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African Herp News

Newsletter of the Herpetological Association of Africa



RANIDAE***Pyxicephalus adspersus*
African Bullfrog****EMERGENCE BEHAVIOUR**

On the 29th October 2002, during a night drive at Rietvlei Nature Reserve (25°52'S; 28°17'E; 1493m a.s.l.) on the Acacia route, we saw an adult male African Bullfrog on the tar road at 19:30. We stopped and picked it up and found its body covered with wet soil, which indicated that it had emerged the same day. After examination of the frog, it was released. No other African Bullfrogs were observed on the tar road for the duration of the drive. October 2002 was a relatively dry month at Rietvlei Nature Reserve, with only 18.5mm (7th and 8th October) rain until the 25th October. On the 26th 10.5mm fell, none on 27th October and 7.5mm on the 28th (Riaan Marais, *pers. comm.*). This indicates only 18mm of rain had fallen in the preceding time before the bullfrog emerged. All the temporary ponds were still dry and no breeding could have taken place. Two more bullfrogs were found on separate occasions in December 2002, but there were no recorded attempts of breeding at all at Rietvlei Nature Reserve for the 2002/2003 breeding season for African Bullfrogs (Riaan Marais, *pers. comm.*). Rietvlei Nature Reserve is the only protected area in the Gauteng province where the African Bullfrog is known to breed. In other areas of Pretoria successful breeding did take place during 2002/2003. The standard literature states that African Bullfrogs need 65mm of rain or more to emerge and to breed (Channing, A. 2001. *Amphibians of Central and Southern Africa*, Protea Book house, Pretoria, p.470. It seems far less rain can cause some bullfrogs to emerge. For successful breeding much more rain is required in order for temporary ponds to fill up. African Bullfrogs can also emerge in any particular season and without not necessarily breeding.

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REPTILIA : CHELONIA**TESTUDINIDAE*****Homopus signatus signatus*
Namaqualand speckled padloper****AGGRESSIVE COURTSHIP BEHAVIOUR**

Courtship behaviour in captive *Homopus signatus signatus* has been described to consist of a male constantly following a female, and head-bobbing prior to mounting attempts (Loehr, 1999, *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* 3:468-473). Within the stud-book on this species at the Homopus Research Foundation (to date six mating pairs or groups), no aggressive courtship behaviour was observed between 1995 and 2004.

A female (SCL 99.0 mm) that had been housed in a wild-caught group consisting of a male and another female died on 14 May 2004. The group had been kept together since 1995, and the male had always shown typical courtship behaviour towards both females. The enclosure had a surface of app. 150 x 150 cm and contained many hiding places and visual barriers. On 16 May 2004 the dead female was replaced by a reproductively active captive-bred daughter born on 30 November 1996 (SCL 98.5 mm) (note: eggs would not be incubated as they would result in inbred specimens). Courtship behaviour of the male was extended to this female, but became aggressive, including biting of the marginal scutes and the hind and front limbs, before mounting. On 4 June 2004 the female was separated from the wild-caught couple, as wounds started to form on the front limbs. To date, no aggressive courtship behaviour has been shown towards the remaining female.

It is unclear why the male showed different courtship behaviour towards the captive-bred female, and why it differed from all other courtship behaviour observed in the stud-book population. There are no accounts of courtship behaviour in the wild, but both wild and captive males can be aggressive amongst each other (Loehr, 2002, *Bulletin of the Chicago Herpetological Society* 37:1). It is recommended to closely observe mating pairs in captivity, and to separate them timeously when necessary to prevent stress and wounds.

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TESTUDINIDAE***Psammobates tentorius verroxii*
Bushmanland Tent Tortoise****CLUTCH SIZE**

According to Boycott & Bourquin (2000. *The Southern African Tortoise Book*, Russel Friedman Books, Halfway House, South Africa) the clutch size for all *P. tentorius* subspecies varies from 1 to 3 eggs although it "appears that only one egg is produced at a time during spring or summer" for *P. t. verroxii*. Branch (1998. *Field Guide to the Snakes and Other Reptiles of Southern Africa*, Struik Publishers, Cape Town) mentions that the western races – i.e. *P. t. verroxii* and *P. t. trimeni* – lay 1 or 2 eggs during summer. The egg size as described by above mentioned authors falls within the range of 21-28 x 27-35 mm.

During early February 2004 an old carcass of an adult female *P. t. verroxii* was collected by Nico Straus on 5 February 2004, on the farm Velloor approximately 80km south of Karasburg, Namibia (28°34'S, 19°11'E, 804m). Located inside the carapace were two eggs, one of which was broken. The size of the complete egg was 40x26mm. It is uncertain if the size of the egg could have resulted in the death of the individual. Clutches of 2 eggs each were also observed for *P. t. verroxii* in the vicinity of the Tiras Mountains in southwestern Namibia (Helmeringhausen area) where four nests, each containing a clutch of 2 eggs, were found after being excavated by mongooses during May 2003 (Schleicher pers.obs.).

From these observations it is clear that *P. t. verroxii* lay up to two eggs in Namibia with the egg size being slightly larger than previously recorded.

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REPTILIA : SAURIA

AGAMIDAE

Agama agama (Linnaeus, 1758)

Red-headed Rock Agama

NOCTURNAL ACTIVITY

On April 9, 2003 at 21h25, three of us (MB, SG and OSGP) observed a night-active adult female *Agama agama* in Tchibanga (02°55'05''S, 10°59'47''E), Mougoutsi Dpt, Nyanga Province, Gabon. The specimen (PEM R 5512, SVL 102 mm, total L 267 mm, 69 midbody scale rows) was in close proximity a neon light, three meters above the ground on the wall of a hotel-restaurant in the city center, in syntopy with a few *Hemidactylus mabouia* (voucher IRSNB 16658). Its stomach was full and contained insects of various orders (notably Coleoptera, Hymenoptera Formicidae and Orthoptera) and four small berries (about 6 mm diameter) with a proportionally big seed. This is the second record of nighttime activity by *A. agama*, the first being reported by Pauwels et al. (2003. Herp. Rev., 34, in press) from Mouila city in Ngounié Province, 115 km N of Tchibanga, along the same main road. The geographical restriction of this nocturnal activity by such a widely distributed species is remarkable, and a behavior as far as we know still recorded only from Gabon. Moreover, numerous citizens of Libreville explained to us that this species appeared in Libreville only at the end of the 1970s, and that it has since progressively invaded the interior of the country, inadvertently being translocated by vehicles. According to our informants, the species apparently arrived on

boats coming from western West Africa.

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CHAMAELEONIDAE

Chamaeleo dilepis

Flap-necked Chamaeleon

PREDATION

On 9th September 2002 an adult Little Banded Goshawk (*Accipiter badius*) was observed, catching and eating an adult Flap-necked Chamaeleon, *Chamaeleo dilepis*, at Bon Accord, on Plot 92 (25°38'S; 28°12'E 2528CA), near Bon-Accord Dam, north of Pretoria. The chameleon's total length was about 20-25cm. The chameleon was in a white stinkwood tree (*Celtis africana*) at 11:00, when the bird attacked it. The goshawk grasped the chameleon by the body with its claws. The chameleon then wrapped its tail around a branch, opened its mouth, made noises to try to intimidate the bird, and tried to bite the bird. After more than half an hour the bird succeeded in killing the chameleon. While killing the chameleon, the bird never let go of it and maintained balance with its wings. During the attack, the bird did not notice, or did not care about, the presence of humans. After it had killed the chameleon it only flew to the next tree when we approached it while it was eating.

According to the literature, about 70% of the diet of the Little Banded Goshawk consists of different species of lizards (W.R. Tarboton 1978, Breeding of the Little Banded Goshawk. *Ostrich* 49:132-143), but no mention was made of the Flap-necked Chamaeleon. In the standard literature mention is made of different enemies of this chameleon such as the Vine Snake (*Thelotornis capensis*), Spotted Bush Snake (*Philothamnus semivariegatus*) and African Grey Hornbill (*Tockus nasutus*) (Pienaar, U.deV., Haacke W.D. & Jacobson. N.H.G., 1983. *The Reptiles of the Kruger National Park*. National