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## REPTILIA : CHELONIA

### TESTUDINIDAE

#### *Psammobates oculiferus* (Kuhl, 1820)

#### Kalahari Tent Tortoise

#### DIET

The natural diet of *Psammobates oculiferus* is poorly known. Only one study of the diet of this species appears to exist (Rall & Fairall, 1993, *S. Afr. J. Wildlife Res.* 23: 63-70). Neither this study, nor the information on the species' diet in several field guides (Branch, 1988, *Field Guide to the Snakes and Other Reptiles of Southern Africa*, Struik Publishers; Boycott & Bourquin, 2000, *The Southern African Tortoise Book*, privately printed) mention arthropods to be part of their diet.

On 8 January 2004 an adult male *P. oculiferus* was noted on the road between Hotazel and Vanzylsrus, South Africa. It was avidly feeding on the remains of a giant millipede that had recently been killed by a vehicle. Although I had passed the tortoise with my vehicle to less than 50 cm, it continued to feed and took at least five more bites after I had approached it for the second time.

One day and night before the observation there had been thunderstorms, bringing approximately 30 mm of rain. As a result, many millipedes were crossing the road. Road-killed millipedes are an easy prey for *P. oculiferus*, and might be a regular food item when available.

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#### *Kinixys spekii* Gray, 1863

#### Speke's Hinged Tortoise

#### BREEDING and FEEDING

Hans Merensky Nature Reserve, Limpopo Province, RSA; 2330DA. 16 March, 2004: 15h30. Mopane Bushveld (Savanna Biome).

Whilst walking during the afternoon of 16 March, 2004, in the Hans Merensky

Nature Reserve, we came across a mating pair of Speke's Hinged Tortoise, *Kinixys spekii*. A second male approached and attempted to dislodge the first, but was successfully rebuffed. The second male then, perhaps in a fit of displacement behaviour, proceeded to feed on the fallen fruit of a Marula tree, *Sclerocarya birrea*.

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## REPTILIA : SAURIA

### GEKKONIDAE

#### *Hemidactylus mabouia* (de Jonnes, 1818)

#### Tropical House Gecko

#### MORTALITY

On 6 October 2004, at 12h05, an adult *Trachylepis punctatissima* was seen running with a sub-adult *Hemidactylus mabouia* held in its jaws. It ran up a tree and proceeded to 'smear' its victim against the tree's rough bark. The gecko had already lost its tail and was still alive. This was observed in the grounds of the Limpopo Department of Finance, Economic Affairs and Tourism in Polokwane, Capricorn District, Limpopo (23°55'S, 29°27'E; 2329CD). I was unable to observe the interaction further and predation can therefore not be confirmed.

Haagner (1997, *Hemidactylus mabouia*. Tropical house gecko. Predation. *African Herp News* 26: 25) recorded predation on *Hemidactylus mabouia* by both *Homopholis wahlbergii* and *Pachydactylus turneri*. This record is, however, significant in that it constitutes an interaction between a diurnal predator and this nocturnal gecko.

**Acknowledgement**

Bill Branch is thanked for commenting on the content.

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### CHAMAELEONIDAE

#### *Chamaeleo dilepis* Leach, 1819

#### Flap-necked Chameleon

#### PREY

On 16 June 2005 at 07h30 an adult (SV 15 cm, T 14 cm) Flap-necked Chameleon

(*Chamaeleo dilepis*) was observed being attacked by two adult Senegal Coucals (*Centropus senegalensis*) at Nkwazi Lodge situated approximately 20 km east of Rundu on the Okavango River in northern Namibia. The chameleon was knocked out of a Silver Terminalia (*Terminalia cericea*) tree and harassed on the ground. Throughout the encounter the Flap-neck Chameleon was actively hissing and attempting to bite the Senegal Coucal which was worrying the cloacal region of the chameleon, and in the process injuring the back and hind legs of the chameleon.

According to Maclean (1993. *Roberts' Birds of Southern Africa*. John Voelcker Bird Book Fund, Cape Town) the diet of the Senegal Coucal includes small rodents, reptiles, birds and bird eggs. Branch (1998. *Field Guide to Snakes and Other Reptiles of Southern Africa*. Struik Publishers, Cape Town) includes, as predators of the Flap-necked Chameleon, snakes, monkeys and birds such as the Crowned Hornbill.

Such predator/prey interactions are possibly not unique albeit rarely witnessed as an anecdotal reference to a Burchell's Coucal (*Centropus superciliosus*) attacking and killing a Black Mamba (*Dendroaspis polylepis*) in the vicinity of the Limpopo River in northern South Africa indicates (Fairhead, *pers. com.*).

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### AGAMIDAE

#### *Agama agama* (Linnaeus, 1758) Red-headed Rock Agama

#### NOCTURNAL ACTIVITY

Very recently, O.S.G. Pauwels *et al.*, 2004, *Afr. Herp News* 37: 20-21, reported on nocturnal activity in an adult female *Agama agama* which they observed at Tchibanga, Nyanga Province, Gabon, on 9 April 2003. The specimen was observed on a house wall, close to a neon light, preying upon nocturnal insects attracted by the light. It was in close syntopy with some *Hemidactylus mabouia*. The authors claimed this to be the second reported instance of nighttime activity in this species, the first one also having been reported by Pauwels *et al.* (*Herp Review*, "2003, in press"), but actually appeared in Vol. 35(2): 164-165, along the same main road, 115 km north of Tchibanga.

With this note I want to remind the readers that I had reported on nocturnal activity in *A. agama* already 30 years ago (W. Böhme, 1975, *Zur Herpetofauna Kameruns, mit Beschreibung eines neuen Scinciden. Bonner zoologische Beiträge*, 26: 2-48), and as my old reference was published in German, I shall literally translate the respective paragraph:

"A remarkable ethological observation, elucidating the plasticity of this commensal was made in Douala" (On December 27, 1973) "Around 22.00 h, longtime after sunset, several individuals of all age classes assembled under a street-lamp in the city" (close to the German Seamen's Mission) "in order to prey upon winged, swarming termites, which fell down with singed wings in large numbers. *Bufo maculatus* and *Hemidactylus mabouia* resident at this place were participating in this hunt. For members of the otherwise strictly diurnal agamids, this is a very unusual phenomenon."

Pauwels *et al.* thought this behaviour to be geographically restricted to Gabon and found this remarkable because of the huge range of this species. My old observation indicates a wider distribution of this phenomenon and argues for a high ecological plasticity of *Agama agama* rather than for a peculiarity of the Gabon population.

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### SCINCIDAE

#### *Panaspis wahlbergii* (A. Smith, 1849) Wahlberg's Snake-eyed Skink

#### PREDATION

On 30 June 2005 I observed a Brown-Hooded Kingfisher (*Halcyon albiventris*) dive from its perch on a Jacaranda tree and seize an adult Wahlberg's Snake-eyed Skink (*Panaspis wahlbergii*) on open lawn in our garden at Hillcrest, 25 km west of Durban, KwaZulu-Natal (2930DD). Instead of returning immediately to its perch to consume its meal the bird remained on the lawn, barely three metres from me, holding the lizard for at least half a minute before flying back to the tree and swallowing its prey. I had ample opportunity to observe the lizard closely and see that it was a male (as evidenced by the salmon-pink underside) about eight centimetres long.

According to McLachlan & Liversidge (1972. *Roberts' Birds of South Africa*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. John Voelcker Bird Book Fund, Cape Town) the Brown-hooded Kingfisher includes lizards in its diet, but they do not indicate which species have been recorded. Other authorities consulted (Newman, 1983. *Birds of Southern Africa*, Southern Book Publishers, Johannesburg; Stuart Irwin, 1981. *The Birds of Zimbabwe*, Quest Publishing, Harare) were equally uninformative. Branch (1998. *Field Guide to Snakes and Other Reptiles of Southern Africa*. Struik Publishers, Cape Town) does not give any predators for this little lizard, and a search through other herpetological literature at my disposal has been no more enlightening. This appears to illustrate how many gaps there are still left to fill with respect to the biology of not only some of our commoner reptiles, but also of the so-called "higher vertebrates" which on the face of it have