Herpetology Notes, volume 5: 31-32 (2012) (published online on 2 March 2012)

Predation of a cape genet (*Genetta tigrina*, Schreber 1776) by a southern African python (*Python natalensis*, Smith 1840).

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Python natalensis is the largest species of snake in southern Africa, potentially attaining a maximal total body length of five metres and mass of 60 kg (Alexander and Marais, 2007). Previously classified as a subspecies (*P. sebae natalensis*), much of the scientific literature pertaining to diet refers to what are now African rock pythons (*P. sebae*), based on study localities (e.g. Starin and Burghardt, 1992; Luiselli et al., 2007). Having been elevated to full species status (Broadley, 1999), published details regarding the feeding biology of the southern African python within its present distribution remain limited. Herein we report the first recorded case of predation of a cape genet by a southern African python, following the dissection of an individual found in the Mankwe wildlife reserve, North-West Province, South Africa.

On 26 March 2010 at approximately 10:00 am a female southern African python (Total length = 278 cm, Snout-Vent Length = 254 cm) was found trapped in the electrified boundary fence of Mankwe wildlife reserve in the North-West Province of South Africa (25˚14' S, 27˚16' E). The snake had become ensnared within the fence due to the presence of a food bolus and did not survive following its removal. Subsequent examination of the stomach contents revealed a partially digested *Genetta tigrina* individual (Fig. 1A). The identification of the cape genet was confirmed, based on the presence of light annulations that were 50-75% of the width of dark annulations and solid black markings at the end of the tail (Fig. 1B). Both of these characters are typical of *G. tigrina* (Gaubert, 2003; Gaubert et al., 2005) and can be used to differentiate this species from *G. gennetta* Linnaeus 1758, the second genet species known to occur within Mankwe wildlife reserve (http://www.mankwewildlifereserve.net/mammals.htm).

Typically, opportunistic observations of feeding events by large pythons and boas have been biased towards larger prey items as a result of the prolonged duration of feeding bouts and their conspicuous habits following these consumption events (Pope, 1961). In the case of *P. natalensis* Alexander and Marais (2007) list prey records as including; a range of small birds and mammals, grey duiker (*Sylvicapra grimmia*), impala (*Aepyceros melampus*), blesbok (*Damaliscus albifrons*), nyala (*Tragelaphus angasii*), vervet monkeys (*Chlorocebus pygerythrus*), African wild dogs (*Lycaon pictus*), cheetahs (*Acinonyx jubatus*), monitor lizards (*Varanus* spp.), Nile crocodiles (*Crocodylus niloticus*) and fish. In addition, there have been published accounts of predation of domestic animals (Savage, 1844) and even

Figure 1. Examination of a female *Python natalensis*' stomach contents (A) and the partially digested remains of a cape genet (*G. tigrina*) contained therein, note the scalpel for scale (B).

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a fatal attack on a young boy (Branch and Hacke, 1980). Published work on the food habits of the closely related *P. sebae* includes a single record of an unidentified *Genetta* sp. in its natural habitat in southern Nigeria (Luiselli et al., 2007). However, there have not been any previous records of *P. natalensis* predating any genet species (Graham Alexander pers. comm.). This novel record, not only provides new information on the diet of *P. natalensis*, but also provides important information identifying a predator of *G. tigrina*; information which remains relatively unknown (Wemmer, 1977).

Acknowledgments. We are grateful to Lynne and Dougal McTavish for permission to work in Mankwe Wildlife Reserve. A.P.P. would like to acknowledge the University of Brighton, for financial support.

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Accepted by Philip de Pous