



**Figure 1: Tail of a female *Platysaurus imperator* shortly after autotomy. Photo: Christian Schneider**

## LACERTIDAE

### *Meroles ctenodactylus* (Smith, 1838) Smith's Desert Lizard

#### DIET

On 11 April 2013 at 15h00 (ambient temperature 24°C), I observed a large *Meroles ctenodactylus* (about 20 cm total length) attack and partially consume a large Armoured Darkling Beetle (*Gonopus tibialis*) (about 2 cm long). This observation was made about 50 km north of Oranjemund (28°05'39.3"S, 16°11'44.3"E, 350 m) in the Sperrgebiet National Park, Namibia during a vertebrate fauna survey prior to proposed mining exploration activities. The substrate was sandy and the general area dominated by *Brownanthus arenosus* and *Salsola nollothensis* shrubs and tufts of *Cladoraphis spinosa* grass. The *M. ctenodactylus* initially bit and chewed into the harder parts of the thorax and abdomen of the beetle without much success. After various attempts, it eventually flicked the beetle over and commenced eviscerating its softer underparts (Fig. 1) which it consumed. After short spells of vigilance and thermoregulation alongside its prey, the lizard attempted to eat the head and thorax by chewing into these harder parts, but with little success. During this feeding bout the *M. ctenodactylus* was approached by a *Meroles cuneirostris* (Wedge-snouted Desert Lizard, about three-quarters its size, which resulted in the former picking up its prey and moving off, occasionally stopping and head-bobbing, until it was about 2 m away. This seemed

to dissuade the *M. cuneirostris* from approaching. After 20 mins (at 15h20) the prey remains were abandoned and the lizard resumed its foraging patrol.

According to Branch (1998) *M. ctenodactylus* are sit-and-wait hunters that prey on passing insects. Cooper & Whiting (1999) noted that *M. ctenodactylus* has a mixed foraging mode, i.e. it engages in both active and ambush foraging. Alexander & Marais (2008) stated that the diet of sand lizards (including *Meroles*) in general typically includes most invertebrates small enough to overpower (e.g. adult and larval beetles, termites, grasshoppers, cockroaches, scorpions and spiders), including other lizards and vegetable matter (e.g. grass seeds). The diet of other sympatric *Meroles* species comprises mainly coleopterans and hymenopterans (*M. cuneirostris*) and grass seeds (*M. anchietae*) (Murry & Schramm 1987).

## REFERENCES

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**Figure 1. *Meroles ctenodactylus* eviscerating an adult Armoured Darkling Beetle in the Sperrgebiet National Park, Namibia.**