

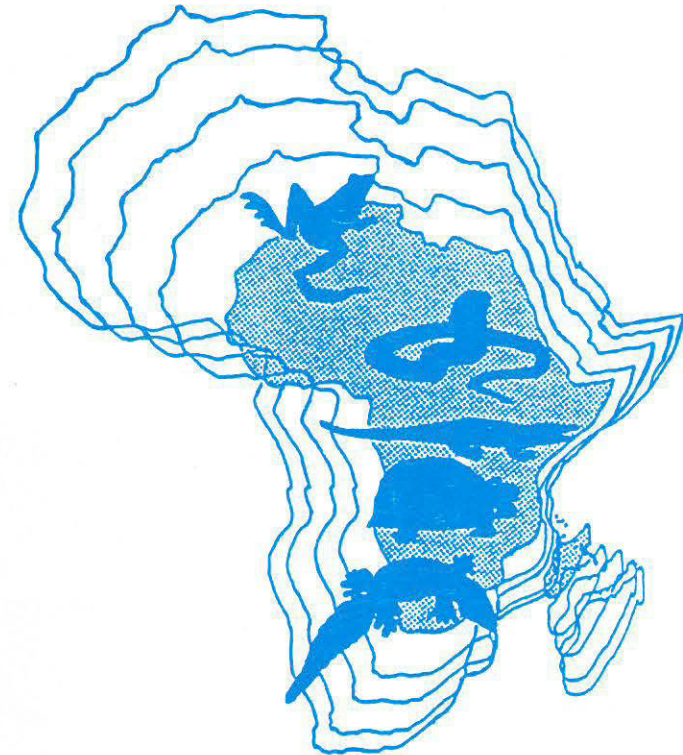
AFRICAN HERP NEWS

NO. 26: JULY 1997

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AFRICAN HERP NEWS

HERPETOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION OF AFRICA
NEWSLETTER

JULY 1997

NO. 26

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).

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 disk in ASCII 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.

Typist:

Ms A. Lombaard, National Museum, Bloemfontein.

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EDITORIAL

It is with some sadness that I write this, my last editorial. Having served three consecutive terms as Chairman/Newsletter Editor over a period of seven years, the H.A.A. has become very much a part of my life. I am thankful for the many opportunities I have had to correspond with and meet members, and have thoroughly enjoyed my work as editor of *African Herp News*.

From the start of my first term I initiated various changes to the style and format of the newsletter. Firstly, the Committee agreed to change the title of the newsletter. *African Herp News* #13 (August 1990) was the first newsletter to appear with a hard paper cover. In general, few changes were made until *African Herp News* #17 (June 1992), which featured a *Bibliographic Index to the Journal* by Rod Douglas, and was the first to be formatted with lines at the top and bottom of each page. In 1993, after a policy change to the Journal, it was decided that the Life History Notes, Geographical Distribution, and Venoms and Snakebite sections would be transferred to the newsletter. This resulted in a flood of extra newsletter contributions, the first of which appeared in *African Herp News* #21 (July 1994). Later, at the General Meeting during the St Lucia symposium (October 1995), it was decided that the Newsletter Editor should send articles requiring review to at least two referees for their opinions. This practice was initiated from *African Herp News* #24 (December 1995). Recently, in *African Herp News* #25 (October 1996), a double-column format was introduced, section headings and titles of articles were set in blocks, and glossy paper used. All of the above changes were made in an attempt to produce a neater and more attractive newsletter.

Producing the newsletter was always a pleasant challenge. I was never short of newsletter material (for which I thank you the member) and I could always be certain of posting an *African Herp News* which had at least something of interest for everyone. Editing and proof-reading a newsletter takes up a fair amount of time, but seeing the

finished product is always a rewarding experience. However, while I have thoroughly enjoyed the job, I must echo what Bill Branch said in 1993 when resigning as editor of the Journal after 11 years: "It will be a pleasure to open an envelope with a NEW journal (= newsletter) in it, and read something that I haven't spent the last six months bringing to fruition".

In the past several members were concerned about the relatively infrequent appearance of H.A.A. publications. I stated in my first Editorial (*African Herp News* #13) that it was my prime objective to ensure that the Association's Newsletter and Journal appeared more frequently. This situation has improved considerably and members now regularly receive two newsletters and two journals per year. During my seven years in office 14 issues of *African Herp News* (#13 to #26; 810 pages in all, average of 58 pages per newsletter) and 11 Journals (#38, edited by Johan Marais and myself; #39 to #42, edited by Bill Branch; and #43, #44 [parts 1 & 2], #45 [1 & 2] and #46 [1], edited by le Fras Mouton) were produced.

Accreditation status for the journal is another matter which has been questioned on several occasions this decade. Following various improvements to the journal it is now likely that an application for accreditation status will be made at the end of 1997.

As this is my last newsletter, I take this opportunity to thank all those who have served on committees with me or assisted in any other way. Your co-operation and suggestions were invaluable. A special word of thanks to: my colleague Rod Douglas who has on many occasions offered valuable advice and support; Frank Farquharson, who on occasion has given me a damn hard time, has been an excellent and diligent Secretary/Treasurer largely responsible for the Association's very healthy financial situation; Le Fras Mouton for his competence and co-operation while Journal Editor; Bill Branch for his advice and regular newsletter contributions (e.g. book reviews); Gerald Haagner who's endless supply of Life History Notes almost led me to create a special

REPORT ON A COLLECTION OF LIZARDS FROM OWAMBO DISTRICT, NORTHERN NAMIBIA

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Little has been published on the occurrence of lizards in the Owambo district since Robert Mertens' (1955, 1971) papers on the reptiles and amphibians of Namibia. Collecting in this region was restricted during the 1970s and 1980s because of military activity during the South Africa - Angola War.

The Owambo district, situated in central northern Namibia, is the most densely populated region of that country (Marsh & Seely, 1992). A variety of vegetation types cover the region, with mopane woodland and palm savanna dominating (Claassen & Page, 1978).

Over a three-day period from 22-24 May 1996, 13 localities in the Owambo district were visited (Appendix 1). The main aim of the trip was to collect *Agama etoshae* for a project on their reproduction and distribution (NJLH). A total of 100 lizards assignable to nine species (one gekkonid, three agamids, two scincids and three lacertids) were collected, with an additional sight record of a gerrhosaurid.

In most cases 4-5 persons went on foot searching for terrestrial, and occasionally arboreal, lizards which were captured either by hand or by shooting them with stretched rubber bands. The majority of specimens were deposited in the preserved collection of the National Museum, Bloemfontein (NMB). Numbers preceded by "FN" are National Museum field numbers; these specimens will be sent for deposition in the collection of the National Museum of Namibia, Windhoek.

The collection is documented below, together with comments on habitat, behaviour, distribution and taxonomic status.

SPECIES ACCOUNTS

Gekkonidae

Pachydactylus turneri (Gray 1864)

Turner's Gecko

One specimen: Omuulu (NMB R7450).

A single specimen (74 mm SVL) with distinctly keeled dorsal tubercles was found under reeds outside a hut. This identification, using a diagnostic key translated into English by Prof. Aaron Bauer, is based on the revision of the *Pachydactylus bibronii* - *laevigatus* complex by H. Benyr (1995), with the substitution of the name *turneri* for *laevigatus* based on priority.

Agamidae

Agama aculeata aculeata Merrem 1820

Western Ground Agama

Eighteen specimens: Ohakweenyanga (NMB R7425); Omutha (NMB R7418-20, FN 4002, 4006); Onanakali (NMB R7421-24, FN 4020-21, 4024, 4027-28); Omuulu (NMB R7417); Onandi (NMB R7426); Oukango (NMB R7416).

Fourth toe on both feet longer than 3rd (typical for this subspecies: McLachlan, 1981) in 14, but shorter in four, specimens; 17-21 (19 in eight specimens) lamellae under 4th toe of right foot. Four males (74-99 mm SVL) had 9-12 pre-cloacal pores. Largest male (NMB R7417) 99 mm SVL + 137 mm tail length = 236 mm total length; largest female (NMB R7421) 100 mm SVL.

According to McLachlan (1981) *A. a. aculeata* is distinguished from *A. a. distanti* by its smooth (vs. rugose) dorsal head shields, 18-24 (vs. 11-17) lamellae under the fourth toe, and fourth toe longer (not

shorter) than third. Most of the specimens collected key out as *A. a. aculeata* with reference to all three criteria listed above. However, several head shields are somewhat ridged in NMB R7416, 7420, 7425, while a few are keeled in FN 4021. Also, the third toe on both feet is longer than the fourth in NMB R7416 and 7420, and FN 4006 and 4020. NMB R7420 also has only 17 subdigital lamellae on the fourth toe of the right foot, and could therefore be considered an *A. a. distanti* using the above criteria; while NMB R7416 is similar, but has 19 subdigital lamellae. The last two specimens nevertheless have mainly smooth head shields, and all other variations mentioned above are here considered minor. All specimens are therefore referred to the nominate subspecies.

Usually found in sandy areas with sparse, low thorn bushes, although a male from Omuulu was discovered under the trunk of a felled tree, and another male from Oukango ran across a sandy opening and climbed the trunk of a mopane tree *Colophospermum mopane* (Kirk ex Benth.) to a height of about 50 cm before being captured.

Agama etoshae McLachlan 1981

Etosha Agama

Fifty-three specimens: Echama (NMB R7408-13, FN 4090, 4092-93, 4095-96); Emono (NMB R7390-91, FN 4035); Ohakweenyanga (NMB R7392-95, 7415, FN 4042, 4046-48); Ompundja (NMB R7396-407, FN 4057, 4070-71, 4074-77, 4080-81, 4085-86); Onanakali (NMB R7389); Onyaanya (NMB R7387-88, FN 4013-14); Oshinadhila (NMB R7414, FN 4100).

Largest male (NMB R7406) 75 + 73 = 148 mm; largest female (NMB R7412) 78 + 50 = 128 mm.

Usually found in open, sandy areas with a few scattered, low bushes in or near palm savanna or at the ecotone between mopane and palm biomes; a young male (NMB R7391) was discovered under a section of black cloth and had an overall dark greyish colour. In a sandy, open, overgrazed area at Ompundja, individual adults and juveniles were observed at the mouths of burrows,

into which they retreated when disturbed; burrows were usually situated in close proximity to small thorn bushes. These lizards are well camouflaged but usually easily captured when in the open and away from burrows. Males usually have short orange, black and/or brown stripes on a yellowish throat, together with a characteristic black spot-like marking at the base of the throat; females have a white gular region, sometimes with brown or grey streaks only, and the throat turns a pinkish-orange shade during the breeding season (NJLH, pers. obs.). This species is sympatric with *A. a. aculeata* at Ohakweenyanga and Onanakali. The throat of the latter has broken or continuous dark stripes, although a black marking at the base of the throat is occasionally also present. Other characters used to distinguish the two species in the field are: in *A. etoshae* there are usually three pairs of distinct, dark, oval-shaped paravertebral markings on the back between the fore- and hindlimbs, the inner part of each oval with a distinct white border, the belly is immaculate and the ear opening minute; while in *A. a. aculeata* dorsal markings are more variable and not as distinctive, grey reticulations are often present on the underparts and the diameter of the ear opening is more than half that of the eye cleft.

Acanthocercus atricollis (A. Smith 1849)

Tree Agama

One specimen: Ompundja (NMB R7427); Omuulu (sight record).

The captured specimen (59 mm SVL) was found in bushes in a sandy area, the other was an adult observed high up in the branches of a tree. In the western half of southern Africa this species occurs only in the Owamboland area (Branch, 1988).

Scincidae

Mabuya binotata (Bocage 1867)

Ovambo Tree Skink

One specimen: Omuulu (NMB R7441).

A large specimen (about 126 mm SVL, damaged) was found about 2 m up at the edge of a hollow in a large mopane tree in mopane woodland. The lizard was whitish-

grey with a distinct black band from behind the eye to above the shoulder. The geographical range of *M. binotata* is restricted to northern Namibia and southern Angola (Branch, 1988) and corresponds closely with that of the mopane tree *C. mopane* (Coates-Palgrave, 1977) in Namibia.

Mabuya striata wahlbergii (Peters 1869)

Wahlberg's Striped Skink
Sixteen specimens: Elundu area (NMB R7430-32); Emono (NMB R7437-38, FN 4039); Ompundja (NMB R7440); Omuulu (NMB R7429); Onanakali (NMB R7435-36, FN 4019); Onandi (NMB R7439); Onhinda (NMB R7433); Onyaanya (NMB R7434); Oukango (NMB R7428, FN 3984).

Supraciliaries 5; supralabials anterior to subocular 5-6 (4 on right side in NMB R7434); subocular in contact with lip (excluded on right side of head in NMB R7440 and FN 4019); lamellae under 4th finger of right hand 14-17; mid-body scale rows usually 34-38 (32 in NMB R7428); mid-dorsal scales tricarinate.

Habitat utilization in this very common skink apparently depends on size. The smallest lizards (30-40 mm SVL; $n = 5$) were found in sandy areas with scattered bushes (at the base of which they take shelter), sometimes near trees; one juvenile (NMB R7437, 38 mm SVL) was observed taking shelter in a hole (upper diameter c. 10 mm, near a small thorn bush) from which it reappeared after a few minutes. Larger lizards (48-71 mm SVL; four males, two females, gonads examined) occupied small trees, standing or felled. The largest individuals (73-88 mm SVL; two males, three females, gonads examined) were usually found 1-2 m up on the trunks of large mopane or palm trees; in some cases 3-4 adults were observed on or around the base of a tree trunk, and almost every palm tree, as well as mopane trees in open areas, seemed to have at least one resident adult. In only one case was what appeared to be a subadult seen with these larger adults. At Onanakali a fairly large individual was observed on a tall termitarium.

The Owamboland skinks did not have the brown, unstriped colour pattern of "typical" *M. s. wahlbergii* as illustrated in Branch (1988, pl. 54). Large adults closely resembled a Botswana specimen photographed by Auerbach (1987, pl. 10). The large Owamboland skinks had grey-brown dorsa and flanks, with occasional dark markings; scattered pale flecks and numerous larger dark markings present only in NMB R7435, which has a dorsal pattern intermediate between large and medium sized specimens; a fairly distinct 2-3 scale-wide cream coloured dorso-lateral stripe present from behind the eye to the tail base from where it fades, the stripe being most distinct on the anterior half of the body; venter white, gular region with numerous distinct black speckles usually extending only to the level of ear openings, but more extensive in the largest specimen (88 + 82r = 170 mm; NMB R7434, male); gular markings virtually absent in one female (NMB R7435). The throat was orange in a few large specimens observed on tree trunks at Ompundja. At Ompundja NMB R7440 (75 mm SVL) was taken from a small tree outside a building - only the labials and anterior part of the dorso-lateral stripes were orange. Medium sized specimens differed in having light brown dorsa and flanks with varying amounts of black and white speckling. Monard (1937) noted that the most "colourful" of his "typical" *M. striata* (= *M. s. wahlbergii*) had black and white spots on the flanks. Dorso-lateral stripes (two-scales-wide) tended to fade out from about midbody. Top of head brown, virtually free of dark markings which are present in smaller and larger specimens; markings on the throat grey, indistinct and fewer in number. The smallest specimens had dark brown dorsa with numerous dark speckles, the dorso-lateral stripes and throat were similar to the latter group. The black band from behind the eye often reaches to beyond the level of the shoulder, extending to the level of the hind limbs in the medium sized group, in which it is also most distinct.

Broadley (1977) reviewed the *Mabuya striata* complex in south-eastern Africa, excluding Namibia and Angola, but nevertheless referred Mertens' (1955) northern and

central Namibian *M. s. striata* (Peters) records to *M. s. wahlbergii* (see map in Branch 1988). More recently the latter subspecies was recorded from south-eastern Angola (Branch & McCartney, 1992) and the Western Caprivi (Haacke, 1996).

Lacertidae

Pedioplanis lineoocellata cf. *pulchella* (Gray 1845)

Spotted Sandveld Lizard

One specimen: Onyaanya (NMB R7447).

A single specimen (35 + 54r = 89 mm) was collected at 13h10 in a sandy area with scattered, low thorn bushes, into which it ran. It was collected in sympatry with *Heliobolus lugubris* at this locality. The specimen had a blue-grey dorsum with a pale dorso-lateral stripe from behind the eye extending onto the tail where it faded away. Black and white spots present on upper parts of limbs, dorsum (especially between stripes) and anterior half of tail; white spots often superimposed on the duller dorso-lateral stripes. This is the most northerly record for the species and only the third quarter-degree record for Owamboland; only four quarter-degree records exist north of 21°S latitude in Namibia (see Visser, 1984a; Branch, 1988). The specimen is referable to *P. l. pulchella* on the basis of its weakly keeled, granular and juxtaposed posterior dorsals. The upper head shields are not noticeably rugose and the scales on the posterior part of the back are generally smaller than those on the tibia (lower leg). *P. l. pulchella* occurs in the southern parts of the subcontinent (Branch, 1988), with an apparently isolated population concentrated in the Northern Province of South Africa (Jacobsen, 1990). However, Jacobsen (1990) also recorded the typical subspecies in the same general area. He noted (p. 487) that *P. l. pulchella* "forms part of a complex of forms which currently have been lumped under a single species *P. lineoocellata*"; and that the "*P. lineoocellata* complex is in need of a thorough revision".

Nucras holubi (Steindachner 1882)

Holub's Sandveld Lizard

One specimen: Emono (NMB R7448).

A single specimen (43 mm SVL) was found in a sandy area with scattered bushes. It occurs in sympatry with *Heliobolus lugubris* at this locality. Jacobsen (1990) treats the large "ornata" morph of *N. taeniolata ornata* (Gray) (see Broadley, 1972) as a full species, while Bates (1996) considers the smaller "holubi" morph also to be specifically distinct from typical *N. taeniolata* (A. Smith). This locality appears to be the only the third quarter-degree record for Owambo district; it is only the eleventh quarter-degree record for Namibia (Broadley, 1972; Visser, 1984b). Apart from an Oshakati specimen (1715DC; locality incorrectly plotted on the maps of Broadley, 1972 and Visser, 1984b) the nearest other records are about 220 km to the west and about 220 km to the south-east.

Heliobolus lugubris (A. Smith 1838)

Bushveld Lizard

Eight specimens: Emono (NMB R7445-46, FN 4031, 4036); Omuthea (NMB R7442); Onanakali (NMB R7444); Onyaanya (NMB R7443, FN 4009).

This cursorial lacertid is the most commonly encountered in the area, all specimens being found in sandy areas with scattered bushes into which they take refuge. The series of specimens demonstrates the gradual change in colour pattern with increasing size/age. Juveniles (smallest 39 mm SVL, FN 4031) are a blackish colour both ventrally and dorsally, with large white spots on the back. With increasing SVL the black is replaced with a grey-brown and both median (most distinct) and dorso-lateral stripes become more prominent. The largest specimens (largest 54 mm SVL, NMB R7442) collected have grey backs, the black remaining on the flanks and in the form of bars between the stripes, while only a patch of black remains mid-ventrally on the whitish belly. The upper surfaces of the limbs are decorated with white spots, these being most prominent in young lizards. In all specimens examined the

median stripe divides at the level of the forelimb insertion, each fork ending at the back of the head posterior to the parietals.

DISCUSSION

This paper represents a small contribution to our knowledge on the lizards of Owamboland, documenting new distribution records for nine species, namely one gekkonid, three agamids, two scincids and three lacertids (including a northerly range extension for *Pedioplanis lineocellata*). Three size classes of *Mabuya striata wahlbergii* were apparent on the basis of shared colour patterns and microhabitat utilization.

Apart from the lizards discussed above, a few additional reptiles and frogs were observed. A large *Gerrhosaurus* (? *nigrolineatus*) was observed in a sandy clearing between bushes in the Elundu area; the only other congeneric species recorded from the area is *G. multilineatus* Bocage (Mertens, 1955, 1971; Branch, 1988). At mid-day at Onanakali what appeared to be an adult sand snake (*Psammophis* sp.) was observed grasping and constricting a medium sized *Agama a. aculeata* at the edge of a thorn bush. It released the lizard when disturbed, but a few minutes later the same scenario presented itself on the opposite side of the bush, both participants again escaping capture. At Onhinda what appeared to be a large spitting cobra, *Naja nigricollis nigricincta* Bogert, was seen entering a hollow in the trunk of a large mopane tree. Numerous *Cacosternum boettgeri* (Boulenger) and a lesser number of *Tomopterna cryptotis* (Boulenger) frogs were found in cracks in partially dried mud at Emono; while a large adult *Bufo garmani* Meek was observed at Ohakweenyanga.

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Appendix 1: Localities, with map co-ordinates (quarter-degree units in parentheses), for lizards collected and observed in Owamboland.

Ehama	17°49'S,	15°43'E	(1715DC)
Elundu area	17°28'30"S,	16°33'E	(1716BC)
Emono (2 km SW of Onayena)	17°58'S,	16°11'E	(1716CC)
Ohakweenyanga (near Oshinyadhila)	17°49'S,	15°47'30"E	(1715DD)
Omuthea (near Onyati)	18°12'15"S,	16°23'E	(1816AB)
Ompundja	17°57'30"S,	15°40'E	(1715DC)
Omuulu	17°30'20"S,	16°10'E	(1716CA)
Onanakali	18°11'S,	16°22'E	(1816AB)
Onandi	18°07'30"S,	16°20'E	(1816AB)
Onhinda	17°38'S,	16°30'45"E	(1716DA)
Onyaanya (30 km SE of Ondangwa)	18°04'55"S,	16°17'E	(1816AB)
Oshinadhila (= Oshinyadhila)	17°50'S,	16°46'30"E	(1716DD)
Oukango	17°28'30"S,	16°17'30"E	(1716AD)