

AFRICAN HERP NEWS

No. 28 January 1999

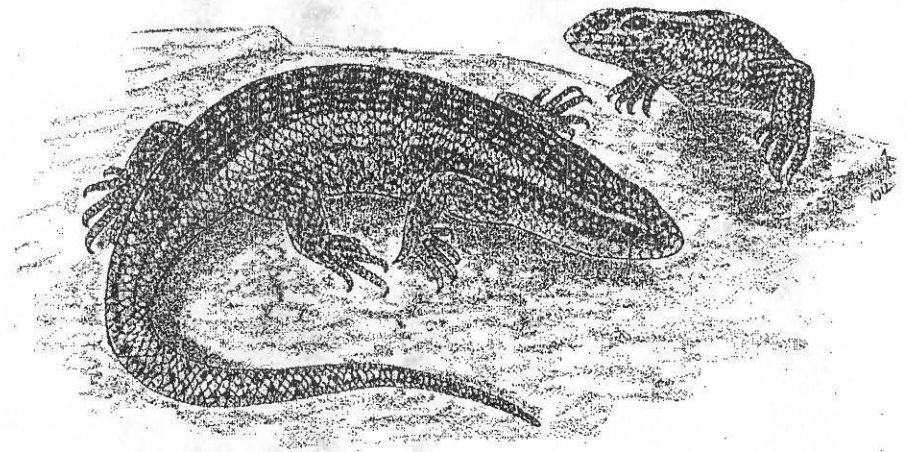
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A VISIT TO NORTHERN DAMARALAND, NAMIBIA

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A recent visit to my brother D.M. Liebenberg, who runs Etendeka Mountain Camp, was of great interest from the wildlife and particularly the reptilian point of view.

The camp is located in Northern Damaraland, Kunene Province, 10 km north east of Palmwag and 6 km east of the Sesfontein main road, at an average altitude of 1000 metres above sea level. Average rainfall is 100 mm per annum with a peak in late summer, i.e., February to April. The terrain varies from extremely rocky, stony plains to steeply sloping mountains with very sheer krantzies and deep kloofs with no permanent water. Vegetation is sparse, with mainly annual grasses and drought-adapted trees and shrubs on the hills, with stunted Mopane trees (*Colophospermum mopane*) in the valleys. Euphorbia bushes (*Euphorbia hereroensis*) are abundant on the level areas.

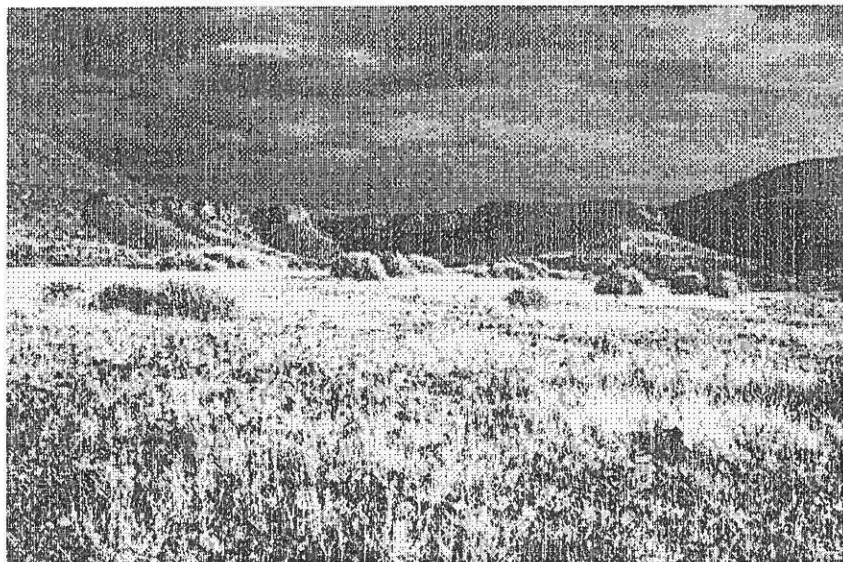


Fig. 1: North East view of plains and hills from Etendeka Camp. (Photo A. Liebenberg).

I stayed at the camp from 18th to 16th March 1998, when the temperature varied from 18°C at night to 36 - 44°C during the day. Eighteen mm of rain fell on the first night, with a further 10 mm over the next few days.

The area is very rich in bird, mammals and reptile species, and I was privileged to see the following reptiles:

Kaokoveld Sand Lizard (*Pedioplanis gaerdesi*)

These were very common, running from rock to rock across the sand during the heat of the day.

Ovambo Skink (*Mabuya binotata*)

These large lizards were seen on Mopane trees, and on the shower tents at the camp.

Western Rock Skink (*Mabuya sulcata*)

These skinks were also common, especially on rocky outcrops.

Variiegated Skink (*Mabuya variegata*)

Several tame specimens were present on the outbuildings at the camp.

Western Three-striped Skink (*Mabuya occidentalis*)

One large specimen lives at a popular tourist lookout spot on a rocky hill.

Namib Rock Agama (*Agama planiceps*)

These beautiful animals were common on larger rock outcrops.

Ground Agama (*Agama aculeata aculeata*)

These were frequently seen in pairs in the ground, and on fallen tree trunks under which they hide for protection.

Bibron's Gecko (*Pachydactylus bibronii*)

These geckos were found on tents at the camp.

Boulton's Day Gecko (*Rhoptropus barnardi*)

Seen on smaller rocks than the previous species.

Rock Monitor (*Varanus albigularis*)

Following the alarm calls of some birds, I found a large monitor in the trunk of a hollow Mopane tree.

Marsh Terrapin (*Pelomedusa subrufa*)

I was amazed to find several Marsh Terrapins in rock pools in a steep-sided valley. Four hatchlings were spotted in a pool one metre in diameter, and two subadults were seen in another larger pool.

Leopard Tortoise (*Geochelone pardalis*)

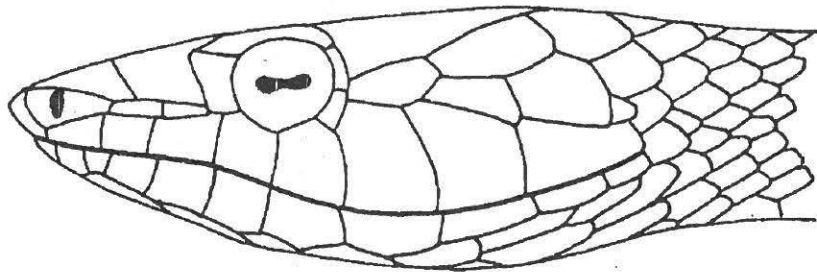
A subadult was found in the den of a porcupine (*Hystrix africae australis*), along with many mammalian bones. Tortoises are reported to be very scarce in the area due to difficulties in moving over the stony ground.

Karoo Sand Snake (*Psammodon notostictus*)

One specimen was seen at close range.

Other snakes which have been seen by experienced people include the Western Barred Spitting Cobra (*Naja nigricollis nigricincta*), which is common; Black Mamba (*Dendroaspis polylepis*); Angolan Dwarf Python (*Python anchietae*), of which eight specimens of this rare animal have been found in the vicinity over the last seven years; and African Rock Python (*Python sebae natalensis*), of which only one has been found in the same period.

There are many more reptiles, as well as amphibians, which were not encountered but which still wait to be discovered on my next visit.



Thelotornis capensis oatesii (Gunther, 1881). Mtorashanga, Zimbabwe.

Illustration: A.J.L. Lambiris

DIETARY REQUIREMENTS OF CAPTIVE HATCHLING NAMAQUALAND SPECKLED PADLOPERS (*HOMOPUS S. SIGNATUS*)

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In a studbook breeding programme, the Namaqualand speckled padloper (*Homopus s. signatus*) has been kept and bred successfully in The Netherlands since October 1995. Some notes on reproduction have been described (Loehr, 1997). Additional information can be found at the internet site of the programme (address above). A detailed report summarising the greater part of information gained is in preparation.

Between October 1995 and July 1997, three adult *Homopus s. signatus* were generally fed three times weekly on a mixture of green leaves (endive, chicory, *Taraxacum*, *Plantago*, *Vicia*, *Bellum*, *Trifolium*, etc.) and fruits (apple, tomato, carrot and cucumber), supplemented with a calcium/vitamin additive (Gistocal; Beaphar BV, Raalte, The Netherlands). Four captive-bred hatchlings present in that period received the same diet, but were fed daily during the first year of their lives. During the period that this mixture was fed, no feeding-related problems were noticed. The mass of the second oldest hatchling dropped considerably between January and March 1996, but this decrease was not accompanied by behavioural and/or external changes and the decrease was reversed spontaneously later on.

From July 1997, the diet of all the tortoises was changed almost exclusively to green leaves, supplemented with a single kind of fruit only once a week, and the calcium/vitamin additive. The amount of fruits fed was gradually further decreased until completely excluded from the diet by the end of April 1998. Recent information with respect to the feeding of tortoises suggested that providing fruits could be unbeneficial, due to the often low Ca/P ratio and fiber content, and the high water and sugar content (among others, McArthur, 1996). Three hatchlings were born in October/November 1997 and therefore first received a daily diet low in fruit content (single kind of fruit once a week) and later the diet without any fruits.

Apart from two of the 1997 hatchlings, the *Homopus* did not show a distinct response to the change in diet. Growth (figure 1) and behaviour proceeded as expected (January-April 1998 coincided with winter climatic conditions in the enclosures [figure 2]). Two of the 1997 hatchlings, however, showed a normal mass increase (compared to the other hatchlings) between the time of hatching and May 1998 (period of diet with low fruit content), and a mass decrease (average 24% of the mass measured in May) after that time (period of diet without fruits) (figure 1). The two tortoises that showed a mass decrease from May 1998 furthermore had their