SVL 72.3 mm, tail length 75.9 mm, mass 7.8 g) was collected in the period 28 January to 2 February 1991 by C.D. Lynch, S. Lamprecht & J. Senoge. The specimen was deposited in the collection of the National Museum, Bloemfontein (NMB R6422). It exceeds the size (SVL 66 mm) of the holotype and longest recorded specimen of this species (Hewitt 1925; FitzSimons 1943; Branch 1998). Four specimens of *Pseudocordylus melanotus subviridis* (NMB R6418-6421) were also collected at this locality at the same time. ii) South Africa, Free State Province, Harrismith district, 200 m south of Vemvane (River) Falls (28º44'59"S, 28º52'42"E; 2828DB; 3020 m a.s.l.). An adult (SVL 63.8 mm, measured after fixation and preservation) was collected by the author on 7 May 2005 under a rock in a rocky outcrop on the grassy summit above the Chain Ladders more-or-less on the border between Free State and KwaZulu-Natal provinces. The specimen was deposited in the collection of the National Museum, Bloemfontein (NMB R8564). A specimen of *Pseudocordylus langi* (NMB R8553) was also collected at this locality on the same day. iii) South Africa, KwaZulu-Natal, Bergville district, top of Organ Pipes Pass (29º00'40"S, 29º11'00"E; 2929AA; 3000 m a.s.l.). On 9 December 1998 an adult was collected on the summit of the Drakensberg by P. le F.N. Mouton where it was sympatric with *Pseudocordylus langi* (NMB R8445-8449); it was photographed and released after being examined by the author.

Colouration: NMB R6422 was mostly dark brown dorsally with the venter marbled dark and pale bluish; NMB R8564 (in life) was black dorsally with scattered but vivid orange scales mid-dorsally, extending onto the base of the tail, and yellowish-cream scales forming a more-or-less continuous lateral stripe on either side of the body, from the upper labials, along the neck and body to the tail base (Fig. 1), and the ventral surfaces were mottled black and pale blue (cream-white under head and on throat) (Fig. 2). The Organ Pipes Pass specimen was dark brown dorsally, with yellowish spots.

Morphological characteristics of NMB R6422 and NMB R8564: the first two specimens: Mid-dorsal scales medially keeled, pointed at ends and overlapping, but laterals smooth; dorsal scales across middle of body 29 (NMB R6422) or 30 (NMB R8564); ventrals in six longitudinal rows (outer ventrals similar to adjacent lateral scales, but mostly wider than long); transverse rows of ventrals (from anterior part of forelimb insertion to groin) 28 (NMB R6422) or 24 (NMB R8564); femoral pores 10 per thigh, but 9 on left thigh in NMB R6422; two enlarged pre-anal scales present, the anterior one much smaller; scales on sides of neck distinctly reduced in size, smooth and granular; gular fold well-marked across throat; a preocular, loreal and large postnasal present on either side of head; nostril pierced near the posterior edge of the nasal; rostral

and frontonasal in narrow contact, but very nearly separated by the nasals in NMB R6422; first supralabial well separated from the nostril; anterior supraocular elongate and much reduced in size compared to other supraoculars.

At the time of FitzSimons' (1943) monograph, *T. cottrelli* was known only from the holotype collected at Nemahadi (= Namahadi or Namahali) Camp (a police post at the top of Namahali Pass - see Ambrose 2006) in the Free State (not in Lesotho as indicated by Hewitt, 1925). Bourquin & Channing (1980) recorded this species from a few localities in the Drakensberg of KwaZulu-Natal, and it was subsequently recorded from the Eastern Cape (at Naude's Nek, 2650 m a.s.l.) for the first time by Branch (1985). For Lesotho it is known from a specimen collected by Angelo Lambiris at Kotisephola Pass (29º31'49"S, 29º11'27"E, 2929CA, 3257 m a.s.l.; see Ambrose 2006) and 8 km WNW of Sani Pass Border Post (2929CB; Lambiris 2001). *Tropidosaura cottrelli* is now known to be a high elevation Maloti-Drakensberg endemic found in a narrow zone along the summit at the escarpment edge (Bates 2005; Cunningham *et al*. *in press*. – see http://vmus.adu.org.za/vm_sp_summary.php). This note documents three new localities of a poorly-known species, including only the third locality for, and first record in the north of, Lesotho; and only the second specimen for, and second locality in, the Free State.

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Figure 1: Dorsal view of *Tropidosaura cottrelli* (NMB R8564) from near Vemvane Falls, Drakensberg, Free State.

Figure 2: Ventral view of *Tropidosaura cottrelli* (NMB R8564) from near Vemvane Falls, Drakensberg, Free State.

SCINCIDAE: ACONTINAE

***Acontias kgalagadi kgalagadi* (Lamb, Biswas & Bauer, 2010)**
Striped Legless Skink

During a recent Rapid Biodiversity Survey of the lower Cuito- and Cuando river system in southern Angola, undertaken by the Southern Africa Regional Environmental Program (SAREP), the first specimen of *Acontias kgalagadi kgalagadi* was recorded from the country. On 30 April 2013 an adult specimen was collected under a log in sandy soil near the small village of Sasha, on the western bank of the Cuando River, 36 km south-east of Luiana, Cuando Cubango Province, south-eastern Angola (17°34'31"S, 23°15'47"E, 1723CB, 981 m a.s.l.) by W. Conradie, S. Bourquin and S. Byron. The specimen (Fig. 1) was accessioned into the Port Elizabeth Museum collection (PEM R20474), and has the following meristic and scalation details: snout-vent length 132 mm, tail length 18 mm, total length 150 mm; ventrals 182; subcaudals 28; midbody scale count 14; anal undivided; upper labials (UL) 4/4 (left/right), lower labials (LL) 3/3; four chin shields bordering the mental; ocular as high as long; subocular 1/1; supracilliaries 2/2; suboculars 2/2; preocular 1/1; and postocular 1/1. Colouration: mid-dorsum pale yellow with four dark longitudinal stripes, the outer stripe on either side broken and somewhat poorly defined, flanks pinkish-cream; ventrum unmarked and white.

Acontias kgalagadi kgalagadi [previously *Typhlosaurus lineatus lineatus* - see Lamb et al, 2010] occurs in the Northern Cape Province, South Africa, extending to northern Namibia and Botswana. Broadley (1968) described a northen subspecies *Typhlosaurus lineatus jappi* [now *Acontias jappi*]. Schneider & Bauer (2009) later elevated the later subspecies to full species status. Subsequent genetic analysis supported this evaluation (Lamb et al. 2010), but *A. kgalagadi subtaeniatus* of northern Limpopo Province was retained as a subspecies. Altough Broadley (1968) reported a single record of *A. jappi* from Cago Coutinho district in the south-east of Angola, there are no records of *A. k. kgalagadi* from this country. This note represents the first record of *A. k. kgalagadi* in Angola and a range extension of about 200 km north-east of the nearest other record in north-western Botswana (Broadley 1968; Auerbach 1987). The species is expected to occur more widely in the Zambezi Region (Caprivi Strip) and further northwards into southern Angola.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
Chris Brooks and his team at the Southern Africa Regional Environmental Program (SAREP) for organising and leading the Rapid Biodiversity Survey of the lower Cuito- and Cuando river system in April 2013 in collaboration with the Angolan Ministry of Environment's (MINAMB) Institute of Biodiversity and the Angola Ministry of Agriculture's National Institute of Fish Research (INIP). Mike Bates (National Museum Bloemfoentein) commeting on earlier drafts.

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Figure 1: *Acontias kgalagadi kgalagadi* (PEM R20474) from near Sasha, south-eastern Angola. Photo: Werner Conradie.

COLUBRIDAE

***Dasypeltis gansi* Trape & Mané, 2006**
Gans' Egg-eater

We report on two new localities for *Dasypeltis gansi* in Upper West Region, Ghana: i) 6.4 km north of Jirapa (town) (10º34'N, 02º42'W, 295 m a.s.l.), adult (Fig. 1) collected by S. Spawls on a road at night after a rainstorm, 20 October 1979, field number GS 15; ii) Wa (town) (10º04'N, 02º30'W; c. 305 m a.s.l.), juvenile (Fig. 2) collected by S. Spawls on a tarmac road at night, 13 April 1980, field number GS 116. Both specimens were found in Guinea Savanna. They were deposited in the private collection of B. Hughes (London, England). Figure 1 below was also published in the book *A Field Guide to the Reptiles of East Africa* by Spawls et al. (2002; p 416) and labeled "*Dasypeltis fasciata*"

from "Ghana". This was prior to the description of *D. gansi* by Trape & Mané (2006a), when brown *Dasypeltis* from West Africa were generally considered a colour phase of *D. scabra*, although largely brown and feebly-patterned *D. fasciata* were also known from the region (see Gans 1959). *Dasypeltis gansi* is tan brown dorsally, usually with vaguely indicated ovoid to rectangular dark saddles, separated by smaller pale to whitish areas, with dark lateral bars extending down the flanks between the saddles (pattern fades after preservation); and is cream to yellowish ventrally (Trape & Mané 2006a; Bates & Ineich 2012). Figure 2 shows the typically more contrasting colour pattern (dark markings more distinct) of the juvenile from Wa, which is similar to the juvenile illustrated in Trape & Mané (2006b). Trape et al. (2012) showed that *D. gansi* has an extensive range in the Guinea Savanna of West Africa, from Senegal in the west through Guinea, southern Mali, southern Niger, Togo, Benin, Nigeria, northern Cameroon and the adjacent parts of Chad, but they did not record it from Ghana. This species was later recorded from several widespread localities in neighbouring Togo (Segniagbeto et al. 2011) and to the east in Bénin (Hughes 2013). Bates & Ineich (2012) noted that at least two of Gans' (1959) 'brown' *D. scabra* from Ghana (Achimota in the forest-savanna mosaic of the Dahomey Gap, and Tamale in the West Sudanian Savanna in the north) were probably referable to *D. gansi* based on their colour patterns and the scalation data provided. The two specimens documented above confirm the occurrence of this species in Ghana. The '6.4 km north of Jirapa' record extends the range 243 km north-west of Tamale into the extreme north-western part of the country, within the West Sudanian Savanna.

Note: Images of what appears to be a subadult *Dasypeltis gansi* (apparently from a 'breeding farm in Africa') were posted at the following webpage: http://www.sareptiles.co.za/forum/viewtopic.php?f=91&t=24177 (accessed 2 September 2013).

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Figure 1: Adult *Dasypeltis gansi* from 6.4 km N of Jirapa, NW Ghana. Photo: S. Spawls

Figure 2: Juvenile *Dasypeltis gansi* from Wa, NW Ghana. Photo: S. Spawls

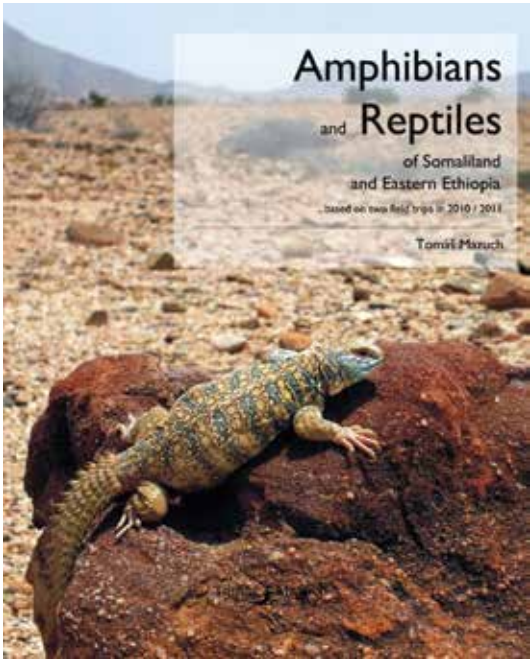
BOOK REVIEW

Amphibians and Reptiles of Somaliland and Eastern Ethiopia (based on two field trips in 2010/2011) By Tomáš Mazuch. Privately published by Tomáš Mazuch. 80 pages, hard cover. ISBN 978-80-90543904.

In 2003, after publishing a field guide to the reptiles of East Africa, I contacted a group of herpetologists with northeast African expertise, with a view to preparing a book on the reptiles of that area, after a cautious approval from our publishers, Academic Press. But our publishers were then taken over by a firm who moved totally into internet publishing and their entire natural history list was sold to the publishers A and C Black, who felt that the sales of a north-east African reptile book were likely to be too small to publish commercially. However, having done some preliminary work, Malcolm Largen and I decided to try and do something on the reptiles and amphibians of Ethiopia and Eritrea, and Chimaira kindly accepted our proposal. By then, neither of us was living in Ethiopia, and the region that we had little photographic material from was the dry area where the rift valley cracked outwards, from northeast Ethiopia across into Djibouti and northwestern Somalia. Our book came out in 2010. So when I received in 2011, an e-mail from Tomáš Mazuch, a Czech herpetologist, with a selection of his slides from two safaris into that dangerous area, I simply gnashed my teeth with frustration. Tomáš had managed to photograph a good number of those species that we lacked…and, I should say, have never been photographed before.

This handsome, quarto-sizebook is a record of Tomáš' two safaris in 2010 and 2011 into north-eastern Ethiopia and the state now known as Somaliland (although not formally recognised by any other country; it occupies the western side of what was British Somaliland and the eastern border is disputed with another 'informal' state, Puntland). It is a dangerous area to visit, war-torn, its future still unclear (ethnic Somalis live in four countries; Ethiopia, Djibouti, Kenya and what was independent Somalia). The British Foreign Office advises against all travel to Somaliland, which means no putative British visitor can get travel insurance. The environment is largely a harsh, dry, low-altitude wilderness of sand, rock and thorn scrub, where daytime temperatures can soar to over 50oC; this is where Africa cracked apart over the last 30 million years, and the rising land of the rift valley deprived the Horn of much of its rainfall. There are active volcanoes here and many things that bite, from hyenas through to abundant carpet vipers. A travel guide to the country laconically notes that you are advised not to leave the roads if you see painted rocks on the verges, as these indicate the presence of land mines. It is mandatory within Somaliland to travel with an armed escort and in some areas there are violent gunmen, motivated by religion, politics and economics. In travelling there, Tomáš took his life into his hands, what he found and documented there enriches his fellow African herpetologists.

There is no formal text in this book, save a brief introduction. Its eighty pages are graced by nearly 300 full-colour captioned pictures illustrating the landscape and the



herpetofauna; there are also a number of pictures of scorpions (one of Tomáš' other interests), a few mammals, (including a pectinator), arthropods and unusual plants. Tomáš states in his introduction that the purpose of the book is to serve as an adjunct to scientific papers, which rarely have space for abundant photographs. Abundant indeed. The 60-plus landscape pictures are arranged in roughly the order of travel, often with the landscape image spread across an entire page or two, with the photographs of the inhabitants strategically scattered across the main picture. Some 57 species of lizard, twelve species of snake, five amphibian and two chelonians are illustrated. The lizard pictures include 26 species of gecko, twelve agamas and 14 lacertids, which aficionados of the African dryland fauna will appreciate is a pretty representative combination. Many species are illustrated by a full-body shot in representative surroundings and a close-up of the head.

The coverage isn't comprehensive; a total of fifty-odd snake species, about 90 species of lizard and a dozen amphibian species are recorded from the region. What this book does show is the landscape, in stunning detail, and a remarkable selection of its unique and attractive herpetofauna. It indicates what can be done by a scientist willing to take risks in the pursuit of knowledge and what is so aptly called 'ground truth', real knowledge gained in the terrain. Tomas' two trips, with a field time of only about six weeks, revealed a number of reptiles that have never been photographed before, as well as several new forms. Here you will find pictures of snakes like *Telescopus pulcher* and *Psammophis punctulatus punctulatus*, five species of *Pristurus* geckoes, four species of *Philochortus* and fourteen species of *Hemidactylus*. There has been a unique radiation of *Hemidactylus* in this area and Tomáš and his colleagues found several species only known previously from preserved specimens. Not since the sterling efforts of Captain R.H.R. Taylor of the British-Italian boundary commission has so much effective fieldwork been done in this dangerous region. The quality of the photographs is superb; there isn't a bad picture in the book, and the full-page shots of the remote habitats, animals like the little *Rieppeleo*n and the languid *Uromastyx macfadyeni* on a log in his stony landscape are stunning. The colours of some of these semi-desert reptiles is astonishing; bright blue-chinned strange agamas, *Xenagama*, plum-coloured geckoes, red and white *Pristurus phillipsii*, blue and yellow *Uromastyx* and red and green sand

lizards, *Latastia*. There is a shot of Tomáš photographing an *Echis* in his hotel room, with a little set of sand and rock placed on the bed; an activity well known to field herpetologists!

I have a few minor complaints. The absence of any sort of listing, contents or index means you just have to scan through the book in the hope of finding what you want, and some species appear on several different pages. The picture choice is a bit over-indulgent in places; there are fourteen pictures of the different forms of Echis, six of leopard tortoises and more than 20 of various scorpions. The map on page 1 could have been improved by marking the localities that the team visited. But these are minor problems. This book is a remarkable contribution to African herpetology, enabling the reader to visualise the wonderful herpetofauna of this unique and enthralling area. Tomáš has done us a favour in exposing the beauties of this strange land. I wish I'd been there with him.

Amphibians and Reptiles of Somaliland and Eastern Ethiopia is available directly from the author at Dřiteč 65, 533 05 Dřiteč, Czech Republic or through Chimaira, Frankfurt am Main. 52 Euros (roughly 620 South African Rand)

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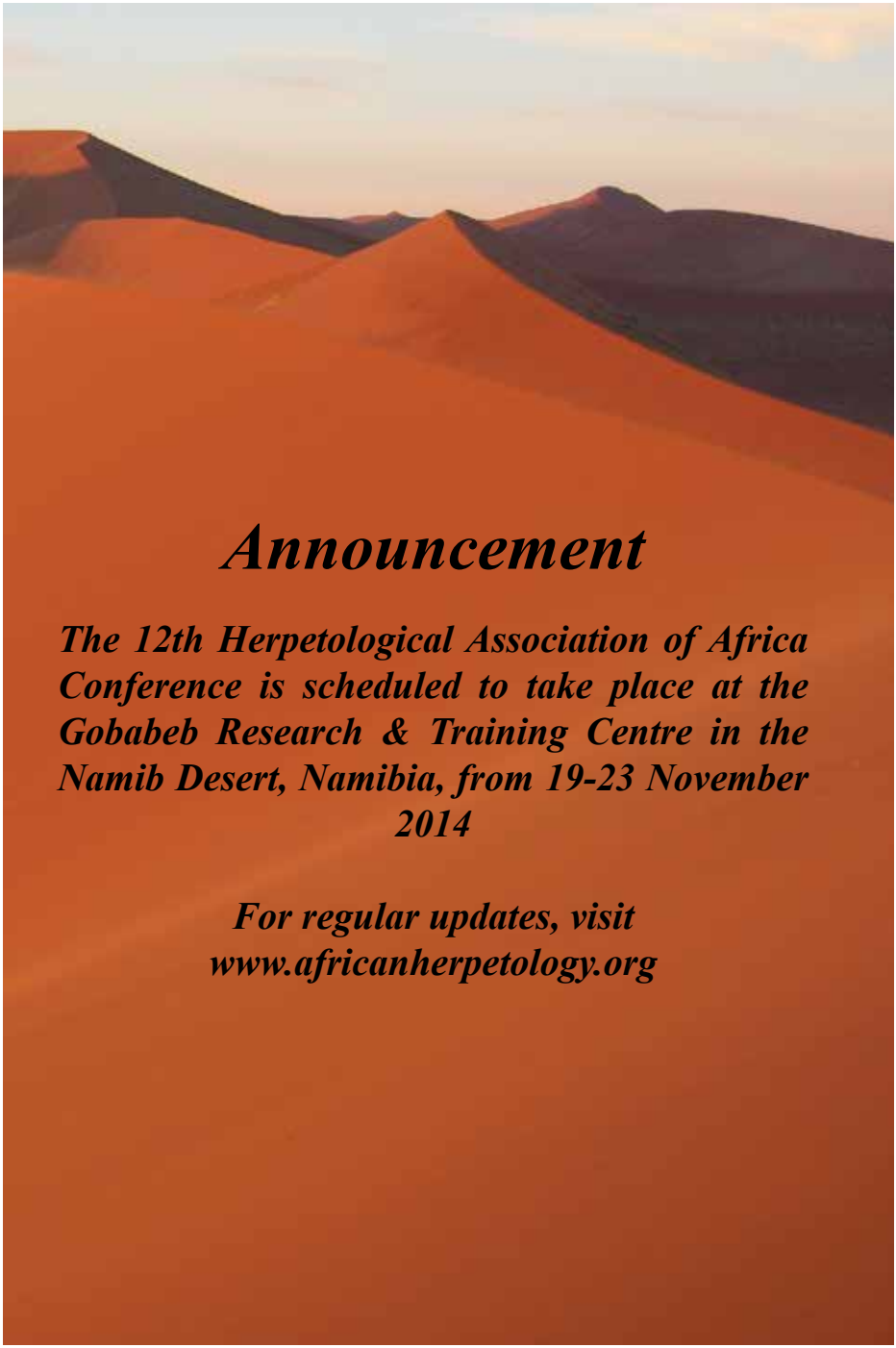
Marbled Tree Snake (*Dipsadoboa aulica*) from Swaziland. Photo: W. Schmidt



Announcement

The 12th Herpetological Association of Africa Conference is scheduled to take place at the Gobabeb Research & Training Centre in the Namib Desert, Namibia, from 19-23 November 2014

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INSTRUCTIONS TO AUTHORS

African Herp News publishes manuscripts in four categories, namely Articles, Herpetological Surveys, Natural History Notes, and Geographical Distributions. **CONTRIBUTIONS SUBMITTED IN AN INCORRECT STYLE (SEE GUIDELINES BELOW) WILL BE RETURNED TO THE AUTHORS**. All submissions should be set in 10 pt, Times New Roman font, with 1.15 line spacing throughout. Submitted manuscripts should not contain any consecutive space characters, nor should they contain tab characters. Every word in English common names should start with a capital letter (e.g., Namaqua Dwarf Adder).

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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)** (bold, centred); Author's address(es) (italicised; use superscript Arabic numerals with author's names and addresses if more than one author); **HEADINGS** (bold, aligned left) and **Subheadings** (bold, aligned left) as required; **REFERENCES** (bold), following the standardised formats described below.

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African Herp News publishes succinctly 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 defined geographic unit of special relevance to the herpetological community. For example, surveys should 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. 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). Survey results should be presented in the same format as used for Articles (described above), and must additionally include a section titled **SYSTEMATIC ACCOUNT** (bold) comprising Scientific name (including author citation), location and habitat, evidence (including registration numbers and location of vouchers), and comments (where required). REFERENCES should follow the standardised formats described below.

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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: **FAMILY: *Scientific name* (including author citation); English common name** (using Bill Branch's *Field Guide to Snakes and Other Reptiles of Southern Africa*, third edition, 1998, for reptiles; and Du Preez & Carruthers' *A Complete Guide to the Frogs of Southern Africa*, 2009, 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). The body of the note should include information describing the locality (Country; Province; quarter-degree locus; location; latitude and longitude in D° M' S" format; elevation above sea level), providing the date (day, month, year), naming the collector(s), and stating the place of deposition and museum accession number or describing the fate of the animal. **REFERENCES** should follow the standardised formats described below. **SUBMITTED BY: NAME**, Address, E-mail.

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Reference formatting is similar to African Journal of Herpetology. References should be listed in the following format:

ALEXANDER, G. J. 2007. Thermal biology of the Southern African Python (Python natalensis): does temperature limit its distribution? Pp. 50-75. In HENDERSON, R.W., AND POWELL, R. (eds.), Biology of the Boas and Pythons, Eagle Mountain Publishing, Utah.

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LAMB, T., BISWAS, S. & BAUER, A. 2010. A phylogenetic reassessment of African fossorial skinks in the subfamily Acontinae (Squamata: Scincidae): evidence for parallelism and polyphyly. Zootaxa, 2657: 33-46.

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TABLES, FIGURES, AND PHOTOGRAPHS

Tables should be submitted as separate MS Excel files. Tables should be small enough to fit onto an A5 page, and should NOT contain any vertical lines. Photographs and figures should be submitted as separate JPEG files, and not embedded in the text. They should preferably be over 1MB in size, and not more than 5MB. The name of the photographer should be given, if not taken by the author of the submission. Each table, figure, or photograph, needs to be associated with an appropriate caption that should follow the reference list in the submission.

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