

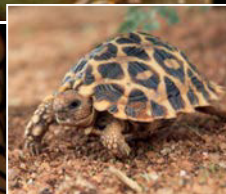
NUMBER 62 | JUNE 2015

AHN

AFRICAN HERP NEWS



Giant Legless Skinks
Agonistic Behaviour



Serrated Tent Tortoise
Winter Activity



Banded Caecilian
Behaviour



Eastern Shield Cobra
Distribution

HAA

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NEWSLETTER

EDITOR'S NOTE

Articles shall be considered for publication provided that they are original and have not been published elsewhere. Articles will be submitted for peer review at the Editor's discretion. Authors are requested to submit manuscripts by e-mail in MS Word '.doc' or '.docx' format.

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COVER PHOTOGRAPH: *Dendroaspis jamesoni* from Soyo, Angola. Photograph by: Warren Klein.

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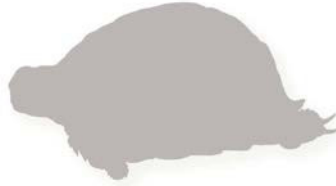
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TESTUDINIDAE

Psammobates oculifer Kuhl, 1820

SERRATED TENT TORTOISE



WINTER ACTIVITY

Psammobates oculifer has been reported as typically dormant or semi-dormant over extended periods during the colder winter months in southern Africa i.e., at least 4-5 months (Boycott & Bourquin 2000); while Branch (2008) reports dormancy from March-September with individuals often half buried in red sand. Cunningham (2014) notes that a single, adult animal maintained in an urban garden (indigenous plants) in Windhoek, Namibia during 2013 settled into sustained winter dormancy for a period of more than four months between May and September at the base of a *Aloe arborescens*, although "...it regularly shifted body position".

As part of a larger study we have been following wild telemetered *P. oculifer* in typical thorn bush savannah 45 km SE of Windhoek since December 2013 (Hohewarte Guest Farm, Windhoek, Namibia; 22° 38' 39" S, 17° 24' 12" E). Six tortoises (5 male, 1 female) were tracked and GPS positions recorded between 7 and 12 times (total = 57) for each tortoise during the winter period 01 May-02 August 2014. To account for GPS accuracy (\pm 5m) we considered any individual tortoise's consecutive moves of

<10 m to be non-moves. An automated weather station was installed at our study site, recording air temperature at 20 cm above the ground.

Home range minimum convex polygons for this period ranged from 0.3-4.4 ha. Of the 57 tortoise GPS observations, 52 (91%) comprised tortoises that had moved from their previous location. Allowing for at least one week between observations the minimum distance moved was 13 m over 6 days and the maximum was 224 m over 8 days. Our results are consistent with Keswick (2012), who found *P. oculifer* (n = 25) at Benfontein farm, near Kimberley, South Africa, to be active in the winter under favourable daytime temperatures (afternoons 18-20 °C), in spite of typically cold nights (2-5 °C). At our study site from May to August the average daytime high was 27.3 °C and the average nighttime low was -0.5 °C.

We caution the broad use of the term dormant or semi-dormant to describe *P. oculifer* winter behaviour, as results clearly indicate that they are active in the dry, cold winter months, because even following cold nights daytime temperatures are frequently warm enough to initiate activity.

Photo for image reference provided by John Marais

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Photo Jill Heaton

Neonate Serrated Tent tortoise (*Psammobates oculifer*) found in early 2015 at Hohewarte Guest Farm, Windhoek, Namibia.