

VIPERIDAE

Bitis rubida Branch, 1997

Red Adder

SIDE-WINDING BEHAVIOUR

At 11h00 on the 14 May 2006 a male Red Adder, *Bitis rubida*, was found basking on the side of a gravel road in the Swartberg Mountains, Western Cape Province, South Africa. On touching its tail, the snake immediately began to side-wind across the road. This behaviour was unexpected, and the snake showed remarkable efficiency in moving at a walking pace, throwing body loops forwards and off the surface of the ground in the classic manner; just as effectively as the more well known side-winding adders such as *B. peringueyi*, *B. schneideri*, and some *Echis* spp. (Figure 1.)

The little adder, which measured 25cm total length, repeated the behaviour several times. Furthermore, it was moved into a sandy spot within the fynbos, whereupon again it began to side-wind, until reaching more rocky substrate when it adopted the more familiar lateral undulatory mode of locomotion.

It has been stated in the literature that *B. rubida* never sidewinds (Branch, 1999: Dwarf Adders of the *Bitis cornuta-inornata* complex (Serpentes: Viperidae) in Southern Africa. *Kaupia*. 8: 39-63. Mallow et al 2003: *True Vipers, Natural History and Toxinology of Old World Vipers*. Krieger Publishing, Malabar, Florida; Marais, 2004: *Complete Guide to the Snakes of Southern Africa*. Struik Publishers, Cape Town). Indeed, it is perhaps surprising behaviour for a snake which inhabits rocky habitat. This behaviour could also be attributed to a threat response when the snake is unduly alarmed in a way similar to that shown for the Horned Adder, *Bitis caudalis* (Hoffman, L., 1988: Note on the ecology of the Horned Adder *Bitis caudalis* from Gobabeb, Namib-Naukluft Park. *Journ. Herpetol. Ass. Afr.* 35: 33-4).

However, it may be that side-winding behaviour is inherent in a number of snake species. During hot weather at DeHoop Nature Reserve, two other species, an adult Puff Adder, *Bitis arietans*, and an adult Skaapsteker, *Psammophylax rhombeatus*, were seen to side-wind across a tar road, moving very effectively and fast (*pers. obs*).

Submitted by

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