

THE "OUVOLK" - AN ENDANGERED SPECIES



J.O.P.

THE Giant Girdled Lizard, (*Cordylus giganteus*), better known in the Free State as the "ouvolk", is nowadays apparently often confused with the pangolin or "ietermagog" (see article in this issue). The pangolin is presumably extinct in our part of the country, but the rather queer name under which this peculiar mammal is known has survived. The little superficial resemblance between the pangolin and ouvolk, i.e. their scaly covering, might possibly be the reason for this illogical confusion.

The ouvolk is a typical example of an armoured lizard, and is a reptile. It was first named and described by the famous naturalist Dr Andrew Smith in 1844 as occurring in "the interior districts of Southern Africa". After this, the ouvolk practically remained forgotten until 1913 when the well-known Dr Robert Broom obtained an adult female which he took with him to England. This female gave birth to two little ones during the course of the boat trip. Dr Broom was so happy about this that he took the little lizard family with him to attend a

meeting of the Zoological Society of London. He afterwards donated these lizards to the London Zoo where they lived for years.

As the name *giganteus* implies, the lizard is the largest member of the group of some 30 species of girdled lizards, reaching a length of 38 cm. Apart from those on the belly nearly all scales are sharp-pointed, and the lizard forcefully resists any attempt to turn it onto its back. It seems to be well aware of the vulnerability of the softer parts of its body.

The ouvolk is a burrowing species, does not frequent rocky hills and koppies, and lives in colonies. Its distribution is restricted to the open highveld of the north-eastern Orange Free State and the adjoining southern Transvaal.

They are fond of sitting with the head pointed towards the sun, hence the other common name of "sonkyker". They swiftly pursue their prey which consists mainly of insects.

The ouvolk, like many other reptiles, is ovoviviparous, i.e. the eggs are incubated within the female and the young are born alive. Two young measuring approximately 15 cm are born each year.

The recently completed reptile survey of the O.F.S. conducted by staff members of this Museum between 1972 and 1974 has shown that the ouvolk is probably an endangered species. The main reason for its decline being the destruction of its habitat. These animals occur only on arable land and the ploughing of farmlands, as well as industry and road-making have already taken a heavy toll of their numbers. In the vicinity of the Free State Goldfields hundreds are annually killed by motorcars when crossing highways.



S. de W.

Typical habitat of the ouvolk or Giant Girdled Lizard *Cordylus giganteus*.

In overseas countries there is a demand for these animals as pets. Although protected by law in both the Transvaal and Orange Free State numbers are still being exported illegally.

According to literature the ouvolk occurred in the Bloemfontein and Boshof districts some sixty years ago. However, during a recent reptile survey, no species could be obtained from these areas and since Winburg is the nearest locality to Bloemfontein where these lizards are still to be found, it is evident that the range of this species has been reduced with more than sixty miles. Several farmers within the range of its distribution testified to the fact that these lizards were formerly abundant but are now rare or completely absent in certain areas.

Although still quite numerous in certain localities the case of the ouvolk is one that merits special attention and further measures should be taken timeously to preserve these interesting creatures for posterity.

BRIEWE wat gerig is aan *Die Bestuurder, Bloemfonteinse Museum* of andersinds onduidelik geadresseer is, word gewoonlik deur die Poskantoor aan die Nasionale Museum gestuur. Hier word dit oopgemaak en afgehandel indien dit wel vir die Nasionale Museum bedoel was. Heel dikwels egter het die skrywer een van die

Die vier museums van Bloemfontein

ander Museums in die stad in gedagte gehad toe hy geskryf het en moet dit dan verder verwys word.

Dit mag dus van nut wees om kortliks iets omtrent elk van die vier Museums te vertel en elkeen se korrekte adres te verskaf.

1. Die Nasionale Museum geleë in die sentrale stad te Aliwalstraat 36, regoor die Hertzogplein. In sy versamelings, uitstallings en navorsingsprogramme word die hele natuur- en kultuurhistoriese velde gedek. Die Museum het ook 'n permanente kunsversameling wat eersdaags saam met dié van die Bloemfonteinse Munisipaliteit in die A. C. White-kuns-galery in die stadskouburg tentoongestel sal word. In die kunssaal van die Nasionale Museum word ook gereelde wisselende tentoonstellings aangebied. Hierdie Museum is 'n Staatsmuseum wat bykans al sy fondse ontvang van die Departement van Nasionale Opvoeding. Die Provinsiale Administrasie en die Munisipaliteit dra nie tot die fondse van die Nasionale Museum by nie.

Direkteur: Mnr. J. J. Oberholzer. Posadres: Die Direkteur, Nasionale Museum, Posbus 266, Bloemfontein, 9300. Telefoon: 79609.

2. Die Oorlogsmuseum van die Boererepubliek is geleë by die Vrouemonument in die suidelike gedeelte van die stad. Hierdie museum beeld die Vryheidstryd van die boer

uit vanaf die Eerste Vryheidsoorlog tot en met die Rebelle. Net soos die Nasionale Museum is dit ook 'n Staatsmuseum en ontvang ook sy lopende fondse van die Departement van Nasionale Opvoeding.

Direkteur: Mnr. K. J. Pienaar. Posadres: Die Direkteur, Oorlogsmuseum van die Boererepubliek, Posbus 704, Bloemfontein, 9300. Telefoon: 73447.

3. Die Nasionale Afrikaanse Letterkundige Museum en Navorsingsentrum gevestig in die ou Goewermentsgebou aan die westelike punt van Maitlandstraat (agter die standbeeld van President Brand). Hierdie Museum lê hom uitsluitlik toe op die Afrikaanse Letterkunde in al sy fasette en omsluit ook 'n Toneelmuseum en 'n Musiekmuseum. Die N.A.L.N. word deur die Provinsiale Administrasie van die O.V.S. bestuur en gefinansier.

Direkteur: Prof. P. J. Nienaber. Posadres: Die Direkteur, N.A.L.N., Posbus 517, Bloemfontein, 9300. Telefoon: 70511, uitbreiding 212.

4. Die Militêre Museum Fort Bloemfontein is gevestig in die ou Fort (ook as Queens Fort bekend) wat by die Basoetie-monument in Kerkstraat geleë is. Hierdie museum in wording lê hom uitsluitlik toe op die militêre geskiedenis van die O.V.S.

Dit word deur die Departement van Verdediging beheer en gefinansier en vorm deel van die Direktoraat van Militêre musea van daardie Departement.

Stafoffisier: Luitenant-kommandeur B. P. van Coller. Posadres: Privaatsak X20599, Bloemfontein, 9300. Telefoon: 75478.

DIE FVB-SENTRUM



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