

ELAPIDAE

Naja nivea (Linnaeus, 1758)

Cape Cobra

SCAVENGING

On the 24 November, 2005, at 11h45, a Cape Cobra, *Naja nivea*, approximately 1.2m in length, was observed to approach a road-killed Skaapsteker, *Psammophylax rhombeatus*, and after a very brief inspection began to ingest the dead snake. The posterior half of the Skaapsteker was completely flattened, and with numerous pieces of small gravel adhering to the body. The cobra swallowed the entire snake, gravel included, in just over 55 seconds; the Skaapsteker was estimated to be 60cm in total length. The cobra then slowly moved off into the surrounding habitat, which consisted of limestone fynbos.

The observation was made at DeHoop Nature Reserve, on the main gravel road that runs from the entrance gate - 34°28'52"S, 20°25'56"E.

It is well known that *N. nivea*, and other cobras, prey on snakes, and this record follows on from the interesting observation of Loehr, 2005 (*Naja nigricollis woodi* (Pringle 1955) Black Spitting Cobra, Scavenging. *African Herp News* 38: 27) with regard to the scavenging behaviour of *N. nigricollis woodi*.

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VIPERIDAE

Bitis armata (Smith, 1826)

Southern Adder

PREDATION

African snakes are subject to a wide range of predators, and some, especially a number of bird species, are specialist snake-eaters. Small snakes obviously attract a wider suite of predators, including smaller birds.

On 27 November, 16h30, at DeHoop Nature Reserve, a common Fiscal Shrike, *Lanius collaris*, was observed perched atop a bush with a small Southern Adder, *Bitis armata*, dangling from its bill, which it was holding by the head. The Southern Adder was approximately 20cm in total length, and was obviously already dead hanging limp from the bird's bill.

Interestingly, at around the same period, a Fiscal Shrike was seen to catch a small Striped Mouse, *Rhabdomys pumilio*. Although not snake-related, the interesting point about this observation was that the bird used its feet in the manner of a larger bird of prey. Not having actually observed the shrike seizing the Southern Adder, it is not known if it was caught by feet or bill; but it does emphasise that this