

## Gluttony Causes Death in Juvenile Puff Adder *Bitis arietans*

G.V. HAAGNER

*Gazankulu Nature Conservation, Manyeleti Game Reserve, P.O. Manyeleti, 1362 Gazankulu.*

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Little is known about the predator/prey relationship in reptiles. The puff adder *Bitis arietans* is known to feed on a variety of food items, their diet consisting mainly of rodents, while birds, lizards and toads may be included (Broadley 1983, *FitzSimons' Snakes of Southern Africa*, Johannesburg: Delta Books). Pitman (1974, *The Snakes of Uganda*, Glasgow: Wheldon and Wesley) recorded larger prey for puff adders in East Africa, while Robertson, Chapman & Chapman (1965, *Puku* 3: 149-170) reported on the diet of puff adders in Tanzania and Zambia, respectively.

A gravid puff adder was collected in the Manyeleti Game Reserve in the Mhala district (24°38'S, 31°28'E) of Gazankulu. On 12 February 1986 she gave birth to 28 young. The average length of the fry was 219,12 mm (S.D. 9,72 mm) and their average mass 15,72 g (S.D. 0,67 g). The young were separated from the mother and placed in another cage. The first ecdysis was completed within 24 hours. After 10 days some newly weaned mice were placed in the cage. On subsequent inspection, it was found that a young snake gorged itself to death. The young puff adder contained three young mice with a total mass of 13,8 g, while the post-mortem mass of the snake was 14,2 g. Having swallowed 97,2% of its own body weight, the snake evidently died of suffocation. The specimen was preserved and is now part of the Transvaal Museum collection in Pretoria (TM 64088).