

Eaten Alive: Predation of *Philothamnus semivariiegatus* by *Varanus albigularis*

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On 25. Oct 2017 at 13:15 h local time (UTC+02:00), a male Rock Monitor Lizard (*Varanus albigularis* DAUDIN, 1802) measuring approximately 1.2m (total length) was observed dragging a medium sized (0.6-0.7m) Spotted Bush Snake (*Philothamnus semivariiegatus* SMITH, 1840) into a Nyala tree (*Xanthocercis zambesiaca*) (Figure 1). The lizard had caught the snake by the tail and the snake attempted to escape by winding itself around the lizards neck to free its tail. Once the lizard had found a position in a tree fork, 10m above the ground, he started swallowing the snake from the tail (Figure 2). The snake attempted to free itself continuously whilst it

was still alive and until it was completely eaten. At 13:24 h the head of the snake disappeared into the monitor's mouth.

After the snake was completely taken in, there were still movements visible when the monitor shortly opened his mouth to swallow the rest.

After it had eaten, the monitor remained in the Nyala tree. It came down approximately 1.5 hours later and walked slowly to the tree where it usually resides, around about 200 m away. It climbed up and remained there.

The event was observed at the Eco Training camp in Makuleke, Parfuri, Kruger National Park, South Africa. The lizard is a resident



Figure 1. Male *Varanus albigularis* successfully predating on a *Philothamnus semivariiegatus* 10m above ground level in a Nyala tree.



Figure 2. *Varanus albigularis* swallowing an individual *Philothamnus semivariiegatus* after successfully capturing and incapacitating it.

animal living in this camp. It usually spends the night in a tree hole, approximately 4m above the ground. On warm and sunny days it is often observed within a radius of 200 - 400m around this tree foraging for food.

On 21st December 2017, the same individual was observed catching another Spotted Bush Snake (total length 0.3-0.4m) and eating it on the ground, approximately 20m away from the Nyala tree mentioned above.

Reference List:

Daudin, F. M. (1802) Histoire Naturelle, générale et particulière des reptiles, ouvrage faisant suite, à l'histoire naturelle, générale et particulière composée par LECLERC DE BUFFON, et redigée par C. S. SONNINI, 3.

Smith, A. (1840) Illustrations of the zoology of South Africa, consisting chiefly of figures and descriptions of the objects of natural history collected during an expedition into the interior of South Africa, in the years 1834, 1835, and 1836; fitted out by "The Cape of Good Hope association for exploring Central Africa": together with a summary of African zoology, and an inquiry into the geographical ranges of species in that quarter of the globe. London :Smith, Elder and Co., 1, 1838-1849.