

**A RECORD OF EGG PREDATION BY
THE EAST AFRICAN EGG-EATER
*DASYPELTIS MEDICI***

(SQUAMATA:COLUBRIDAE).

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In the Vhimba forest fringing the Lusitu river, on the border between Rhodesia and Moçambique, at about 20° 01' S 33° 00' E, the following observations were made on an East African egg-eater *Dasyveltis medici* predated the egg (eggs) of a yellow-streaked bulbul *Phyllastrephus flavostriatus*.

At 06h20 on 2 December 1972, we observed a bulbul on a nest at c 1,5 m above ground level in the sparse canopy of an understory shrub. This nest had been under construction on 26 November 1972 and had contained a single unincubated egg on 1 December 1972. The bulbul remained sitting as one of us approached the nest slowly, allowing the observer to insert his fingers and lift the bird so as to view the nest contents. It was seen that the nest cup contained a coiled snake and the observer swiftly

withdrew his fingers, at which the bird hopped on to a nearby branch. The nest was found to contain only the snake which had an egg bulge in its throat. The observers then withdrew a short distance and the bulbul immediately returned, looked into the nest cup and settled to incubate. At 06h43 the bird raised and arched itself slightly, as though laying an egg, and then settled again. At 06h45 the bird stood up, and perching on the edge of the nest, started pecking into the nest cup, and was once seen to hold a section of the snake in its bill. The snake immediately slid over the edge of the nest and fell to the ground. The bulbul resumed incubating. The observers then approached the nest and captured the snake, which was attempting to climb the nest shrub. At this stage there was no longer an egg bulge in its throat. A search of the ground in the vicinity failed to reveal regurgitated egg shell. The bird left the empty nest during the disturbance and did not return.

The snake, which was 530 mm long, was identified as *Dasyveltis medici* (D G Broadley pers. comm.). The specimen is in the Umtali Museum collection (Catalogue No. UM 28659).

We are unable to explain the unusual tameness of the bulbul nor its tolerance of the snake's presence, even though the snake filled a substantial proportion of the nest cup. That the bird settled on the snake again after having been flushed from the nest, and returned to sit on the empty nest from which it had evicted the snake was even more remarkable. The possibility exists that the unusual behaviour of the bird resulted from its being about to lay an egg. This species usually lays two eggs on consecutive days (pers. obs. W R J D). It should also be noted that at the time of observation the light level in the forest was very low (approximately 0,25% of bright sunlight, measured with a camera exposure meter), and the diurnal forest birds had not yet become active.

