

AFRICAN HERP NEWS

No. 32

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AFRICAN HERP NEWS

NEWSLETTER OF THE
HERPETOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION OF AFRICA



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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: East African Egg Eater, *Dasypeltis medici medici*. Photograph by Errol and Jeff Pietersen

EDITORIAL

Herewith the first issue of *African Herp News* for the New Year. I trust that 2001 has gotten off to go a good start for each and every one of you.

In the previous issue of the newsletter (Vol 31) you will hopefully have made note of the HAA Conference announcement. It is all go from here and the 6th HAA Symposium will be held in Stellenbosch from the 9-12 September 2001. The symposium is being organized by the Department of Zoology and the Department of Nature Conservation at the University of Stellenbosch. Within this volume of the newsletter (as a loose flyer) is the second conference announcement. Please read through this carefully and take note of the important deadlines. Pre-registration forms must be submitted to the Conference organizers by 30th April 2001. Application forms can be submitted electronically or by fax (see details on form). Abstracts are due by the 31st May and full payment for the conference is due by 30th June, 2001. A full conference programme is envisaged with some fun events, including a wine tour and a sheep/crocodile spit banquet. Please make every effort to attend the symposium. Spread the word as the more the merrier! And while still on the topic of the symposium: I hereby invite you to send nominations for individuals who have made an "*Exceptional Contribution to African Herpetology*". Nominations can be sent to the Chair, via either standard mail or e-mail. (for addresses see inside front cover).

Please note that due to increasing production and postage costs, HAA membership fees will be increased as of the 1st April 2001. Please see the back inside cover for further details.

Good news for authors contributing articles to the African Journal of Herpetology – the number of free reprints for authors has increased from 10 to 25.

A special thanks to all those who have contributed to this issue of the newsletter. Keep the articles/news coming and we will keep the newsletters flowing!

I look forward to seeing you all at the symposium.

Alison Leslie

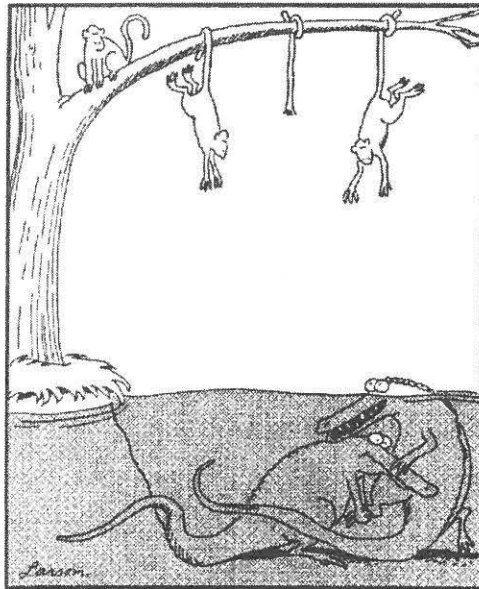
Chair and Newsletter Editor.

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

African Herp News publishes brief notes concerning the biology of the herpetofauna of 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 (using Bill Branch's *Field Guide to Snakes and other Reptiles of Southern Africa*, third edn. 1998, for reptiles; and Passmore & Carruthers' *South African frogs*, 1995, for amphibians as far as possible); **KEYWORD** (this should be one or two words best describing the topic of the note, eg. Reproduction, Avian predation, etc.); the Text (in concise English with only essential references quoted and in abbreviated form); **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).

Submitted by: **NAME**, Address (in parentheses).



"Okay, here we go again ... one ... two ..."

REPTILIA SAURIA

GEKKONIDAE

Pachydactylus haackei

Haacke's Thick-toed Gecko

REPRODUCTION

Two females from the vicinity of Grünau (2718Cb), 26 Karasburg district, Namibia, have been kept in a terrarium in Berlin, Germany, since 1994. In 1998 a male from Namibia without a known locality was added. The terrarium has a floor cover of fine sand and leaning sandstone flakes and a cork tube provides a retreat. It is illuminated by a neon tube and a spotlight.

The first batch of eggs was found glued to the inside of the upper third of the cork tube on 5 July, (northern hemisphere summer) 1998. The tube with the pair of eggs was transferred to a second terrarium, where they were kept at 26 - 28° C during the day and 18 - 22° C at night, until the young geckos hatched after 91 and 93 days, respectively. No further eggs were laid during that season.

The next batch of two eggs was stuck to the back wall of the terrarium near the mounting of the spot light on 20 March, 1999. They measured (length x breadth) at 16.3 x 12.7 mm and 14.9 x 12.7 mm respectively, were kept at 28 - 30° C by day and 25 - 27° C by night and hatched after 80 and 84 days. The hatchlings measurements were a) SVL = 34 mm, TL = 32 mm and b) SVL = 30 mm, TL = 27 mm. No further eggs were laid during that season. It appears as if their reproductive cycle has been adjusted to that of the northern hemisphere.

During the current season, 2000, the second female started laying on March 30, then on May 6 and a single egg on June 26. Of these the first pair was too close to the light fitting and overheated. The second pair could not be measured, as they were stuck to the inside of the cork tube. The three other eggs were measured at 15.3 x 15.3 mm, 16.5 x 16.0 mm and 16.0 x 15.5 mm respectively, but were later damaged. The two from inside the cork tube hatched on 26 and 27 July, after 81 and 82 days, respectively. The hatchlings measurements were a) SVL = 35.0, TL = 28.0 mm and b) SVL = 34.0, TL = 28.0 mm. Their measurements were rechecked on 24th October, ie: three months later and were as follows: a) SVL = 45.6mm, TL = 44.8mm and b) SVL = 50.1mm, TL = 49.8mm. The female was again gravid at the end of July.

FitzSimons (1943) made the apparently unusual statement that *P. namaquensis* laid eggs by "affixing them to rock faces, often in communal nests in batches of 30 – 40". This is unknown in other *Pachydactylus* species. The photograph (Plate X, Fig.6) in the same publication of one such batch was taken on Barby Farm (2516DC), Bethany district, Namibia. As this is within the accepted range of this species (Branch et al., 1996), it can now be accepted that those were eggs of *P. haackei*, a taxon not yet recognized in 1943. Although Branch (1999) repeats for *P. haackei* the statement previously made for *P. namaquensis* (Branch, 1988) nl. "Two large, round, hard-shelled eggs (16 mm diameter [similar to FitzSimons 1949 and the current new measurements]) are laid in a rock crack. Communal egg sites may contain many eggs". If this statement is based on observations, it may apply to *P. namaquensis* specifically, as the senior author has information, which will be published later, that the laying process in *P. kladeroderma* differs significantly from that of *P. haackei* and he expects that it may differ from *P. namaquensis* as well.

The present observations and indications of differences in the reproductive strategies in the *P. namaquensis* complex should be verified in the field.

References

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GEKKONIDAE

Pachydactylus punctatus

Speckled Thick-toed Gecko

REPRODUCTION

Two pairs of this gecko were collected in April 1996 near Chapman's Tree (20° E 29.40'S, 25° E 14.93'S) in the central area of the Makgadikgadi Pan system, Central District, Botswana. They were found as pairs under the loose bark of logs in association with termites. They were taken to Germany and placed into two separate terraria (25x25x25 cm) in the combination as found in nature. A 40W neon tube provides illumination, the substrate is fine sand, a piece of bark provides shelter on the ground, while a stone mosaic against the back wall provides climbing facilities. Small crickets, waxmoths and their larvae, fruitflies and meadow sweepings are provided as food.

The first eggs were laid during the following northern spring, when each pair produced one batch of 2 hard shelled eggs with mean dimensions of 8.00 x 5.80 mm. They hatched after 55 (+/- 5) days in an incubator at temperatures varying between 28° and 30° C. Additional observations were made on these geckos while keeping them in captivity for the next four years. As previously mentioned, each pair was kept in a separate terrarium where the above mentioned eggs were produced. After the first season one of the males died and the single female was transferred into the terrarium of the remaining pair. After a short while the 'widowed' female became dominant. This also became evident in her physical condition as she managed to capture more of the prey items than the other two individuals. During this season no eggs were laid. During the following season the former 'pairs' female, which was now dominated by the 'widowed' female, was removed from the terrarium. Again no eggs were produced during the entire season. Only once the original pair was reunited and the 'widow' removed during the following, i.e. the fourth season, were further eggs produced (one pair and then a single egg). The fact that reproduction only occurred once again when the original combination of partners was re-established, could be an indication that this species might be monogamous, possibly mating for life.

Of the seven hatchlings (mean size SVL = 14.0 mm., TL = 15.0 mm) two surviving females attained adulthood and therefore possible sexual maturity after two years. However, in the absence of available males this could not be determined. The senior author is under the impression that in nature adults tend to occur in pairs, while sub-adults and juveniles are found singly.

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