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DIET OF THE PRIRIT BATIS *BATIS PRIRIT* IN THE FREE STATE, SOUTH AFRICA

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The Pririt Batis *Batis pririt* forages mainly by foliage- and hover-gleaning insects but it is also known to hawk flying insects (Spottiswoode 2005; Louette 2006). Although the species' diet is described as insectivorous, there is only limited information available on its diet. Kopij (2005) found the Pririt Batis' diet comprised mainly of unidentified Coleoptera (beetles), Heteroptera (bugs), Hymenoptera (bees and ants) and some insect larvae whereas Louette (2006) also included Lepidoptera (butterflies and moths). This note reports on some new invertebrate taxa recorded in the diet of the Pririt Batis from the Free State, South Africa.

Pririt Batis specimens were collected at various localities in the Free State between May 1998 and December 2013. The specimens were prepared as study skin specimens and the stomach contents stored in 70% alcohol. The stomach contents of 22 male and 14 females were examined in the laboratory using a Leica EZ4 stereo microscope and keys in Scholtz and Holm (1996). No attempt was made to quantify the relative composition of the stomach contents.

The Coleoptera was the dominant component in the diet with a prevalence of 86.1% in the stomachs analysed, confirming literature reports that beetles are a significant component of the diet of batises (Fig. 1). This was followed by Hemiptera (22.2%), Hymenoptera (16.7%) and Arachnida (13.9%). The Arachnida (spiders), Isoptera (termites), Orthoptera (locusts) and Mantodea (mantids) represent new records in the diet of the Pririt Batis, but all these taxa have been recorded in the diets of several other *Batis* species (Louette 2006). All the taxa recorded in this study were present in the stomachs of both sexes and there were only minor differences in the prevalence of the different taxa in the diet of the sexes. The presence of small amounts of pollen in the stomachs of two specimens is unusual, but was likely obtained through accidental ingestion while foraging for prey.

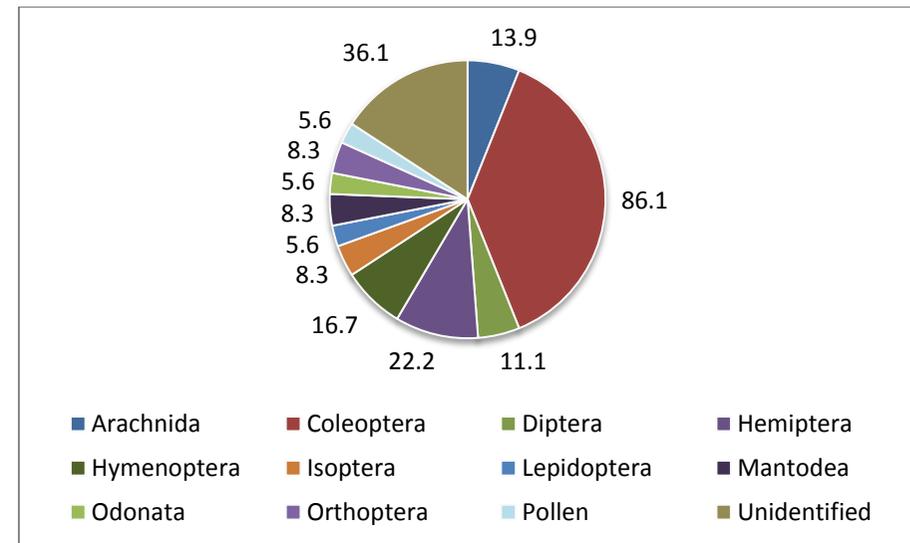


Fig. 1. The prevalence (%) of different invertebrate components in the diet of the Pririt Batis in the Free State.

It is worth noting that the diet of the Pririt Batis may well be more diverse than reflected here and in Kopij's (2005) study. Most of the

stomach contents were characterised by extremely small fragments of various body parts, presenting difficulties in assigning fragments to various taxa. Nevertheless, the value of stomach content analysis of museum specimens can make a valuable contribution to our understanding of the ecology, distribution, competition and evolutionary relationships of birds.

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