

# FIELD TRIP REPORT: NIASSA, MOZAMBIQUE – OCT/NOV 2003

## JOHAN MARAIS

### 13 October 2003

**07:45.** 120865 km. About to leave Johannesburg for Maputo in Mozambique. We still have a bit of last minute shopping to do. We need some locks, plastic sheeting for the trap lines, a pool net for tadpoles and some batteries. Mo flew in yesterday and was very tired – said he wanted to get some sleep in but I think the excitement was too much. He ended up chatting away and going through my book collection. I had to finish the last bit of work on my snake book for Struik and sort out some habitat pictures. Graham Alexander kindly agreed to look at corrections in my absence. Bill was trying to explain the rules of cricket to Mo (South Africa was playing Pakistan in a one day international) but I wasn't sure whether Mo was absorbing much.

We drove over to Pretoria to visit Wulf Haacke in the late afternoon and had a really good time. Wulf certainly enjoyed the visit and we all ended up at Nando's for dinner.

Stopped off at the Sand Pit Hardware shop in Germiston where Bill found the right plastic for the drift net fences. Then drove off to Mica in Bedfordview and got the rest of the outstanding goods. Headed east.

**12:55.** 121227 km. Stopped at Hall's in Nelspruit for fuel and lunch. We had an earlier stop just outside Machadodorp for coffee and some awful dry wors. It's a hot, misty and windy day, around 27 ° C. Enjoyed a Great Traditional Wimpy breakfast and looked through some *Strelitzia* leaves next to the Wimpy for frogs but it was far too dry. Refueled 89.38 l @ R348.58. Headed east.

**17:50.** 121447 km. 581 km from Johannesburg. The border crossing went smooth and was done in under half an hour, despite the fact that we accidentally checked out of Mozambique instead of entering it. Passport control charged R12.00 each and third party insurance for the Land cruiser cost R120.00. It appears as though it may well be possible to get a visa for Mozambique at the border post for around R175.00, but could be risky and is certainly not advised. We went through two tollgates in Mozambique, the first costing 9,500 MC and the second 55,000 MC, a total of around R20.00. The exchange rate is in the region of 32,000 MC for a Rand. We were booked into the Hotel Monte Carlo, a smart 3-star hotel close to the harbour in a seedy part of Maputo. There were guards all over the place, not unlike back home. It had both the South African and the German flag, the latter pleasing Mo. Took a walk up to Mimos and had a good pizza meal. Saw some Palm swifts (*Cypsiurus parvus*) nesting on the hotel premises as well as a Cape Dwarf Gecko (*Lygodactylus capensis*) on the same palm tree.

### 14 October 2003.

I started the morning early with a walk through town, following the route that I had walked on my previous visit to Maputo. Maputo is a mess with broken sidewalks, derelict buildings and litter all over the place. Like most African cities it's full of street traders and minibus taxi's hooting for passengers. I had a coffee at Nautilus, the coffee shop opposite the bank that had the shootout during my last visit. It's a hangout for Portuguese businessmen and tourists and the vicinity is riddled with cigarette hawkers and curio sellers. The curio sellers are not easily shrugged off and are a real nuisance.

Breakfast at the hotel was very civilized with yoghurt, fresh fruit, cereals and the greasy stuff. We walked over to the agency where we met with Anabela Rodrigues, an elegant and organized Portuguese lady. She gave us a run-down on Niassa Reserve while we sipped on sweet black coffee in a small air-conditioned room. Also met her assistant Michelle Soto. Niassa Reserve is about twice the size of Kruger National Park – around 42,000 km<sup>2</sup>, and is the second largest reserve in Africa after Selous in Tanzania. There are around 11,000 people living in various villages in Niassa, with 4,000 of them in Mecula. If one includes the hunting blocks there are around 20,000 people in total living in Niassa reserve.

Elephant are abundant (around 14,000) as are Sable antelope (9,000), lion, leopard and crocodiles. Wild animals kill few people but a great deal of damage is done to crops. Aids do not appear to be a major problem but malaria is common and problematic. It's mainly subsistence farming with people planting cassava and maize. The soil is very poor and slash and burn practices pushes the people deeper and deeper into the Miombo woodland.

Mo was very concerned about the lack of rain as it is close to impossible to get a good collection of frogs without good rain. The first rains are only expected quite late in November. We had a quick lunch at the sport café in town and I got myself some Mozambique T-shirts. In the afternoon Michelle took us off to air cargo to weigh our baggage and to send some excess baggage as unaccompanied luggage. Our total weight allowance from Nampula to Niassa, including us, was a mere 430 kg! Nampula is the third largest city in Mozambique and is about a 2 hours flight from Maputo. Wanted to go to the famous Casa Del Sol for a prawn dinner but our vehicle was

parked in, so we headed for Mimos again. Mo and I went for t-bone steaks and Bill tried the seafood rice with lots of garlic. Upon leaving the restaurant I got chatting to three South Africans from Durban whom I heard speaking Afrikaans. They run a dingy hotel called Hotel Centrale. It's the cheapest in Maputo but they do not recommend it! The closest showers or toilets are way down the passage from the rooms.

### 15 October 2003.

Another good breakfast at the Hotel Monte Carlo, probably our last for a while. We drove to the agency where we left the Land cruiser with a lot of our excess luggage. Had to sacrifice my tripod and some other odds and ends. The airport, needless to say, is third world and seats on flights are not allocated. Fortunately, the first leg of the flight to Pemba was not very full and I had three seats to myself. Even got a Star newspaper! The flight, in a Boeing 737-200, took 2½ hours and we had to spend an hour in a stuffy transit lounge at the airport. The flight from Pemba to Nampula was brief, lasting 40 minutes. From the air the habitat looked devastated by slash and burn farming practices and regular veld fires. There is a clear divide between those areas that have been burnt regularly and those that haven't.

**15:00.** Got to Nampula and took a taxi to the Hotel Tropical. The ride cost us 65,000 mc. It's a run-down city, very low on infrastructure and with lots of people. The rooms were somewhat primitive but adequate and cost \$65 per person per night. I guess we were spoilt at the Hotel Monte Carlo! Dropped our luggage and started scratching around for herps in some vacant land next to the hotel. It's marshy with clumps of banana trees. S 15° 07' 07.7" E 39° 16' 08.2". Saw lots of Rainbow Skinks (*Trachylepis margaritifer*). The males are golden brown and robust while the females and sub adult males have blue tails. Most of them were on concrete block walls with convenient holes and crevices but I eventually saw them all over town. Bill and Mo walked off and saw Mozambique Agama (*Agama mossambica*), Striped Skink (*Trachylepis striata*), Flat-headed Tropical House Gecko (*Hemidactylus platycephalus*), Moreau's Tropical House Gecko (*H. mabouia*) and a rather thin-looking Tropical House Gecko (*Hemidactylus cf. platycephalus*) in the hotel. We also got some Dwarf Geckos (*Lygodactylus cf. capensis*), quite low near the ground on vegetation such as paw paw trees and banana trees. I wiped out a Boulenger's Skink (*Trachylepis boulengeri*) with a rubber band. It was in dense vegetation, close to the ground in shade amongst some banana trees. Bill was quite excited about it. We also got *Phrynobatrachus acridoides*, *Ptychadena anchietae*, Rainbow Skinks (*Trachylepis margaritifer*) and I found five gecko eggs in a hole in the ground, probably Moreau's Tropical House Gecko (*Hemidactylus mabouia*) eggs. They were round, white and appeared too large to be Dwarf Gecko (*Lygodactylus sp.*) eggs.

**16:45.** Sitting on the verandah of the Hotel Tropical, enjoying a cold beer. It's around 30°C and humid. Mo is chatting to a black guy who speaks German and he is sharing his cigarettes with his newfound friend. Needless to say, the guy eventually got through the small talk and asked for money. Mozambique music blaring in the background, a few pickup trucks parked outside as well as a big BMW scrambler. Quite a bit of Afrikaans spoken at the other tables. Bill called our pilot Greg and he popped around to introduce himself. Bill took a DNA sample from the Boulenger's Skink (*Trachylepis boulengeri*). Current elevation 434 m a.s.l.

**19:00.** Collected to marshland next to the hotel again and got *Afraxalus fornasini*, 10 small *Afraxalus crotalus*, 2 *Hyperolius sp.*, *Bufo gutturalis*, *Ptychadena sp.*, some *Phrynobatrachus sp.*, more Dwarf Geckos (*Lygodactylus sp.*), more Boulenger's Skink (*Trachylepis boulengeri*), Flat-headed Tropical House Geckos (*Hemidactylus platycephalus*) and Moreau's Tropical House Geckos (*H. mabouia*). It was a hot, dry evening. The *Afraxalus sp.* were all found in a clump of banana trees, under the axilles. Most were found close to the ground (< 1 m). The small *Afraxalus crotalus* were abundant with as many as 13 under one leaf stem. Both *Hyperolius sp.* were on top of leaves, about 50 cm off the ground, and at the top of the shrubs covering the ground. Both Moreau's Tropical House Geckos (*Hemidactylus mabouia*) were found on the concrete block wall where we saw the Rainbow Skinks (*Trachylepis margaritifer*) during the day. A *Bufo gutturalis* was found hopping amongst some leaf litter next to the hotel.

### 16 October 2003.

Got up early and walked through town taking photographs. It's a poor city with lots of people carrying goods over vast distances, usually on their heads. These goods include dry fish, smoked fish, fresh fish, chickens and charcoal. Most of the locals ignored me except for the wood carvers (Hello, my friend) and a mental case that scared off kids. He followed me for a while, chatting away in Swahili, but eventually gave up. Had a rather poor breakfast consisting of fried eggs, a slice of ham and some tasteless paw paw. Greg, who could be a really good lay preacher or civil servant, picked us up in a Land rover and took us to a hanger where everything was weighed, including ourselves. We were overweight and had to start sacrificing goods. My contribution included my binoculars, cd player, field guides and a jacket. Greg took us downtown to purchase buckets and rice and we stopped off at his house for coffee and freshly-baked muffins. Met his wife Melanie and his 15-month old daughter Hannah. I had some problems pouring milk from a poorly-opened carton and ended up with most of it in my hat! Took off around 12:30 in a Cessna 206. The flight was smooth and Greg was meticulous but seemed quite green at flying the 206. The last 20 minutes were rather bumpy (we were flying at about 200 m) and Mo wasn't feeling great. We crossed the Lugenda river and saw lots of people, fish traps and villages but very little game, except for three lone Sable antelope. Veld fires had left their mark and most of the veld seemed to have suffered recently. White ash outlined the position of tree stumps that had burnt out on the ground.

15:00. Landed at Mbatamila in Niassa (S12° 11' 01.0" E37° 33' 02.9" – 470 m a.s.l.). Mecula mountain lies to the north-east and looks quite spectacular, though only about 600 m higher than the surrounding landscape. It's probably about 20 km away. The warden Chandi Baldere, a tall, lean, friendly Portuguese man, met us. A Brazilian youngster Paulo, who had arrived from Maputo the previous day and was staying in Niassa for about two months, accompanied him. The Land rover trip to the camp was brief but very bumpy and there is no way that one can sit on the back of the Land rover in Niassa. It's far too rough a ride. I really dislike Land rovers! Mbatamila camp is very civilized with World Wildlife Fund huts and various tents erected on raised platforms. There is also a kitchen area, bush shower, long drop and a lounge area that occasionally has bush E-mail that works on radio frequencies. A generator comes on at around sunset, really spoiling the ambience, and runs 'till about midnight. Chandi was off to town the next day and kindly offered to buy us some food. I climbed an inselberg north-east of the camp but the area had been burnt recently and I saw very little, except for some Purple-crested Louries (*Tauraco porphyreolophus*). Pulled quite a lot of bark off trees but it's very dry. The Furmont stump ripper came in very handy and it must be the finest bit of herpetological equipment even designed. Managed to get a Dwarf Gecko (*Lygodactylus cf. capensis*) in the camp as well as some Wahlberg's Snake-eyed Skinks (*Panaspis wahlbergii*). Saw some Flat-headed Tropical House Geckos (*Hemidactylus platycephalus*) in the lounge area – they seem to be everywhere! Paulo caught a Mozambique Agama (*Agama mossambica*) in his hut and I got a few Puddle Frogs (*Phrynobatrachus cf. zimbabweensis*) in two small ponds close to camp. One of the ponds appeared to be the main water source for the camp. Also saw some Grey-headed Parrot (*Poicephalus* – not sure of the species), Common Bulbul and a Mozambique Batis. Spoke with Chandi – he was sipping a luke-warm fish-smelling 2M beer while working on some E-mails. Told me that there is no good fishing in the area. Pity. All rivers and ponds are extensively fished with gill nets, fish traps and local poison. Also told me that they killed a Black mamba (*Dendroaspis polylepis*) in his office recently and that he had sent the specimen to Maputo. He caught a Flap-necked Chameleon (*Chamaeleo dilepis*) the previous day but Paulo had released it in a tree. Mo and I had a quick dart game and ended up one game each. It was good to get to sleep. We had some elephant chewing very close to our tent during the night.

#### Friday 17 October 2003.

Got up around 06:00 and climbed to inselberg west of the camp site. Saw a Mozambique Agama (*Agama mossambica*) low down on the rocks but it disappeared quickly. Also found two small gecko eggs and collected a large scorpion. Wacked a female Rainbow Skink (*Trachylepis margaritifer*) with a rubber band. It was under a rock on sand but disappeared up a tree. I had to climb after it. (S 12° 10' 59.2" E 37° 32' 44.1" – 615 m a.s.l.). Also got two geckos, possibly the Tete Thick-toed Gecko (*Pachydactylus tetensis*) and a Speckled Thick-toed Gecko (*Pachydactylus punctatus*). The former was found under a vertical piece of exfoliating rock and the latter under rock on rock with quite a bit of soil present. The walk up the inselberg took about 2½ hours and I was somewhat amazed at the lack of reptiles. The bird life was somewhat better and I saw Arrow-marked babblers, Fork-tailed drongo and Trumpeter Hornbill.

10:00. Had an energy bar and two black coffees for breakfast. Mo is busy preparing specimens and is very involved in what he is doing. He places the live frogs in Chlorabutanol to knock them off, then lays them on paper towelling covered in formalin to set the specimens. This is, of course, after he had removed a toe for DNA. Quite a bit of effort is put into posing the specimens, ensuring that all toes are spread out and clearly visible. The vehicle that Chandi had left us was out of order and we ended up spending most of the day in camp with Bill and Mo preparing specimens, mainly those caught in Nampula. Mo prefers to use alcohol when preserving specimens but it's expensive – over R120.00 for a litre. He preserves specimens in 70% ethanol or 50% propanol. DNA samples are placed in 100% alcohol. Commercial formalin is usually sold in a 40% concentration and that is diluted by adding nine parts water to one part formalin, in other words 10% of the commercial strength or 4% of the actual strength. Formalin therefore works well in the field as you need not carry that much with you. 75% salt added is very good osmotically and will help preserve specimens better.

Went out again to find a Variable Skink (*Trachylepis varia*) that I had missed earlier on. It was close to Bill's house and I got it with a rubber band after doing quite a bit of digging beneath a large rock. Bill got a Mozambique Agama (*Agama mossambica*) right outside his house and I got another Wahlberg's Snake-eyed Skink (*Panaspis wahlbergii*). They are very common in the leaf litter in camp and are most active in the early mornings and late afternoon.

Met Vincent Parker, the bird man of Mozambique. Vincent works for the Endangered Wildlife Trust and has been scratching around Mozambique for years, looking and listening for birds. He reminds me a lot of Lynn Raw – has a beard and speaks slowly and softly. He has done southern and Central Mozambique and will be in northern Mozambique for the next four years. Vincent lives in a pickup truck with all of his equipment and cooking utensils in the back and a tent on the roof. He thinks a while before speaking and seldom says much.

Went up the riverbed outside camp, following an elephant path, with Bill and Mo. Got some common frogs but driver ants made it unpleasant and we headed back for camp.

Saw two Flat-headed Tropical House Geckos (*Hemidactylus platycephalus*) mating. The male bit the female in the neck region and twisted his tail beneath hers. Copulation lasted just short of a minute. Towards the end of copulation both geckos had their tail tips twisting in the air. Took a walk along the stream in the evening and got some *Ptychadena* sp. as well as *Phrynobatrachus* sp.

### Saturday 18 October 2003.

Had some strange sweet pap for breakfast that Paulo made and Bill, Mo, Paulo and I headed out of camp for the big inselberg directly north of the one that I had climbed the previous day. Saw two Tropical House Geckos (*Hemidactylus* sp.) on the way to the inselberg but didn't collect them. Pulled a lot of bark off trees but got nothing. We scratched around along the base of the inselberg on the north-eastern side and Mo got a scorpion. Seems Paulo has the runs as he keeps on disappearing behind a bush. Climbed the northern slope and saw a male Rainbow Skink (*Trachylepis margaritifer*) as well as a Mozambique Agama (*Agama mossambica*). At 595 m a.s.l. I removed a piece of exfoliating rock and caught a Speckled Thick-toed Gecko (*Pachydactylus punctatus*) (perhaps a juv *P. tetensis*?). It was a vertical piece of exfoliating rock with no soil in it. The specimen was dark grey with light spots. (S 12° 10' 31.4" E 37° 32' 48.9").

**09:45.** Close to the top of the inselberg I disturbed about a dozen Helmeted Guinea fowl (*Numida meleagris*). They didn't fly very far, about 40 metres, and two of them remained on the edge of a cliff face for a while, seemingly confused. They then flew off and appeared to locate the calls of the group as they changed their direction of flight and landed amongst the others. I walked up an evergreen valley where I encountered lots of large light brown ants that use some sort of webbing to make nests out of leaves. The nests end up like delicate bits of pastry. Like most ants they bite and are a real nuisance. On top of the inselberg I got a Kirk's Rock agama (*Agama kirki*). It had an orange-red head and dashed under a large flat rock. I was lucky to get it as I grabbed with one hand while picking up the rock with the other. Also got a Moreau's Tropical House Gecko (*Hemidactylus mabouia*) under a rock in the shade of some trees. (S 12° 10' 39" E 37° 32' 39" 734 m a.s.l.). I flushed about eight Hildebrand's Francolin – could have got a great shot on the last one that took off! (S 12° 10' 38.5" E 37° 32' 39.1" – 740 m a.s.l.). It's 34°C and 932 on the barometer. It was a long walk down and I had used up all of my water. I saw very little on my way down except for two magnificent male Kirk's Agamas (*Agama kirki*) in full breeding colours. Their bodies looked bright blue-green and their heads bright orange. They were both very nervous and I didn't get within 20 metres of either specimen.

Walked past Candy's house and met Keith and Colleen Beggs. Also got some cold water from them! The water that I had been drinking so far was from the spring but boiled and filtered. It was awful and I invariably blocked my nose prior to drinking so that I didn't taste it. But the water that I got from the Beggs was really good. This puzzled me as it was from the same source. It turned out that in the process of boiling our water in an open pot above a smoky fire, the smoke was contaminating the water. This was resolved quickly. The Beggs had been in Mozambique for six months searching for honey badgers with traps, spotlights at night and speaking to honey collectors, but to no avail. They had seen some evidence of honey badgers but no sight of one! They trapped a variety of small carnivores and some leopard and were really desperate to get a badger for radio telemetry work. They told me that the badgers used very little finesse when killing snakes, even Puff Adders (*Bitis arietans*). They lack the agility of other small carnivores such as mongooses and merely close their eyes and rush in, biting. With most snakes, especially Cape Cobras (*Naja nivea*), they just wear their prey down. They often get bitten in the process but appear to have a very high resistance to snake venoms. A badger that was bitten in the cheek by a Puff Adder slept for about four hours and had visible swelling on the side of the head, but eventually woke up, ate what was left of the snake and walked off! Badgers move up to 40 km in a night and have home ranges of up to 600 km<sup>2</sup>. They are relentless and suicidally brave, even going up trees to rob prey from leopard. Reptiles make up a substantial part of their diet in the Kalahari with lots of Giant Ground Geckos (*Chondrodactylus* sp.) and Barking Geckos (*Ptenopus* sp.) being dug up. Most of the other lizards, especially lacertids, are probably far too quick for the badgers to catch.

Bill and I made funnel traps from mosquito wire. I could hear Flat-headed Tropical House Geckos (*Hemidactylus platycephalus*) calling in the background. Their call is not unlike that of the Barking Geckos (*Ptenopus* sp.) but is more of a tika-tika-tika that lasts about three seconds, consisting of anything from 10 – 20 clicks at a time. Moreau's Tropical House Gecko (*Hemidactylus mabouia*) does not call that long, usually just a few tika-tika-tika's. Elephant have become a common sight and walk past the kitchen area daily. It's usually a cow with two young, probably one of this year and one of last year, or a cow with a single young. Larger groups of elephant are also seen around camp. We have been taking some photographs but the cows are quick to do a mock charge if we get a little too close. Still no sign of Chandi.

### Sunday 19 October 2003.

It's a beautiful morning and Paulo has gone off with Rob Cunliffe, a Zimbabwean doing social work in Niassa. This resulted in us losing out on a promised breakfast of pap. Bill gave each of us an energy bar and we drank black coffee. We are rapidly running out of coffee and it's going to be tough to face Mo in the mornings without his coffee fix. Hope Chandi gets back soon. Freshly-baked bread has been promised but we're not sure when. Bill spotted an unusual Dwarf Gecko (*Lygodactylus* sp.) on a satellite dish and we managed to catch it. It has bright black markings dorsally and yellow down the centre of the belly. Met Frazer Gear, Mike and Isabelle from Twinspot Travel. They are in a camp on top of Mecula Mountain and are expecting their first batch of paying tourists. Frazer has seen lots of Water Monitors (*Varanus niloticus*) along the banks of the Lugenda River in the south of Niassa and also dug up a Rainfrog (*Breviceps* sp.) in a river bank. I took a walk to one of the water holes but had to walk circles around some elephant. They are abundant. Saw some Green-spotted Dove (*Turtur chalcospilos*) and Black-eyed Bulbul (*Pycnonotus barbatus*) that came down to drink but the Bulebuls were very nervous whereas the Green-spotted Dove came down one at a time and landed very close to me. Also saw a Dwarf Gecko

(*Lygodactylus* sp.) on a log close to the ground but couldn't get near it. They are active, agile little lizards. Was hoping that, with it being so dry, some snakes might come to the water hole to drink but to no avail. Had another chat to Keith Begg about their work, photography and publishing. Keith thinks that the Sony PD150 is by far the best in its class and anticipates a new model appearing early next year. Worth waiting for as I have been looking at the Canon Xp1, but Keith doesn't like it for a variety of reasons. Mo went off with the pool net to look for frogs and tadpoles and picked up two bee stings in the process. This could be problematic as he is allergic to bee sting but carries Cortisone, both in tablet form and in an injectable form. Bill and I went out to set up the trap line, pitfall traps and funnel traps. Mo was feeling very sorry for himself after his altercation with the bees and stayed back in camp. Our new assistant Adam, who costs 35,000 MC a day and cannot speak any English, was nowhere to be found. We fixed the plastic sheeting to bamboo stakes at 1,2 m intervals, using a staple gun. The bottom lip of the plastic was folded out and buried, effectively preventing anything from crawling underneath the plastic. A bucket was buried at either side of the 30 metre trap line as well as one in the middle. At the ends the plastic is extended about 20 cm past the bucket, passing over its centre. Funnel traps were placed on either side of the trap line and covered with leaves for shade. Logs were also placed at an angle at either side of the funnel traps, steering any crawling creatures towards the funnels. Bill caught an *Arthroleptis stenodactylus* and a *Phrynobatrachus mababiensis* while we were setting up the traps and Mo, after a brief visit, got a male *Hemisis marmoratus*. It was hopping about like a toad. Back at camp the Beggs had left us 2 tins of Bully beef, ½ a cabbage and some small ripe tomatoes. Rob got back just after dark and had driven over a 2 m+ Black Mamba (*Dendroaspis polylepis*) (S 12° 07' 50" E 37° 21' 34"). It was around dusk and he already had his vehicle's lights on when he came across the snake. Bill pickled the head, tail with hemipenes everted, and the skin. The carcass was given to the Beggs for their badger traps. We checked the stomach contents of the snake but it was empty. Dinner was a bit more pleasant with cabbage and tomatoes added to the flavoured rice.

### Monday 20 October 2003.

Went out to the traps first thing in the morning filled with anticipation but got very little. A few common frogs that we had already collected and a bucket filled with army ants. The first trap line had 2 x *Phrynobatrachus mababiensis* and a *P. acridoides* and the second line 1 x *P. mababiensis* as well as a dried out *Arthroleptis* sp.. It's extremely hot and dry and the reptiles just aren't moving. Hope the elephant don't wreck our traps – we're on their highway. Ran into Keith and Colleen Beggs again – they're heading out of camp for a week in search of badgers. Chandi had returned and we got some food as well as a functional Land rover. Bill got somewhat ripped off as Chandi returned less food than ordered, no beers plus we had to pay in! An expensive mistake that will obviously not be repeated. We headed out to the dambos in the west and saw some Zebra that are beautifully marked. They lack the shadow markings that our zebra have. Also took some habitat pictures. S 12° 08' 44.6" E 37° 28' 02". Saw a juvenile Variable Skink (*Trachylepis varia*) but didn't collect it. This lizard appears to be very common. Also saw a Tree Agama (*Acanthocercus atricollis*) run up a tree but couldn't catch it. Saw another nine Zebra. Caught a few *Phrynobatrachus acridoides* and *P. mababiensis* but Mo released them (S 12° 08' 45" E 37° 28' 01"). This was in an area right next to the road with a very small water hole but quite a bit of greenery compared to the rest of the Miombo woodland.

S 12° 07' 55.1" E 37° 26' 08.2". On Mbatamila-Matondovela road, about 15,5 km from camp turnoff – Stopped at some pools in a drainage line with thicker bush and some water lilies and collected *Ptychadena mossambica* under a log on damp soil about 4 m from water. Also caught Flat-headed Tropical House Geckos (*Hemidactylus platycephalus*) under bark close to the ground. I saw a Boulenger's Skink (*Trachylepis boulengeri*) but couldn't catch it. It was on the ground in thick grass next to a rotting log, in shade. Mo got various frogs including *Phrynobatrachus acridoides* and *Ptychadena taenioscelis*. He uses a plastic bottle with a foam top to catch frogs and it works incredibly well – the transparent plastic bottle is popped over the frog and the foam top used to cut off the frog's escape, in other words from behind. Bill was really excited as he had his first sighting of the rare Arnot's Chat (*Thamnolaea arnoti*), a major tick for a twitcher. He was happy. Also collected *Phrynobatrachus mababiensis* S 12° 07' 50" E 37° 21' 37" – about 24,7 km from camp turnoff. Stopped at a drainage line with granite bedrock and a few pools in Miombo woodland. Collected one Variable Skink (*Trachylepis varia*), a *Phrynobatrachus natalensis*, *P. acridoides* and *P. mababiensis*.

S 12° 07' 12.5" E 37° 19' 38.8". 28.6 km along Mbatamila –Matondovela Road – A deep channel drainage line with leaf-covered water and riverine trees. I got a smallish Water Monitor (*Varanus niloticus*) after quite a chase across some grasslands, during which I slipped and fell twice. I eventually pinned it my foot just before it disappeared into some water. Also got more *Phrynobatrachus* "red back", *P. acridoides* and *P. mababiensis*. Saw a Green-backed Night Heron.

S 12° 07' 24" E 37° 17' 43". Came across a rocky outcrop in Miombo woodland and collected a Variegated Skink (*Trachylepis varia*). Bill saw two *Gerrhosaurus validus* but they disappeared very quickly. This lizard appears to be very shy as there is a lot of evidence where they live but they are seldom seen. Don't know how but we're going to have to catch one as it will be quite a range extension for the species and we need some DNA. Also saw *Agama kirkii*, *Trachylepis margaritifera*, *Pachydactylus tetensis* and what could have been *Pachydactylus punctatus* eggs.

S 12° 06' 50" E 37° 15' 01" – A drainage line at the southern base of the Namba inselberg. Mo got 3 *Phrynobatrachus mababiensis*, *P. acridoides* and some red back *Phrynobatrachus*. Bill got 4 *Panaspis wahlbergii*, including two juveniles.

**14:00.** Back at camp – toast and coffee. It's very hot. Checked the trap line and got 1 x *Lygodactylus capensis grotei* in a funnel trap plus two *Panaspis wahlbergii* (one dead and disposed of).

Night trip to the dambos on the road to Matondovela. We basically collected one spot only, the second spot that we had visited earlier in the day with water. (S 12° 07' 55" E 37° 26' 08"). Got a variety of frogs including *Phrynobatrachus acridoides*, *P. mababiensis*, *P. natalensis*, *P. sp (red back)*., *Ptychadena oxyrhynchus*, *P. taenioscelis*, *P. mossambica*, *Bufo maculatus* and *Chiromantes xerampelina*. Saw some galagos and Elephant shrew while driving.

### **Tuesday 21 October 2003.**

Checked the traps first thing in the morning but got nothing. Very disappointing and we desperately need some rain to get the reptiles up and active. We drove off, heading south for the Lugenda River. On our way we stopped off at Lechengwe village (S 12° 10' 52" E 37° 39' 49.8" – 363 m a.s.l. ) where some women were working in the field. They had killed a small *Lamprophis capensis* as well as a *Lycophidion capense*. Bill paid them 10,000 mc each (about R3.00) for the dead snakes and asked them to keep any more snakes that they may come across. S 12° 19' 19" E 37° 39' 26". Our second stop was at Rio Incaloue, a dry river bed where I saw a *Gerrhosaurus validus* disappear very quickly. Again, a lot of evidence that there are quite a few living in the outcrops but extremely shy. Also got an Agama with the help of a rubber band, even if it just knocked it off the rocks. It looks like a juvenile *Agama kirkii*. Also saw *Trachylepis margaritifer*. Bill got a *Ptychadena anchietae* and two hatchling *Nucras cf. ornata* and a *Trachylepis varia*. Also saw *Panaspis wahlbergii*. We drove on to the Lugenda River but got no more reptiles. The river, at the bridge, is wide but shallow with a few streams passing below the bridge. Lots of fish traps and evidence of the area being fished extensively. We saw a crocodile skull stuck onto a pole at the entrance to Niassa. We drove back to camp and the afternoon was used for fixing specimens and a bit of photography. We will visit the village in the morning to see if the women killed more snakes while working in the field. It's close to midnight and I got an E-mail off before bed.

### **Wednesday 22 October 2003.**

Bill woke us up well before 06:00. He seriously needs a watch. Some guys left the camp in the early hours of the morning, severely disturbing our sleep. Got another *Lygodactylus cf. capensis* in a funnel trap as well as around nine frogs, all *Phrynobatrachus mababiensis*. So far the traps have produced around 18 specimens. We are heading for the workshop at the air strip for some minor repairs to the Land rover as well as diesel, then hope to get down to another section of the Lugenda river. Breakfast consisted of home-baked bread with margarine and Weet-bix covered in instant milk made from milk powder. Quite civilized. And some coffee. We got stuck at the workshop for more than an hour and scratched around. Saw *Panaspis wahlbergii*, *Trachylepis varia*, *T. striata*, *Acanthocercus atricollis*, another Agama that looks like *A. armata* and the elusive Arnot's Chat. In fact, there were two of very and they were both very tame, feeding within 2 m from where I was standing. Also saw Blue Waxbill Green capped Eromomela, Red-faced crombec and a Violet-breasted Sunbird. Arnot's Chat even went down holes amongst rocks looking for food! Went back to Lechengwe Village and upon our arrival we were presented with a dead *Meizodon semiornatus*, chopped in half while hoeing. Also got a chopped-up *Crotaphopeltis hotamboeia*, a dead *Chamaeleo dilepis*, one dead *Agama armata*, a *Chiromantes xerampelina* and a *Ptychadena oxyrhynchus*. We drove on to Mecula village to buy some groceries. It supposedly has about 4,000 inhabitants but Mo thinks that there are many more people than that living there. The mango trees, most of them really big, all full of green mangoes. Got some basics like tinned sardines and a bit of oil but there is very little to purchase. Couldn't even get a cold drink. In town the villagers brought us some live *Bufo maculatus* in a variety of containers. Drove back to Lechengwe Village There were lots of people, including kids and a great deal of excitement. People had sticks and bags with lot of lizards and frogs. There were at least a dozen *Chiromantes xerampelina*, if not more. Some in plastic bags, others at the end of sticks. Most of these mud and grass houses must have at least one or two living inside during the dry season. Also some *Bufo maculatus*, one dead *Philothamnus semivariatus*, *Trachylepis striata*, *T. margaritifer*, *Hemidactylus platycephalus*, *Ptychadena oxyrhynchus* and a *Agama sp.* as well as a few live *Chamaeleo dilepis*. More and more kids were arriving with dead lizards and frogs, some jammed in forked sticks and others hanging from looses like in a Gary Larsen cartoon. It was like a scene from a reptile horror movie. Managed to get some photographs but a lot of what they brought, as is usually the case, was common and not required. There were released *Chiromantes* and *Chamaeleo dilepis* all over the place, followed by lots of screaming and laughing as frogs jumped onto peoples legs. Some people got paid for their find but the majority not, as their critters were released or disposed of. Nobody seemed unduly disappointed and they all returned to normal life as we drove off. Back in camp the tsetse flies were really pestering us. As mentioned, there are no dogs nor cattle in Niassa because of the tsetse flies. Bill checked the traps and got 1 x *Lygodactylus capensis grotei*, a *Phrynobatrachus mababiensis* and a *Panaspis wahlbergii*.

### **Thursday 23 October 2003.**

Didn't sleep well with mosquitoes keeping me awake. Also had a lot of bugs crawling over me while I was trying to sleep. Bill was up early and checked the traps. He got one *Arthroleptis stenodactylus*, a *Phrynobatrachus mababiensis* and a *Ptychadena anchietae*. One of the funnel traps had a large water crab in it and the trap was damaged, possibly by an otter trying to get to the crab. We took the damaged trap with the crab to the airstrip to see whether we could trap the *Agama armata* – thought that the crab may attract enough ants to get the lizard in

the trap. We saw a lacertid dash into the bush as we left the airstrip but couldn't get it. Marked the bush where it had disappeared – will be back. Our next stop was at Lechengwe Village but this time they had nothing. We left Adam there for the day, hoping that he would inspire them to get more reptiles, and headed for Mecula Mountain Camp. Saw a brightly-coloured *Acanthocercus atricollis* run up a tree and I had about five shots with my kettie to get him down. Got very close but no joy. It's been years since I last used a kettie. Saw warhog and baboon, the latter apparently Yellow baboon according to Kingdon. Stopped at a river with a few pools but all of the waterside vegetation had been destroyed by people. It's the upper reaches of the Rio Licombe (S 12° 05' 20" E 37° 33' 39"). Saw *Phrynobatrachus acridoides*, *P. mababiensis*, *P. sp.* (red back) and a *Ptychadena taenioscelis* but no tadpoles. Also saw *Trachylepis varia*. Some locals had set up camp there and were doing a lot of habitat damage to the area. This was, in fact, the bridge-building team and they were working their way towards the mountain camp. Bill netted some fish, including some Mormyrids and *Barbus sp.*, which he pickled in formalin. S 12° 05' 20.1" E 37° 33' 38.9".

We drove down a dead-end towards Mecula Mountain and worked some Miombo woodland, much of which had been burnt. Saw *Trachylepis varia* and *Acanthocercus atricollis*. I was pulling large chunks of bark off a fallen log and exposed a *Psammophis orientalis*. Got Bill to give me a hand in getting it as it disappeared under the log. S 12° 04' 27.4" E 37° 33' 55.2". We headed on for the mountain.

On our way up the mountain we saw a *Gerrhosaurus cf. nigrolineatus* disappear down a leaf-covered hole next to a tree. (S 12° 02' 38" E 37° 36' 51") Both Bill and I started digging frantically but without success. There were just too many tunnels leading off in all directions and I eventually had my entire arm down a hole. We unearthed a *Lygosoma afrum* in the process, which Bill grabbed. I haven't seen one of those since my Transvaal Snake Park days and then it was one that Dave Morgan had caught in Malawi.

S 12° 02' 38.3" E 37° 36' 51.1" Our next stop, still driving up Mecula Mountain, was at a beautiful Baobab tree. Scratched around and took some pics but got nothing. The road up the mountain pass became hectic, very steep and the sand was like talcum powder. I helped drive up a difficult section and soon we were on top of Mecula Mountain with its spectacular view to the west. The tented camp is picturesque, with tents on the edge facing south and west, a lounge area right on the western edge and the kitchen somewhat concealed to the east of the camp. The view was rather hazy with lots of veld fires in the distance. The bush is sometimes set alight to make way for crops, accidentally ignited by honey collectors or merely burnt so that people can see better and avoid the dangers of running into elephant or lion.

S 12° 02' 55.4" E 37° 38' 28.3" – 1090 m a.s.l. We entered an evergreen forest on an eastern sloping drainage line, which ends up in a hidden valley in the east of Mecula Mountain. It is dense and moist with ferns and swampy areas and trees extending some 40 – 50 metres into the sky. Saw a lot of elephant tracks throughout the swampy areas. Sadly this area has also been affected by fire. Mo went straight to the first bit of water, the spring that supplies the camp with all of its water. He got *Afrana angolensis*, *Arthroleptis a* (large); *b* (hourglass.); and *c* (red back). Also 4 *Phrynobatrachus sp.*, *P. acridoides*, *P. natalensis*, *P. mababiensis* and *P. sp.* (red back) Mo also got a *Ptychadena cf. mossambica*. We then moved over to the western side where we were told there is running water. It's quite different from the previous spot and not near as moist. I saw a large *Trachylepis* that looked like *T. boulengeri* but Bill thinks that it might have been *T. meculiabis* or *T. planifrons*. Will have to get back there and get it. It was running along a fallen branch close to the ground and disappeared down a hole. It was quite a bit bigger than the *T. boulengeri* that I got in Nampula. Also saw a *Lygodactylus sp.* with lots of yellow but couldn't get it. Mo got two *Hyperolius cf. argus*, 2 small *Arthroleptis sp.*, one reddish and one with the hourglass-marking., *Phrynobatrachus acridoides*, *P. mababiensis* and *P. natalensis*. It was a good day and our total herp count is now around 45. Headed back to camp after picking up Adam. He has a quiet day and got one *Agama*, probably *mossambica*. By the time we got back to camp a few of the frogs that we had collected had died and Mo had to prepare them for preservation. We photographed some of the frogs and settled down for another favoured meal of rice and tuna. I pitched my one-man tent as the mosquito's had made a meal of me the previous night. The airstrip trap had produced nothing and the trap line 1 x *Panaspis wahlbergii* and 1 x *Phrynobatrachus mababiensis*. Got to bed just before midnight.

### Friday 24 October 2003.

The usual breakfast and off to the airstrip to check the funnel trap with the crab. Bill checked the trap line and got 1 x *Arthroleptis stenodactylus* and 1 x *Ptychadena anchietae*. We found the trap about forty metres from where we had left it, totally destroyed. Some small carnivore ate the crab through the wire mesh and wrecked it. We decided to head north towards Tanzania on the Nyati road, along the western side of Mecula Mountain heading for the Ruvuma River. The habitat is very similar to elsewhere, dry Miombo woodland, and once we had passed the few ponds that we had stopped at previously it became very boring. Just far too dry! At this stage our tally for the day was one *Arthroleptis stenodactylus* and one *Ptychadena anchietae* from the pitfall traps and Mo got a *Psammophis orientalis* from a water hole at the airstrip. (S 12° 10' 12" E 37° 32' 33")

S 12° 01' 58.5 E 37° 32' 57.1". Further along the Nyati road, heading for Tanzania, and the road is deteriorating by the minute. Elephant have left their tracks in the rainy season, making the dirt road very bumpy. And it's dry. Got a *Trachylepis striata* and *Panaspis wahlbergii* and, when we made a u-turn, Adam got an *Agama armata*. (S 11° 56' 17" E 37° 31' 19") This road, with its black soil, is going to be impassable in the wet season.

S 12° 05' 20.1" E 37° 33' 38.9" – Stopped at the bridge builder's camp and got *Hyperolius nasutus*, *H. marmoratus* and an odd-looking *Lygodactylus sp.* that Bill caught in an antelope skull stuck on a log. Also some shitty little

frogs, according to Bill. Back at camp we did some photography and I started reading Wilbur Smith's *Birds of Prey*. Mo hadn't finished the book yet so we cut it through the middle.

Bill wasn't feeling well – a bit of a headache – so Mo and I drove off to the pond that we had visited earlier where the bridge construction guys had set up camp. We got *Hyperolius nasutus*, *H. marmoratus*, *Xenopus meulleri*, *Bufo gutturalis*, *Bufo maculatus*, *Afrixalus fornasini*, *Ptychadena anchietae*, *P. mossambica*, *P. taenioscelis*, *Phrynobatrachus acridoides*, *P. mababiensis* and *P. sp.* (red back) It was a good evening's collecting and our species count now exceeded 50. The bridge builders also got us an *Agama mossambica* and 6 x *Trachylepis varia*.

### Saturday 25 October 2003.

Got up at 06:30 and Bill, as usual, was wondering around like a lost soul, looking at birds. Obviously had far too much sleep the previous day. We heard a lot of buffalo activity the previous night and, as was now expected, elephant close to the kitchen. Was having breakfast when one of the game guards brought us a live *Crotaphopeltis hotamboeia* without any visible injuries! Drove to Mecula to get some soap, sardines and canned tomatoes. Mo stayed behind to prepare some specimens. Bill spotted a marshy area on the northern side of town, just below the market, with banana trees. We scratched around and I got a small *Afrixalus sp.* under the stem of a banana leaf. Also got two pairs of eggs under banana leaves, probably *Lygodactylus* eggs. They were small, white, hard and adhered. Also got 2 x *Phrynobatrachus acridoides* and 2 x *P. red back*. On the way back some kids in the village had a dead *Crotaphopeltis hotamboeia* and two *Trachylepis margaritifera* while another kid had a dead *Psammophis orientalis*. There was another *Crotaphopeltis hotamboeia* hanging in a tree but it must have been there for a few days and was rotten. Another new species for the day with the *Afrixalus sp.*

Photographed some snakes and frogs in the afternoon and then went to a rock outcrop near the airstrip for sundowners. Sunset was spectacular with inselbergs fading in the distance. Drove out west at sunset, hoping to find some snakes crossing the road but nothing. We did the ponds in the drainage line again, out in the dambos. I wondered off quite far south and got some adult *Hyperolius marmoratus*. Some males were calling about 30 cm above water level. Also got some *Hyperolius nasutus* close to the water on reeds and one *Ptychadena taenioscelis* on a lily pad. I then walked off into some grassland and ended up in a stampede with about thirty buffalo around me, most of them less than 50 metres away. It was quite scary with shiny eyes everywhere. I was a bit worried about them heading towards Bill and Mo but they were far off. All my screams in vain. On the way back to the other two I had a lonely hyena circling me. Mo heard a *Leptopelis sp.* close to where the vehicle was parked and we tried to home in on it but initially without success. It gave one call about every four minutes and sounded quite high up a tree. Bill joined us and we had our torches off for a while when I heard something plonk onto the ground next to me. It was the tree frog and looked somewhat like *Leptopelis concolor* or *L. bocagii*. Other species collected included *Afrixalus sp.*, *Hyperolius nasutus*, *Ptychadena oxyrhynchus*, *Phrynobatrachus mababiensis*, *P. acridoides*, *P. natalensis*, *P. sp.* (red back), *Bufo maculatus* and Mo heard *Chiromantes xerampelina*. Mo missed a sleeping *Trachylepis boulengeri*. It was about 30 cm off the ground sleeping in some reeds. This is the same spot that I had missed one previously. We headed back to our vehicle with the hyena again circling us. In one of the furthest ponds I got a good eye shine from a juvenile Nile crocodile (*Crocodylus niloticus*). I tried to get a better view but it disappeared.

### Sunday 26 October 2003.

Got up a little late and had a quick breakfast. The trap line produced 2 x *Ptychadena anchietae* and 2 x *Phrynobatrachus mababiensis*. Then photographed a bunch of frogs, mostly those caught the previous night. We decided to have a bit of an easy day. However, around lunchtime we decided to head up Mecula Mountain. Someone brought in a *Lamprophis capensis* from Lechengwe Village. Grabbed all our gear and vacated camp. Adam joined us but communication was not going to be easy.

Once on the mountain, around 16:00, we met Frazer and his team. We dropped our equipment in luxury tents, all with en suite bathrooms and showers. Each tent also had a canvas cover and we had spectacular views over the western horizon. Also had a central kitchen with good facilities including a working freezer! The camp also has a generator that is dug into the ground to eliminate noise and a water tank to supply the bathrooms and showers. We soon ran out of fuel and water.

We went into the evergreen forest directly east of the camp and put a 30 metre trap line in. It had eight funnel traps and three pitfall traps. Also had a quick scratch around and both Bill and Mo each caught a *Natriciteres sylvatica*. (S 12° 02' 55" E 37° 38' 30"). This is the first time that I have seen this species. They were captured at around 16:30 and both snakes were active, crawling around on the surface amongst leaf litter. There were frogs everywhere, jumping in all directions and even climbing up the plastic of the drift net fence. We got back into camp just in time for sunset and joined Frazer and his crew for sundowners. Frazer poured each a whisky and we had a pleasant chat. There is another patch of evergreen forest further south, just east of the highest peak on Mecula. It has three swampy areas in savanna and the water then drops down into evergreen forest. Lots of elephant around. We went back into the eastern forest once it got dark and the funnel traps already had lots of frogs as well as one *Natriciteres sylvatica*. We heard *Leptopelis* calling and quickly caught about half a dozen specimens. They were 50 cm to 1,8 m off the ground and superficially resemble *Leptopelis natalensis*. Also got 1 x large *Arthroleptis sp.* and 2 *Hyperolius cf. argus*. An elephant trumpeted in the background, obviously objecting to our presence in

the forest. On our way back, near an airstrip, we saw a pennant-winged nightjar. Bill got a *Crotaphopeltis hotamboeia* next to his tent. None of the specimens seen so far have any orange or red around the lips.

### Monday 27 October 2003.

Got up at about 05:15, scratched around a bit and then headed for the traps with a bunch of containers for water – the camp was dry. Some of the funnel traps were bursting with frogs and one had been raided by army ants. There were also two small *Natriciteres sylvatica* in the funnel traps. While Bill and Mo counted the frogs, I scratched around. Pulling apart a log on some dry ground I got a nice-sized *Natriciteres sylvatica* as well as two *Melanoceps* sp., legless skinks that look like shortened *Typhlops*. I also got a *Philothamnus hoplogaster* under a piece of loose bark. It was about 40 cm off the ground and under the bark of a massive log. Also found quite a few gecko eggs in the area, usually around 2 – 6 per location, usually associated with some soil. These eggs looked like *Lygodactylus* eggs, small and white but not adhered. The traps produced 663 *Arthroleptis* B (hourglass), 41 *Arthroleptis* C (red back), 3 *Arthroleptis* A (large), 5 *Phrynobatrachus natalensis*, 2 *Phrynobatrachus* (red back), and the 2 *Natriciteres sylvatica*. One of the snakes regurgitated 2 x *Arthroleptis* hourglass. Another 200+ frogs had been killed by the ants! The total number of frogs in the traps exceeded 900!

Had breakfast and wrote some notes at the view site. We then walked off into the eastern forest via some rocky outcrops to the south. Mo saw a *Gerrhosaurus* cf. *flavidus* but it shot down a hole. I got a *Trachylepis varia*, which I chased up a tree and shot down with a rubber band. We then got a few *Cordylus maculae*, all found in rock crevices! Mo spotted a beautiful *Gerrhosaurus validus* in a large rock crack and called for help. It was very dark grey to black with light lines down its back. Bill produced his copper wire/gut noose and noosed the lizard, only to loose it when he pulled it from the rocks as the gut broke. I somehow managed to catch the *Gerrhosaurus* between the calves of my legs. If it bit me it may well have got away! I also got a *Chamaeleo dilepis* about 3 m off the ground in a tree. Next was a *Lygodactylus* sp. B, a dark spotted specimen a bit of yellow underneath. It was close to the ground and even dropped to the ground to escape. S 12° 03' 10.6" E 37° 38' 49.1" – 1105 m a.s.l. Saw very little in the forest on the way back except for a *Lygodactylus* communal laying site in a rotten log, containing around 30 eggs. Common frogs, including *Arthroleptis* and *Phrynobatrachus* were also found on the way back.

The afternoon was spent photographing specimens. The *Natriciteres* made no attempt to bite, despite excessive handling to pose them for photographs. Both specimens were quite uncooperative but settled down eventually. One regurgitated an *Arthroleptis* sp. The spinning trick worked well on the frogs – place the frog in a plastic bag with a bit of water and quickly spin it in circles about 5 – 10 times. The disorientated frog sits still for quite a while and poses naturally. Had sundowners with the red sun disappearing behind some inselbergs and a monkey calling nervously from the western forest. Supper consisted of rice and tuna (again!) with a bit of tomato sauce for flavouring. Quite monotonous but it kills the bug. At about 20:00 we walked off into the western forest and initially got a bit lost. Both sides of the forest slope quite steeply with a small, trickling stream in the middle, flowing to the west. Mo thought that he had heard a new *Leptopelis* call but it turned out to be *Hyperolius argus*. He caught a few including some big females. Bill got a *Leptopelis* sp. coming out of a hole in the ground but managed to lose it while looking at it. Despite us looking around for quite a while we couldn't find it. Mo got very excited about an *Afrana angolensis* that eluded him (he does tend to get quite turned on by some frogs), so much so that he started believing that it had a red band down its back. I managed to catch it in some undergrowth, roughly where Mo had spotted it initially. He was a happy man. I also got a *Leptopelis* sp. close to where Bill had lost his – probably the same frog. We quit after about 1½ hours, somewhat disappointed as we really hoped to find more. We had the *Hyperolius argus*, *Afrana angolensis* and the *Leptopelis* sp. B to photograph in the morning. S 12° 03' 03.5" E 37° 38' 15.1" – 1024 m a.s.l.

### Tuesday 28 October 2003.

Early rise, breakfast and off to clear the traps and fetch water. The traps were not near as full as the previous day and the forest floor seemed much drier. Bill and Mo went further east down the forest while I took water back to camp in the Land rover.

I scratched around in the rocks above the eastern forest and saw a *Trachylepis varia* but it was very weary and ran off. Pulled a flat rock off another rock and got a *Hemidactylus mabouia* as well as two eggs. It does appear as though this gecko lays loose eggs while *Hemidactylus platycephalus* lays two eggs that stick to one another. Went into the forest and got a small *Natriciteres sylvatica* on the prowl at 10:00. Also a nice striped *Phrynobatrachus* (red back). Further down, close to the water and about 90 cm off the ground I got a *Leptopelis* sp B. sleeping under a leaf with it's legs tucked in. Mo found a *Phrynobatrachus acridoides* – the first one on the mountain! Bill and Mo found a nice bit of water for an evening visit but no herps.

On the way back we walked the airstrip and Bill flushed a Pennant-winged Nightjar. What an unusual bird. It really seems to struggle when flying! Nothing else other than a lot of sings that *Gerrhosaurus validus* is common in the area but extremely shy. Took some pics in the afternoon and took a bit of a break. Then went down into the eastern forest again but went further east. Looked in a variety of habitats, desperately trying to find chameleons, but came across very little. Some *Leptopelis* sp. A, *Leptopelis* sp. B, *Hyperolius argus*, a *Ptychadena angolensis* and an *Afrana angolensis*. A bit disappointing as we will finish our day with no new species. The morning pitfall/funnel trap results as follows: 172 *Arthroleptis* B (hourglass); 8 *Arthroleptis* C (red back); 1 *Arthroleptis* A (large), 4 *Phrynobatrachus natalensis* and 1 *P. mababiensis*. The total for the day around 186 frogs.

### Wednesday 29 October 2003.

It started raining at about 03:00 and it came down quite hard. At last, some long-awaited rain – probably around 10 mm! Got up at about 05:30 and it's 19 ° C. Bill and I walked down to the eastern forest for a quick look and it's very wet. The bucket that we had left next to the water pump had about 3 cm of water in it. However, elsewhere outside of the forest the water had barely penetrated the ground. I found a *Natriciteres sylvatica* at the entrance of a funnel trap. We didn't empty the traps and returned to camp for breakfast. I headed north with a crowbar to check out some rocky areas. My first find was a *Hemidactylus platycephalus* and a *H. mabouia*, both under the same piece of exfoliating rock on an east-facing cliff face. S 12 ° 02' 44.3" E 37° 38' 22.5" – 1032 m a.s.l.

A bit further I got a *Cordylus maculae* in a small rock crevice. It certainly doesn't behave like *C. tropidosternum*, inhabiting rock cracks and not living under the bark of trees. S 12 ° 02' 28.7" E 37° 38' 37.7" – 1105 m a.s.l. Found another smaller *C. maculae* in a large vertical crack in a ravine. I saw the lizard disappear down the crack. S 12 ° 02' 25.2 E 37° 38' 31.6" – 1013 m a.s.l. Then found another *Hemidactylus mabouia* under exfoliating rock, close to several pairs of adhered eggs, probably *H. platycephalus* eggs. S 12 ° 02' 21.2" E 37° 38' 37.8" – 1098 m a.s.l.

Also got a beautiful male *Trachylepis margaritifer* under a vertical sheet of exfoliating rock. Also got a *Lygodactylus* sp. B and a *Trachylepis varia*. S 12° 02' 42.6" E 37° 38' 35.2" – 1062 m a.s.l.

Bill and Mo did the trap line and got a new *Leptopelis* sp. C in one of the funnel traps. Also two *Natriciteres sylvatica* in funnel traps and another two hunting on the forest floor. One specimen in a funnel trap was in the process of eating a *Phrynobatrachus* sp. Bill also got a *Philothamnus hoplogaster* and a *Trachylepis boulengeri* quite close to where I got the *Philothamnus*. Great excitement back in camp as the guys got a *Lamprophis capensis* and two caecilians! Bill paid the guys 50 000 Metacales for them. They scratched around and found another two dead caecilians. These were all found while raking away leaves close to the kitchen. The rain the previous evening certainly got a few creatures moving! These are the first caecilians ever found in Mozambique. Results for the pitfall/funnel traps for the previous evening: 146 *Arthroleptis* sp. (hourglass); 9 *Arthroleptis* sp. (red back); 2 *Arthroleptis* sp. A (large); 13 *Phrynobatrachus natalensis*; 2 *Natriciteres sylvatica*, one eating a *Phrynobatrachus natalensis* and one *Leptopelis* sp. C. Photographed a bunch of stuff, wrote some labels for Mo and took a walk – got one *Lygodactylus capensis grotei* on a tree.

Lots of elephant tracks all over the place and I am amazed that we haven't run into serious trouble with them as yet. The previous night, on the way to the eastern forest, we ran into some elephant close to camp but they moved off quickly.

The evening looked very promising with dark clouds looming. A good downpour would really do the trick. We went into the eastern forest with sound recording equipment and could hear *Leptopelis* calling. Mo managed to get some recordings and we scratched together a few frogs, all species that had already been collected. We returned to camp and the temperature had dropped dramatically. We could hear a few *Breviceps* calling and Mo got very excited. A light drizzle started but the downpour never came. We looked around for a while, focussing on *Breviceps* calls but we got nothing. The temperature had dropped more and both Bill and I went to bed. Mo looked around for a while, peeking down holes in the ground, but got nothing.

### Thursday 30 October 2003.

Headed for the trap line before breakfast. Quite amazing how few frogs we found in the traps after our earlier success. 5 x *Arthroleptis* B (hourglass), a *Natriciteres sylvatica* in a funnel trap and another one crawling along the drift fence. One funnel trap had a large river crab and a *Natriciteres sylvatica*, the latter mauled by the crab. Also one *Phrynobatrachus natalensis*. Just a few days back we had over 900 frogs in the same traps! In the debate that followed it was suggested that it was wet enough elsewhere for the frogs to disperse to and that it was in their interest to move away from the driver ants.

Bill and Mo packed their bags as they were heading down the mountain, back to base camp. The idea was that they would fly to different locations throughout Niassa to get a better idea of the various habitats and I would remain on the mountain with Adam. At the bottom of Mecula Mountain we found the bridge building team and left some formalin with them with instructions to pickle any snakes (cobra) that they may find, fossorial lizards and frogs. We did our utmost to explain that we only wanted *Breviceps* but communication was a problem. One of the bridge builders spoke some English, somewhat parrot-fashion, and we thought that we were making good progress explaining everything to him. That was until Bill asked him whether they had had any rain and then it became clear that they understood virtually nothing. We left the formalin with them and drove back to base camp. Adam, Raphael and another game guard joined us for the ride and we went on to Mecula town to do some shopping. Then back to base camp. Chandi was busy with a building team at the air strip and we spoke to him about the aircraft and somewhat of a program but he was in his usual 'I'm not sure what's happening' frame of mind. The aircraft had come in but flew out to Pemba. It should have returned from Pemba but was not back yet. It was not the usual Niassa aircraft but a private plane chartered by Anabela. Fuel was in short supply and Chandi also had some flying that he needed to do. It didn't appear as though we were going to have the use of the plane in the next few days. We were also evicted from our tent and house and had to move to the top house on the left, as one enters the camp. After a brief discussion it was decided that the lot of us would return to Mecula Mountain where

we would stay for another three or four days. We eventually made it to Mecula town for some shopping. Several people, including Paulo and a Swedish aid worker, joined us to Mecula. I purchased a bag of mealies for pap in the morning and asked Paulo to explain to Adam that we needed the mealies ground but Paulo misunderstood me and we ended up with a bag of rock solid mealies. Frustrating! Saw a strange *Trachylepis* sp. on one of the huts at the market but didn't manage to get it. It had silver on its back with dark markings down the sides, slightly resembling *T. varia*. Also managed to purchase three chickens for around R10 – R15 each. Stopped off at Lechengwe Village and they had a *Lamprophis capensis*, a bit off but worth preserving. The bridge building team had one *Lygosoma afrum* in the formalin – a good find. (S 12° 02' 38" S 37° 36' W51"). We got to the top of the mountain after a bit of a struggle. The road is deteriorating fast and the Land rover slipped all over the place. The sun was disappearing and we were just in time for sundowners with elephant and guinea fowl in the background. Mars was shining brightly in the west.

### Friday 31 October 2003.

Surfaced at 05:30 and was looking forward to some pap for breakfast. Adam clearly misunderstood us and was cooking whole mealies! We had spotted a box of Jungle Oats earlier that Frazer had left behind for the game guards and I purchased it for about R30.00. The traps were not very productive and we got 4 x *Arthroleptis* B (hourglass) and 1 x *Phrynobatrachus natalensis*. Headed out for Mecula Mountain peak. S 12° 03' 29.7" E 37° 38' 22.3" – 1087 m a.s.l. Got a *Cordylus meculae* in a rock crack as well as a *Trachylepis varia* and a *Hemidactylus mabouia*.

S12° 04' 35.9" E 37° 37' 53.5" – 1288 m a.s.l. Foothills of Mecula Mountain peak. We were walking on an elephant path at the foothills of the highest peak on Mecula Mountain when Bill slipped and had quite a bad fall. He sat in the shade for a while and Mo continued scratching around while I climbed the mountain peak. Saw three *Cordylus* sp. basking near rock crevices, quite unusual as most lizards disappeared the moment they saw us. Top of the mountain peak – S 12° 04' 39.4" E 37° 37' 48.6" – 1413 m a.s.l. Very little reptile activity as there are few rock crevices but the view is magnificent! Got a *Trachylepis varia* and missed a second specimen. These lizards are extremely nervous.

Bill had seen an unusual *Lygodactylus cf angularis* on a dead tree, about 3 m up, and we went back looking for it. We spotted one on another tree and Bill got him with a rubber band, doing surprisingly little damage in the process. (S 12° 04' 36" E 37° 37' 57"). It's a beautiful little gecko with black on the sides and a yellow belly, quite unlike anything that we have seen to date. I got another one, also with a rubber band, again doing very little damage. We saw another individual on a thin dead tree and we pulled the tree down. It produced three *Lygodactylus* sp. and a *Hemidactylus mabouia*, as well as three batches of *Lygodactylus* eggs, eight eggs in each batch. The eggs were small, white and not adhered., usually with a bit of soil in the cavity where they were laid. The *Lygodactylus* sp. appear to be largely tree-living and quickly move high up when threatened or disturbed, easily going as high as 4 – 5 m.

S12° 04' 36" E 37° 37' 57" – 1250 m a.s.l. Mo pulled a loose flake off the side of a granite rock, just a few metres east from the spot where we had caught the *Lygodactylus*, and exposed a communal *Lygodactylus* nesting site. There were lots of old egg shells and some fresh eggs. I counted 523 eggs with about eighty of them fresh and seemingly viable. Scratched around some more but found very little. The evergreen forest produces very little other than a large *Arthroleptis* sp. that was active on leaf litter and a bit further down an *Arthroleptis* sp. B (hourglass). In a swampy area below a spring, now heading north, Mo caught 2 *Ptychadena oxyrynchus* and *Phrynobatrachus natalensis*. Also saw *Arthroleptis* B (hourglass). Headed back to camp to photograph the specimens. The guys at the camp had caught a *Causus defillipii*, freshly shed and in excellent condition. Got lots of pics.

Had a really tough chicken for dinner but it was a nice change from tuna. Bill had put a lot of effort into preparing the chicken and was trying to teach me something about cooking in the process but, I think, in vain. We were all very tired and had an early night. Just remembered – Mo saw an *Agama* on some rocks which we chased from rock to rock but I missed it. That was the second *Agama* that Mo had spotted and only the second one we had seen on the mountain. Our species total was in the region of 62 for the trip. We heard and eventually saw some Samanga monkeys in one of the forests. The moon is up and the elusive *Breviceps* still calling.

### Saturday 01 November 2003.

Jungle Oats for breakfast, then checked the traps. 6 x *Arthroleptis* sp. (hourglass) and 1 x *Phrynobatrachus natalensis* in the funnel traps but about half of them dead. Back at the camp I checked some gecko egg sizes: *Hemidactylus platycephalus* eggs – 11.8 x 11.2 mm; 11.4. x 10.3 mm; 11.6. x 10.9 mm; 11.2. x 10.1 mm; 11.7 x 11.1 mm; 11.6. x 10.7 mm. These eggs are always laid in pairs and adhered. They are not perfectly round and seem to collapse somewhat soon after being laid, giving them an uneven appearance. The eggs were found under rocks and in the roof of the lounge area at base camp. Eggs initially white but get quite dirty.

*Hemidactylus mabouia* eggs: Eggs were found under rocks and in rotting logs. They are white, hard-shelled and never adhered. 9.2 x 8.1 mm; 9.3 x 8 mm.

*Lygodactylus cf. capensis* from the eastern forest: Small white eggs, normal shape, not adhered. 6.3 x 5.4 mm; 6.4 x 5 mm; 6.7 x 5.3 mm; 6.8 x 5 mm; 6.9 x 5.2 mm.

Lygodactylus sp. from next to Mecula Mountain peak. 6.9 x 5.9 mm; 7 x 5.3 mm; 7 x 5.5 mm; 6.9 x 5.4 mm; 6.8 x 5.9 mm; 7 x 5.5 mm; 6.8 x 5.8 mm; 7.2 x 5.9 mm; 7.3 x 5.7 mm; 7 x 5.7 mm; 6.9 x 5.5 mm; 6.8 x 5.6 mm; 7 x 5.9 mm; 7.3 x 5.3 mm.

Bill headed for the airstrip to do some bird watching where after he wanted to scratch around in the western forest. Mo got Adam to help him dig for *Breviceps*, the elusive frog, and I headed down the mountain, initially following the dirt road. Saw lots of fresh elephant tracks and fresh dung, often containing crushed monkey apples. The elephant certainly make good use of the road. Also saw some lizard tracks. A baboon on lookout duty warned the others of my presence and he kept on barking until I had passed. Saw two klipspringer very close to the baboon. One looked straight at me for quite a while. I started turning rotten logs on the ground and proceeded to jump on the remains of the logs. Found an *Aparallactus capensis* under a rotting log on the ground. It later regurgitated a centipede. Close by I got a *Lamprophis capensis*, also while turning rotting logs. It was in the log, not under it. It was a juvenile and looked just like the specimens from Durban. It's a juvenile. S12° 02' 21.1" E 37° 37' 59.5" – 751 m a.s.l.

I walked further down the hill and eventually came across the bridge building team. It was incredibly hot, well over 40 °C. They informed me that they had two snakes that they had placed in the jar of formalin back at their base camp. I followed the road to their camp, disturbing two baboons along the way. The formalin jar contained two snakes, a *Causus defillippii* and a large *Rhinotyphlops schlegelii mucruso*. I then cut south through the Miombo woodland and found a stream with a lot of *Phrynobatrachus* sp. It was very hot and I relaxed in the shade of a large tree for a while. Further up the mountain I found two *Cordylus meculae* – both in rock crevices close to the ground. Also found a *Pachydactylus punctatus* under a solitary rock on the ground. S 12° 02' 46.0" E 37° 37' 21.3" – 643 m a.s.l. Continued climbing and saw a beautiful *Agama cf kirkii* with a bright blue/green body and bright orange head. Also had a light vertebral stripe. Caught a sub adult *Trachylepis varia*. Got no more herps but disturbed a dassie and two klipspringer. The latter snorted and coughed as they moved off. I chose a steep section of the mountain to get back to the top and really struggled. Then I cut through the western forest, starting quite low down and working my way upstream. AT this stage my water was virtually finish and the stream water tasted fantastic. Bill and Mo, despite Mo putting a lot of effort into getting some *Breviceps*, caught nothing. We spent the afternoon photographing what I had caught and I moved into the kitchen to supervise the preparation of the evening meal. It was village chicken again and Adam refused to do the killing. Fortunately he had watched Bill the previous night and he didn't have to rely much on my culinary skills. Bill and Mo went to a pond in the east to net for frogs. The camp was low on water and I did another water run. The game guards were camped next to the kitchen and their radio was tuned into Radio Tanzania – we listened to songs like 'My Lollipop', 'Bye Bye Baby' and 'Blueberry Hill'. It was a lot better than some half-asleep DJ talking in a language that I couldn't understand. The radio station must have some really old LP's.

The forest that Bill and Mo disappeared to is past the airstrip on the western slope, immediately south of the western forest. A few streams run out of the forest into fern-covered open landscape that dams up. They fished around with the net and found *Xenopus meulleri*, *Phrynobatrachus* red back, *Phrynobatrachus natalensis* as well as *Ptychadena oxyrhynchus*, *Arthroleptis* hourglass and a small *Leptopelis*. This frog had been breeding and spawn was visible. Mo also managed to record the *Ptychadena oxyrhynchus* calling and heard two different *Leptopelis* calls. After dinner we sat at the view site looking at the stars with elephant close-by. Saw a shooting star. It was half-moon with a few thin clouds high up and a bit on the chilly side. *Breviceps* was calling in the background.

### Sunday 02 November 2003.

Up at about 5:30 and it's Jungle Oats for breakfast. We're about to pull up the pitfall traps and trap line as we're heading down the mountain today. Wonder if I will ever be on Mecula Mountain again. Checked and lifted the trap line. It had a total of 32 frogs, 30 x *Arthroleptis* hourglass, 1 x *Phrynobatrachus* red back and one *Phrynobatrachus natalensis*. Photographed the large *Trachylepis margaritifer* but could only manage a head shot – not very cooperative. Time to pack up and head down the mountain. Mo got himself stung by a small scorpion that was hiding in his camera bag – had a swollen finger and sore arm for a few days! Got back to base camp and unloaded in our new house. The trip down the mountain produced a *Philothamnus hoplogaster* (S 12° 02' 38" E 37° 38' 07" – 880 m a.s.l.), which was crossing the dirt road. Adam spotted it – I was again scanning low trees for *Thelotornis*. The Beggs left us a *Pelusios signatus* shell that they found next to the Lugenda River (S 12° 10' 29" E 38° 14' 02") and a half rotten *Naja mossambica* – it was still good enough to pickle. It was found about 20 km downstream of Mbamba Village on the Lugenda River – S 12° 11' 29.5" E 38° 10' 29". They also left a message that it had rained near Lusingi Camp while we were on the mountain. Met the pilot Peter who informed us that he could easily take 150 kg of luggage. Good news. Bill asked Chandi about snakes – he recalled having seen *Bitis arietans*, *Python natalensis*, *Thelotornis* sp. and *Telescopus* sp. Also mentioned a few snakebite incidents, one caused by *Causus defillippii*. He also recalled three crocodile attacks in the rivers over the last two or three years. Mo and I drove to the village as they had some snakes for us. As we passed Chandi's house we saw about a dozen guinea fowl. They looked a lot smaller than the ones back home. After the Nyati turnoff, on the way to Mecula town, we saw about 10 Sable antelope, initially very close to the road but they quickly moved about eighty metres away and stood still, watching us. As we got to the hut where we had left a jar of formalin, we saw about six large elephant, some with magnificent tusks. The villagers were lighting grass to chase them off. They had one *Meizodon semiornatus* in the formalin and a kid brought us a freshly-killed *Philothamnus semivariiegatus*, it's tail

still twitching. They also had a rotten *Bitis arietans* hanging from a piece of bamboo. Mo photographed it but it was beyond being useful. As Bill had mentioned before, the colour on the back was most unusual and appeared as though the snake had some Gaboon Adder genes. The back was light with pastel shades. Saw a side-striped jackal on our way back but no snakes. It was more silver and was in no rush to move out of our way. We purchased some 2M beer and three Cokes in Mecula Town – a cold Coke will really go down well.

### Monday 3 November 2003.

Heading for Lusingi in Block C, one of the hunting concessions. The Beggs reported good rain down there. (Lusingi S12° 14' 32.4 E 37° 59' 59.04"). Mo, Adam and I were driving down and Bill was flying around with Peter and would join us later. Peter had shown us his Flightstar program – costs around 200 Euro and may well be useful for herping. The drive to the Lugenda river was quick and we were at the bridge around 09:00. I saw a *Cycloderma frenatum* with a carapace of around 20 cm just below the bridge. It hid under a bit of bamboo and looked quite easy to catch. I made a gaffe from my stump ripper and a large hook and approached it from upstream while Mo waded closer from downstream. Needless to say, it evaded us but Mo managed to get a pic. Some of the local guys came to help us catch it and stuck their arms down burrows in the river bank. On two occasions they actually felt it but didn't manage to catch it. The drive along the south of the Lugenda River was hot and bumpy and seemed to go on forever. We saw some baboon and very nervous Impala as well as about five elephant.

We saw a tree Agama run up a dead tree trunk and pushed the trunk over, anticipating the Agama popping out of the hole on top of the tree. As the tree hit the ground the Agama ran off but a hatchling *Varanus albigularis* also dropped out. We were so excited about the *Varanus* that we lost sight of the Agama and it disappeared. The habitat consisted of dry Miombo, well burnt and with a lot of dead trees around. The young *Varanus* was beautifully marked with lots of yellow and pastel browns. S 12° 22' 59.2" E 37° 44' 44.1" – 295 m a.s.l. The drive to the hunting camp dragged on and it was very hot. We stopped a few times to turn logs but saw nothing. It was 38°C and the tsetse flies were eating us alive. Adam must have suffered on the back of the Land rover.

Got to the hunting camp and Derek was out with the Beggs. The camp is stunning, on the bank of Lugenda River with a beautiful view of an inselberg in the northeast. We were immediately offered ice-cold Oros and thereafter coffee and it went down really well. Derek arrived with the Beggs and they were all euphoric – after a six months struggle they had captured and collared their first badger in Mozambique! Derek produced some ice cold beers and it was time to celebrate. Bill flew in and joined us. He had a good time flying around Niassa and saw some new areas but nothing spectacular. Derek is one of the nicest people you could hope to meet and Colleen was telling us that the hunting camp really kept them going with excellent food and good company. In the late afternoon we sat down to a meal of half chickens and chips. It was fantastic and certainly the best meal that we had had in a long time. While eating the plant guys (Phil & Dan) arrived with Paulo. Paulo was shaking everybody by the hand, which he always does, affectionately patting you on the shoulder with the other hand. He should really consider becoming a lay preacher or perhaps go into politics. S 12° 13' 52.8" E 38° 00' 37.4" – 308 m a.s.l.

We had a really nice evening, listening to Derek and the Beggs. Mo got two *Lygodactylus cf capensis* and I saw two small *Crocodylus niloticus* below the camp in some backwaters. Also saw a *Ptychadena* and caught a *Bufo gutturalis*. The camp is full of *Hemidactylus platycephalus*. Derek told us that he had seen a lot of *Python natalensis*; *Dendroaspis polylepis* (especially in May); *Hemirhagerhis* sp. (coming out of cracks of firewood) and *Philothamnus semivariegatus* but no *Thelotornis* or *Dispholidus*. Also lots of *Pyxicephalus* but no land tortoises. The biggest croc that they shot measured 15 feet! That's a monster and as big as Footloose, the legendary crocodile at Kwena Gardens. Derek also spoke of a *Bitis gabonica* in Zim that weighed close on 30 kg! Says he has a pic.

On the way to the camp we stopped at the river where some fishermen were clearing their nets. They had quite a haul, probably around 6 kg of fish including two nice barbel. Got some pics.

### Tuesday 4 November 2003.

Coffee in the open overlooking the river. The Beggs told us that they were sick – bed-ridden for 6 days with some form of viral meningitis. During that time they barely ate and spent most of their time vomiting. But they recovered, albeit a bit skinnier. Had breakfast with the plant guys and a nice chat. We headed for a bit of water south of the air strip and pulled a lot of bark of logs but nothing interesting. Then headed east along the river looking for backwater. Again, nothing interesting. Netted some fish in a tiny mud pool that wasn't very far off drying out completely. We drove for ages and eventually stopped off at the river. Bill threw a spinner and got a nice catfish in no time. We drove as far east as we deemed necessary and stopped at a bush fire for some photographs. Then all the way back to camp. We saw very little; a *Gerrhosaurus validus*, Mo missed a large gecko; saw some *Trachylepis varia*, *T. striata* and one *Lygodactylus* sp. high up in a tree. It was another very hot day, peaking at 42.9°C. Little happened in the afternoon and we scratched around in camp, picking up the odd *Lygodactylus*. Also photographed the little *Varanus*. Dinner was excellent, consisting of chicken curry with cold mangos for desert. Camp = S17° 13' 55.1" E 38° 00' 38.0" – 215 m a.s.l.

### Wednesday 5 November 2003.

Up at 05:30. Will be heading for another hunting camp in the west, a few kilometres west of the Lugenda bridge. It has some backwaters with lily pads and, hopefully, some *Kassina maculata*. The drive to Napata camp was long and hot and the tsetse flies were very active. I must have killed well over 60 tsetse flies inside the vehicle. There were some animals to be seen, including kudu and elephant. Mo was on the back and banged on the roof a few times for us to stop when he saw animals but we didn't hear him. He was quite excited when we eventually stopped and wanted to know whether we were deaf and blind. Napata camp is about 20 km west of the bridge and is more rustic than the other camp. It seems that there are also more people in the area. Bill and I had a go at some fishing, using warthog meat as bait. We both got some small fish and lost a few hooks, some bitten off 10cm above the hooks! Really strange. Had Sable antelope for dinner and it wasn't bad. Tried more fishing at night but kept on losing hooks. While scratching around for bait I found two *Philothamnus hoplogaster* under the bark of trees, about 50 cm off the ground and close to one another. Also found a shed skin. The earlier trip to the stretch of water behind the camp with lily pads produced *Hyperolius marmoratus*, *Hyperolius pusillus*, *Ptychadena oxyrhynchus*, *Ptychadena anchietae*, *Ptychadena taenioscelis*, *Phrynobatrachus acridoides*, *P. natalensis*, *P. mababiensis*, *Bufo gutturalis* and *Xenopus meulleri*. We also found skeletons of *Pelusios signatus*, *Cycloderma fernatum* and *Crocodylus niloticus* in and around the camp. Also saw *Agama mossambica*, *Trachylepis margaritifera*, *T. varia* and *Hemidactylus platycephalus*. (S 12° 27' 06.2" E 37° 29' 23.1" – 293 m a.s.l.)

### Thursday 06 November 2003.

Another quick bash at fishing at 05:00 but caught nothing. Quick breakfast and we packed up to head back to Mbatamila camp. Tomorrow we fly out to Pemba. We stopped on the way to the Lugenda River – Bill spotted a lacertid on the road. He eventually got it with a rubber band and it's a *Nucras cf orates*. Also saw *Gerrhosaurus validus*, *Trachylepis varia*, *T. margaritifera* and what appeared to be an *Agama armata*. (S 12° 27' 06" E 37° 29' 23"). From there we drove on to Lechengwe Village where we picked up 1 x *Lamprophis capensis* and 1 x *Rhamphiphis rostratus*. Back in camp we were packing up. Vincent Parker was back and said very, as usual. He did have two DOR's – one *Chamaeoleo dilepis* that he found at the Mecula-Matondovela Road junction and an *Agama mossambica* from the Lugenda river bridge. Both were not worth retaining. Dinner consisted of the last village chicken with some rice and was far too salty.

### Friday 07 November 2003.

Up at about 04:00 to get ready for the flight to Pemba. The flight took about 1¼ of an hour and was both pleasant and scenic. Saw a lot of different habitat and four elephant groups. Had somewhat of a breakfast with Peter at the airport. We booked into the Nautilus Hotel. Luckily, while waiting for a taxi, we ran into Derek again, and he gave us a lift to the hotel. The hotel consists of a series of rondavels on the beach with wooden walkways joining them. It cost us \$90 a night. Went to the bar and had a decent breakfast while watching a soccer game on the sports channel. Derek arrived later with some of his crazy (and half drunk) friends and drove us out to his house to do some collecting. It was a bumpy drive on the back of a bakkie and we were taken to the other side of the bay, about 45 km away. The house, which Derek is renovating, is in Taratara Village, about 5 km west of Pemba bay (S 12° 56' 43" E 40° 21' 17" – 50 m a.s.l.). We go down into the swampy area below the house where there are lots of banana trees and find 2 x *Pachydactylus turneri* under stones on sand, 1 x *Lygosoma afrum* under some building rubble behind a derelict building and we see *Trachylepis varia*, *T. striata* and *Hemidactylus platycephalus*. Mo and Bill also got 2 x *Schismaderma carens* and some *Xenopus meulleri*. Also got *Afrixalus fornasini*, another *Afrixalus* sp., *Phrynobatrachus acridoides*, *P. natalensis*, *P. mababiensis*, *P. sp.* (red back) and *Ptychadena oxyrhynchus*.

Derek Took us on a 500 m walk to a nearby dam but it took us more than one hour to get there. The dam was very low with fishermen catching very small cichlids. We saw Openbill Stork, Common Sandpiper, Squacco Heron, White Pelican, Black-winged Pratincole, Little Egret, Yellow-billed Egret and White-faced Duck. We walked back as the sun went down and the crowd back at the house had far too much to drink by the time we got there. Mo and I had another walk and got some more *Xenopus meulleri*. Drove back to the hotel and had a sleepless night with mosquitoes bugging us.

### Saturday 08 November 2003.

Had a good breakfast at the hotel and took a taxi to Blackfoot Camp, the local backpackers hangout about 5 km south of the hotel. It's a real dive but has satellite television and South Africa is up against New Zealand in the semi-final of the Rugby World cup. There were quite a few expatriates and some of them are real characters! The game was shocking and we lost. We had to recover our luggage that was forwarded from Nampula from some missionary and he was in bed, going down with malaria. Not very reassuring! On the way back to the hotel Bill and got off the bakkie and decided to look for *Cryptoblepharus boutonii* along the beach. They are extremely common right below the Pemba Beach Hotel and we got 9 in no time. (S 12° 58' 16" E 40° 32' 20"). We had lunch at the hotel and relaxed for most of the afternoon.

### Sunday 09 November 2003.

Got up quite early and did a bit of photography. Got some *Lygodactylus cf capensis* and also saw *Agama mossambica*, *Trachylepis varia*, *T. striata* and *T. margaritifera*. One *Agama*, on a palm tree, was quite tame and managed to get quite a few pics. Bill settled the account and we left for the airport with Derek and his friends.

They were still drinking! Flew to Maputo without problems and took a shuttle to the Monte Carlo Hotel. Bill had a brief meeting with Anabela and we went to the Costa Del Sol for a seafood meal. The restaurant, like always, was crowded and the food was good.

**Monday 10 November 2003.**

Got up early and drove to Anabela's office for a meeting. That took about an hour. We collected all our goods and headed out of Maputo by 10:30, heading for the eastern foothills of the Lebombo Mountains in the south. We scratched around in a few spots but it was too dry. Also couldn't get into the Lebombos as the road doesn't get close enough. Came across a clump of *Aloe marlothii*, including several dead plants and found 4 x *Cordylus jonesii* and 1 x *Pachydactylus maculatus*. All specimens were found amongst the leaves of dead aloes on the ground. (S 26° 19' 54" E 32° 15' 10.2"). We decide to call it a day head back for South Africa via the Komatipoort border. Further north we come across a rocky ridge and stop to scratch around. I climbed up a rock face with a crowbar, slipped and fell back onto a rock. Injured my back badly and could barely walk. Bill drove while I was laying on the back seat. I was in agony and the drive to Nelspruit was painful. Couldn't manage to get up at the border posts but Bill and Mo managed to get us through without problems. At Nelspruit Mediclinic I had painkillers and was x-rayed from all angles. Fortunately nothing broken, just a lot of muscle damage. We spent the night at a guest house and drove on to Johannesburg first thing in the morning.

**11 November 2003.** I was still in a lot of pain, otherwise the drive to Jhb was eventless. It poured down with rain. That evening we went to the Alexander's where we enjoyed good homemade sushi. Mo left for Germany the next day and Bill departed for P.E. a day later. It was an amazing trip.