

COLUBRIDAE

Gonionotophis nyassae (Günther, 1888)

Black File Snake

DIET

On the evening of 4 February 2014, at approximately 19:00, an adult Black File Snake (*Gonionotophis nyassae*) (SARCA No. 98927) was encountered on a dirt road in the Crocriver Conservancy near Mbombela, Mpumalanga, South Africa (25°33'38.07"S; 31°10'50.11"E; 960 m a.s.l), in the process of subduing and swallowing a struggling East African Shovel-snout (*Prosymna stuhlmannii*; Fig. 1-6). We were unable to measure either of the snakes directly; however we estimate the total length of the File Snake to be 600 mm, and the total length of the Shovel-snout to be 200 mm. The entire process of ingestion took fewer than 5 min to complete, following which the File Snake moved off the road.

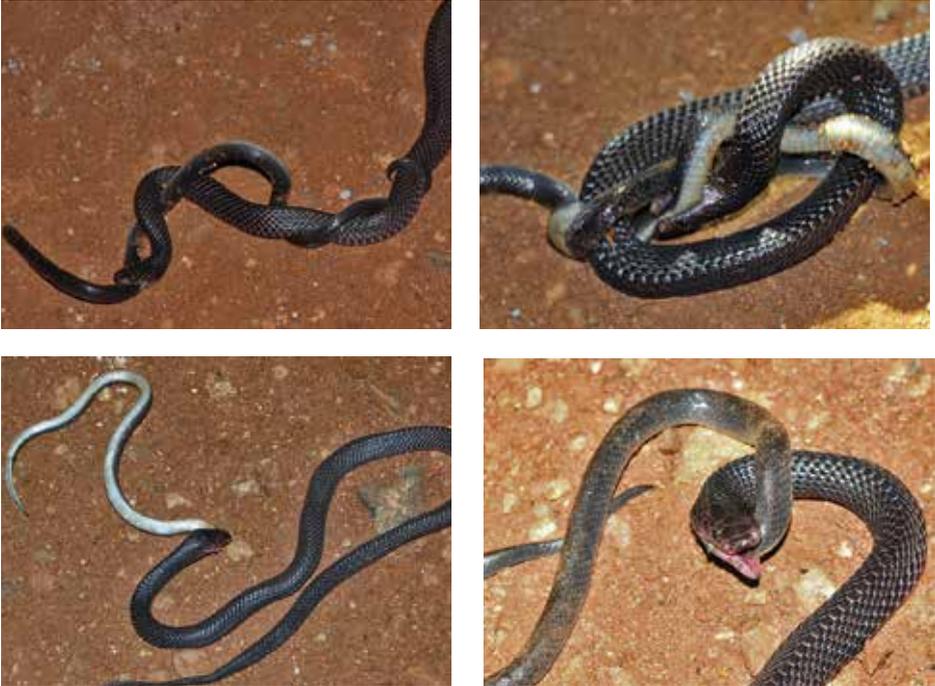
Our observation is the first record of *P. stuhlmannii* in the diet of *G. nyassae*, and represents one of only two known instances of ophiophagy in the species. Shine *et al.* (1996) reviewed the available literature regarding the diet of *G. nyassae* and examined the stomach contents of 58 specimens. They reported that the species is known to primarily consume terrestrial lizards, particularly lygosomatine skinks, and occasionally frogs (Shine *et al.* 1996). Additionally, they identified the remains of two snakes in the guts of preserved specimens: one a *Leptotyphlops*, the other unidentifiable. More recent texts (Branch 1998, Marais 2004, Alexander & Marais 2008) do not provide additional information on the diet of *G. nyassae*.

REFERENCES

- ALEXANDER, G. & MARAIS, J. 2008. *A guide to the reptiles of southern Africa*. Struik Publishers, Cape Town.
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- MARAIS, J. 2004. *A complete guide to the snakes of southern Africa*. Struik Publishers, Cape Town.
- SHINE, R., BRANCH, W.R., HARLOW, P.S., & WEBB, J.K. 1996. Sexual dimorphism, reproductive biology, and food habits of two species of African file snakes (*Mehelya*, Colubridae). *Journal of Zoology*, London 240:327–340.

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Figures 1-4: *Gonionotophis nyassae* (SARCA No. 98927) feeding on *Prosymna stuhlmanni*. Photo: Bryan Maritz.

PSEUDOXYRHOPHIIDAE

Dromicodryas bernieri Duméril, Bibron & Duméril, 1854
Bernier's Striped Snake

CLIMBING BEHAVIOUR

On 9 December 2007 at 14:45, a *Dromicodryas bernieri* was seen climbing a pine tree in a rural area alongside Route 7 near Ambatolampy, Madagascar (19°23'25.77"S, 47°25'27.37"E). (See figure 1 and 2.) It could be seen slowly moving its way upwards, using the rough bark to hold its grip. The pine tree was solitary with short mowed grasses surrounding it, and a human settlement 20 meter distant. After 8 min the snake disappeared out of sight at a height of approximately 5 m. This seems to be the first published record of tree climbing in *D. bernieri*. Most snake species appear terrestrial, rarely entering shrubs or trees. The Malagasy widely-distributed *Dromicodryas bernieri* is also terrestrial (Glaw & Vences, 2007). The reason for this arboreal behavior remains unknown. Possibilities are seeking shelter or foraging. *D.bernieri* feeds on lizards (Glaw