

The Gaboon Viper in Yenzi!

Some of you had already seen around Yenzi one of the most feared snakes of the country, the famous Gaboon Viper (*Bitis gabonica*). Axel HARTMAN had indeed encountered it on the cycle path from Yenzi to the Terminal in June 2005, and Gerard BOS had met it once in 2005 on the golf course, but so far no specimen had been caught nor photographed, especially inside Yenzi. Until this first week of July 2006, when the guard Guy OTOUMOU of OSY team was attracted by the unusually loud noises made by a Village Weaver (*Ploceus cucullatus*) colony established in a Chinese bamboo thicket at case 94 (Joël and Diane MBADINGA'S). The birds were signaling to each others the presence of a snake – in this case a young Gaboon Viper, lying just at the foot of the bamboos. These nest colonies are very attractive to snakes, which eat chicks when wind or rain make the nests fall.



Yenzi and the Terminal are home to at least 21 snake species, inventoried by the Smithsonian team and OSY (in collaboration with HSE) from 2001 to 2006. Eleven of those (thus 52%) are venomous, including seven very venomous ones, such as Jameson's Mamba, the Forest Cobra and Goldie's Tree Cobra, and... the Gaboon Viper. The confirmation of the presence of this additional venomous species does not make of Yenzi a more dangerous place to live. All these snakes have always been here crawling in our gardens, but are so discrete that they are only rarely seen – and nobody was ever bitten by a venomous snake in Yenzi Camp. Just remember the elementary precautions to avoid snake bites: never try to touch a snake, never approach one too closely, and do not walk in high grass without boots, or at night without seeing where you put your feet. Tell your children. If you meet a snake in your garden, house or office, call 1111. OSY guards were especially trained for these snake cases. Yenzi Clinic moreover has all necessary antivenoms and material to take care of a bitten person, if it ever occurred. If you need information on first aid, do not hesitate to contact the Yenzi Clinic (9431).



The young Gaboon Viper was caught alive and will be on display at the Smithsonian Biodiversity Center in Vembo. You are all welcome to visit the Center, preferably on Wednesdays afternoon (call Elie TOBI at 9610).

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