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No rat on reptile's menu today

HANTI OTTO

The food chain was temporarily disrupted when a rat refused to become lunch for a 1.5m Boa constrictor.

Instead, it decided to attack the snake.

The young female snake, a Red-tailed Boa, is now recovering from her ordeal at the Bird and Exotic Animal Hospital at the Faculty of Veterinary Science at the University of Pretoria.

She was bitten about 10 times, with some of the wounds so deep

that her vertebrae were visible.

Now, patches of white plaster cover the many deep wounds on her body.

Apparently, although snakes eat rodents such as mice and rats, they are not always invulnerable to their prey.

According to Dr Dorianne Elliot, who works at the hospital, a rat can kill a snake.

"The snake cannot defend itself and will try to hide from the rat," she said.

She said incidents like this one

happened when snake owners put a live rat in the cage when the snake was not yet hungry.

The snake would leave its food alone until it got hungry.

But this rat decided not to wait until that happened, and took the view that attack was its best form of defence.

It bit - hard.

"The snake is in for long treatment," Elliot said.

After the incident, the perpetrator fled and its whereabouts are unknown.



Meisie Malatse, an assistant at the Tuks Faculty of Veterinary Science, shows the plastered patches on the snake's back.

PICTURE: LIZA VAN DEVENTER

