

## GENERAL MEETING

The last meeting was held on the 24<sup>th</sup> February 2006.

Meynies Bornman from Australia gave a very interesting presentation and slide show on Reptiles from Australia. There were a few specimens on display as well, which included species such as Womas, Ridge Tail Monitors, Black Headed Pythons and Blue Tongue Skinks just to name a few.

The next meeting is to be held on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2006. The time will be 19h30 for 20h00 as usual.



**TRANSVAAL HERPETOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION**  
**TRANSVAAL HERPETOLOGIESE VERENIGING**

## NEWS FROM SOUTH AFRICA

### REPTILES ARE WARMING UP!

Since its launch in May 2005, the SARCA project (Southern African Reptile Conservation Assessment) has been busy!

Barend Erasmus and Bryan Maritz at Wits carried out a gap analysis for southern African reptiles. Fully 786 (39%) of the 2008 quarter-degree grid cells in the region are estimated by the SARCA gap analysis to be at least 80% under-sampled (i.e., have fewer than 20% of the expected species recorded from the grid cell). Although priority grid cells are found in almost all provinces of South Africa, the great majority are in Northern Cape and North West provinces.

Marius Burger, SARCA's Project Herpetologist, planned his first field season around these identified priority grid cells. To date he has completed eight 10-day surveys in various parts of the Northern Cape, with the help of enthusiastic and energetic volunteers. Approximately 40 surveys will be completed around the country within the 4-year SARCA period.

Although all volunteers claim to have an excellent time with Marius in the field, I wonder how many of them curse at getting themselves involved in a jaunt that requires wielding a pick and shovel in the scorching Kalahari sun? The first two days of each survey are especially taxing because it is then that the trap arrays have to be set, and that involves digging in 32 10-litre buckets that serve as pitfall traps!

Back at the SARCA offices in the Avian Demography Unit at UCT, René Navarro created a "virtual museum". This concept is the brainchild of Prof. Graham Alexander at Wits and is, to our knowledge, the first museum collection of its kind in the world.

SARCA invites all interested members of the public to take digital photographs of reptiles in the wild and to submit these along with some simple supporting information, by email, to SARCA. The images and data are processed and placed in the virtual museum collection, which is available to the world, online, as part of the SARCA website ([www.saherps.net](http://www.saherps.net)). To date, 180 people have contributed 1000 photographic records to the SARCA virtual museum.

These "specimens", although virtual, will not lose their colour with time and will not need regular topping up with 70% alcohol! Best of all, anyone with an internet connection, anywhere in the world, can access this fascinating collection and learn from it.

South African museums have collectively accumulated approximately 49 000 reptile distribution records for South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland. These records are being incorporated into an integrated SARCA database. How does the SARCA data-collection effort compare? The first seven SARCA field surveys yielded 1150 distribution records. Add to this the 1000 records in the virtual museum, and we have 2150 records that SARCA has added to the existing total. This is a 4.4% increase in distribution data in less than one year, relative to roughly a century of scientific herpetology in the region.

If we manage to maintain this productivity, by the end of the project SARCA will have added something like 18% to our store of reptile distribution records. However, we will have added considerably more than that to our knowledge because the new information will have come largely from areas where we had no information at all before. In addition, all available data will have been quality controlled and integrated into a single database, making it vastly easier to use and analyse.

So, where does SARCA stand in March 2006? In short, SARCA is at the brink of having an integrated database of reptile records which will allow us to map the distributions of species. Although the database will be updated as new records become available, especially from the next three field seasons, it will allow work on SARCA's core activity to begin, namely, assessing the conservation status of species.

## 1 067 crocs in car: Man held

George - A man appeared briefly in George magistrate's court on Tuesday after being caught with 1 067 baby crocodiles in his car, said Paul Gildenhuys of Cape Nature Conservation's environmental crime unit.

Gildenhuys said the man, a South African, faced charges of possession and transport of the crocodiles without a permit.

The man was arrested on February 27 and his case was transferred to the environmental court in Hermanus.

Gildenhuys said that the origin of the crocodiles formed part of the investigation.

He said crocodiles fetched about R120 each when sold on registered crocodile farms.

Asked about the illegal trade, Gildenhuys said: "Everything that flies, walks, swims and crawls has a price on its head. That's a fact of life."

He said recent figures from the international policing agency, Interpol, showed that illegal trade in flora and fauna was now the second-largest illegal trade in the world, after narcotics.

Recent estimates for the illegal flora and fauna trade put the figure at about \$20bn (about R124.5bn) a year.

Gildenhuys said South Africa was seen as one of the world's hotspots for biodiversity and faced an increasing run on its natural resources.

The man is due to appear in Hermanus on May 8.

## NEWS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

### 'Clive of India's tortoise' dies aged 250

Thursday, March 23, 2006; Posted: 3:03 p.m. EST (20:03 GMT)

The tortoise had been the pet of Robert Clive, the famous British military officer in colonial India around the middle of the 18th century, a local minister in West Bengal state said.

Local authorities say the tortoise, named "Addwaitya" meaning the "The One and Only" in Bengali, was the oldest tortoise in the world but they have not presented scientific proof to back up their claim.

"Historical records show he was a pet of British general Robert Clive of the East India Company and had spent several years in his sprawling estate before he was brought to the zoo about 130 years ago," West Bengal Forest Minister Jogesh Barman said.

"We have documents to prove that he was more than 150 years old, but we have pieced together other evidence like statements from authentic sources and it seems that he is more than 250 years old," he said.

The minister said details about Addwaitya's early life showed that British sailors had brought him from the Seychelles islands and presented him to Clive, who was rising fast in the East India Company's military hierarchy.

On Thursday, the tortoise's enclosure wore a deserted look.

"This is a sad day for us. We will miss him very much," a zoo keeper said.

Wild Aldabra tortoises are found in the Aldabra island in the Indian Ocean Seychelles islands. They average about 120 kg (265 pounds). It is believed that tortoises are the longest lived of all animals, with life spans often surpassing 100 years

<http://www.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/asiapcf/03/23/india.tortoise.reut/index.html>

## **APRIL MEETING**

Due to the public holiday in April there will be no meeting, but we will be back on the 26<sup>th</sup> May 2006.

## **BIRTHDAYS**

On behalf of the THA we would like to wish you all a happy birthday.

## **MARCH**

- 2 – Renier Delpont
- 4 – Neal Martin
- 8 – Raymond Cross
- 9 – Hendrik van den Heever
- 11 – Lora Coutts
- 15 – David Burt
- 15 – Hendrik Lourens
- 17 – Natasha Veldkamp
- 18 – Roy Dady
- 20 – Bennie Havenga

## **APRIL**

- 3 – Fanie van den Heever
- 18 – Desiree Clarke
- 19 – Karen Clarke
- 25 – Charlene Pfeifer
- 30 – Juan Foster

## **MAY**

- 1 – Rikus Fischer
- 12 – Stuwart Maseko
- 21 – Zane Jageman
- 23 – Debbie Heunis
- 28 – Martin Buitenbach

## **UPCOMING EVENTS**

Reptilians Pet Shop will be exhibiting at the Clear Water Mall on the 1<sup>st</sup> April. Pop past and support them.

Snake Identification and Bite Treatment Course will be held on the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> May 2006 at Aqua-Aviaries, Walkerville. The course is presented by Arno Naude and Gustav Collins. Please contact Heidi at 083 374 7087 for further information and bookings.

Venomous Snake Handeling Course will be held on the 14<sup>th</sup> May 2006 at Aqua-Aviaries, Walkerville. The course is presented by Arno Naude and Gustav Collins. Please contact Heidi at 083 374 7087 for further information and bookings.

## EDITORS NOTE

Thank you to those who submitted articles. We would like to request original articles, which have been written by members.

Please visit our website [www.tha.co.za](http://www.tha.co.za). We are open to any suggestions to improve the website. There will be some exciting changes in the near future, which will include a discussion forum and a news page.

## COMMITTEE MEMBERS

<b>Chairman</b>	:	Gustav Collins (011) 949-1045 / 083 266 0261 <a href="mailto:info@aqua-aviaries.co.za">info@aqua-aviaries.co.za</a>
<b>Vice Chairman</b>	:	Arno Naude (012) 333-6674 / 083 739 9303 <a href="mailto:bushmaster@webmail.co.za">bushmaster@webmail.co.za</a>
<b>Secretary</b>	:	Jo Peinke (012) 355 5363 / (012) 333-2825
<b>Editor</b>	:	Heidi Pfeifer 083 374 7087 / 012 343-4353 <a href="mailto:heidi@tha.co.za">heidi@tha.co.za</a>
<b>Sub-Editor</b>	:	Anco Pretorius 072 244 9505 <a href="mailto:anco@tha.co.za">anco@tha.co.za</a>
<b>Additional member</b>	:	Melanie Collins (011) 949-1045
<b>Webmaster</b>	:	Anco Pretorius 072 244 9505 <a href="mailto:anco@tha.co.za">anco@tha.co.za</a>