
NAJA MOSSAMBICA (Peters, 1854)

Mozambique Spitting Cobra

DIET

Spawls & Branch (1995: The dangerous snakes of Africa. Natural history. Species directory. Venoms and snakebite. Blandford, London: pp. 1-192) state that *Naja mossambica* preys on amphibians, lizards, snakes, rodents and insects. According to Branch (1998: Field guide to snakes and other reptiles of Southern Africa. Third edition. Struik, Cape Town: pp. 1-399), this species feeds on toads, lizards, rodents, and grasshoppers. Eggs and chicks are also part of its diet (Jacobsen, 1985: Ons reptiele. CUM-Boeke, Roodepoort: pp. 1-208).

We here present a documented case of ophiophagy in this species. A *Naja mossambica* (MNHN 1981.1166), from "Southern Africa, Ladysmith, 3,500 ft. alt., Natal Midlands, Klip River, Farm Dawns Pride", collected by H.D. Shaw-Copeland on January, 3, 1981, was found having nearly completely ingested a Herald Snake *Crotaphopeltis hotamboeia* (Laurenti, 1768) (MNHN 1999.7629). The Cobra is a female, measuring 466+103 mm, and has 190 ventrals, 58 (3 single + 55 divided) subcaudals, and 23 midbody scale rows. The Herald Snake, which was ingested head first, is a female measuring 412+59 mm, and has 152 ventrals, 41 divided subcaudals, and 19 midbody scale rows; its own stomach contains unidentifiable frog remains, nematodes, and 6 partly digested termite workers (*Microcerotermes* sp.). There is no doubt that the termites were ingested by the frog itself. Anuran Amphibians constitute the main part of the diet of the Herald Snake (see notably Rasmussen, 1985: *Steenstrupia* 11(4): 113-129), but this snake is also known to eat other snakes (Stucki-Stirn, 1979: Snake Report 721. Herpeto-Verlag, Teuffenthal: vii + 1-650). *N. mossambica* willingly frequents termitaries (Jacobsen, loc. cit.; Spawls & Branch, loc. cit.).

The Mozambique Spitting Cobra has a very eclectic diet, and the compilation of the diet records of the species shows that it feeds on warm-blooded as well as on cold-blooded vertebrates and even insects. The predation case presented above is interesting in that it places *Naja mossambica* in a complex food chain.

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Submitted by

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