

NOTE ON AN UNSUITABLE FOOD ITEM TAKEN BY A DEATH ADDER.
(*Acanthophis antarcticus*) (Shaw)

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On the 29th November 1980 at 12.30p.m. a female Death Adder *Acanthophis antarcticus* was caught in bushland adjacent to St. Ives N.S.W. Latitude 33°44' , Longitude 151°12' . The sv length was 74.5cm, total length 86.5cm. The weather was humid and sunny and the air temperature was approximately 24°C. The snake was stretched out and moving under a sandstone overhang close to a large creek when caught.

When the author received this snake at 2.00p.m. the same day, a stick like object was found protruding from the snakes' mouth, which proved to be the tail of an Eastern Water Dragon *Physignathus lesueuri*. The snake had eaten the 80cm (total length) dragon almost immediately prior to capture as no digestion had commenced.

During the next few days digestion commenced but on the 2nd December the health of this snake deteriorated and it died the same day. At death it rolled onto its back and convulsed several times.

The snake attempted regurgitation of the Eastern Water Dragon unsuccessfully, on several occasions prior to it's death.

The health of this snake seemed perfect, excluding a few ticks on it's skin and it was concluded that the cause of death was the excessive meal. Upon post mortem, it seems that the spines on the lizards ruptured part of the digestive tract.

With reference to Stopford's (1980) note about the unusual food intake of a

Diamond Python it appears that excessive or unnatural meals by snakes in the wild may not be uncommon. From my observations with snakes in captivity, it seems that once a snake commences feeding on apparently suitable food, it is often reluctant to regurgitate even if the food proves to be unsuitable.

References:

Stopford, J., (1980): Unusual Food Intake of a Diamond Python. *Herpetofauna* 12(1): 35.