

Letters

back and forth across the Canada–US border, expressed outrage, with a hint of lawsuits to come, when four wolves—three radio-collared and one ear-tagged, were killed by Canadian hunters. The Wildlife Branch forthwith closed the hunting season on 23 October and decided not to open the trapping season due to begin on 1 November.

Mr Walker reacts only in general terms to my criticism of black bear control, but does not volunteer specifics. Indeed, he finds himself unable to refute a single word of my observations. He also fails to clarify the point that ‘of the two people killed and others seriously injured in confrontations with bears’, all incidents occurred in remote areas of the province, and involved hunters and transients encroaching on bear habitats, including the surprising of females with cubs.

Meanwhile, wolves continue to be indiscriminately shot, trapped and poisoned in British Columbia—sacrificed to the lucrative trophy hunting trade. The BC Government has much to answer for in its rampant abuse of wildlife—but never more so when it fails to articulate its own policies with a sense of responsibility, honesty and accuracy.

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Round Island boa eats Serpent Island gecko

The article by Cooper and West (*Oryx*, **22**, 18–24) on radiological studies of Mascarene Island fauna, includes a radiograph of a Round Island boa *Casarea dussumieri* supposedly containing a Round Island gecko *Phelsuma guentheri* that it had eaten (Figure 4). The lizard is incorrectly identified; it is a Serpent Island gecko *Nactus (Cyrtodactylus) serpensinsula*.

The specimen of the boa and its prey are of interest since it provides us with a previously unreported food item, and suggests an unusual cause of death for this very rare snake. The boa was found freshly dead on Round Island, Mauritius on 13 March 1981 by John Hartley of the Jersey Wildlife Preservation Trust. I subsequently sent this specimen to John Cooper for post-mortem examination.

The snake, an immature with the characteristic overall orange-brown colour, was 310 mm in total length, of which 80 mm was tail. There was an obvious swelling where the snake had recently consumed a relatively large lizard. The lizard was removed and submitted to the British Museum (Natural History) where it was identified as a Serpent Island gecko (E.N. Arnold *in litt.* to J.E. Cooper, 30 June 1981). No pathological lesions were detected in the boa's tissues, but it was suggested that the large prey item may have induced cardiac failure or cerebral hypoxia because of prolonged pressure on major blood vessels (J.E. Cooper *in litt.*, 23 June and 7 July 1981).

This is the first known example of a Round Island boa preying upon a Serpent Island gecko, although it has previously been suggested as a likely food item (Bullock, 1986). Both of these reptiles are very rare Mauritian endemics. The boa is, as its name suggests, only found on Round Island although it was found on pristine Mauritius as well as some of the satellite islands (Cheke, 1987). Likewise, the Serpent Island gecko, or a closely related species, was found on the mainland (Arnold, 1980), but today is limited to Round and Serpent Islands.

The boa and the gecko are both nocturnal and difficult to census accurately, but their populations probably number in the hundreds, if not more. The populations are apparently healthy and reproducing well with many young animals. Nevertheless, these and the other reptiles on Round Island are very vulnerable and the introduction of exotic mammals or reptiles to the island could spell their doom.

References

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- Bullock, D.J. 1986. The ecology and conservation of reptiles on Round Island and Gunner's Quoin, Mauritius. *Biological Conservation*, **37**, 135–156.
- Cheke, A.S. 1987. Ecological history of the Mascarenes with particular reference to extinctions and introductions of land vertebrates. In *Studies of Mascarene Island Birds* (ed. A.W. Diamond). Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

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