

BIRD PREDATION BY THE HOODED SNAKE (*MACROPROTODON CUCULLATUS*)

By: David Buttle, 2 Manchester Place, Norwich, NR2 2SH, England.

* * *

The Hooded snake is found in southern Iberia, across North Africa from Morocco to Egypt, Israel, the Balearics, also the island of Lampedusa between Tunisia and Malta, and a small area in Western Sahara (Wade, 1988). The ecology of this species is little known (Salvador, 1985; Wade, 1988).

In May 1990 while walking in hills near Atalaya de Alcudia in the northeast of Mallorca, Balearic Islands, during a bird watching holiday, Mr. Barry Buttle spotted a pair of Wrens (*Troglodytes troglodytes*) behaving in an extremely agitated manner. On looking closer, a small snake was seen and photographed in the act of swallowing a young chick, below an overhanging bank where the Wrens nest was situated. On being picked up, the snake reluctantly released its meal and reacted aggressively, striking with an open mouth.

In view of the snakes characteristic markings, aggressive nature, and the waterless surroundings where it was found, it is reasonable to assume that it is an example of the Hooded snake (*Macroprotodon cucullatus*). The subspecies *Macroprotodon cucullatus mauritanicus* occurs on the island (Wade, 1988).



Foto 1: *Macroprotodon cucullatus*, preying on Wren chick, *Troglodytes*, een vogeltje etend; foto D. Buttle.

Natrix maura is the only other snake recorded on Mallorca, where it is abundant, but always found in the vicinity of water. Unlike *Macroprotodon cucullatus* it never bites, though it may strike with the mouth closed.

In literature I can find no reference to bird predation by *Macroprotodon cucullatus*, its principal prey being given as small lacertid lizards and geckoes. Other small reptiles are also taken, e.g. *Blanus* and *Anguis*; Salvador (1985) mentions insects. The only mention of warm blooded food items is made by Wade (1988), who found that nine out of twelve captive Balearic specimens readily accepted small mice as well as lizards. Specimens from Lybia also ate mice, but these were refused by others, including all specimens originating from Iberia.

Though primarily nocturnal, *Macroprotodon cucullatus* is also occasionally active during daylight hours. The snake photographed was found in mid afternoon, the weather being clear and sunny. Its ground colour was light brown, resembling the specimen shown in Gruber (1989).

REFERENCE

- Arnold, E.N., J.A. Burton & D.W. Oviden, 1978. A field guide to the Reptiles and Amphibians of Britain and Europe. Collins, London.
- Gruber, U., 1989. Die Schlangen Europas und rund ums Mittelmeer. Kosmos-Naturführer, Stuttgart.
- Salvador, A., 1985. Guia de Campo de los Anfibios y Reptiles de la Peninsula Iberica, Islas Baleares y Canarias. Salvador, Leon.
- Steward, J.W., 1971. The Snakes of Europe. David & Charles, Newton Abbot.
- Wade, E., 1988. Intraspecific variation in the colubrid snake genus *Macroprotodon*. *Herpetological Journal*, Vol. 1 (6): 237-245.