



April 2000

The Barking Gecko

Newsletter of the NamibRand Nature Reserve

Volume 1, Issue 1

Message from our CEO

When it was suggested during our Kgotla in February last that a quarterly newsletter should be introduced to improve on communication and bring stakeholders in NamibRand closer together, I said to myself "an exercise in futility? Who is going to do it without a dedicated driver? This will be a non-event!!"

Well, I have been proven wrong with the arrival of this first edition hot off the press. The information contained therein is surely of interest to the large "family" living on and off the NamibRand Nature Reserve and the observations recorded therein

will surely, one day, support the installation of a database on event and occurrences happening in the Reserve.

Thank you, for putting this publication together. Whenever I consider something worthwhile to be included in future editions, I will happily contribute.



Keep it up and thank you for your efforts.
Albi Brückner
Custodian and CEO

Editor's Comment

Thanks a million to all of you who contributed to this first issue. The response has far exceeded our expectations!

Many apologies to those whose articles I had to shorten due to space constraints, or kept back for our next issue. Contributions will be welcomed from anyone linked to NRNR—landowners, concessionaires, employees, tour guides,...

Thanks also to Brigitte for all her typing. For the July issue, please let us have any articles of interest from you by the end of June. Let's try for a maximum of 300 words per article, preferably in MS Word format on diskette or by E-mail. If this sounds like Greek to you, typed on paper will do!

Editor

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Neighbourly Love—Achim Lenssen

The commercial farmers that surround us all hate the predators in nature and call them "ongediertes". They try to kill them and to exterminate them. The NamibRand warden has to protect them as well, he cannot discriminate between the different species in nature. He is thus in the firing line when farmers launch their attack on the Reserve by claiming that we breed jackals and hyenas. This statement is always

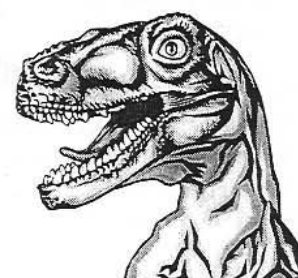
incorrect because we do not breed any animal species. This they do on their own without our intervention or manipulation. We only protect them in this natural process.

On 9 February this year I saw a female hyena in the western section of Vreemdelingspoort in the late morning. She emerged from the shade of a calcrete overhang in a dry wash on the route to the fossil

dunes. It was immediately obvious that she was highly pregnant or had given birth very recently. Her behaviour was most uncommon and she would not run off. Standing elevated above the vehicle only twenty meters away she looked most ominous and I would not have dared to get out of the vehicle then.

This particular hyena was sighted by the Mountain

(Continued on page 2)



Are hyenas heading for the same destiny?

Neighbourly Love—continued

(Continued from page 1)

Lodge staff a day or so later. Speculation was rife as to why she would not run off and stood her ground each time at the same spot.

For me it meant that she had cubs in a den in this calcrete stratum but others had different versions. We sighted her

How big is the NamibRand "family"? For the next issue, please let us have from each of you, the number of employees and dependents at your establishment.

again after the Kgotla and she would still not run off. Then two days later we dropped a gemsbok carcass nearby. This was devoured within a very short time and there were some small paw prints around. They were too big to be those of a jackal.

Yes, you guessed it, they were those of hyena cubs. Wayne Hutchinson of the Lodge says he confirmed that there are two cubs. This was the first pleasant experience I have had with spotted hyena in my long career as conservator. I will tell you of some unpleasant experiences some other time.

Achim Lenssen

Suggestion from Elinor Dürr:

An idea I had – lets run a competition – prizes etc. to be worked out later – we (as guides) need to ask our guests to come up with what they think caused the fairy circles. Some of the theories should be quite funny and can be published in the newsletters. By asking the guests to come up with ideas will also easily introduce the idea of the fairy circle project and one can then explain why we need to raise funds to research the circles and thus hopefully we'll sell some more circles.

Can we have some feedback? Ed.

Vultures on NamibRand—Marilyn and Peter Bridgeford

The Lappetfaced Vulture is the most common and is a breeding resident. The Whitefaced Vulture is present at certain times of the year, but breeds further east and to the north.

The lappetfaced vulture, the largest in Southern Africa, but not the heaviest, is a large black bird with a distinctive, pinkish, bald head. They breed in the tops of impossible to climb trees, and the nest can be 1,5 – 2,0 meters in diameter. Breeding starts in June/July, when an old nest is relined, or a new one built. One egg is laid and incubated for 56 days. At four months of age the chick starts flying, but is dependent on the adult for another two months. It often roosts in the nest for another two to three months.

The birds are only sexually mature at about six years of age. Breeding success, i.e. the number of chicks that survive the first year, are only around 40%. From these few facts it is obvious that vulture populations increase at a very slow rate, and any poisoning, drowning and other unnatural deaths can harm the population for many years.

During the past nine years 273 lappetfaced vulture chicks have been ringed in the adjoining Namib-Naukluft Park. A further 45 breeding records have been collected.

If any dead vultures are found, with or without rings, please inform us immediately. This also applies to areas out-

side the NRNR. Please check all dead birds for rings, and record the number on the metal ring. If you can get close enough to a live vulture to see the colour rings, please write them down immediately. It is very important to get the correct sequence of colour rings, as each bird has a unique combination, which identifies the bird and its nesting site. The date and place must also be recorded. As we hope to ring Lappetfaced vulture chicks in the Reserve during October this year, keep a lookout for nesting birds. Please let us know and we will investigate. We hope to involve as many people in the Reserve as possible in the ringing process. Your assistance will be appreciated.

Other Interesting Sightings

Philip from Camp Mwisho reported seeing many *scorpions* on the plains catching and eating locusts – so if we had thousands of scorpions there would be no need to spray the locusts.

Swarms of locusts occur mainly at Kwessiegat, Draaihoek and partly on Keerweder. The employees go out regularly spraying with a biodegradable poison, especially early



morning and late afternoon as then the locusts congregate in swarms. It is a law that locusts are sprayed to avoid a national and even an international locust problem. Locusts were also seen on Aandster, Stellarine and Die Duine but there the concentration seems to be less.

Wayne from Sossusvlei Mountain Lodge reported to Keerweder the sighting of a *black Wildebeest* on

Vreemdelingspoort some 200m from the staff houses.

In March 2000 a small *frog* was caught in the garden at Aandster. It was identified by Mike Griffen of the M.E.T as tremolo sand frog, (*Tomopterna cryptotis*). If you find a frog on the reserve, please inform us. In this way we can start to build up a database of all frogs on NamibRand Nature Reserve. (The Bridgefords)

Letters to the Editor

To all the NamibRand people:

As you know, all good things must come to an end. It is our time that has come to an end and therefore we are moving on Northwards to manage a Game Ranch between Outjo and Kammanjab, better known as Ohorongo Safaris.

For Michelle and myself it is quite sad to leave this beautiful area and the people we know. Luckily memories lasts forever and that can't be taken away.

Michelle has been working on NamibRand for three months in total, she moved to Toekoms after we married

on December 11, 1999. I worked a total of four years on NamibRand of which one was as guide for NamibRand Safaris and the other three as Game Ranger and Professional Hunting Guide.

We would just like to thank those that could make it to the farewell at Aandster and those that could not make it we know were working.

We wish you all the best for the future and hope that NamibRand would make you proud of this beautiful landscape of Namibia.

Kind Regards,
Michelle & Louw van Zyl

Dear Ursi and Mandy,

Thank you both for the initiative to start a newsletter, I'm sure it will be great fun for all to partake in it. Stephan and I spoke about the same idea about a year ago and we thought a good name for a newsletter would be "The Barking Gecko". Maybe it will be good to use this name, or we can ask for ideas for a name from some of the other participants.

Herman Cloete, Wolwedans

Did We Inherit a Meteorite From Space? - Ursi Lenssen

On 4th April 2000 between 20:00 and 20:30 following observation was made by staff from Kwessiegat, Keerweder, Wolwedans, Sossussvlei Mountain Lodge and even as far as Geluk.

A very bright shooting star was seen, so bright that it illuminated the houses of Abraham, Willem on Keerweder, Markus at Verweg and of the staff houses at Wolwedans. Some time later a "big bang" was heard, which can be described as following:

Jimmy described it as a shot from a huge caliber rifle. The Wolwedans,

Camp Mwisho and Geluk staff described it as a rumble or a thunder with a thump. Keerweder staff had the feeling that a big rock came crashing down from heaven. So far it can be assumed that this "big bang" occurred between the Chateau plains and Bushman Hill. At Wereldend and Aandster nothing was heard.

We will try and to find out more about this and perhaps even find a meteorite, hopefully on NamibRand – what a boost this would be to our tourism.



At about 02:00 on 5th April 2000 a helicopter came flying over the Nubib Mountains in the direction of Jagkop where it landed for a very short time before slowly making its way to Jagkop and then moved in the direction of Bushman Hill.

So far no more has been seen of the helicopter. Since we have once again a defect telephone we cannot even make contact with the outside world to find out whether more is known about this occurrence.

A New Species

It has long been the contention of the NamibRand Nature Reserve that the boundary fence with the Namib-Naukluft Park, does not stop the movement of birds and animals. Food, water and shelter are enticing and they will cross the fence in both directions.

The green grass of NRNR attracted another species from the Namib-Naukluft Park in November 1999, when for the first time the Bridgefords were seen



moving into a vacant nest on Aandster. They are not summer migrants, and have settled in well in their new environment. Marilyn and Peter migrated to Etosha from South Africa in the middle 70's, but soon left for the Namib. They moved up the coast, with short stops at Swakop, Henties, Ugabmond and Möwe Bay.

In 1983, a reverse migration took them to the Naukluft Mountains,

where they stayed until October 1999. While erecting and maintaining the boundary fence of the Namib-Naukluft Park, they had occasional, but pleasant meetings with the species inhabiting NRNR and the surrounding farms. The family includes a horse that eats bratwurst, a dog that eats tomatoes, two budgies, a dormouse, eight chickens and numerous spiders.

Marilyn and Peter Bridgeford

Proud Dad—Marc Dürr

My two puffadders (for which I have permits) have been living together in perfect harmony for over two years. We have often wondered what sex they were – you can tell the sex by pushing out their sex organs that lie under their tail – a hair-raising job on a puffadder!

However, watching the two together made us think that they were male and female, but which was which we could not tell. We had begun to think that they were infertile when Titus (our gardener) came and told me about a “klomp slange in die hok”.

Thinking that perhaps he had no clue that the “hok” was for the snakes (he’s new) I answered that I knew that – it was for the puffadders. “No”, he says, “nie die twee grottes nie, die klomp

kleintjies” ... the snakes had babies.

We called Mike Griffin for advise on whether the mothers looked after them, or whether the father would eat them. He told us that the babies ate small lizards and baby mice and that from when they were born they fended for themselves, the adults do not usually eat the young. We did not want to keep them as our permit only allows for five Bitis specimens, and we do not have food, i.e. baby mice for them.

Our permit does not allow for us to sell the young so the best solution was to release them. The question arose as to the location of the planned release, NamibRand lies well within the



distribution, and generally the snakes prefer rocky areas like dry water-courses. We decided, after consultation with Achim, to let them go further east where they are more commonly found as it is moister there and therefore food is more readily available.

This means that there are not 11 new puffadders around Wolwedans (as Losberg is ideal country for them) terrorising discerning quests, but there are 11 cute little “puffies” scaring the day-lights out of approximately 250 lizard juveniles and 1000 baby striped mice somewhere in the Zaris mountains. We sincerely hope that at least a few of the little guys and ladies survive.

Moving On—Ursi Lenssen

Having lived in the Namib Desert for over 16 years, the desert has got a hold on us, which is not so easy to shake off. As it was time to move on we had two options, one was to move to Swakopmund and the other to move further south to the NamibRand Nature Reserve. We chose the latter, packed a borrowed cattle truck with all our belongings and moved to a new home and a new destination.

Now two years later we may honestly say that we feel part of the Namib as ever. If the desert with its wide open spaces, its solitude, its silence and its ever changing colours has become part of you, it is difficult to imagine living somewhere else. There was a time many years’ back when I thought that I would never be able to leave Ganab, a place that had meant so much to me, where I had spread my roots.

Ganab was the place that had changed me, my outlook on life, the place where I had seen my daughters grow

up and turn into mature adults. In the Bible a number of personalities had lived in the desert for some time where they had time to think, get to know themselves, take stock of their life and more important be prepared to face the world with renewed vigour. The same applies to me, the desert changed me like no other place could.

Yet I have also realized in the meantime that I did not leave Ganab or the desert but only moved on. The time had come for me to no longer live hidden behind the mountain, as had been the case at Ganab, but to move on, to start a new life, to meet new people, to share all the experiences gathered over the years and to acquire and learn more about life and living.

NamibRand is different in many respects yet has many similarities with the Namib Desert. We always need to keep in mind that we are working with nature which should be treated with respect and care. Watching nature and trying to live with it side by



*Talking of proud Dads:
Congrats to Marc and Elinor
Dürr on the birth of Sheena in
Swakopmund on 31st January.
And to Niko and Elke
Brückner, whose son
Christopher was born in
Windhoek on 18th April.*

side can be our greatest teacher if we care to be open-minded and willing to learn something new.

It is a golden opportunity all of us have on NamibRand to live here, to experience daily what life actually is all about. The most important however is to take care and make sure that this part of the world may still be enjoyed for many generations to come. We should plan for the future and not just for the next day. Only then may we be certain that we have reached our goal if future generations may still find places on earth which have not changed that much since man first came.

History of Stellarine—Andreas Brückner

The first evidence of habitation in this old farmstead on the southern edge of the NamibRand Nature Reserve (NRNR), dates back to 1945, and can be found on an old borehole socket, where none other than the infamous J. J van Lil engraved the date. The "van Lils" were among the early settlers in this area, and much of what is the NRNR today is in some way connected to this name.

During the renovation it transpired from the old roof-beams, that a certain Mr Esterhuizen (probably Clutch's grandfather) was the builder of the original house – when exactly is anyone's guess, but probably in the fifties, i.e. something like half a century ago. The original walls, of which most still

stand today, were made from clay found in the pans of the area and whitewashed with "beesvet" to hold the contraption together. These rudimentary structures have weathered some of the harshest desert conditions – anyone who has experienced an east wind storm here will know.

Stellarine was one of the first farms of the present day NRNR acquired by J A Brückner in the early eighties.

Since then the old farmstead had been standing in ruins for more than fifteen years, and who knows for how long before then.

The old dried out bluegum trees out-

side the house, and the Kolmanskop like remains of the "kraal", a Manga and shearing shed – all half covered by dunes – tell a story of time, that certainly leaves lots of room for imagination.



The name Stellarine appears to originate from old J.J van Lil, whose wife's name was Stella, and whom he either loved very much or who wore the pants – this little detail is not part of this historic anecdote.

In 1999 Andreas and Mandy Brückner got the go-ahead to convert this ruin into what is known as the NamibRand Family Hideout today.

Cats... Achim Lenssen

Do you have any suggestions for The Barking Gecko?

Please do let us know!

The Editors

The morning air was unusually fresh on the morning of 17 March 2000 and the shadows of the mountains were still long when we were on our way to Maltahöhe.

About a kilometer before the boundary of the farm Waterkop an animal crossed the road. It was sleek and fast and before we were much closer it had cleared the jackal proof fence with an easy jump. The animal was feline

without a doubt, bigger than a caracal and smaller than a lion. The long grass did not make it easy to get a good second glimpse as the feline headed for the mountains crouched low. I stopped the vehicle to ask Markus Tsaobeb, who was standing on the back and had a far better vantage position, whether he had been able to get a positive identification.

He said yes, that was a leopard.

Eco-tourism Corner

Quote from
nationalgeographic.com/traveler:

"Well-executed tourism means two things: that you as a visitor have a great travel experience, and that your destination benefits from your visit. Some good indicators: atmospheric architecture and uncluttered landscapes. Lodging and dining and shopping that give you a sense of

place, not just more international sameness. Local efforts to avoid pollution and ecological damage. Evidence that your tourist dollar is benefiting permanent residents in a constructive way, inducing them to take good care of what you've come to see. Do your guides or hosts obviously love the place you're visiting and want you to love it too? Did your experience give you rich memories to take home?"

Makes you think, doesn't it?



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"The wildlife of today is not ours to dispose of as we please. We have it in trust and must account for it to those who come after us."

Known Websites:
www.wolwedans.com
Any others?

NamibRand Facts

FARMS	OWNER	OCCUPANT / CONCESSIONAIRE
Gorrasis	JAB's - NamibRand Ventures	JAB's Family
Stellarine	JAB's - NamibRand Ventures	NamibRand Family Hideout
De Duine	JAB's - NamibRand Ventures	Tok Tokkie Trails cc—Marc and Elinor Dürr
Wolwedans	NamibRand Desert Trails	NamibRand Safaris:Wolwedans Dunes Lodge & Camp
Jagkop	NamibRand Desert Trails	-
Verweg	Mr Achterfeld	-
Keerweder	Mr Achterfeld	NamibRand Nature Reserve - Achim Lenssen
Kwessiegat	Mrs Berker	NamibSky Adventure Safaris
Vreemdelingspoort	Gold Venture Lodges	Afro Ventures - Sossusvlei Mountain Lodge
Toekoms	Toekoms cc JAB	NamibRand Nature Reserve
Draaihoek	Draaihoek cc Mr Klein	Vacant
Toskaan	Toskaan cc Mr Klein	Vacant
Aandster	Aandster cc Grand Circle Foundation	NamibRand Nature Reserve - P Bridgeford

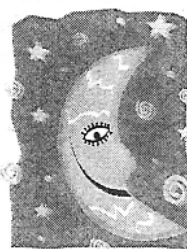
The Last Laugh—Elinor Dürr

Very often our guests are what one would call gullible. We all laugh at the kind of things they believe especially at a time when as a guide we think they understand we are joking and they are taking us perfectly seriously. Maybe our acting is very good or maybe the language barrier prevents the guests from understanding the humour. Marc shows the people a sociable weaver's nest and tells them that it is an ostrich nest. Often he is believed, and the question comes: "how do the ostriches get into the nest?" Marc demonstrates by climbing into the nest himself – as an ostrich ostensibly would. When he realizes that the guests are fully believing him, he does make sure to let them know that he is pulling their leg.

Often, however, this does not come across. One morning I was sitting at brunch with guests who had been out

with Marc on a trail. They spoke perfect English, so no one could use the excuse that the language was a problem. The man was pulling his wife's leg about something and I chirped "you're as bad as Marc, he tells the people that those big nests in the Acacia trees are Ostrich nests!" The lady looked at me with a very surprised expression on her face and said, "they're not??, what are they then?"

While in Swakopmund, we were having sundowners with my parents, Peter Ward and some of the Wilderness Safaris staff that had come in from Botswana. I was happily telling the group about our "ostrich nests" when Chris Kruger, a Botswana guide who I have known since my yuppie Jo'burg days, told my folks the story about my very first visit to Botswana.



He was telling us that the holes in the termite mounds were caused by elephants sticking their tusks into the mounds and the termites cleaned them, hence elephants in Botswana always have very clean tusks. Needless to say I believed every word of this and pleaded ignorance, rather than gullibility! Perhaps we shouldn't be so quick in laughing at the gullibility of our guests, and rather make them sure that we inform and educate them so that they leave, like I did from Mombo with a greater awareness and love for the nature around them. This does not mean that we cannot pull their legs – the aim should be to be able to pull their legs and then make sure that they can laugh at themselves.