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Submitted by:

Christian SCHNEIDER, Fliederweg 6, 65527 Niedernhausen, Germany. E-mail: christian@pachydactylus.com.

VARANIDAE

***Varanus albigularis* Daudin, 1802**

Rock Monitor

DIET

On 1 April 2010 at 14h00 we observed what appeared to be a hatchling *Varanus albigularis* Daudin, 1802 (approximately 250 mm total length) feeding on a garden slug of approximately 60 mm total length in a Windhoek garden (Fig. 1). According to Jauch (2002) *V. albigularis* hatchlings have a total length of between 240 - 260 mm. The *V. albigularis* hatchling was struggling with the relatively large slug by bashing it against a mica rock, managing to swallow about 50% of the slug after 20 minutes of observation after which the lizard disappeared into the grass.



Fig. 1: *Varanus albigularis* hatchling eating a slug, Windhoek, Namibia.

As a generalist feeder (Clauss & Clauss 2002) *V. albigularis* diet consists mainly of invertebrates (including land snails) or anything small enough to swallow ranging from small tortoises to snakes and even carrion (Branch 1998, Branch 2006, Alexander & Marais 2007).

Although this observation is not entirely unexpected it includes slugs to the long list of prey items for *V. albigularis*. What was interesting to note was the size of the slug

(approximately 25 % of the total body length) that the hatchling *V. albigularis* was attempting to consume, albeit with difficulty, and probably a first lesson in prey selection.

References

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Submitted by:

Peter CUNNINGHAM & Janke CUNNINGHAM, Environment & Wildlife Consulting Namibia, P. O. Box 90717, Windhoek, Namibia. E-mail: pckkwrc@yahoo.co.uk.

VARANIDAE

Varanus niloticus Linnaeus, 1758
Nile Monitor

FEEDING BEHAVIOUR

Nile monitors (*Varanus niloticus*) are the largest lizards in Africa (Alexander & Marais 2007), and are one of the most widespread. Nile monitors are known to occupy a wide variety of habitats (excluding desert environments) but are usually associated with permanent water bodies (Branch 1998, Alexander & Marais 2007). They can occur at fairly high densities in parts of Africa (as many as 40-60 per km² in northern Kenya, Ghana and around Lake Chad - Gore et al. 2003) and are heavily exploited for their meat, skin, organs or as live pets (Luiselli et al. 1999, Gore et al. 2003). Despite their large size, wide distribution, high abundance, and general exploitation, descriptions of their foraging strategies, intra-species relationships and cooperative behaviour have seldom extended beyond the generalized.

In mid-February 2008, two Nile monitors (*ca.* 1.2 m in total length) were observed from a distance of *ca.* 4 m between the hours of 08h30 and 09h10 foraging for fish in a shallow pool along the Sabie River in the Kruger National Park. One monitor was observed progressively moving across a shallow pool (maximum depth *ca.* 150 - 200 mm) of dimensions *ca.* 2 m x 3 m, using its body and tail to drive the trapped fish (most likely *Tilapia sp.*) into the shallow edges of the pool (Fig. 1). The trapped fish jumped over the body of the monitor to escape. The monitor snapped at fish as they jumped over its back