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been well studied!

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***Trachylepis capensis* (Gray, 1830)
Cape Skink**

SIZE

On 6 December 2003, in heavily grazed mountain grassland on the summit ridge of the Lebombo Mountains in the Manyiseni region, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa (26°58'54"S, 31°59'42"E; 2631DD) we collected a very large female Cape Skink (*Trachylepis capensis*). Measurements for the skink were: snout-vent length (SVL) 136 mm; tail length 163 mm (tip lost and partially regenerated; and live weight 61.5 g.

Another very large female Cape Skink was also captured in October 2002, in mountain grassland on the summit of the Lebombo Mountains, but about five kilometres south of Ingwavuma. On capture it was of similar size to the Manyiseni female, but after being kept in captivity for over a year, during which it fed regularly on grasshoppers, and occasionally on small *Platysaurus lebomboensis*, it measured: SVL 138 mm; tail length 170 mm; and live weight 76.4 g.

Both of these exceptionally large females surpass the previously largest recorded size (SVL 135 mm) for the species (Branch, 1998, *Snakes and Other Reptiles of Southern Africa*, Struik Publishers, Cape Town). Moreover, both were exceptionally heavy-bodied.

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***Trachylepis margaritifer* (Peters, 1854)
Rainbow Skink**

COMMENSALISM

Number 7 Antelope Road, Matseumhlope, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, borders the Hillside Dams, and a large syenite rock outcrop extends well into the garden. Three species of *Trachylepis* occur on the property, and when I first moved into the house 20 years ago *T. margaritifer* and *T. varia* were found only on the kopje, while *T. (striata) wahlbergii* lived around the house and garden, but was rarely found on the kopje.

During the last 12 months or so, *T. margaritifer* have largely deserted the kopje and started living around the house, retreating under flower-pot stands and rocks bordering the fishpond when disturbed. *T. wahlbergii* still occurs around the house, but gives way to the adult Rainbow Skinks in any dispute over refuges. From January 2005 several clutches of eggs (apparently laid in plat pots, etc.) have hatched out and the surroundings of the house and yard are alive with hatchlings of *T. margaritifer*. *T. wahlbergii* is now the commoner species on the kopje.

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REPTILIA : CHELONIA

TESTUDINIDAE

***Geochelone pardalis* (Bell, 1828)
Leopard Tortoise**

PREY

Leopard tortoise (*Geochelone pardalis*) remains were found beneath the nest of a Verreaux's Eagle (*Aquila verreauxii*) on the farm Swartfontein in western Namibia. Swartfontein farm lies partly on the escarpment between the Namib Desert and the Namibian interior in the general area known as Sreetshoogte Pass. Two Verreaux's Eagle nests, approximately 11.5km apart, are known in the area, one being on high escarpment cliffs while the other was in an area of granite 'kopjes' set back about 4 km from the true escarpment. Both nests seem to lie within the territory of one pair of eagles, although only the granite kopje nest had *G. pardalis* remains. Approximately 8 broken carapaces indicating at least 6 individuals of *G. pardalis* were located below the nest situated on a cliff face. The size of the *G. pardalis* individuals preyed upon, as determined from the carapace remains, indicate that only adult *G. pardalis* individuals were preyed upon. The area below the escarpment nest also was littered with klipspringer skulls and the remains of one baboon.

G. pardalis are usually preyed upon as juveniles by a variety of mammalian, reptilian and avian predators while adults are preyed upon by humans (Boycott & Bourquin 2000. *The Southern African Tortoise Book*. Russel Friedman Books, Halfway House). Another threat to adult *G. pardalis* include veld fires (Branch 1998. *Field Guide to Snakes and Other Reptiles of Southern Africa*. Struik Publishers, Cape Town).

According to Steyn (1982. *Birds of Prey of Southern Africa*. David Philip Publishers, Cape Town) the Verreaux's Eagle is extremely prey specific with Dassies (*Procapra capensis*) very rarely constituting less than 90% of its prey and reptiles – including tortoises – occasionally preyed on. The tortoise species included in the diet

are however not indicated. Maclean (1993. *Roberts' Birds of Southern Africa*. John Voelcker Bird Book Fund, Cape Town) states that reptiles are "less often" included in the diet of Verreaux's Eagle.

Hawes (2005. Feeding habits of Verreaux's Eagle. *Africa – Birds & Birding*, February/March 2005: 9-10) recently documented *Chersina angulata* (Angulate tortoise) as constituting 36.7% of the prey of Verreaux's Eagle in the Cederberg in the Western Cape. Our observation indicates that Verreaux's Eagle in Namibia preys upon non-juvenile *G. pardalis*. *G. pardalis* are probably selected for due to their relatively larger size than most other species occurring in Namibia or their abundance in the area. Steyn (2005. Prey of Verreaux's Eagle. *Africa – Birds & Birding*, June/July 2005: 9-10) suggests that Verreaux's Eagles may exploit a locally abundant food source whenever available. The extent to which tortoises are included in the diet of Verreaux's Eagle in Namibia is unknown and warrants further investigation.

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REPTILIA : SERPENTES

COLUBRIDAE

***Mehelya nyassae* (Günther, 1888)** **Black File Snake**

DIET

On 31 October 1990 a large (348 + 95 mm) female Black File Snake (*Mehelya nyassae*) was collected in Dune Forest scrub on the edge of the garden of Madlangula House overlooking the third lake in the Kosi Bay Nature Reserve, Ingwavuma District, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa (2732DD, 26°56'S, 32°50'E). The snake was struggling with a large dead prey item that it had partially swallowed headfirst. The snake was killed and after death a large (167 mm SVL) Golden Legless Skink (*Typhlosaurus aurantiacus*) was removed from the snake's throat. The head of the skink showed signs of digestion indicating that the skink had been ingested (at least partially) some time prior to the snake being killed.

Although *M. nyassae* is known to feed on snakes and a variety of semi-fossorial skinks, e.g. *Scelotes* and *Panaspis* (Shine, R., W.R. Branch, P.S. Harlow & J.K. Webb, 1995. Sexual dimorphism, reproductive biology and food habits of two species of African filesnakes (*Mehelya*, Colubridae). *J. Zool.(Lond.)* **240**: 327-340, this is the first record of predation on *Typhlosaurus*.

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***Crotaphopeltis hotamboeia* (Laurenti, 1768)**

Herald Snake

MAXIMUM SIZE

In March 2003 three Herald Snakes (*Crotaphopeltis hotamboeia*) were confiscated from a resident of Port Elizabeth who was in possession of the snakes without the relevant permits from the Eastern Cape conservation authorities. The snakes were from an unknown locality, but believed to have been recently imported, illegally, from Zimbabwe where they were probably wild-caught. This was supported by the pale upper labials, which had only a faint red flush in all specimens. Herald snakes from the Eastern Cape have prominent red upper labials, from which the common name Red-lipped Snake derives. However, snakes from Zimbabwe have white or dark brown lip (Broadley, D.G., & Cock, E., 1975, *Snakes of Zimbabwe*, Longman Zimbabwe, Harare), whilst further north in East Africa the upper labials are usually white (for which reason it is known as the White-lipped Cat Snake). The largest of the confiscated series (PEM R5516) is a giant male that measures 751 + 140 = 891 mm in length. This easily exceeds the previous maximum sizes published for males of the species (696 mm SVL [810 mm TL]), Bulawayo, Broadley & Cock, *op. cit.*; 700 mm SVL, Keogh *et al* 2000, *Afr. J. Herpetol.*, **49**: 129-137; 701 mm SVL, Branch, 1998, *Snakes and Other Reptiles of Southern Africa*, Struik Publishers, Cape Town).

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***Lamprophis capensis* (Duméril & Bibron, 1854)**

Brown House Snake

DIET

A sub-adult Brown house Snake (*Lamprophis fuliginosus*) was killed on 1 of February 2004 at Plot 127, De Wildt near the R513 road between Pretoria and Brits (29