

# AFRICAN HERP NEWS

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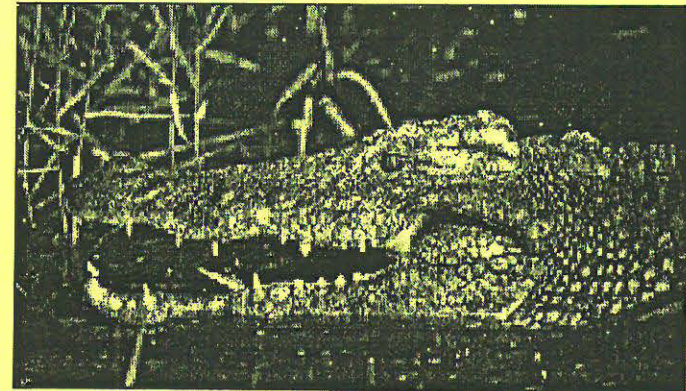
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## CONTENTS

EDITORIAL _____	1
SHORT COMMUNICATIONS	
WELDON, C. New Threat to South African anuran biodiversity _____	2
JACKSON, K. Unusual colour variation in the legless skink, <i>Feylinia currori</i> _____	5
NATURAL HISTORY NOTES	
HEBBARD, S. AND P. CUNNINGHAM. <i>Phython anchietae</i> _____	8
PAUWELS, O. AND A. KAMDAM TOHAM. <i>Pseudohaje goldii</i> _____	10
VAN WYK, J. <i>Lamprophis fuliginosus</i> _____	11
CUNNINGHAM, P. AND K. E. SHILONGO. <i>Naja nigricollis nigricincta</i> _____	12
PIETERSEN, E. AND D. PIETERSEN. <i>Mehelya nyassae</i> _____	13
PIETERSEN, E. AND D. PIETERSEN. <i>Amblyodipsas polylepis</i> _____	14
PIETERSEN, D. AND PIETERSEN, D. <i>Crotaphopeltis hotamboeia</i> _____	15
VAN WYK, J. and C. SWARTS. <i>Cordylus giganteus</i> _____	16
BATES, M. <i>Bufo vertebralis</i> _____	17
PIETERSEN, D. <i>Hemisis marmoratus</i> _____	18
GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION	
PAUWELS, O. ET AL. <i>Pelusios marani</i> _____	20
BROADLEY, D. <i>Philothamnus carinatus</i> _____	22
BROADLEY, D. <i>Agama kirkii</i> _____	22
PIETERSEN, D. AND E. PIETERSEN. <i>Agama armata</i> _____	23
PIETERSEN, E. AND D. PIETERSEN. <i>Chamaesauria macrolepis macrolepis</i> _____	24
PIETERSEN, D. <i>Afrixalus delicatus</i> _____	24
RECENT AFRICAN HERPETOLOGICAL LITERATURE _____	25
HERPETOLOGICAL BOOKS _____	42
PRESS RELEASES _____	44

# AFRICAN HERP NEWS

NEWSLETTER OF THE  
HERPETOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION OF AFRICA



No. 35

October 2002



## 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: Nile Crocodile, *Crocodylus niloticus*, with hatchling Photo: Alison Leslie

## EDITORIAL

As the summer draws closer in the southern hemisphere it is time once again to elect a new H.A.A. Committee. African members have already submitted nomination forms. Within this issue, African members will also receive a voting slip/ ballot paper. Members have unfortunately shown little interest in the H.A.A. elections in the past. I urge you all to play an active role in this year's elections. Please take the time to fill in the ballot paper and to submit it to the relevant party. Remember that as members you are all very welcome to submit comments and any suggestions you may have concerning the running of the Association, including comments about the journal or newsletter. Many thanks in advance for your participation.

Please also take note of the short communication section on page 2. If you are a South African or working in South Africa, Che Weldon requires your assistance in identifying a possible new threat to the country's anuran biodiversity. A leaflet entitled "Frog submission form" is provided within this issue. If you can assist Che in any way, please do so.

This issue contains a number of exciting Natural History notes, new Geographical distributions and #23 of the "Recent African Herpetological Literature" series. Thanks to all those who submitted articles and news items for this issue of *African Herp News*. Keep them coming!

Alison Leslie

*Chair and Newsletter Editor.*

that *Steatomys* sp. (fat mouse) and *Mus minutoides* (pygmy mouse) form part of the house snakes diet in the then Transvaal. There is no detailed study about the diet of the brown house snake (Dr W.R. Branch, Port Elizabeth, pers. comm). Although there are no literature records of the stripe mouse, *Rhabdomys pumilio*, being part of the diet of the brown house snake, *Lamprophis fuliginosus*, it probably happens often according to Dr W.R. Branch (Port Elizabeth, pers. comm) who also witnessed such an event.

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## ELAPIDAE

### *Naja nigricollis nigricincta*

#### Western Barred Spitting Cobra or Zebra Snake

#### DIET

The Western Barred Spitting Cobra, or commonly known as the Zebra Snake (*Naja nigricollis nigricincta*) occurs in central and northern Namibia, extending into southern Angola (Branch 1998, Broadley 1983, Marais 1992). It is mainly nocturnal and favours rocky arid regions (Branch 1998, Marais 1992).

The diet of *N.n.nigricincta* is varied and includes reptiles, amphibians and small mammals (Branch 1998, Marais 1992). According to Branch (1998) the diet is similar to that of *Naja mossambica* (Mozambique Spitting Cobra) which also includes arthropods such as grasshoppers. On 6 May 2002 an adult *N.n.nigricincta* was observed in the northwest Kunene Region in Namibia, close to the village of Omunuandjai (due south of Opuwu) at approximately 14h00. This area is classified as Mopane Savanna by Giess (1971). The specimen – unaware that it was being observed – was foraging amongst Mopane (*Colophospermum mopane*) trees. During this observation it was seen preying on Mopane worms (*Imbrasia belina*), which it gently took from leaves close to the ground. Mopane worms are common in this area during autumn and frequently utilized as a source of food by humans.

As far as we could determine this is the first record of *N.n.nigricincta* preying on Mopane worms throughout its range. It is however not clear to what extent Mopane worms are included in the diet of *N.n.nigricincta*.

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## COLUBRIDAE

### *Mehelya nyassae*

#### Black File Snake

#### DIET AND DEFENSE

On 2 January 2002, a single specimen was caught on the tarred road, 2 km east of Klaserie (at the Hoedspruit-Klaserie junction, 2431CA, Northern Province, South Africa), on a rainy evening. The specimen was placed in a material bag and taken home to be identified.

While handling the snake it excreted an extremely pungent fluid from its cloaca, which was colourless. A tingling, burning sensation was experienced by one of the authors. This could probably have been due to an allergic reaction. The fluid stuck to the skin and could only be removed after washing many times with detergents, soap and water. This holds true for a specimen caught on 12 December 2000 at Kingfisherspruit ranger station in the Kruger National Park, South Africa. The specimen was found while it was consuming a Sundevall's Writhing Skink (*Lygosoma sundevallii sundevallii*) a day after a