



July 2001

The Barking Gecko

Newsletter of the NamibRand Nature Reserve

Volume 2, Issue 3

Rain! The Essence of Life

When a few of us on NamibRand were beginning to think that we would not be blessed with good rains after a very hot season, the first signs of a good cloud build-up began to appear on the horizon.

Our best rainfall month was April, when we had light and steady showers on most parts of NamibRand.

Below are the figures from January to June, which should be of interest to all:

Vreemdelingspoort	83.9
Hyaena-Water	87.2
Air Strip	58.3
Draaihoek (house)	178.2
Bushmankoppie	221.0
Porcupine	177.6
Keerweder (house)	135.6
Jagkop-dam	104.1
Boscia	121.0
Toekoms (house)	92.5
Kudu-water	147.6
Verweg (house)	122.0
Zegradam	98.0
Wolwedans (house)	131.0
Dunes Lodge	110.0
Chateau Plain	98.5
Karls Valley	68.0
Kraal Junction	66.6
Gorrasis (house)	70.0
Straussenwasser	77.3
Satanskop	45.0
Die Duine (house)	124.5
DDR	167.5
Schafsberg	109.5
Stellarine (Hideout)	126.0
Horseshoe camp	131.0
Aandster (house)	126.0
Prosopis	62.0
Twee Pompe	113.0
Top dam	119.0
West End	94.0

Where exact rainfall figures are not available for other farms on the Reserve, no figures are quoted. A comparison to last year's annual figures (where available) is shown in the chart below. The rainfall shown for a farm is the amount measured at the farm's main house, or farmstead.

The average annual rainfall for the Namib Rand area is 50-100 mm, indicating that we have had two good consecutive rainy seasons. In Namibia after the "winter" months have passed, the thoughts inevitably revolve around rain. The newspapers publish the weather predictions made by our various "weather prophets".

Everyone would like to believe them, since rain does mean everything to the inhabitants of this country. Firstly our water supplies will be replenished, as without water there is no life.

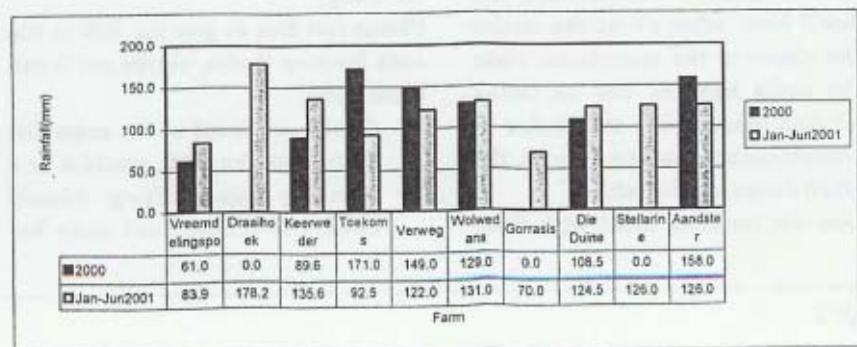
Secondly after good rains there will be enough grazing for the animals and the soil will be moist

enough for planting crops, vegetables etc. The towns will experience a face-lift, as the trees that are usually not watered boast a much "greener" green than normal. For the gardeners it means that for at least some time one can save on the water bills.

Be it nature, man or beast to each of them rain means upliftment. When the first clouds start to appear on the horizon man becomes excited about the possibility of rain. Very often one has experienced many weeks of extreme heat, with the nights hardly cooling down enough to make sleep possible. *Ursi Lenssen*

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Origin of the enigmatic, circular, barren patches (Fairy Rings) of the pro Namib

Well, well, well, yes Eric grabs a pen and overcomes his allergy to ink.

I read with great interest the article in the South African Journal of Sciences and at the same time I thought to myself "there goes another of nature's secrets". And I admit maybe the fact that I bet a few good bottles of wine about my personal theory got me at the desk asking a few questions. Surely, the time I was teaching biology is a long way behind but insects have always fascinated me to the point that I wrote my thesis about them.

The fact that termites are invading circles because they are water collectors is to me no problem. It is logical and insects will always make the most out of their environment.

Now termites, social insects par excellence are very well known to sterilise the ground they occupy by eating anything available around them and process it. But never did I hear so far that they would produce toxins that would kill grass that in our case remains the base of their alimentation.

As I am completely out of labs and not too keen to come close to them again, I will try to proceed by elimination and let you hear a theory I cannot prove but maybe can someone tear my arguments to pieces and get a step forward.

Lets forget about UFO parking lots, balloon crash landings...and look at insects, plants, and my favourite guys, the fungi.



I. Termites.

As I understood, termites' "nests" have been found at +30cm below the surface!? Now, what about the circles on the slopes of the mountains, right in the rocks like the one on Geluk farm? And what about the circles in the conglomerate, on the way to the petrified dunes, on the left? So, are our termites fitted with drill-

ing machines in the front? So far, the termites that I observed in our area are easily noticeable from the surface and their activity is easy to observe. Now, it would be interesting to calculate how long the grass would stay standing at the rate that our local termites eat if they were present in the numbers we must suspect looking at the amount of fairy circles in the Jagkop area. If it was the case, I hope the next alates don't come back too soon or our Oryx herds will have to migrate to better areas if they want food!!

Well, to stop blaming the termites, in Congo, all termites' mounts that were abandoned would be colonised by vegetation within three years and normally, where there is prey, there is a predator. As far as I know, their worst enemies are the ants, but where are then all their colonies?

... Let's wish for the bat-eared foxes that I were wrong!

II. Euphorbias.

I'll try to be short because some of you are starting to fall asleep or to think I'm too naughty.

Plants generally colonies one type of subtracts. They tend to be or in the rocks, or in the sand or ...

Especially when they reach that kind of diameter and certainly would need big root systems. Then if euphorbias were the cause, where are the remains of roots and why only at this longitude?

When Lovegrove mapped the circles from Angola to South Africa, we could see that they were always found at in around 80 to 100 km from the coast.

III. Fungi.

Please feel free to give me hell in the next Barking Gecko, maybe you'll win some wine!!

> Circles are found at the same distance from the coast, would it be a humidity factor? Fungi (closely related to lichen) need some hu-

Next Issue:

For the October 2001 issue, please let us have any articles of interest as early as possible in October.

From the October issue, we began running a **concessionaire profile** per issue, with the bulk of the profile material provided by the concessionaire themselves (one to two A4 pages when laid-out). A description of your product, perhaps how it came about, photos, people, etc...

The sequence is as follows:

Oct '00	Sossusvlei Mountain Lodge
Jan '01	NamibRand Family Hide-out
Apr '01	Tok Tokkie Trails
Jul '01	Wolwedans Dunes Lodge and Dune Camp
Oct '01	Namib Sky Adventure Safaris

- > No root systems found in the circles. Fungi roots are called mycelium and are mostly microscopic.
- > Fungi are known to colonise areas in a circular form (look at penicillin or at witches circles in Europe of appr. 1.5m diameter)
- > As you can see on some of Paul's photographs, some circles tend to follow a very straight line like an old road or fence line. Fungi spores propagate easily with vehicles or animal vectors.
- > Fungi colonies are not only famous for growing in circles, but also for observing a certain distance between colonies (competition)

Come on, go for it, and tell me termites cultivated my fungi...
Eric Hesemans
Namib Sky Adventure Safaris

Concessionaire Profile



The WOLWEDANS Collection

NamibRand Safaris (Pty) Ltd, t/a Wolwedans

Writing something about Wolwedans for the Barking Gecko should be the easiest task in the world – so I thought. Seeing that the newsletter has mainly got an internal/insider readership and everybody knows the basics which normally easily make for an hour's sales talk (i.e. how many beds, what kind of activities, our terrain etc. just to name a few) the task of filling a whole page on Wolwedans for 'NamibRanders' who know it (almost) all actually isn't such an easy task. It presents a good opportunity though to sit back and reflect a bit on the past, the present and the future.

History

Wolwedans started some seven years ago with eight beds pitched somewhere in the dunes. Thinking back to those humble beginnings makes one smile with a touch of sentiment. Those were the days when the (one) NamibRand Ranger – Kai Hillen – apart from looking after the reserve still functioned as a guide once or twice a week, supported by Louise (being a hostess, chef, housekeeper and pipe-fixer) as well as Lazarus, Lena, Hendrik and myself occasionally. Tranquil times which are still cherished by some guests today (not to mention Louise...).

As the years moved on, the Dune Camp grew to 12 beds and when we started having four to five arrivals per week – the concept of a full camp was completely strange to us – we all got madly excited and this is when Kai decided to move to Keenweder as tourism got too busy. Apart from a new era at Wolwedans this move also brought the clear cut division of tourism and conservation on NamibRand.

Having not much of a firm development plan in mind we sailed on, going through ups and downs, joy and grief, happy times and many of those 'moments' (which could fill 10 Barking Gecko's). We realised though, that 12 beds would not be able to carry Wolwedans, let alone the Reserve (at the time it was only Mwisho and the Dune Camp). The staff compliment had by the time risen to a staggering 12 people in the field and two full-timers in the office and hence we saw no other option as to increase the capacity. The major change and challenge came with the completion of the lodge and a capacity that had more than doubled over one year, resulting in more staff, more cars and consequently more headaches. We went through stormy times, today however - three years later - we have made major progress and Wolwedans is again running like a clock...(feels like it's almost time to 'start something new and exciting again).

Wolwedans today

Over the last couple of years, Wolwedans has earned itself a sound reputation in the market place. With a team of close to 40 people in the field working in five different departments and a support team in Windhoek the ship is sailing with full sails and ready to weather (almost) any storm.

Our portfolio of camps provides ample opportunity to meet visitors different expectations and preferred levels of comfort - be it the rustic Dune Camp targeted at the younger more adventurous traveler, the elaborate Dunes Lodge or the Wolwedans Private Camp, a secluded Suite catering for one couple only. No matter where our guests opt to stay, warmth and personalized service - embraced by a commitment to care for the guest and nature alike - are the hallmarks of Wolwedans.

It is our aim to provide the nature-loving individual with a wonderful, honest, down-to-earth nature experience, focusing on an interpretive wildlife encounter, intimate camps, personalised service and good pan-African cuisine. Still today Wolwedans is free of wannabe fanciness and pretence and we seem to manage to keeping the personalised atmosphere of the early days, despite being such a big operation.

The future

What are our plans for the future, where are we heading and what is important to us. We have come a long way and one could probably say that Wolwedans has successfully earned itself the image of being one of Namibia's top tourism destinations, benefiting not only us but the reserve at large.

Our occupancies are well above average, our staff situation is very stable (compared to industry standard) and judging from this we seem to be on the right track. Now comes the stage in Wolwedans' 'life' though to reflect on where we are heading. In a way it's like a human, we have outgrown the teenager years, learned our lessons and now have to form a distinct and identifiable character. As a 'grown up' we now enter a phase of greater professionalism, higher productivity, better economic results and fine tuning of product and experience – for the sake of ourselves, NamibRand and our valued visitors.

For the years to come we want to commit ourselves to sustainable growth by balancing the quest for the highest possible level of quality (in terms of product and visitor experience) with economic progress, social responsibility and care for our environment. Broken down into chewable chunks this bold statement entails visions as follows:

- ♦ To improve our product, we will strive to further develop the Wolwedans Collection into a very well-rounded, high quality, diverse and exciting desert experience which will have no comparison in Namibia. Our quest for the highest possible level of quality will stand on five pillars, namely: the competence and professionalism of the entire team, exciting guest infrastructures, technical competence, superb catering and an ever-improving service orientation.
- ♦ With regard to economic growth, we are determined to turn NamibRand Safaris (Pty)

Ltd, into a profit making operation which allows for realistic returns, good cash-flows and more monetary freedom in terms of operations and development.

- ♦ Our social responsibility will primarily focus on development of human resource, social upliftment (mainly health and education), improved living conditions as well as a secure and pleasant working environment.
- ♦ "Care for the environment" – thanks to the strict rules set by the reserve - is not a mere phrase, but already deeply enshrined in our day-to-day operations and way of thinking. We do know however, that a lot more progress can be done, especially with regards to more wise use (and re-use) of water and limiting overall impact on our sensitive environment. The challenge will be to balance commercial operations with conservation, one being dependant on the other.

The two main success factors for Wolwedans' future – taking into account the size of our operation - will be steady occupancy levels providing economic stability, and our ability to build and maintain a team that is able to carry the visions addressed above. Building expertise and a professional team base will hence be an area of key focus in the years to come.

With regard to secure occupancies, we believe that the time has come to look at alternative and more creative ways of marketing Wolwedans. Ideally we would like to see Wolwedans as well as the Reserve in its whole to develop away from 'just-another-stop-over-on-the-standard-Namibia-tour' destination to some kind of insider tip for people who don't stop over there by co-incidence but for a specific reason.

We can see people spending a week at NamibRand instead of going to ClubMed, relaxing at Wolwedans instead of rushing through Namibia like mad dogs, and getting more out of it for themselves than merely nice landscapes and some animals.

Space, beauty, peace, lovely sunsets and blue skies are the ingredients NamibRand supplies in ample quantities. Our 'spice in the soup' (and visible to our guests) should be a passion for what we do, down-to-earth but comfortable and exciting infrastructures, excellent and informative guiding which involves the guests, exquisite food, a relaxed atmosphere, a wonderful caring team and a warm ambience. Mix all of this, and Wolwedans has the potential of becoming a 'Mecca' of well-being, freedom and happiness for everybody concerned...- it's entirely up to us. If we can achieve this for the guests and ourselves as well, make money in the process and all of this without doing too much damage then we have indeed achieved something.

By Stephan Brückner

Place Names in Use on NamibRand Nature Reserve

We all give names to places, prominent points, routes, mountain peaks etc. Why is this done? Simply to communicate more readily with other people and to ensure that they know where to go or where something took place.

It is thus of great advantage if all place names are circulated and become part and parcel of our lives on NamibRand Nature Reserve.

I would like to start this long-term project by listing a few of the names in use in every issue, giving the locality and reason why the name was chosen. To keep it alive it will not be in alphabetical order.

Discovery:

An area to the west of Mwisho in the dunes close to the boundary fence of the Namib-Naukluft Park. This area is not easily entered by vehicle and was "discovered" from the balloon flights.

DDR:

A water point on Die Duine about 3.5 km north west of the homestead. This name has no relation to the East German country. It refers to "Die Duine Reservoir" which has been removed in part as it was no longer in use. The

place name will stay, as there is a four-way road junction here.

Moringa Valley:

This valley is in the northern part of the farm Toskaan facing northeast and borders on the farm Welverdiend that lies beyond the Nubib mountain range. In the top of this valley is a water-point (currently dry) and beyond that are some very massive Moringa trees. One has a girth of almost three meters. Hence the name.

Boscia Water:

The solar installation on Keerweder at the base of the Nubib Mountains. The site has two boreholes of which only one is utilized. The area abounds in *Boscia albitrunca* trees the common name being the shepherds tree or witgat-boom. There is no other area on NamibRand that has as many trees of this species.

Hyaena-Water:

A water point west of Sossusvlei Mountain Lodge on Vreemdelingspoort on the road to the fossilized dunes. The water-point consists of two tanks and a drinking trough and water was taken there by vehicle, as there is no borehole in the vicinity. When this water-point was built there were more hyenas tracks than game

tracks to be seen round it. The hyenas have several dens not far to the north. Game in the proximity have become accustomed to the site and frequent it regularly.

Chateau Namib:

A small hunting cottage on a small hill overlooking the vast Chateau plains. It is on the western boundary of Wolwedans. It was sited and built by previous owners of Wolwedans to spend the night, while game from the protected reservoir of the Diamond Area moved onto farmland in search of water and grazing. When hunting proceeded early in the morning the game would have their retreat route cut off and were forced away from the boundary deeper onto the farm. Fences to aid this hunting procedure have long been removed.

Kudu-Water:

A water point east of the Losberg in the drainage line running adjacent to the public road on farm Toekoms. This water point was established for the kudu that switch between the Losberg and the Nubib range. There are no boreholes in the area and water is brought in by vehicle from the Toekoms house.

Achim Lenssen, NRRN

Tribute to a Ludwig's Bustard

"...Looking and searching for an article for the Barking Gecko is always an experience on its own. It is like planning an excursion – an excursion of the mind."

The last two months I had the time to read several books and made it my mission to find out more about why Africa was so attractive to the Europeans and what made them settle on a continent that had little comfort to offer according to standards of the time. Two books inspired me to write why I see Wolwedans and NamibRand as a place to settle and call home. A short philosophy, but I would like to share it. Nature as I experience it at Wolwedans and how I would like to remember it is "an unconditional

truthfulness with no pretence which brings only the true spirit out in anyone that explores it. The quality of any person deciding to make this his home increases in growing understanding of oneself and in an acceptance of body and soul".

Another quote to explain why people are interested in traveling to our beautiful continent says it all: "The use of traveling is to regulate imagination by reality, and instead of thinking how things may be, to see them as they are!"

To end this letter to the Barking Gecko, just a part of another poem from my small treasure:

I saw the bustard flying like
A goose over the grassy plains
Wild bird vibrant in the
High air –
Unswerving from horizon to
Horizon.
With their soul stiffened
in their silence –
And their colour ribboning
The enormous skies
And the spokes of the sun
Over pale distant mountains.

Taken from my "Tribute to a Ludwig's Bustard".

Hermann Cloete, Wolwedans

Ode to my Spell-Checker (uncredited)

I have a spelling checker,
It came with my Pc.
It plane lee marks four my revue,
Miss steaks aye can knot sea.

Eye ran this poem threw it,
Your sure real glad two no.
Its very polished in its weigh,
My checker tolled me sew.

A checker is a blessing,
It freeze yew lodes of thyme.
It helps me right awl stiles to reed,
And aides me when aye rime.

Each frays comes posed up on my
screen,
Eye trussed too bee a joule.
The checker pours o'er every word,
To cheque sum spelling rule.

Bee fore a veiling checkers
Hour spelling mite decline,
And if we're lacks oar have a laps,
We would bee maid too wine.

Butt now bee cause my spelling



Is checked with such grate flare,
There are know faults with in my cite,
Of nun eye am a wear.

Now spelling does not phase me,
It does not bring a tier.
My pay purrs awl due glad den,
With wrapped words fare as hear.

Too rite with care is quite a feet,
Of witch won should be proud,
And wee mussed dew the best wee
can,
Sew floors are knot aloud.

Sow eye can sea why eye dew prays

Such soft wear four pea seas,
And why eye brake in two averse
Buy righting wan to please.

With acknowledgements to SABONET
new, vol 3(1), April 1998.

CONCLUSION:

Never trust a machine, particularly when you are writing a science related article. It regularly wants to change capitalization when it shouldn't and/or separate words into components e.g. Blackbreasted Snake Eagle in the middle of a sentence will be turned into black breasted snake eagle, or Xerus inauris to xerus inauris. This, according to scientific spelling conventions is wrong. Anyone reading it will think you are stupid, not the SPELL-CHECKER.

Marilyn Bridgeford, Aandstêr.

The "Knight" of NamibRand—with apologies to Lewis Carroll

I'll tell thee everything I can;
There's little over which to swoon
I saw an aged, not so aged man
A sitting on a dune.
"Who are you, not so aged man?" I
said.
"And how is it you live?"
And his answer trickled through my
head
Like electricity through a sieve.

He said, "First I bought Gorrasis
But there wasn't any grass
So I bought Stellarine but then
couldn't
Sit upon my
So I bought Wolwedans and started
with the tourists
And that's the way I get my bread –
Not from the conser-
vation purists!



But I was thinking
of a plan to make a
big Reserve
For animals and
nature and tourists
to preserve
But then I need Concessionaires to
help me make some money

'cos building up such a place cannot be
done with milk and honey!"
So, having no reply to give
To what the not so old man said,
I cried, "Come tell me how you live"
And did not thump him on the head!

His accents mild took up the tale:
He said "I go my ways,
And when I find a farm to buy
My mind goes all a blaze.
How will I finance such a thing and
buy a thing so fine"
But luckily he had some friends and
one called Mr Klein!

"But I was thinking of a way
To make the Reserve bigger,
So then came along the Mountain
Lodge
Which stopped my silly snigger.
I shook him well from side to side,
Until his face was blue:
"Come, tell me how you live," I cried,
"And what it is you do!"

He said, I have three sons
And a wife and daughter too
They do everything they can
To make my dreams come true!

But I was thinking of a plan to make
my estate more surer
So I bought myself another farm
With which I got more poorer.

Hot air balloons, Zairians,
And walking trails about
Do not forget the game wardens and
The family Hideout.
With these I make my dreams alive
I hope for other people too!"
I said, "You really are a knight -
You made my dreams come true!"

Elinor Dürr, Tok Tokkie Trails



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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."

NamibRand Facts

How many Fairy Circles have been sold so far?

Concessionaire	Number Sold
Wolwedans (NRS)	122
Sossusvlei Mountain Lodge	9
Tok Tokkie Trails	6
NR Family Hideout	4
NamibRand Nature Reserve and JAB	17
TOTAL	158

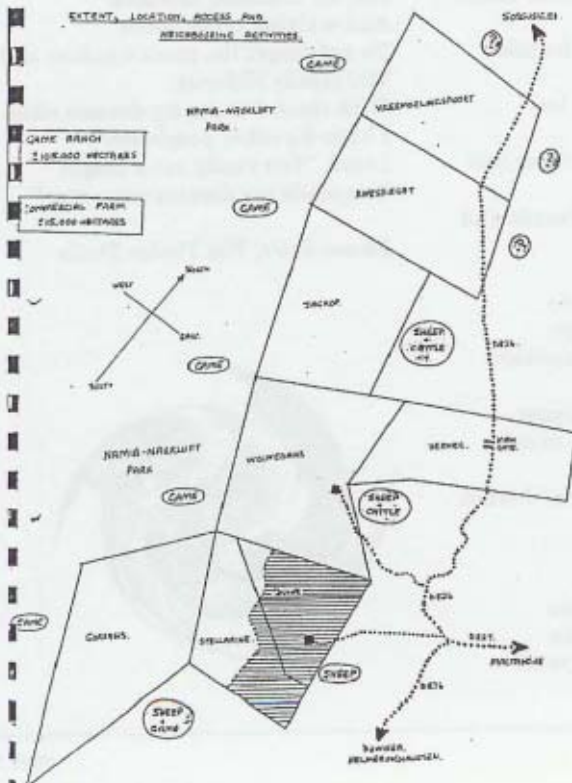
Website:
www.namibrand.com



Many thanks to the following guests for Adopting a Fairy Circle since the last issue:

The Reserve in 1991

This map, drawn by Mark Paxton, was taken from the report on a strategic workshop held at Wolwedans in September 1991.



Beate Hübner	Germany	NRS
Elisabetta Galimbert	Namibia	NRS
Pamela Isdell	USA	NRS
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Sabine Eoderbauer	Dinkelsbuehl	NRS
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Margaret Macquat	Switzerland	NRS
Steinfeld/Mittan	Germany	NRS
Karen Sowerby	England	NRS
Rochelle Rosen	USA	NRS
John Winston	USA	NRS
Sanger Family	Germany	NRS
Hedwig Liechtenstein	Austria	NRS
David Rodwell	England	NRS
Dr Wolf	Unknown	NRS
W Geyser	Namibia	NRNR