



African Snakebite Institute

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REPTILE NEWS

Hi all,

As some of you may have heard, I was bitten by a Puff Adder while doing training at the Telkom Satellite station in Hartbeeshoek. It was a large specimen measuring well over a meter and it got me through a boot on the instep of my foot. This was my first bite in more than 35 years and although a bit of a freak accident, it was probably preventable. In the past few weeks we have also had reports of a number of other bites especially from Mozambique Spitting Cobras and Stiletto snakes. One Mozambique Spitting Cobra bite victim was bitten on the eye and it was reported that the snake struck out more than once. This behaviour from the Mozambique Spitting Cobra is quite unusual and there are a few theories as to why these snakes are biting more than once when people are bitten while asleep. My good friend Dr. Colin Tilbury is of the view that it is a feeding response with the snake thinking that it has found prey in the darkness of a house and it is the only plausible explanation that I have heard.

Back to my bite – it was very painful and felt like stepping onto a large Acacia thorn or being injected with a bit of petrol. An immediate burning sensation. I quickly packed up and was taken to the nearest hospital where the doctors managed the bite very well. One of the rules with Puff Adder bites is that if the swelling on the limb progresses quicker than 15 cm per hour, serious consideration must be given to administering antivenom. In this case the leg had swollen less than 10 cm in one and a half hours. I was placed on a drip, given painkillers, cortisone and antihistamine (not that there is good evidence that the latter two substances do much good) and the affected foot was kept slightly elevated.



After four days in hospital I was discharged with a slightly swollen foot and leg, a bit of discolouration at the site of the bite and very little pain. I had to keep the leg elevated as it was excruciatingly painful the moment I dropped the foot to the floor. It felt as if the foot was going to explode!

It is now 8 days after the bite and the swelling on the foot and leg is going down very slowly. I have kept the foot elevated most of the time and am not as yet able to walk.

Puff Adder bites, like Mozambique Spitting Cobra bites, are often associated with necrosis and this was obviously a fear. So I decided to make use of some creams that are used by doctors, especially plastic surgeons, to cope with scar repair and necrosis. I used RegimA Scar Repair and RegimA Tissue Resurrector and Healing Accelerator and with seemingly good results. The discolouration at the site of the bite has disappeared and there is no sign of necrosis. I realise that it is an insignificant sample (a sample of one) but hope to get these products to some of the doctors that deal with a large number of snakebites and then conduct clinical trials.

Back to antivenom. As most of you know, most deadly snakes (except the Boomslang and Vine snakes in Southern Africa) have full control over their venom glands and can regulate the amount of venom that they inject. We therefore see a large number of so-called “dry” bites where someone is bitten by a deadly snake and no venom is injected. There are also numerous bites where the snake injects a little bit of venom – enough to cause discomfort but not near enough to do serious damage. My bite would fall into this category. Then there are bites where snakes inject enough venom to do serious damage or just about empties out the venom glands. That would be a very serious bite.

Depending on how big a sample size one looks at, up to 80% of snakebite cases in Southern Africa where victims are hospitalised require no antivenom. So the idea of killing a snake to take it to the hospital for identification (a dangerous practise) is not very sound as most snakebites have to be treated symptomatically. If the snake is positively identified, especially in Black Mamba bites, it could help the doctor in that he/she will be better prepared for what may follow. But just because the identity of the snake is not known does not mean that a doctor would administer antivenom prior to checking symptoms.



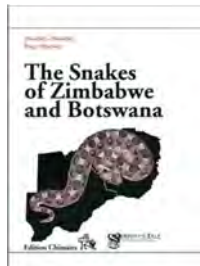
Regarding bites with excessive swelling, such as Mozambique Spitting Cobra and Puff Adder bites, the administration of antivenom does not necessarily prevent necrosis but in serious bites the early administration of antivenom may well reduce the area of necrosis. Again, it is for the doctor to decide whether antivenom therapy is required – it is an expensive exercise and may have serious negative effects such as anaphylaxis.

Snake Awareness and Venomous Snake Handling Courses

With my mishap I had to cancel the course at DumaZulu in Zululand and we now have a bunch of public holidays coming up – these result in long weekends so I am trying to decide on a convenient date for the Zululand course.

Bloemfontein course: I have had a number of enquiries for a course in Bloemfontein. If you are keen on attending a course in Bloemfontein, please let me know.

Gauteng Course: The next course will be in April – date to be announced.



New Book: The new book on Snakes of Zimbabwe and Botswana by Don Broadley and Roger Blaylock has reached the publishers in Germany and a batch of them are being mailed to South Africa. It has close to 500 pages, lots of colour photographs and the first book ever to cover the region. It is an expensive book and will sell for just over R500.00 (€49.95 in Europe). I will only be importing a limited number of copies, so please let me know if you are interested.

New tongs: My next batch of tongs have been ordered and are being shipped as we speak. I have also ordered a limited number of 2 m collapsible tongs – they will be ideal for large mambas and snakes in trees. These tongs will sell for R1,450.00 and despite the falling Rand I have managed to keep the standard tongs at R950.00.

Book, poster and snake handling equipment orders: Several orders have been delayed because of the postal strike. If you are still waiting for your order, please send me an E-mail so that I can follow up.



The *Dangerous Snakes of Southern Africa* is still available free as a download (go to www.reptileventures.com) or if you want a printed copy it will be mailed to you at R26.00 per copy (including postage and packaging – South Africa only). Please E-mail your request to johan@reptileventures.com.

Kind regards,

Johan Marais

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