

*natalensis* from the D.R.C. (IRSNB 11035 Parc Nat. Garamba and MRAC 136 Mayumbe), but these may represent relict populations of that species in areas where *P. sebae* is the common large python. Colour slides of *P. natalensis* provided by Steven Spawls confirm the presence of this species at relatively high altitudes in Kenya and northern Tanzania (Arusha, Nairobi and Voi).

With regard to the English names for the large pythons, I am unhappy about the use of "African Rock Python" as these snakes show no particular association with rocky habitats, so I propose the use of "Northern African Python" for *P. sebae* and "Southern African Python" for *P. natalensis*.

#### REFERENCES

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- MILLER, T.J & SMITH, H.M. 1979. The Lesser African Rock Python. *Bull. Maryland Herpetol. Soc.* **15**: 70-84.



*Breviceps v. verrucosus*. Hillcrest, KwaZulu Natal. Photo: Angelo Lambiris.

#### NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

*African Herp News* publishes brief notes concerning the biology of the herpetofauna of the African continent and adjacent regions, including the Arabian peninsula, Madagascar, and other islands in the Indian Ocean.

A standard format is to be used, as follows: **SCIENTIFIC NAME**; **Common name** (using Bill Branch's *Field Guide to Snakes and other Reptiles of Southern Africa*, third edn., 1998, for reptiles; and Passmore & Carruthers' *South African Frogs*, 1995, for amphibians, as far as possible); **KEYWORD** (this should be one or two words best describing the topic of the note, e.g. Reproduction, Avian predation, etc.); the **Text** (in concise English with only essential references quoted and in abbreviated form); **Locality** (country, province or state, location, quarter-degree unit, and latitude and longitude if available; elevation above sea level; use metric units); **Date** (day, month, year); **Collector(s)**; **Place of deposition and museum accession number** (required if specimens are preserved). Submitted by: **NAME**, Address (in parentheses).

New South African Province names must be used.

#### REPTILIA CHELONIA

##### *HOMOPUS SIGNATUS* Speckled Padloper NATURAL DIET

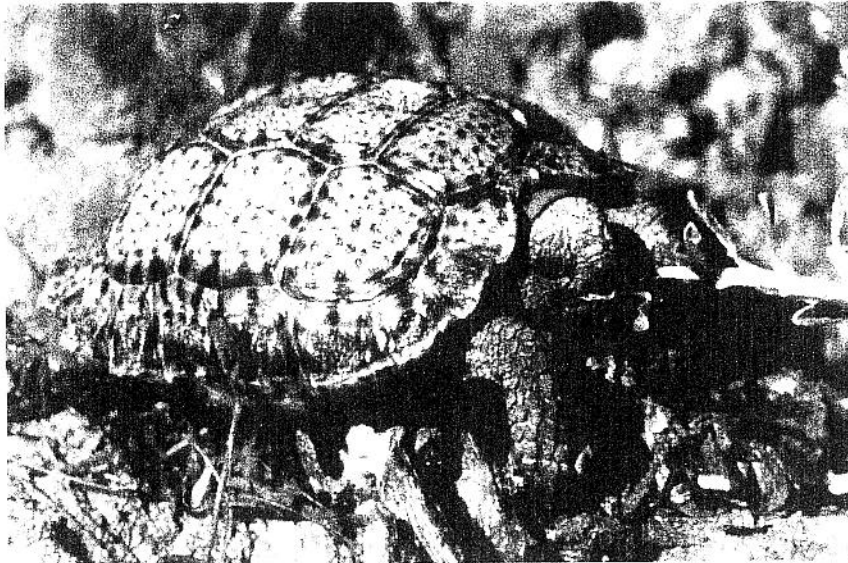
Much of the available ecological information on *Homopus signatus* results from captive observations. Although in many cases studying captive specimens can be extremely useful, it is not always clear how far results reflect the natural situation. Moreover, certain aspects can only be studied in wild populations. Composition of the natural diet is one of these.

A report containing speculative information on natural feeding of *Homopus s. signatus*, as deduced from a captive breeding group, is in press (Loehr, Chelonian Conservation and Biology). We have additionally recorded two observations of *Homopus s. signatus* feeding in nature.

On 22 September 1995, at 11:00, a juvenile *Homopus s. signatus* (no measurements recorded) was found in shade, feeding on flowers of an unidentified grass species along a tarred road a few hundred metres south-east of Springbok, Namaqualand (2917DB).

On 17 September 1998, at 15:45, a juvenile *Homopus signatus cafer* (CL 45.1 mm) was observed feeding on green leaves of a shrub of the genus

*Wiborgia* (family Leguminosae, subfamily Papilionoideae) along a dirt road near Clanwilliam (3219DB) (figure 1). At the time of observation, the sky was clear and the temperature and relative humidity at the site were 37°C and 26% respectively.



#### Acknowledgements

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#### Submitted by

V.J.T. LOEHR (Studbook Breeding Programme Homopus, Nipkowplein 24, 3402 EC IJsselstein, The Netherlands. e-mail loehr@kabelfoon.nl, [http://wwwserv.caiw.nl/abs/loehr/public\\_html/index.htm](http://wwwserv.caiw.nl/abs/loehr/public_html/index.htm)) and T.J. HARRIS (c/o 20 Suikerbosstreet, Blomtuin, 7530 Belville, South Africa).

## SAURIA

### *LYGODACTYLUS CAPENSIS* Cape Dwarf Gecko PREDATION BY BATS

On 18 December 1998, in my home at Game Valley Estates Hella Hella, in the Mkomazi River Valley, KwaZulu-Natal (29°54'46"S, 30°05'20"E; 2930CC, 710 m above sea level), part of the hind portion of a *Lygodactylus capensis* was discovered on the slate floor of the entrance hall amongst bat droppings and discarded insect remains.

*Lygodactylus capensis* is the most common gecko that frequents man-made structures in this area. They soon learn that insects trapped behind windowpanes become easy targets, and appear to live profitably using this hunting strategy. As diurnal predators they appear to be highly successful in domestic situations. Apart from birds that often have their attempts thwarted by the barrier of glass between them and the lizards, the most common predators around our home seem to be Spotted Bush Snakes *Philothamnus semivariatus*. The less frequently encountered Spotted House Snake *Lamprophis guttatus* also takes advantage of this "fast food" source.

At night, the isolated light emanating from our home, in a fairly extensive expanse of valley bushveld, attracts hoards of insects to the house. After the lights are switched off, bats often enter through fanlights and proceed to hunt the abundant insect prey on offer. Evidence of their activities is clearly visible on the floor below regularly used roosting sites. Normally one may expect to find bat droppings and arthropod remains at these sites. The presence of the hind portion of a *Lygodactylus capensis* however seems to indicate that the bat managed to capture and consume a part of the reptile. A close examination of the severed portion of the gecko revealed that an animal with minute teeth had chewed it.

Seven bat species have been reliably identified as occurring in the immediate vicinity by members of the Durban-based Bat Interest Group. The most likely species occurring here that is known to feed in this manner is the Common Slit-faced Bat, *Nycteris thebaica*. This bat is known to take stationary insects rather than those in flight, and it has also been recorded as eating scorpions and sun spiders which they take off the ground (Skinner, J.D. and R.H.N. Smithers, 1990: *The mammals of the southern African subregion*, University of Pretoria, Pretoria).

The *Lygodactylus capensis* frequenting my home are not active only during daylight hours. They continue to hunt insects inside the house for as long as the lights are left switched on. When the lights are extinguished they find themselves unexpectedly stranded in the dark. I have noticed that if the lights are switched on again later, most of the lizards seen earlier in the evening will be found in the open at the same spot, or very close to the point that they had reached before being plunged into darkness. I speculate that they either find