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AFRICAN HERP NEWS

NEWSLETTER OF THE
HERPETOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION OF AFRICA



No. 34

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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).

NEWSLETTER 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 disc or by e-mail in Word 6.0/7.0 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.

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COVER ILLUSTRATION: White-throated monitor (*Varanus albigularis*). Photograph by Herbert Jauch.

HERP CARTOONS: C.A. Seaby

EDITORIAL

Last year ended on a high note, as can be attested by all delegates who attended the 6th HAA Symposium held at the University of Stellenbosch in September 2001. The conference was hugely successful as a wide variety of relevant herpetological topics were presented, stimulating debate until the late evening hours when delegates had the opportunity to learn the enjoyable art of wine tasting at select wine farms in the district. Eddie van Dijk was the recipient of the Association's award for *Exceptional Contribution to African Herpetology*, handed over during an afternoon function during which Alan Channing provided a brief synopsis of Eddie van Dijk's research achievements. The only shadow cast on the proceedings were the unfortunate events of September 11th, necessitating our international delegates to contact family members and reschedule flights back home. On the whole, though, the 6th HAA Symposium was a memorable one, thanks to the hard work and efficient organization of Alison Leslie and Aliko Strydom.

Alison is currently in Botswana overseeing the launch of her Okavango Crocodile Project, thus I am temporarily standing in as newsletter editor. She will be back in the country by March, and contributions for future newsletter editions can still be e-mailed to aleslie@land.sun.ac.za. If any of your contact details have changed and need to be updated, details should also be sent to this e-mail address. In the meantime we would like to wish Alison the best of luck with her project.

Louise Visagie

Newsletter Editor (Co-opted)

On 13 July 2000 the author and his team were heading to Lake Bogoria to do herpetological sampling around Lake Bogoria Reserve. On the Kapsabet-Eldoret route, at around 16h00, we came across a mob of men hurling sticks and stones at a snake by the side of the highway. We attempted to save the green and black-speckled boomslang, but unfortunately a stone paralyzed the snake. The specimen was about 1.8 meters long with the following scale morphology - supralabials: 8 (3rd and 4th in contact with the orbital); 19 scales at midbody; postoculars: 3; dorsal scale singly keeled; long tail with 89 subcaudal scales. It had a lime green and black dorsal coloration, with lime green ventrals. Its large, bronze eyes were placed in the anterior of its head and had distinctive black dumbbell or buttonhole shaped pupils. I pried the mouth open to affirm identity of the specimen. There was a long, prominent pair of fangs under the eye and several small succeeding ones. I used the *Dangerous Snake of Africa: Natural History, Species Directory, Venoms, and Snakebite* by Steven Spawls and Bill Branch as my reference source. According to Spawls, S. and Branch, B. (1995), males normally exhibit this colour form. Unfortunately, the snake was pronounced dead once we reach Eldoret Town, which was some 20 km away. Although the specimen seemed not to have any signs of injury externally, it must have died from fatal internal injuries.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute (KMFRI), Baringo Station administrative staff for gallantly providing us with formalin and a jar.

Submitted by

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COLUBRIDAE

Lamprophis fuliginosus
Brown House-Snake

FORAGING

The brown house snake, or common house snake (*Lamprophis fuliginosus*), has a wide distribution range in Southern Africa and is widespread throughout Namibia. It is nevertheless infrequently seen due to its mainly nocturnal existence. Adults are known to prey mainly on rodents while juveniles

favour small lizard prey. Very little is known about the house snake's hunting strategy, especially with regards to juvenile snakes.

At approximately 20h00, during a warm February evening in 1998, I observed a *L. fuliginosus* juvenile with a total length of approximately 30 cm on my porch in Windhoek. It shammed death in a fashion typical of rinkhals (*Hemachatus haemachatus*), i.e., twisting the head and anterior portion of the body sideways and/or upside down with mouth agape. Approximately 60 cm from the snake was a Cape thick-toed gecko (*Pachydactylus capensis*) on the wall. The snake remained motionless while the gecko moved in closer to investigate, until the latter was disturbed by external sources. Feigning death is possibly used as a technique by *L. fuliginosus* to prey on geckos as observed during this encounter. I was unable to determine from the literature if this specific hunting strategy has previously been documented for this species.

Submitted by

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GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION

African Herp News publishes brief notes of new geographical distributions (preferably at least 100 km from the nearest published record) of amphibians and reptiles on 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: **SCIENTIFIC NAME**; Common name (for sources, see Natural History Notes); **Locality** (country, province or state, location, quarter-degree unit, and latitude and longitude if available; elevation above sea level; use metric units); **Date** (day, month, year); **Collector(s)**; **Place of deposition and museum accession number** (required if specimens are preserved); **Comments** (including data on the size, colour and taxonomic characters, eg. Scallation, webbing, especially for taxonomically problematic taxa; and nearest published locality record(s) in km; references to be quoted in the text). Submitted by: **NAME**, Address (in parentheses).

Records submitted should be based on specimens deposited in a recognised collection. New South African province names must be used.

Notes submitted in an incorrect format or style will be returned to the authors.