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NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

AMPHIBIA: ANURA

HYPEROLIIDAE

Hyperolius mitchelli Loveridge, 1953
Mitchell's Reed Frog

AGE OF MATURITY

Although the age of maturity is a very important demographic parameter we are still lacking the data for the majority of amphibian species. Duellman and Trueb (1994. *Biology of Amphibians*. John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London) reported that anurans commonly mature at the age of one year. Extremely short time to maturity is known in *Sphaenorhynchus bromelicola* where metamorphosing individuals with visible ovulated eggs were observed (Haddad and Prado 2005. *Biotropica* 32: 862-871). Here I report on exceptionally short time to maturity in *Hyperolius mitchelli*.

A pair of *Hyperolius mitchelli* (originated from Tanzania) kept in captivity laid a clutch of 140 eggs on 21st September 2006. Five days later 127 tadpoles emerged from the egg capsules. The tadpoles were reared in plastic boxes and fed *ad libitum* with commercial flake fish food. The first tadpole metamorphosed (more exactly emerged from the water) on 13th November 13 2006. On 11th January 11 2007 this individual was heard calling for the first time. At this time it measured 19 mm. As the calling activity in males indicates their sexual maturity, this individual of *Hyperolius mitchelli* was mature at the age of 60 days. This is one of the shortest times needed to achieve maturity ever reported for anurans.

Submitted by

Michal BEREČ. Faculty of Biological Sciences, University of South Bohemia, Branišovská 31, České Budějovice 370 05, Czech Republic. E-mail: michal.berec@bf.jcu.cz

REPTILIA: SQUAMATA; SAURIA

CHAMELEONIDAE

Chamaeleo dilepis (Leach, 1818)
Flap-necked Chameleon

MORTALITY

On 28 June 2007 I was informed by my daughter that chameleons had been electrocuted on a security fence at her school – St Paul's College – in Windhoek, Namibia (22°34'32.9"S, 17°06'29.8"E, altitude 1720m). On visiting the site two sub-adult Flap-necked Chameleons (*Chamaeleo dilepis*) (SVL 100 mm) were found hanging from the electric strands surrounding a neighbouring residential property bordering St Paul's College. On inspection it was determined that they had been dead for a few days at most. These chameleons must have become active during a warm spell experienced during mid June with subsequent movement leading to their encounter with the electric fence.

The electrocution of reptiles has previously been documented by Boycott & Bourquin (2000) for Leopard Tortoises (*Stigmochelys pardalis*), and Cunningham & Strauss (2005) for Rock Monitor (*Varanus albigularis*) and Bushmanland Tent Tortoise (*Psammobates tentorius verroxii*) with an unconfirmed report of Cape Cobra (*Naja nivea*). Although the Flap-necked Chameleon (*Chamaeleo dilepis*) has been known to be electrocuted in residential gardens in Windhoek, Namibia, whilst attempting to negotiate electric security fences (Adank, *pers. comm.*, Roth, *pers. comm.*) this is the first time I have actually witnessed this.

These urban security fences usually transmit up to 6000-8000 volts (<1amp) and although not lethal to humans, for slow moving reptiles such as chameleons it is a fatal trap. Crime and the associated increase in electric security fences throughout Windhoek are not only socially disturbing, but may have an adverse effect on the reptile fauna, especially chameleons, and should be monitored closely.

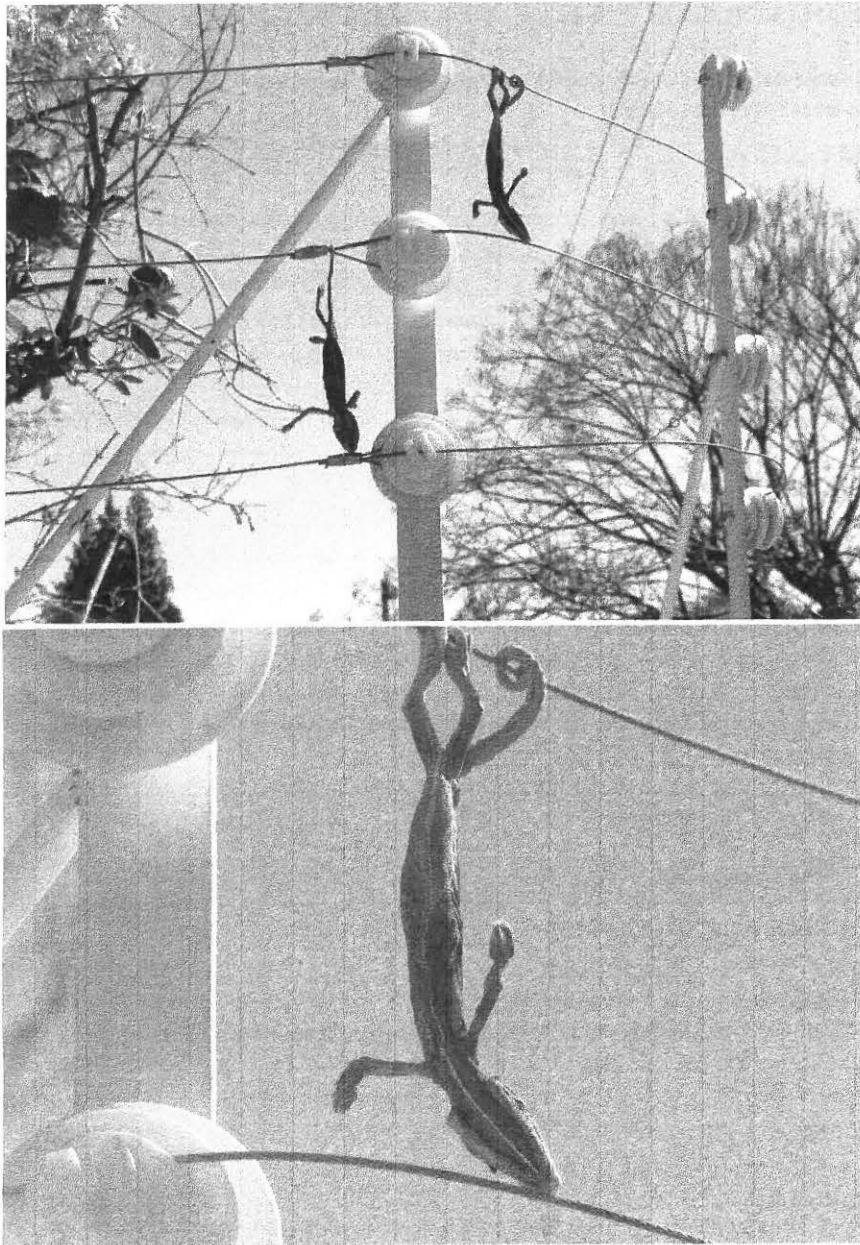
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Submitted by

PETER CUNNINGHAM¹ and NELIA CUNNINGHAM, ¹Department of Nature

Conservation, Polytechnic of Namibia, P/Bag 13388, Windhoek, Namibia, E-mail: pcunningham@polytechnic.edu.na



SCINCIDAE

Acontias meleagris (Linnaeus, 1758)

Cape Legless Lizard

PREDATION/DEFENSE

In March 2000 five live specimens of thin-tailed legless lizard, *Acontias meleagris*, were kept temporarily in the laboratory at the University of the Free State, Qwaqwa Campus for later studies. The lizards were placed in one terrarium filled to a depth of about 10cm with fine white sand covered with dry leaf litter. At night the lights were switched off and the terrarium was left uncovered. On the morning of the third day one lizard was found dead on the surface, with several bite injuries along the length of the body. At first, we suspected that the lizard may have been attacked by its conspecifics. The four remaining lizards were then separated, each placed in its terrarium to avoid more deaths, but the terraria were still left open at night. On the sixth day another lizard was found dead with bad wounds. We then decided to cover the terraria of the three remaining lizards, leaving the one without lizards open. A few days later we noticed rat droppings on the covers of the occupied terraria and its tracks on the sand in the terrarium that was left open, pointing to a rat as the possible predator.

It was, however, not clear whether the rat deliberately attacked the lizards for a meal or to defend itself. On close examination, the dead lizards were only bitten to death with no pieces of flesh removed from their bodies, partially supporting the latter suggestion. Naturally, rodents have not been reported to prey on lizards, neither are the legless lizards such vicious predators to incite a defense from rodents. Branch (1998. *Field Guide to the Snakes and Other Reptiles of Southern Africa*. Struik Publishers, Cape Town) mentions burrowing snakes and carnivorous mammals as predators on lizards of the genus *Acontias*. I presume that the success of the attacks by the rat on the lizards was made possible by the restrictions of movement imposed by their confinement in the terraria.

Submitted by

LEMMY MASHININI, Transvaal Museum, P. O. Box 413, Pretoria, 0001. E-mail: lemmy@nfi.co.za.