AFRICAN HERP NEWS

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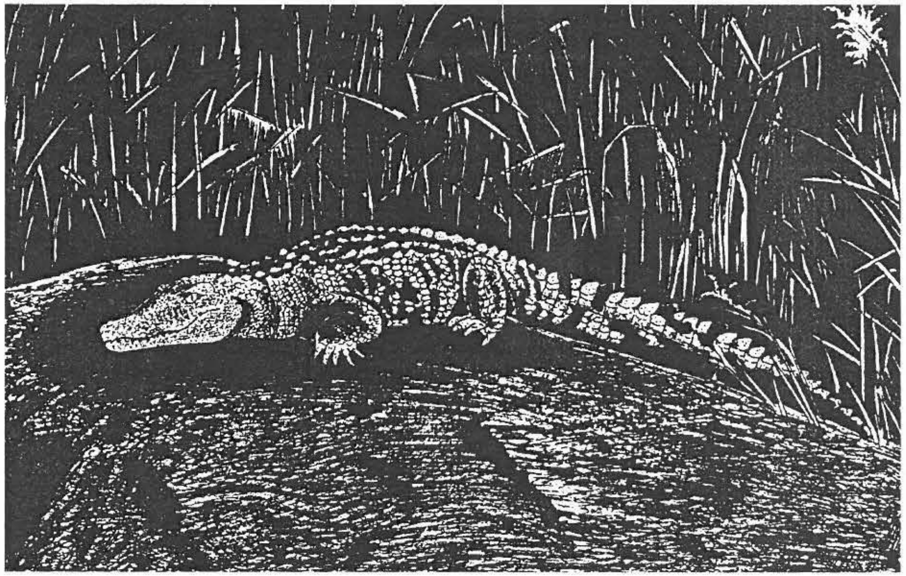
Newsletter of the
Herpetological Association of Africa



No. 30 December 1999

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).

NEWSLETTER 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 disc or by e-mail in Word 6.0 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.

TYPING AND PRODUCTION:

Dr. Angelo Lambiris.

COMMITTEE OF THE HERPETOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION OF AFRICA

EDITORIAL

Members of the Association must be wondering what has happened to the Journal. We apologise for the fact that there was no issue in 1999, but this was the result of matters beyond our control. The problems have been addressed and dealt with. We shall in future meet our commitment to producing two Journals per year.

You will notice with this issue of the Newsletter that we have found another printer—the previous one could not produce anything acceptable. We are currently getting enough contributions to produce two issues of the Newsletter per year, but can only give value to members by producing three or four issues if you send in more articles! Our hearty thanks to those who have contributed this year, and also to the referees who commented on some of the articles. Two wish to remain anonymous, but thanks are due to Prof. John Poynton and Ms. Kate Richardson.

The last two years have eaten heavily into the Association's financial reserves, and it is clear that subscriptions will have to be increased if we are to keep going. Because no Journal was issued this year, we shall not increase the subscription in the year 2000 as originally intended, but shall have to do so in 2001. Hopefully, with increased Journal and Newsletter production members will feel that they are still getting value for money—to the best of my knowledge, our Association has the lowest subscription anywhere for a society that produces a peer-reviewed professional journal as well as a newsletter.

We had hoped to hold another symposium in September next year, but again a series of unforeseen and largely uncontrollable events have effectively demolished Geraldine Pieterse's heroic attempts to get things under way. One of the less creditable obstacles was the unbelievable tariffs charged by an organisation which seems to have changed its mission statement from conservation to fleecing tourists.

Turning to other matters, it is time for a new Committee to be elected. All but one of the present committee members have indicated their willingness to stand for re-election though of course other full Association members may be nominated as well.

The exception is Frank Farquharson, who has carried out the Herculean task of Secretary/Treasurer since 1992, with great competence and distinction. He feels that a break would be welcome, as well as giving some of our younger blood a chance to take up the reins. Frank will be a hard act to follow, and we thank him for his efficiency and his dedication to the interests of the Association. Who would like to follow in his footsteps?

Finally, on behalf of the Committee, I would like to wish you all well over the festive season and in the new year.

Angelo Lambiris
Chairman and Newsletter Editor.

COVER ILLUSTRATION:
Nile Crocodile, *Crocodylus niloticus*. Lake Chivero, Zimbabwe. Sketch by A.J.L. Lambiris

ADDITIONAL RECORDS OF UNCOMMON *PACHYDACTYLUS*

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Geckos of the genus *Pachydactylus* are represented by at least 20 species in Namibia (Branch, 1998). Although many, such as *P. turneri* and *P. punctatus*, are nearly ubiquitous, most species are characterised by restricted ranges and many species are only encountered infrequently. There is little evidence that would suggest that any members of the genus are endangered in Namibia. Rather, the apparent rarity of some species may reflect the combination of low collecting effort in some areas and habitat types, and moderate to extreme habitat specialisation by the geckos. During recent field work in central and northern Namibia (Erongo and Kunene Regions) we collected specimens of three poorly known *Pachydactylus* species. In one case (*P. fitzsimonsi*), the new material represents a significant range extension relative to published records. In a second instance (*P. fasciatus*), we report a minor range extension but also confirm the occurrence of the species in central Namibia for the first time in more than 50 years. Finally, in the case of *P. caraculicus*, we provide additional localities to supplement the only Namibian records, published nearly 30 years ago (Haacke, 1970).

PACHYDACTYLUS FITZSIMONSI Loveridge, 1947
(FitzSimons' Thick-toed Gecko)

Namibia; Kunene Region; Khorixas District; 22.7 km N of Ugab River crossing on road from Brandberg West Mine, ca. 540 m (2014CC, 20°47'17"S, 14°06'41"E); 24 July 1998; A.M. Bauer, W.R. Branch and J.L. Wright; California Academy of Sciences, CAS 206955. Adult female, 87.2 mm SVL.

The southernmost published locality records for *Pachydactylus fitzsimonsi* were plotted in grid squares 2016AA and 1914DC (Visser, 1984). The new record represents an extension of 160 km west by southwest of the first record, and 120 km southwest of the latter. Considerable confusion has existed over the identity of this and other members of the *Pachydactylus bibronii* complex. This form was recognised as specifically distinct from both *P. bibronii* and *P. turneri* (as *P. laevigatus*) by Benyr (1995). In contrast to most individuals of *P. fitzsimonsi*, which are boldly patterned (Branch, 1998), CAS 206995 has a nearly uniform oatmeal ground colour with only very weakly-developed and incomplete darker cross bands. This specimen's scalation is intermediate between that typical of *P. fitzsimonsi* and that characterising *P. turneri*, with relatively large, flattened dorsal scales forming more of a pavement than discrete rows of tubercles. Despite the morphological intermediacy of this specimen, we have referred it to *P. fitzsimonsi* on the basis of mitochondrial DNA sequence data. These data are nearly identical to those from typical *P. fitzsimonsi* from the northern Kaokoveld (1731AC), and differ significantly from sequences derived from *P. turneri* from northern Namibia (several localities). Because mitochondrial DNA is maternally inherited, the possibility remains, however, that CAS 206955 represents

a hybrid between a male *P. turneri* and a female *P. fitzsimonsi*.

The gecko was collected in a vertical crevice in a boulder in a granite outcrop surrounded by sand in the vicinity of Gaias Spring. Other species collected in the immediate vicinity were *Pachydactylus scherzi*, *P. punctatus* and *Rhoptropus bradfieldi*.

PACHYDACTYLUS FASCIATUS Boulenger, 1888
(Banded Thick-toed Gecko)

Namibia; Erongo Region, Karibib District; Farm Usakos West, 10 km E of Spitzkopf turnoff on Usakos-Hentiesbaai Road (2115CD, 21°57'08"S, 15°16'48"E); 21 July 1998; R. Babb, A.M. Bauer, W.R. Branch, A.C. Lamb III, P.moler and J.L. Wright; California Academy of Sciences, CAS 206936. Adult female, SVL 41.7 mm, TL 42.4 mm.

The nearest published locality record supported by specimens is as Karibib (2115DD), approximately 50 km to the east (Bauer and Branch, 1991). The new specimen is the first documented occurrence from central Namibia in more than 50 years. The specimen agrees in morphology with a large series from the Kamanjab area (1914CB, 1914CD), but differs in colour, having a bolder and more well-defined alternating series of medium grey cross bands on a predominantly orangey-brown dorsum. Unlike previously collected specimens of *P. fasciatus* from Damaraland, which have been collected under stones (Haacke, 1965; Bauer and Branch, 1991) this specimen was found under the bark of a large fallen *Acacia* along with *Gerrhosaurus validus maltzahni*, *Mabuya variegata*, and *Mabuya spilogaster*.

PACHYDACTYLUS CARACULICUS FitzSimons, 1959
(Angolan Banded Thick-toed Gecko)

Namibia; Kunene Region; 44.3 km N of Okanguati on Epupa Falls Road (1731AC, 17°14'30"S, 13°14'00"E); 18 June 1993; A.M. Bauer, H.E. Robeck, D. King and J.V. Vindum; California Academy of Sciences, CAS 193804-5, National Museum of Namibia, SMW (catalogue number pending, ex Aaron Bauer Field Series, 1699); 43.4 km N of Okanguati on Epupa Falls Road (1731AC, 17°15'00"S, 13°14'00"E); 18 June 1993; A.M. Bauer, H.E. Robeck, D. King and J.V. Vindum; California Academy of Sciences, CAS 193799, SMW (catalogue number pending, ex AMB 1689); 41.9 km of Okanguati on Epupa Falls Road (1731AC, 17°17'S, 13°11'E; 29 July 1998; A.M. Bauer; CAS 206980; 34.3 km S of Epupa Falls on Okanguati Road (1713AC, 17°15'S, 13°14'E); 30 July 1998; AMB 5991-5993 (to be deposited in SMW; A.M. Bauer, W.R. Branch and A.C. Lamb III.

The distribution of this species in Namibia is limited to the Kaokoveld. The only published Namibian records are those of Haacke (1970), from Swartbools Drift, the Onjamu Mountains, Enyandi, and Sanitatas. The new records, which are all within a few kilometres of each other, lie 40 km southwest of the nearest record at Enyadi on the Kunene River (1731BA). All individuals were collected from horizontal cracks within boulders or in crevices between slabs of rock. *Pachydactylus fitzsimonsi* was collected syntopically at most of the sites. Other rupicolous reptiles collected in at least one of the sites were *Pachydactylus turneri*, *Rhoptropus barnardi*, *Hemirhagerrhis viperina*, and *Bitis caudalis*.

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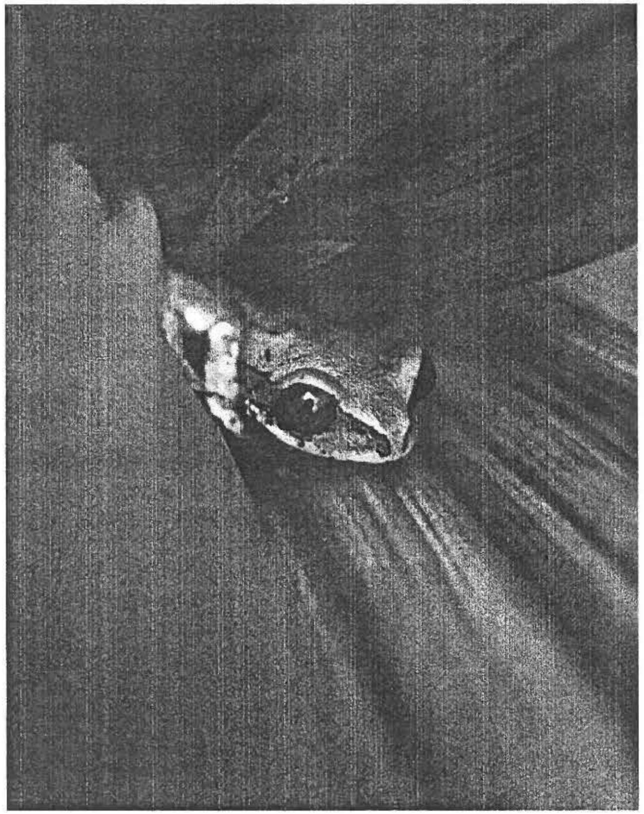

Forest Tree Frog, *Leptopelis natalensis*, sheltering in an orchid. Hillcrest, Kwazulu Natal. Photo: June Lambiris

RECENT AFRICAN HERPETOLOGICAL LITERATURE: 19

W.R. Branch

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This survey covers the period 1997 to present, with a few earlier, overlooked papers. For brevity no articles in any HAA publication are included, neither are peripheral publications using *Xenopus laevis* (or any other African species) as a model in biochemical studies, etc. Where the distribution date is known to differ from the volume year this is included in brackets, as are notes of relevence. I thank Marius Burger (Cape Town) for early assistance in preparing this survey.

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