

GENERAL MEETING

The last meeting was held on the 31st March 2006.

Arno Naude brought along a very wide variety of different Indigenous Reptiles which you do not get to see every day. Amongst these were Olive and Spotted House Snake, Vine Snakes, Many Horned Adders, etc. A special thanks to Mike Perry for bringing along his beautiful striped Gaboon Adder and Woods Spitting Cobra.

The next meeting is to be held on the 30th June 2006. The time will be 19h30 for 20h00 as usual.



TRANSVAAL HERPETOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION
TRANSVAAL HERPETOLOGIESE VERENIGING

NEWS FROM SOUTH AFRICA

Twin-headed snake has gardener on the run

Mythology describes an encounter with a multiheaded snake as symbolic of adept evil, but in Kareedouw, between Port Elizabeth and Plettenberg Bay, the recent discovery of a 10cm conjoined slug-eater was worth its weight in research material.

The slug-eater may be a common garden snake that lives under pot plants, but the two-headed genetic throwback is a rare find.

Michael Caithness, the owner of Lawnwood Snake Sanctuary in Plettenberg Bay, where the snake is now living, said he had read about such a phenomenon among exotic snakes in India and Asia, but this was the first time in 27 years of working with snakes that he had heard of one in Africa.

Both heads are functional on this particular specimen, although they decide to slither their separate ways at times.

Both tongues flicker, sometimes in unison, sometimes separately, a further indication, says Caithness, "that they do not necessarily think the same".

"They each have their own necks but share the same spine."

Kareedouw resident Pieter Harker, 82, found the newly born slug-eater, more popularly known as a tabakroller, while weeding his garden.

The name tabakroller was given to the snake because it spirals like a leaf when threatened and releases a pungent odour like that of pipe smoke.

When Harker's gardener of four years saw the two-headed snake he fled from the house, never to return.

Harker nurtured the two-headed snake for three days and had photographs taken, which he submitted to the South African Broadcasting Corporation's (SABC) 50/50 wildlife programme.

Finally, he was advised to take it to the snake sanctuary.

Slug-eaters have no venom.

Caithness said the snake would not survive in nature because it would be too easily spotted by predators like birds, cats and mongoose.

He hopes the twins gain enough body fat before hibernation begins.

The team at the snake sanctuary are hoping to see both heads eat.

Snakes eat once a week or every two weeks.

"If we let it go it will definitely die, but we are not sure if it will live long because we haven't seen it eat yet. This is not something you find in nature."

http://www.iol.co.za/index.php?set_id=1&click_id=13&art_id=vn20060428012622834C128797

NEWS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Officers seize exotic snakes

A MAN is facing prosecution after wildlife authorities seized two prohibited exotic snakes being illegally kept on a Melbourne property. Department of Sustainability and Environment officers raided a house in Melton yesterday based on a tip-off that followed publicity about the seizure of 11 boa constrictors at an address in Geelong six weeks ago, a DSE spokeswoman said.

They found a two-metre boa constrictor, which is native to Central and South America, and a one-metre corn snake, native to North America. The snakes were freely available in the Americas but were strictly prohibited under Australian law because they could destroy populations of native reptiles, DSE senior investigator Keith Larner said.

"Like most exotic pests in Australia, corn snakes tolerate a wide variety of environmental conditions and they breed readily," Mr Larner said in a statement.

"Boa constrictors can spread disease to our native python populations and prey on Australian wildlife.

"Anyone who gambles with Australia's biodiversity by purchasing a boa constrictor, or any other illegal reptile, deserves the harshest penalty available."

DSE investigators expect to charge a Melton man over the seizure. The keeping, breeding and sale of exotic reptiles is prohibited under state and federal laws with a maximum penalty of \$110,000 or jail sentences of up to five years.



MEMBERS LETTERS / ARTICLES

Am I allowed to scream now?

On a Thursday night you sort of wind down a bit early and at about 11 in the evening I had showered and was just getting ready for bed when the cell phone cuts through the silence. The voice on the other side is very worried because his wife just saw a snake in their baby son's room. Apparently the door has been closed and the snake will be there when I get there.

The callout is on the other side of town and is at least a 45 minute drive. I don't have anyone in the area that can go catch the snake and I do not want to phone them this time of night, so off I go.

The bedroom was sealed off but the snake is nowhere to be seen. We unpack the whole room, which is some master bedroom as well, because I am picking up frilly lacy things which are rather embarrassing and sorting through their clothes. Eventually after a few hours I tell them I am going to leave because the snake is no longer there. They kindly give me a donation for my trouble and I drive home wondering where it went.

I hop back into bed and after a while fall asleep. The cell phone wakens me at 2 in the morning. Apparently the wife saw the snake in the kitchen and it is under the stove. I start to wonder if the wife does drugs or hallucinates a lot. What the hell is she doing in the kitchen at 2 in the morning in any case?

Back in the car and very drowsy I drive all the way back again. Luckily the traffic is light so I manage to skip about 7 red robots and make good time getting there. The owner is standing in his shorts and a shirt so obviously he was sleeping as well.

The snake has just moved from under the stove to under a built in kitchen cupboard. I move the stove narrowly avoiding the open wires in the back of the stove. There is a small hole on the side at ground level but there is not even a cupboard above it as it is where the stove stands.

I try sliding my fingers under the wood to see if I can pull the wood away and the next thing I feel a snake bite me. I pull back and see the blood running out of the open holes in my finger. By this time I am wide awake and shaking. I never saw the snake and the bite is only tingling which at

that time I cannot remember if it is a good or bad sign.

I tell the owner that I am going to destroy his cupboard because I need to know what bit me. He says that it is not a problem and brings me a masonry chisel and a hammer. I slip this into the side of the cupboard and start banging away. My hands were shaking a bit and I am in a hurry so I whack myself on the forefinger of my left hand. It hurts a bit but I do not really feel it.

I tear the wood open and find a bloody little brown house snake pulled back in a striking position. I nearly killed it but scooped it up anyway. The owner gave me another sizable donation and I went home again. It took a while to get to sleep but eventually I dozed off.

This morning I wake up with a finger that is stiff and a headache from the lack of sleep. I am contemplating feeding the house snake to the king cobra.

Then Nature conservation phones and leaves a message to tell me that I must pay R100-00 to renew my catching permit so that I can have the privilege and pleasure of catching problem snakes. Luckily nobody heard the scream or the words that were uttered this morning!

- A F Naude

BIRTHDAYS

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

JUNE

1 – Dylan van Wyk

3 – Chrisjan van den Heever

4 – Yolandi Olivier

11 – Gavin Pelser

18 – Nigel Clarke

23 – Kobus Strydom

26 – Feroz Khan

26 – Mathys Lourens

29 – Raul Marques

30 – Mark Myburg

30 – Paul Murphy

UPCOMING EVENTS

For the Pretoria contingent...

Snake Identification and Bite Treatment Course will be held on the 27th & 28th May 2006 at Prestige College, Hammanskraal. The course is presented by Arno Naude. Please contact Heidi at 083 374 7087 for further information and bookings.

Venomous Snake Handling Course will be held on the 28th May 2006 at Prestige College, Hammanskraal. The course is presented by Arno Naude. Please contact Heidi at 083 374 7087 for further information and bookings.

Jhb area...

Snake Identification and Bite Treatment Course will be held on the 10th & 11th June 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 Handling Course will be held on the 11th June 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. 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.

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You might be a herper if...

...you drive by a board on the side of the road and you just HAVE to go back to flip it to ease your mind.

...when someone asks how many kids you have, you reply 2.1

... you have read and memorized more of your local field guide than any of your school books.

...if half the songs on your mp3 player are frog calls

.....you go to distant family events (like your cousin's wedding) only if the local herping conditions are promising

...your freezer is full of dead rodents

...you never have an old useless pillow case

.....the teller at GAME thinks you are the most organized person in the world for all of the rubbermaid storage boxes you have bought.

You never ever leave home without your camera, pillowcase, toilet paper, and a field guide.

..everytime a friend comes over they ask you if there are any snakes loose.

...you have a field guide with duck tape over the cover that says "Bible."

...you sleep with a snake hook under your pillow

...you have ever told your girlfriend "Don't worry! It won't bite!"

...you own 50 pillowcases and they all have blood/feces stains on them.

...you have ever had to remove a sock because you forgot to bring a bag.

.....you frown when you see people in snake skin boots.

...words like Door remind you of DORs (dead on roads).

...your pillow cases are all dirty, all 38 of them!!!

...you own numerous broken golf clubs....and don't play golf.

.....You check www.sareptiles.co.za forums first thing in the morning, when you get to school/work, on your breaks or between classes, as soon as you get home, right before dinner, after dinner, and before you go to bed.

...you are nodding to most of these things

- www.sareptiles.co.za