

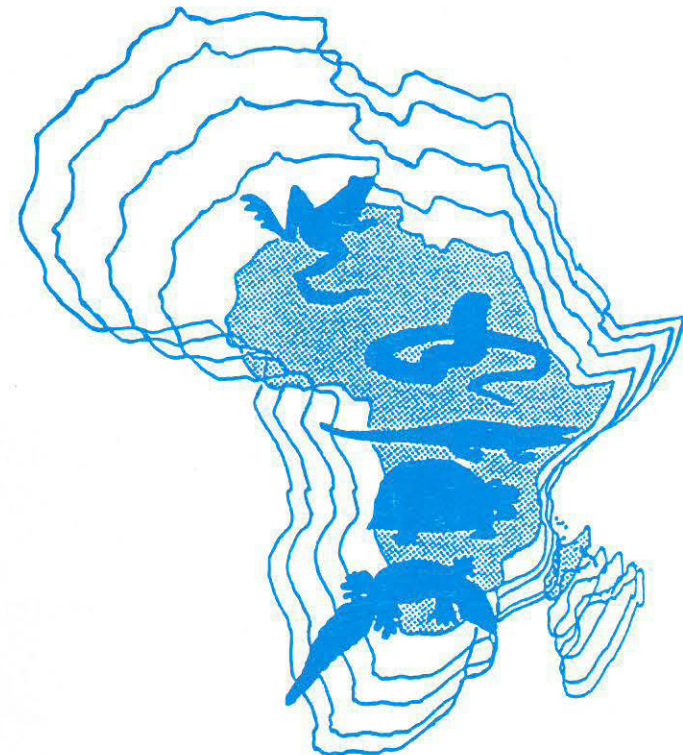
AFRICAN HERP NEWS

NO. 26: JULY 1997

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AFRICAN HERP NEWS

HERPETOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION OF AFRICA
NEWSLETTER

JULY 1997

NO. 26

HERPETOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION OF AFRICA

Founded 1965

The HAA is dedicated to the study and conservation of African reptiles and amphibians. Membership is open to anyone with an interest in the African herpetofauna. Members receive the Association's journal, *African Journal of Herpetology* (which publishes review papers, research articles, short communications and book reviews - subject to peer review) and newsletter, *African Herp News* (which includes short communications, life history notes, geographical distribution notes, venom and snakebite notes, short book reviews, bibliographies, husbandry hints, announcements and news items).

Editor's note:

Articles will be considered for publication provided they are original and have not been published elsewhere.

Articles may be submitted for peer review (at least two reviewers) at the Editor's discretion. Lists of reviewers will be published in the newsletter from time to time.

Authors are requested to submit long manuscripts on disk in ASCII format.

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

Articles and news items appearing in *African Herp News* may be reprinted, provided the author's name and newsletter reference are given.

Typist:

Ms A. Lombaard, National Museum, Bloemfontein.

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EDITORIAL

It is with some sadness that I write this, my last editorial. Having served three consecutive terms as Chairman/Newsletter Editor over a period of seven years, the H.A.A. has become very much a part of my life. I am thankful for the many opportunities I have had to correspond with and meet members, and have thoroughly enjoyed my work as editor of *African Herp News*.

From the start of my first term I initiated various changes to the style and format of the newsletter. Firstly, the Committee agreed to change the title of the newsletter. *African Herp News* #13 (August 1990) was the first newsletter to appear with a hard paper cover. In general, few changes were made until *African Herp News* #17 (June 1992), which featured a *Bibliographic Index to the Journal* by Rod Douglas, and was the first to be formatted with lines at the top and bottom of each page. In 1993, after a policy change to the Journal, it was decided that the Life History Notes, Geographical Distribution, and Venoms and Snakebite sections would be transferred to the newsletter. This resulted in a flood of extra newsletter contributions, the first of which appeared in *African Herp News* #21 (July 1994). Later, at the General Meeting during the St Lucia symposium (October 1995), it was decided that the Newsletter Editor should send articles requiring review to at least two referees for their opinions. This practice was initiated from *African Herp News* #24 (December 1995). Recently, in *African Herp News* #25 (October 1996), a double-column format was introduced, section headings and titles of articles were set in blocks, and glossy paper used. All of the above changes were made in an attempt to produce a neater and more attractive newsletter.

Producing the newsletter was always a pleasant challenge. I was never short of newsletter material (for which I thank you the member) and I could always be certain of posting an *African Herp News* which had at least something of interest for everyone. Editing and proof-reading a newsletter takes up a fair amount of time, but seeing the

finished product is always a rewarding experience. However, while I have thoroughly enjoyed the job, I must echo what Bill Branch said in 1993 when resigning as editor of the Journal after 11 years: "It will be a pleasure to open an envelope with a NEW journal (= newsletter) in it, and read something that I haven't spent the last six months bringing to fruition".

In the past several members were concerned about the relatively infrequent appearance of H.A.A. publications. I stated in my first Editorial (*African Herp News* #13) that it was my prime objective to ensure that the Association's Newsletter and Journal appeared more frequently. This situation has improved considerably and members now regularly receive two newsletters and two journals per year. During my seven years in office 14 issues of *African Herp News* (#13 to #26; 810 pages in all, average of 58 pages per newsletter) and 11 Journals (#38, edited by Johan Marais and myself; #39 to #42, edited by Bill Branch; and #43, #44 [parts 1 & 2], #45 [1 & 2] and #46 [1], edited by le Fras Mouton) were produced.

Accreditation status for the journal is another matter which has been questioned on several occasions this decade. Following various improvements to the journal it is now likely that an application for accreditation status will be made at the end of 1997.

As this is my last newsletter, I take this opportunity to thank all those who have served on committees with me or assisted in any other way. Your co-operation and suggestions were invaluable. A special word of thanks to: my colleague Rod Douglas who has on many occasions offered valuable advice and support; Frank Farquharson, who on occasion has given me a damn hard time, has been an excellent and diligent Secretary/Treasurer largely responsible for the Association's very healthy financial situation; Le Fras Mouton for his competence and co-operation while Journal Editor; Bill Branch for his advice and regular newsletter contributions (e.g. book reviews); Gerald Haagner who's endless supply of Life History Notes almost led me to create a special

Bourquin (1987, *Lammergeyer* 38: 12-14), Free State and Eastern Cape provinces by Haagner & Branch (1996, *African Herp News* No. 25: 44) and has involved the smaller gecko species *Hemidactylus mabouia* and *Lygodactylus capensis*. This appears to be the first report on accidental translocation of *P. bibronii*. Whether this specimen would have survived the harsh winters is questionable, but as the cardboard box was moved into and stored in a garage, it seems possible.

Acknowledgements: Dr W.R. Branch for commenting on the text.

Submitted by: G.V. HAAGNER (P.O. Box 702, Hoedspruit 1380, South Africa).

AGAMIDAE

AGAMA ETOSHAE Etosha Agama SUMMER DIURNAL ACTIVITY

Observations on a group of 16 *Agama etoshae* were carried out at Ompundja (17°58'S, 15°40'E; 1715DC) in the Owambo district of northern Namibia on a cloudless day in January 1995, with a slight breeze blowing. The study group of four males, eight females and four juveniles occupied a flat, sandy area measuring 26 x 36 m, with a burrow system having 20 entrances. The area is situated in seasonally flooded grassland (Claassen & Page, 1978, *Ontwikkelingsplan vir Owambo*. Verslag van die Instituut vir Beplanningsnavorsing, Universiteit van Stellenbosch) with a few tufts of grass and three scattered defoliate bushes. Males and females were easily identified on the basis of the breeding colouration of their gular areas. In males the gular area is bright yellow in colour with a centrally-situated black patch, while in females it is uniformly bright orange in colour. Small individuals lacking gular colouration were classified as juveniles. Activity recordings, from a distance of approximately 30 m, using 8 x 30 Nikon binoculars, started at 07h45 and ended at 18h30. The number of males, females and juveniles visible in the area was recorded at 15 min intervals. Ambient air temperature (T_a) was measured simultaneously at a

height of about 1 cm above the sand in direct sun using a Baily-Bat thermocouple thermometer (Sensortek, New York). Data are given as means \pm 1SD and their statistical analysis consisted of Student's *t*-tests following Sokal & Rohlf (1981, *Biometry*, 2nd ed., W.H. Freeman and Co., San Francisco), with differences between means considered significant at $P < 0.05$.

The daily activity pattern of the group was bimodal. A peak phase occurred in the morning ($28.5^\circ\text{C} \leq T_a \leq 42.6^\circ\text{C}$; mean $36.4 \pm 3.4^\circ\text{C}$, $n = 14$ recordings) followed by a trough phase during the middle of the day ($40.8^\circ\text{C} \leq T_a \leq 47.6^\circ\text{C}$; mean $43.4 \pm 1.9^\circ\text{C}$, $n = 15$ recordings) and a second peak phase in the late afternoon ($36.3^\circ\text{C} \leq T_a \leq 44.1^\circ\text{C}$; mean $39.9 \pm 2.3^\circ\text{C}$, $n = 10$ recordings). The mean numbers of individuals recorded during the two peak phases did not differ significantly [8.4 ± 1.9 (morning) vs. 9.6 ± 2.5 (late afternoon), $P > 0.05$]. Both these figures were, however, significantly greater than the mean number of 3.9 ± 0.8 individuals recorded during the trough phase ($P < 0.001$, in both cases). In 80% of trough phase intervals and 70% of second peak phase intervals, individuals were observed perching in vegetation. In the former phase the mean percentage of individuals in vegetation per interval was significantly greater than that in the latter phase ($65.3 \pm 25.7\%$ vs. $28.3 \pm 26.0\%$, $P < 0.01$).

These limited observations suggest that *A. etoshae* is social during the breeding season. Solitary individuals noticed or collected elsewhere in Owamboland at that time (summer) may therefore have been drifters. Steyn, Finkeldey & Buys (1963, *Cimbebasia* 6: 12-15) stated that *A. etoshae* lives in isolated colonies, some of which are quite large (91.4 x 228.6 m). They did not, however, mention the time of year when their observations were carried out or provide information about the spacing of individuals in these colonies. The large number of breeding males and females in the present study group suggests that the species may be polygamous, but in the absence of any obvious intrasexual agonistic behaviour, the type of polygamy could not

be established. The tendency of individuals to climb into vegetation when ambient air temperature was high may have been a way of taking more effective advantage of the cooling effect of the prevailing breeze (instead of entering the cool burrow system).

Acknowledgements: I thank my students Lysias and Natangwe Amupathi (University of Namibia) for assistance during the observations. Drs G. Alexander and W.R. Branch are thanked for critically reviewing the manuscript.

Submitted by: N.J.L. HEIDEMAN (Department of Herpetology, National Museum, P.O. Box 266, Bloemfontein 9300, South Africa).

CHAMAELEONIDAE

CHAMAELEO DILEPIS DILEPIS Flap-necked Chameleon SIZE

During a visit by Prof. Thomas Madsen from the University of Lund, Sweden, we went out at night on 17 March 1988 searching for chameleons in the Manyeleti Game Reserve, Mhala district, Mpumalanga Province. Several adult chameleons were seen and at 20h14 a very large specimen was noticed in the spotlight approximately 4.5 m up in a Buffalo Thorn Tree (*Ziziphus mucronata*) near the main camp (24°38'S, 31°28'E; 2431CB). It was an adult female *Chamaeleo d. dilepis* measuring SVL 193 mm, tail length 173 mm, total length 366 mm, mass 85.8 g. She was maintained live in a large walk-in cage with shrubs and soil at the Manyeleti Reptile Centre. On 30 March she was noticed sitting on the ground, apparently very weak. She appeared to have just laid a clutch of eggs, as she was very thin, but no evidence could be found of any nest hole dug in the soil. She died later that day and was deposited in the herpetological collection of the Transvaal Museum (TM 67621).

This appears to be a new record size for *C. d. dilepis*. Schaefer (1971, *Mems. Inst. Invest. Cient. Mozamb.* 11[A]: 169-176) reported a

353 (181+172) mm *C. dilepis* that was accidentally transported from Mozambique in a railway truck. The largest reported by Fitzsimons (1943, *Transvaal Mus. Mem.* 1: 151-174) measured only 290 mm, while Cott (1934, *Proc. Zool. Soc. Lond.* 1934: 145-173) recorded 300 mm as the maximum for Mozambique. In a recent survey of the former Transvaal province, Jacobsen (1990, *A herpetological survey of the Transvaal*, Ph.D. thesis, University of Natal, Durban) reported the largest *C. dilepis* from Phayizani to have a SVL of 180 mm. He probably overlooked the Manyeleti specimen, already accessioned in the Transvaal Museum collection at that time.

Acknowledgements: Thanks to Thomas Madsen and Rubin Els for pleasant field assistance; and Dr W.R. Branch for commenting on the text.

Submitted by: G.V. HAAGNER (P.O. Box 702, Hoedspruit 1380, South Africa).

SCINCIDAE

MABUYA STRIATA STRIATA Striped Skink AVIAN PREDATION

On 4 October 1996 my attention was drawn to a group of noisy Black-eyed Bulbuls (*Pycnonotus barbatus*) in a large marula tree (*Sclerocarya caffra*) on the farm Rooodepan 223, Potgietersrus district, Northern Province (23°26'32"S, 28°29'38"E; 2328AD). My first reaction was that the birds were mobbing a snake, but investigation revealed a perching adult Pearl-spotted Owl (*Glauclidium perlatum*) eating an adult *Mabuya s. striata*. The lizard's head and torso were already eaten, but identification (from a distance of approximately 5 m) was based on the grey-brown back with distinct dorso-lateral stripes. These lizards are common in the area and are regularly seen around the house. Pearl-spotted Owls are opportunistic feeders (Steyn, 1982, *Birds of Prey of Southern Africa*, David Philip Publ., Cape Town), and with partly-diurnal habits, they can easily optimise abundant lizard prey.