



October 2001

The Barking Gecko

Newsletter of the NamibRand Nature Reserve

Volume 2, Issue 4

NamibRand Nature Reserve—A Legal Entity At Last

During the last Annual General Meeting of the members of the NamibRand Nature Reserve Association, held at Sossussvlei Mountain Lodge, those present unanimously agreed to restructure the present Association of Landowners, governed by a binding Constitution, into a company "not for gain", under Section 21 of the Company's Act. This decision was taken to once and for all - kill the stigma of a "club of crazy would-be conservationists, with no legal, financial or commercial standing.

The logical consequence of this "mile-stone" decision will be an application to the Ministry of Environment and Tourism to register the NamibRand Nature Reserve as a nature reserve and possibly also as a conservation area. This may hopefully attract those neighbours of the Reserve who express interest to become members of a conservancy without becoming a member of the Reserve proper.

A (Albi) Brückner purchased the first farm in the area—namely Gorrasis—in

1984. This acquisition was followed by a number of further land purchases. During the following number of years twelve additional farms were purchased from the then commercial farmers and integrated into the Reserve which presently measures some 180 000 hectares, comprising thirteen former commercial farms. The area has been rehabilitated into a pro-Namib biome, following the salvaging of almost 2000 kilometres of fencing and the closure of many service roads and other remnants of previous commercial utilisation.

Today NamibRand is one of the exemplary projects in nature conservation in Namibia in the hands of private persons and as such could serve as an example for others to follow. The project is financed through granting concessions to eco-tourism operators, who conduct their business on the Reserve in accordance with strict rules and guidelines, applying the principle of protecting, respectively rehabilitating the environment. Through the NamibRand Conservation Foundation, the establishment of a Desert Awareness, Education

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Little "Kgotala"

As can be seen on the photo taken of Albi Brückner, Achim Lenssen and Peter Bridgeford it is not hard to imagine that it was a cold day on Keerweder, with temperatures dropping to -1 degree Celcius.

The meeting initially started in the house, but soon these tough men moved out in to the sun, to at least catch every ray of warmth the sun was able to give.

It has been universally decided that internal meetings like this one need be held every 2 - 3 months, as only through regular communication can problems be solved and action be taken.

A lot is happening on NamibRand. It is

difficult to always decide how exactly this Reserve should be managed. Everyone has ideas, but are these always the right ones?

Only through discussion and weighing the various thought patterns of different people can one decide which is the best route to take, and to ultimately hope that this idea born many years ago by Albi Brückner will be the success we all want it to be.

Some of the points discussed during this particular meeting:

1. Aandster - the owners and the development implications.
2. Neighbour relations - problems we encounter with farmers who are still farming with cattle and sheep.

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3. Open day for NRNR proposed for early next year. Wilderness areas on the Reserve dis-

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Losberg and the Repeater

Since our radio system has not been functioning well for the past year or so, it was decided with the approval of all the concessionaires to install a new repeater system.

The date set was the 27th September, starting time 06:30 from Toekoms. Achim asked the various concessionaires to let us have a person or two to help carry up all the equipment necessary for this change, plus two batteries.

As Achim at this time was attending a Wilderness course at Waterberg, I was asked to remind the concessionaires for their help and make sure that everything was running smoothly.

Here I would like to thank Namib Sky for sending three and NamibRand Safaris for sending two employees. The other five members were from the Reserve.

All went well, the new system was running and happy but a tired crew returned from the Losberg. But alas, with the sun disappearing in the west so did the reception of the radio. To say it bluntly – our radio was as dead as a dormouse.

A dark cloud lay over Keerweder, as Kevin and Eddie from Radio Electronics along with me were feeling very dejected to say the least. Discussions where held and we all realised that there was just no other option than to climb up this dreaded mountain yet

again.

Another early day was declared, and at 06:00 Kevin and Eddie were on their way. Shortly after 09:00 Kevin once again could make contact with me. So their diagnosis, made the previous evening, seemed correct. What a relief to all of us as things were back to normal, or so we thought...

The evening approached, I once more tried to make contact with everyone concerned. We were happy until 21:00 when once more the repeater decided to play a foul trick on us and from then onwards radio communication came to a standstill, except those having a simplex channel.

Another attempt was made a week later by Radio Electronics and the Reserve staff once again helping to carry up all the necessary equipment. This time a factory fault was found which fortunately could be repaired on the mountain.

Eddie, Kevin and our student Birgit slept on the mountain just to monitor the system throughout the night as well as the first few hours of the next day.

This time it seems that at long last our system is working as it should and everyone concerned seems happy. May this be the case for a long time to come.

By Ursi Lenssen, Keerweder



A Legal Entity At Last (Continued from page 1)
and Research Centre is envisaged in conjunction with the Desert Research Foundation of Gobabeb.

Lastly, a closer co-operation is under discussion with the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, who share a common border of some 100 kilometres between the Namib Naukluft Park and the Reserve.

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★
★ **Next Issue:** ★
★ For the January 2002 issue, please ★
★ let us have any articles of interest ★
★ by the end of January. ★
★ This issue marks the last of the ★
★ concessionaire profiles. We would ★
★ appreciate any suggestions as to ★
★ possible future subject matter. ★
★ Please contact the editors in this ★
★ regard. ★
★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

Little Kgotla (Continued from page 1)

cussed. Areas proposed are: Horse-shoe, Valley of Tears, Jagkop and Losberg.

4. Update of the Vade Mecum (Operations Manual).
5. Veld fire policy – what action to be taken in case of such.
6. Sighting reports – concessionaires who do not give feedback and how this could be solved.

More points were discussed, so it seems that sitting and basking in the sun did bring about a worthwhile session.

By Ursi Lenssen, Keerweder

Conservation News

NEW RECORD FOR NAMIBRAND

During July 2001, a rough-scaled gecko *Pachydactylus rugosus* subsp. *rugosus* was found on Aandster. According to Mike Griffin of M.E.T., this is the first record of this species on NRNR.

Bill Branch has this to say about this distinctly marked gecko: "When threatened, they arch the tail over the back." This little fellow did that and looked like a scorpion.

Branch; Field guide to snakes and other reptiles. 1988.
Page 206 Plate 83.

RINGED LAPPETFACED VULTURE

In July 2001, Guy Palmer, a conservation officer in the Western Cape, found the dried out carcass of a Lappet-faced Vulture on the farm Dina, against the Excelsior boundary.

The chick was ringed on 24/10/99 on the Tsondab Plains, Namib-Naukluft Park by myself, Marek and Hannelore Hrywniak.

It was not quite 2 years old when it was poisoned. Bait for problem animals was found near the carcass. It moved about 170 km from its nest site.

AARDVARK ERDVARK ANT-BEAR

Call it what you like, it remains *Orycteropus afer*, and during August 2001, signs of one were found on Aandster. Several large holes, shallow scrapes, and faint tracks were located. Enquiries on Dina elicited the information that they had also found burrows and spoor, but had not actually seen it. During September, holes were found at several places over a wide area.

So keep your eyes open. The beer is on me to the first person seeing it.

Peter Bridgeford, Aandster

Concessionaire Profile

Namib Sky Adventure Safaris

It all started sixteen years ago. I was working for the President of Zaïre (Mobutu) in the north of the country, very close to the Central African border and the forest was my universe that I was sharing with Paul and Andrée (today Mwisho's managers) and their children.

I had no clue I was just about to meet my boss and love struck me when Nancy came out of a plane. Very quickly, she realised that I was the only male available on the street market and as she didn't want to become a nun, she accepted to marry me. At the time Denis arrived, I was working on a National Park project that kept us a lot in the wilderness.

One day, visiting friends in a coffee plantation, we saw a video showing balloons flying over the African Savannah. Straight away, Nancy and I decided it would be our next job: take tourists above Africa in a balloon...

Very quickly it became an obsession and the first holidays we had, we went to Europe and booked our very first balloon flight over the Belgian wild wild wilderness...

Within minutes, I told the pilot that it looked easy and I was sure I could fly that thing no problem. But, balloons are like women: unpredictable. That specific one

started to hit the ground and make very long leaps over the Belgian countryside as soon as the pilot let me in charge. I quickly realised it would take me longer than an hour to become a pilot and he proposed me to show me again because his back was aching and I was looking like a dwarf...

A year later, after spending a lot of time and money travelling between Belgium and Zaïre, I got my licence. Came the big question: where will we start?

Zaïre was very unstable politically, Kenya was very crowded, Tanzania not ready for ballooning, and Rwanda looked pretty good. It became our choice and we ended up in a civil war... We loaded the car with all our belongings and our Hilux carrying 1.5 tons headed south towards Botswana seeking for the most suitable place for ballooning...

Three months later, we ended up in the Namib Desert. The beauty of the Namib around Sesriem got us standing with an open mouth (that's the French way!) Our dream came true: this was Ballooning paradise.

The only missing link was the tourists. No hotels, no lodges, just a campsite at Sesriem. But it was so beautiful we could not leave any more.

The tourists? We were convinced that very soon they would arrive in waves!

That was 11 years ago and as no balloon existed in Namibia, it took us a few months to convince the authorities (civil aviation...) and a certain Peter Bridgeford (responsible for that part of the Namib) that balloons were harmless to people and wildlife.

Denis and Laurent were three and four years old and we needed a place to settle down as close as possible to Ses-

riem.

We tried "Geluk", but the owner did not trust our future in the area. We then met a crazy guy called Mark Paxton who told us he was managing game for a "rich German" in a big place and there was a house available that just needed some fixing. That's how we got to "Kwessiegat". We build the tented camp and called it "Camp Mwisho", meaning "the end" in Swahili. It was the end of our long trip, the beginning of our new life.

The reserve didn't have its present size and tourism was far from booming but it was ideal for ballooning. It was a time where Mr Brückner senior was wondering what to do with all that beauty around him and hunting was very popular.

For a few years, we were the only concessionaire and then came the Dune Camp,...

The tourists managed to find Namibia on the world map and the Namib Desert became a first class destination.

We are now three pilots, five balloons, plenty old land cruisers, and a very good team totalling twenty.

All these years, we have lived our dream and we shared it with over seventeen thousand passengers.

Today, we still dream and we just created a new product: three times a year, we take a maximum of four guests for a ten day Safaris including five flights in the most scenic places of the country, starting in Camp Mwisho on Namib-Rand, ending in Hartman Valley in Kaokoland.

So, the secret is.... Keep dreaming....

Eric Hesemanns



Place Names in Use on NamibRand Nature Reserve (Continued)

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. This continues the list started in the previous issue of the Barking Gecko.

Piccadilly:

A road junction on Stellarine. This four-way junction south of DDR on the way to the Horseshoe (both names you should remember from before) is not special in any way but was given simply to identify the location.

Donkey Water:

This small drinking trough on the farm Verweg was built especially for the Kudu that always crossed the public road at the Verweg solar installation. To minimise this road crossing, dangerous for both driver and animals, a small satellite-drinking trough was built west of the road.

A donkey, owned by one of our work-

ers, watched the activity all along and was also the first to drink at this trough. This site did thus not become kudu water; it was created shortly after 8 km to the south.

The Horseshoe:

An area surrounded by mountains that have the shape of a horseshoe on Stellarine. The mountains are part of the Gorrasis Mountains and this valley has an opening to the east. It has nothing in it and is utilized by Tok-Tokkie for hiking trails.

The dune across the entrance of this valley has spectacular view and is a popular viewpoint.

Erioloba:

A water point for game about two kilometres south of Camp Mwisho. The name was chosen for the lone camel thorn tree standing close to the site.

Sandgrouse water:

Water point some 1,5 kilometres south of the Keerweder homestead. This artificial water point was named after the birds because at times thousands come here to drink about an hour after sunrise.

A bird shoot took place here when hunting was still an activity on the reserve.

Louwtjies Loops:

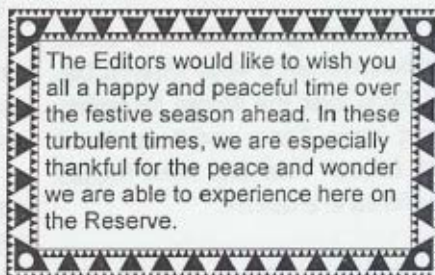
This track runs from Jagkop to Bushman koppie and is very twisty. The track was made by Louw van Zyl who worked on the reserve from 1997 for three years.

The tight corners in this track have negative impacts on the environment and are unpleasant for driver and guests. A long section has been cut out and re-routed recently.

Eric's track:

A new road immediately north of the dunes on Kwessigat. Camp Mwisho used to drive on the boundary line of the farms Kwessigat and Vreemdelingspoort. Because this straight line is ugly for SML visitors it was closed unilaterally. Eric objected, as he needs a track immediately behind the dune to retrieve the balloons. So a new track was made for him.

Achim Lenssen, NRNR



Practical Training on NamibRand

Approximately three months ago, end of June, I arrived at Keerweder not knowing what would await me.

Me, that is Birgit, a third year Nature Conservation student, absolving the second practical training of the study course.

Time passed by quickly and now, with only a few weeks left I must say, that it was a great experience to stay for a while in this remote place, with its impressive desert scenery.



Besides learning a lot of new things, including how to make droewors, estimate sand grouse numbers and to concrete water points, I also had the opportunity to roam around freely in the area – thereby gaining insight into plant and animal life of the drier desert regions.

NamibRand as a private Nature Reserve seems to be a fine concept, and I am sure that everybody staying on the reserve must be very proud to be part of a community, that developed because of an idea to conserve nature privately.

To use this opportunity that Ursi gave me when writing an article for the "Barking Gecko", I would like to thank everybody, who during the in-service training helped and assisted me in one-way or another. Many thanks to Marc and Elinor Durr from Tok-Tokkie Trails, it was a great experience going along on a walk and I really enjoyed it very much.

Not to forget Achim and Ursi who hosted me at Keerweder during the past months and always had an open ear and heaps of patience with an inexperienced, theory-filled polytechnic

student. Without you it would have been only half as informative a practical, as you taught me a lot!

Hoping that all the things that I still would like to do, such as ringing lapped-faced vultures with Mr Bridgeford, climbing onto Losberg (apparently I am about to miss the big event, but who knows?) and faking part in a game drive with Wolwedans, will fit into the few weeks left, I am sure, that for a long time to come I will look back to the eventful days spent at NamibRand.

Wishing the best of luck to all those students to follow (I think, that Tristan, whom you all know will be next) I hope that the project I worked on during my stay, might be of some use, in some way!

Birgit Rahn, Student

Thank you (from the Editors)

A big thank-you to all those of you who contribute regularly towards the Barking Gecko.

Unfortunately it is only Herman from Wolwedans, Peter and Marilyn from Aandster and Marc and Elinor from Tok Tokkie whom I never have to ask twice to write about something interesting.

My Grootste Ervaring

Tot my grootste verbasing was ek geskok om eendag 'n guide to word, maar soos die groot mense se – 'n baba kruip eers en dan begin hy te loop en te praat en so gaan die lewe aan. Om iets uit die lewe te maak is nie maklik nie, maar as hy poog sal jy dit ag kry. Marc en Elinor he my bygestaan en het my aangemoedig en vir my gehelp om van my lewe 'n sukses te behaal en ek se baie dankie

I am sure all enjoy reading the Barking Gecko. May I once again ask each and everyone to sit down and write during their spare time even if only a short article, and not to be begged each time which, to say the least, is quite a frustrating job.

If we want the Barking Gecko to continue we need the support of each and

daarvoor.

Ek het by Intu Afrika 'n kursus geloop en vir ouens soos ek wat nou nie eerste taal Engels praat nie was dit baie moeilik. Dit was basis oor veldopnamens soos bome, grasse, diere, sand, klippe en allersoorde dinge wat in die natuur is. Dit was baie aangenaam en ons het dit geniet. Wat ek nou as guide geleer het, sal ek

everyone. This perhaps poses a very important question: do you want the Barking Gecko to continue?

Perhaps you can let us know in one of the next editions what the Barking Gecko means to you and whether you enjoy reading it as much as we hope you do.

By Ursi Lenssen

nooit weggooi of begrawe nie en ek sal dit uitbrei totdat ek witkop hare op my kop kry. Soos die Engelsman eintlik moet se: Hard work never killed, so just take a chance!

David Brünzil, Tok Tokkie Trails



Letter (to the Editors)

Dear Mandy

Always enjoying the NamibRand news in the Barking Gecko, it was a pleasure writing a short article about myself. It took a bit longer than I expected to finish it, but hope you can

still use it.

As the busy season is getting to an end now, I'm looking forward working on more smaller things for the Barking Gecko.

Thanks for all your effort compiling

our own news letter.

Kind Regards

Marika Verwey
SOSSUSVLEI MOUNTAIN LODGE

Sand in My Ears

I have been living on Vreemlingspoort as one of the rangers of Sossusvlei Mountain Lodge for just over a year now. I consider myself a NamibRand resident and think that it is about time that the rest of the people on the Reserve get to know me a little better. Although I still fall over my words, if someone asks me, how a young woman like myself can live in the desert.

It all started about four years ago, when I was working for Kulala Desert Lodge just after I finished school. The idea was just to see if I liked doing guiding and then go onto studying. It turned out a bit different than planned - I just moved on to freelance guiding in 1999 after I finished Badge II of NATH. It was a great experience traveling through our beautiful country and I still miss it a lot. There was just the one thing, which I can't really explain. I had this ongoing excitement whenever I was on my way to the desert and a real empty heart when I

had to leave.

In July last year, I read in the local newspaper that Sossusvlei Mountain Lodge was looking for a guide/ranger. Already thinking of some potential studying, I saw it as a great opportunity to be stationed at one place. With a few faxes and a message with Ursi (Keerweder), I started working with Conservation Corporation Africa in September. Since then I had the chance to do the Desert Guiding Course at Wolwedans last year and also completing the CC Africa ranger training program in South Africa. The first year flew past extremely fast, but every second of it was a great leaning curve. Being out in the field with guests everyday, firstly, always brings you onto something new, which you didn't know before and secondly, just seeing things through your guests' eyes, widens your horizons so much, that you almost forget that it's work.

Being so privileged to work and live in such a glorious part of our country, I feel responsible for taking care of the environment we live in. Therefore I'm proud to be a part of a conservation-orientated association like Namib Rand. In my little corner I'm making sure that each and every guest I'm guiding realizes how special and sensitive the desert is.

Where I develop my great love for the Namib Desert, I can't tell. It might be the fact that I grew up just on the edge of the desert. Living in Maltahöhe, the Namib Naukluft Park, especially the Sossusvlei area, which has always been a great getaway place for my family. I can still remember rolling down the sand dunes as a little girl, and still love doing it now. For all we know, it was perhaps there where the red sand got so deep into my ears.

Marika Verwey, SML

Newsletter of the NamibRand Nature Reserve

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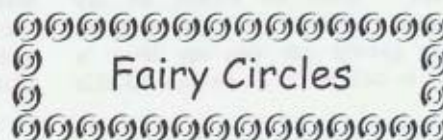
"The wildlife of today is not ours to dispose of as we please. We have it in trust and must account for it to those who come after us."

NamibRand Facts

How many Fairy Circles have been adopted so far?

Concessionaire	Total Fairy Circles
Wolwedans (NRS)	139
Sossusvlei Mountain Lodge	9
Tok Tokkie Trails	11
NR Family Hideout	4
NamibRand Nature Reserve & JAB	17
TOTAL	180

Website:
www.namibrand.com



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

The NRNR AGM—a Stylish Tradition

Until three years ago the NRNR AGM was a non-event, a mere legal requirement of the constitution.

However in 1999 the then Executive Committee decided that it was time to acknowledge the achievements of the NRNR once a year by holding the AGM in a stylish setting. After two memorable occasions in Windhoek, the 2001 AGM was held on 19 October at Sossusvlei Mountain Lodge (SML), i.e. on the Reserve itself.

The SML staff obviously decided upfront that they were going to outdo the Windhoek venues and laid it on. After the formal modalities of the afternoon – yes we do actually hold a fairly elaborate AGM – it started off with sundowners at the foot of the dunes, complete with oysters and champagne to celebrate the new legal status of the reserve (see article on page 1).

Back at the lodge we were treated to a multiple course dinner on the magnificently set terrace under the stars. The only drawback was the early rise at 5am the next morning to be mesmerised by a glimpse of SML's amazing desert observatory.

All in all a grand setting to continue our tradition- who will rise to the occasion next year?

How to be invited to this splendid event? Easy, just buy some land or apply for a concession. Alternatively make a sufficiently large contribution to the Namib Rand Conservation Foundation.

Andreas Brückner

Carola Friedrich	Germany	NRS
Thomas Thelen	Germany	NRS
Gesa Schoop	Germany	NRS
Anja Hess	Germany	NRS
Joachim Rakow	Germany	NRS
M Laesch	South Africa	NRS
Johann Hemstra	South Africa	NRS
B Stemann	UK	TTT
P & E van Overloop	Belgium	TTT
A Messawer	Paris, France	TTT
Melanie Boyle	UK	TTT
John Blackburne	London, UK	TTT
Ms Bartels	Germany	NRS
Isa Gaus	Germany	NRS
Dr H Puls	Bonn	NRS
Hanelore Puls	Bonn	NRS
Ms Autenrieth	Germany	NRS
Francesca Gandini	Italy	NRS
T & M Serrano	South Africa	NRS
Raphael Briner	Switzerland	NRS
Sara Briner	Switzerland	NRS
Marion Briner	Switzerland	NRS