

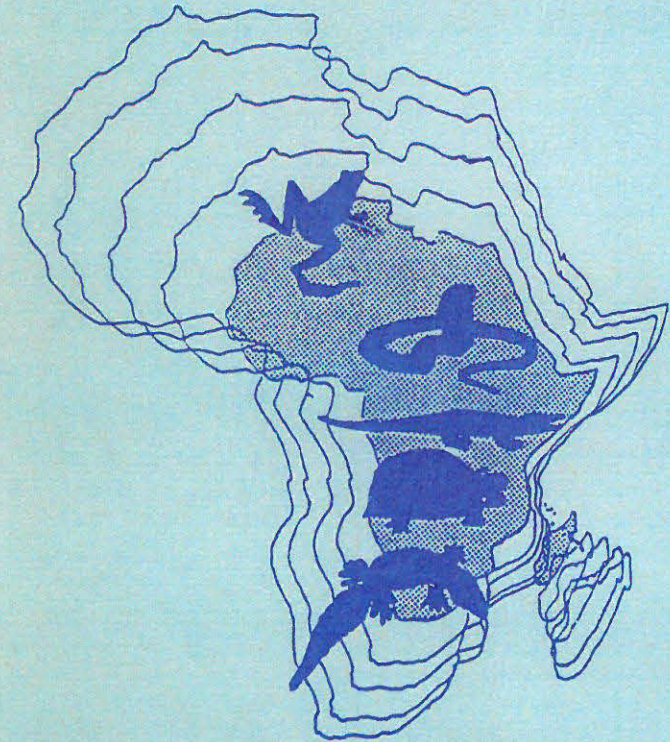
AFRICAN HERP NEWS

NO. 23: AUGUST 1995

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AFRICAN HERP NEWS

HERPETOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION OF AFRICA
NEWSLETTER

AUGUST 1995

NO. 23

HERPETOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION OF AFRICA

Founded 1965

The H.A.A. 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 *Journal of the Herpetological Association of Africa* (which publishes review papers, research articles, short communications and book reviews - subject to peer review) and *African Herp News* (H.A.A. Newsletter) 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 as Short Communications provided they are original and have not been published elsewhere.

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:

Mrs H. de Villiers, National Museum, Bloemfontein.

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EDITORIAL

The time has almost arrived for the *Fourth H.A.A. Symposium on African Herpetology*. As you most probably know by now, this event will be held at St Lucia in KwaZulu-Natal from 23 to 27 October 1995. Orty Bourquin assures me that all necessary arrangements have gone according to plan. All you have to do is get yourself there. A final notice and preliminary programme appear in this issue of *African Herp News*. As you will see, a very exciting list of talks awaits you. If you have not yet registered, do so now, or miss out on what may well be the biggest and best H.A.A. symposium so far!

Two overseas guest speakers have been invited to present papers at the symposium. Prof. Richard Tinsley (University of Bristol, England) will present a paper entitled *Diversity, geographical distribution and general biology of the genus Xenopus*, while Prof. Craig Weatherby (Adrian College, Michigan, U.S.A.; attendance to be confirmed) will talk about *The behaviour and ecology of Geochelone pardalis*. Other papers cover topics such as biodiversity, distribution, conservation, taxonomy, ecology, morphology and reptile husbandry. There will also be a special Conservation Workshop towards the end of the symposium.

I have not received any proposals for candidates for the *Exceptional Contribution to African Herpetology* award, which will therefore not be presented at St Lucia.

The new H.A.A. committee will be announced at the symposium and the results published in the next issue of *African Herp News*, due out in December 1995.

As you will know, special issues of the H.A.A. journal (numbers 36 and 40) were published to document the proceedings of both the first and second H.A.A. symposia on African herpetology. Members will be pleased to know that, thanks to a generous donation from ESKOM, a special issue of the journal is currently being prepared to include summaries of papers dealing with the various southern African lizard families (presented during the *FitzSimons Day* session) and extended abstracts of other papers and posters, all presented at the *Third H.A.A. Symposium on African Herpetology* held at the Transvaal Museum in Pretoria from 11 to 15 October 1993. This special issue will be sent to members later this year. The next "regular" journal, vol. 44(2), will also be posted later this year.

Finally, I thank all contributors of articles and news items for this issue of *African Herp News*.

See you at St Lucia.

Mike Bates

CHAIRMAN/NEWSLETTER EDITOR

SERPENTES

COLUBRIDAE

PHILOTHAMNUS NATALENSIS OCCIDENTALIS

Western Natal Green Snake

DIET

On 8 March 1995 an adult male *P. n. occidentalis* was found dead on the road at the Marine Drive entrance to the University of Port Elizabeth (33°59'S, 25°43'E, 3325Dc). The snake measured 663 mm (427 mm SVL + 236 mm tail length) in total length and weighed 21,8 g. On dissection it was found to contain the regenerated tail and pelvic girdle of an adult *Pachydactylus maculatus*, as well as a partly digested *Hyperolius marmoratus verrucosus*. Both prey items were swallowed head first. The *Hyperolius* specimen had a hind limb length of 42,2 mm. The snake and gut contents were deposited in the herpetological collection of the Port Elizabeth Museum (PEM R11276).

The inclusion of amphibians in the diet of *Philothamnus natalensis* is not surprising. Broadley (1990, *FitzSimons' Snakes of Southern Africa*, Jonathan Ball & Donker, Johannesburg) stated that their diet comprised mainly frogs, although Marais (1992, *A Complete Guide to the Snakes of Southern Africa*, Southern Book Publishers, Halfway House) illustrated an adult snake feeding on a gecko (cf. *Hemidactylus*). Alexander (1987, *The herpetofauna of municipal Durban: A biogeographical review*, M.Sc. thesis, University of Natal, Durban) noted that *P. n. natalensis* is apparently a lizard specialist, feeding mainly on geckos, but also skinks, while *P. n. occidentalis* apparently feeds mainly on frogs. This note appears to be the first record of a terrestrial lizard in the diet of *P. n. occidentalis*.

Submitted by: G.V. HAAGNER & W.R. BRANCH (Department of Herpetology, Port Elizabeth Museum, P.O. Box 13147, Humewood 6013, South Africa).

CROTAPHOPELTIS HOTAMBOEIA

Red-lipped Snake

SIZE

A large, adult male *C. hotamboeia* from Kragga Kamma, Port Elizabeth (33°57'S, 25°30'E; 3325Dc) was brought to the Port Elizabeth Snake Park on 22 January 1994. The snake settled down in captivity, regularly accepting amphibian prey items. During October 1994 it was accidentally injured and later euthenased. At death, the male had a total length of 829 mm (701 mm SVL + 128 mm tail length) and weighed 96,8 g. It was deposited in the herpetological collection of the Port Elizabeth Museum (PEM R10866). This appears to be a new size record for the species. Broadley (1990, *FitzSimons' Snakes of Southern Africa*, Jonathan Ball & Donker, Johannesburg) noted that the largest measured specimens of *C. hotamboeia* were: male - 810 (695 + 115) mm, female - 808 (710 + 98) mm, but added that adults may attain 1 m in length.

Submitted by: G.V. HAAGNER & W.R. BRANCH (Department of Herpetology, Port Elizabeth Museum, P.O. Box 13147, Humewood 6013, South Africa).

VIPERIDAE

BITIS CAUDALIS

Horned Adder

SIZE

During December 1988 the Transvaal Museum received a female *B. caudalis* of exceptional size. It was found by C. Owen, floating in a half-drowned state in the open water canal east of the Waterberg in Namibia. It recovered completely and was kept in a large terrarium. This specimen, which was always in excellent to obese condition, started refusing food at the beginning of the month and died on 17 November 1994. After death she measured 600 mm (548 mm SVL + 52 mm tail length) and weighed 261,6 g. The specimen was deposited in the herpetological collection of the Transvaal Museum (TM 79404).

Previously recorded maximum sizes for this species are: female UM 13170 (Khuis, Botswana) 515 (470 + 55) mm; male TM 5923 (farm Nakeis, Great Namaqualand) 459 (417 + 45) mm (Broadley, 1990, *FitzSimons Snakes of Southern Africa*, Jonathan Ball & Donker, Johannesburg). On re-examination, the latter specimen proved to be a female with a long tail and 30/29 subcaudals.

As a specimen kept in captivity for nearly six years might not be acceptable as a size record, and as the "male" record mentioned above proved erroneous, an examination of all data for this species accumulated in the Transvaal Museum seemed pertinent. The largest wild-caught female is TM 32745, found 3 km S of Ganab, Namib Naukluft Park, Namibia: 523 (486 + 37) mm. TM 31265, found at Gorob, Namib Naukluft Park, measured: 510 (465 + 45) mm, and is the only other wild caught specimen, apart from UM 13170, which exceeds 500 mm in total length. Several female specimens in the TM collection exceed 450 mm total length. Regarding the maximum size of males, only a single specimen (SMWN 21018: Lüderitz, Namibia), in the State Museum, Windhoek collection, exceeds 400 mm: 408 (372 + 36) mm. This specimen was not re-checked. The next longest specimens are TM 35315 (Nabas, Richtersveld) 399 (357 + 42) mm, and TM 5919 (Farm Gründorn, Keetmanshoop district, Namibia) 375 (334 + 41) mm.

In conclusion, females may exceed 500 mm, but males seldom reach 400 mm total length.

Submitted by: W.D. HAACKE (Department of Herpetology, Transvaal Museum, P.O. Box 413, Pretoria 0001, South Africa).