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THE BARKING GECKO

Newsletter of the NamibRand Nature Reserve

Volume 4 Issue 2

FAIRY CIRCLES IN WESTERN NAMIBIA

Unvegetated sand circles surrounded by strongly growing grass are a prominent feature of eastern Namib Desert dune grasslands from Angola southward to South Africa. These circles are subject to wide ranging speculation concerning their origin. A list of these hypotheses would more than fill an issue of The Barking Gecko, so no comprehensive list is attempted here. In February 1990 we marked the outlines of some of these fairy circles and put up a fence around them at an out of the way site suggested by Albi Brückner. At some of the circles, we excavated the sand in and surrounding the circles, mixed it well and replaced it marking the original circle outline. With others, we exchanged soil between well-defined circles and the surrounding grasslands marking both the original and the artificial circles excavated. Controls were also marked.

In February 2003, we returned with Achim Lenssen to have a look at what if anything had happened to them in the intervening 13 years. While these limited observations offered no solution to the issue of the origin of fairy circles, they are informative. Most of the manipulated circles had reverted to grassland. Indeed, as Achim noted, several of the pegged sites could not be distinguished from the adjoining grassland. None of the circles, control or manipulations, were clear, well-defined fairy circles, i.e., they are not unvegetated sand circles surrounded by clumps of *Stipagrostis ciliata* growing more vigorously than the same species on the surrounding plain. Only one of an exchange pair was partially active while on a second exchange pair some taller grass clumps could be identified on the periphery of one circle.

While we examined the old circles, we also checked the inter-circle distance for some of the active circles on the same slope. Nearest neighbour distances were no closer than 7 m (Table 1). Elsewhere in the general area, circles are more widely spaced, with a few overlapping circles. The regular spacing suggests competitive interactions of some settling organism, whether termite or microorganism. Fairy circles have a biological rather than a physical explanation. What that biological explanation is remains to be identified.

Table 1. Spacing of fairy circles at the study site. These are distances to the nearest active neighbour.

0-2 m	0	18-20 m	2
2-4 m	0	20-22 m	1
4-6 m	0	22-24 m	2
6-8 m	0	24-26 m	0
8-10 m	0	26-28 m	0
10-12 m	4	28-30 m	0
12-14 m	3	30-32 m	1
14-16 m	8	>30 m	0

Dr. Mary Seely and Prof. Bill Hamilton

In this issue:

PLANTS ON NAMIBRAND – PART 1

This is the first in a series of articles about the plants on NamibRand, plants that are frequently seen but not well known, as well as those that are more familiar to us all. Much of the information is in the Wolwedans herbarium, which is an on-going project, started about 5 years ago. The 'herbarium' consists of a collection of dried, pressed and mounted specimens, along with photographs and written information about each plant. Our collection is far from complete, as each year brings something different that we have not seen or collected before. In addition, of course, different plants grow in different areas, and we have not managed to collect everywhere. Our collection is a reference only, but anyone is more than welcome to pay us a visit to see if that unknown plant can be identified.

TUMBLEWEED -*Acrotome inflata*

Family:	*Lamiaceae*
English:	acrotome, tumbleweed
German:	Kugelblume
Afrikaans:	perdeskrikbossie
Kwanyama:	etwelakuku
Herero:	eviriri

Acrotome is a conspicuous annual that can grow up to 70 cm. It has numerous small, white, tube-like flowers densely clustered together to form a characteristic, spherical inflorescence. Each flower is surrounded by a spine-tipped calyx (ring of sepals outside the petals). When the flowers die, the calyces dry out to form attractive 'balls' on long, dry stalks. They are very decorative. The plant is common on NamibRand, growing in open areas, along watercourses and on disturbed ground. It is also widespread through southern Africa.

The inflated (hence "*inflata*") inflorescence breaks off at the base just before winter. (Acrotome means 'to cut off'). Strong winds send them tumbling, or the spiny calyx hook on to a passing animal, to disperse the small, shiny seeds.

Acrotome inflata is often erroneously called 'wild dagga'. It is very similar in appearance to the wild dagga plant *Leonotis* species, particularly when it is dry, but the two do

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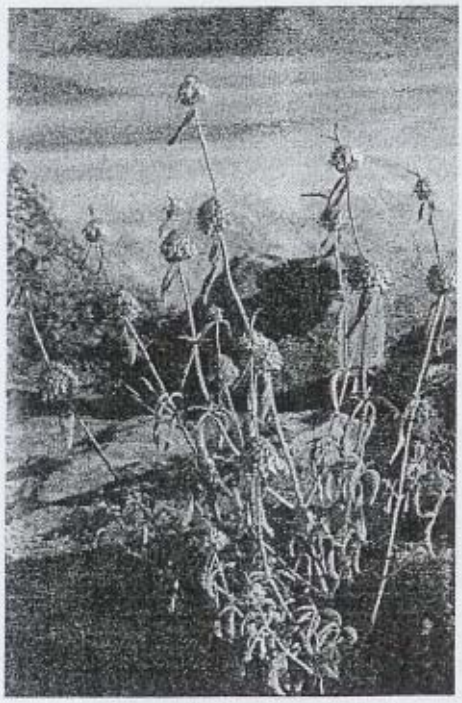
not even belong to the same family. Leonotis has red flowers instead of the Acrotome's white flowers.

Acrotome is reputed to have various medicinal properties. The Damara make a tea from the leaves to treat coughs. In Ovamboland, a water extract from the entire plant is said to act on the gall bladder and be effective against malaria. The ashes of the dried and burnt tumbleweed flower are rubbed into superficial scratches over the temples, for pain, in the Okavango. A tea made from stems, leaves and flowers can be given to children with upset stomachs. For bee stings, chewed leaves are applied to the sting area to relieve pain.

References: von Koenen, E. 2001. Medicinal Poisonous and Edible Plants in Namibia. Klaus Hess Publishers, Verlag.

Louise



Tumbleweed, *Acrotome inflata*
Photo: Louise Clapham

SOLAR PANEL ORIENTATION

In the NamibRand Nature Reserve (S25° E 16°), we have eight solar powered water pumps. During the summer months we usually experience a water shortage due to the increased consumption and because the solar pumps do not meet the expectations. I have investigated this and have identified some of the aspects that need to be addressed when solar panels are installed.

Solar panels must always be orientated to true north and not magnetic north as given by a compass. The difference is quite noticeable in our location 19°.

The tilt angle is not prescribed for the optimum needs of the user but rather for optimum power in mid-winter. In our area, the tilt angle varies from our latitude angle of 25° to as much as 40°. The steep angles are in order that the sun will strike the panels at right angles in mid-winter and hence produce maximum power. In mid-summer however, the sun is directly overhead at noon and it strikes the panels at an acute angle. A considerable amount of radiation is lost because of the glass surface reflection and deflection. The panels probably produce less power now than in mid-winter. The higher the tilt angle of the panels the more radiation is deflected away. We require more water in summer than in winter therefore the panels should be set at low tilt angles or at an intermediate angle.

One is usually told that the longer day length in summer will compensate for the power loss caused by the steep tilt angle due to more hours of pumping. I have found that in summer some pumps switch on later in the morning and off earlier in the evening than during winter. I am told that this is impossible but will now explain why. Although the sun rises two hours earlier in summer, it is far to the south and thus behind the panels which are mounted in a fixed position. The common perception that the sun does not travel further south than the tropic of Capricorn applies only to the noon position. At the summer solstice, the sun is over 20° south of due east when it rises in the morning. I measured the directions of sunrise and sunset on 24 January with a compass and the total angle came to 216°. This means that even a month after the solstice the sun rises and sets 18° south of east and west respectively. The higher the tilt angle is, the higher the sun must be to reach the panel surface. Added to this is the high loss of radiation due to deflection when the angle of panels to sun is acute. This is the cause of the late starting. By decreasing the tilt angle, this lost sunlight time is shortened considerably.

I have found that for our needs a tilt angle of 15° or latitude less 10° is more productive than a steep angle. Unfortunately, some stands for solar panels have been welded together in a workshop and are mounted in concrete on site. No adjustment is possible. The optimum solution would be to construct stands with three basic settings, steep for winter, an intermediate and a low angle for summer. The removal of two bolts should allow a person to adjust the panels easily and quickly if a telescopic type leg is used.

Achim Lenssen

"NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK"

"One of the tragedies of schooling is the barrier between the accumulation of facts in the classroom and their meaning in the field." -A. Strom.

Andreas and I have come to NamibRand Nature Reserve to try to change the outcome of this tragedy into a positive one. As the Namib Desert Environmental Education Trust (NaDEET) was formed last year, we were asked to head the implementation of the Environmental Education Centre on Die Duine.

Since January of this year, we have been busy brainstorming, planning and designing the heart of NaDEET: the Environmental Education Centre. Andreas is responsible for designing and building the Environmental Education (EE) Centre and I am responsible for developing and running the EE programme.

Although the beauty and magic of the Namib is the setting for learning, the philosophy of the EE programme and Centre is based on the principle of "Education for a Sustainable Future". Namibia's young people are faced with a world that is filled with increasing constraints and environmental concerns. The NaDEET programme therefore intends to create an environmental learning experience for participants that will better equip them to deal with living in a finite environment. The programme will also complement the Namibian school curriculum, as it relates to environment and alternative energy, to contextualise their experience in the Namib with their home and school environment.

A crucial component to making their experience at NaDEET truly memorable is the EE Centre itself. The design of the Centre is also based on the principle of sustainable living. Learners will have first hand experiences with not only saving water, but debating 'luxury' vs. 'need' of water in small 'living groups'. They will also experiment with the powers of the sun to cook their food and light the classroom. Learners will be encouraged to design their own "mini-models" of waste reduction and water re-use that they can take home with them and apply in their own lives.

NaDEET's EE programme is designed for all learners in Namibia with a focus on the less privileged schools in the South. It will also develop programmes for teachers and youth educators in regards to effectively facilitating environmental education activities in the classroom or relevant setting.

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Andreas and I have come to NamibRand from Okonjima farm in the Otjiwarongo District where we worked for the past four years. Andreas was senior guide and assistant manager for Okonjima Lodge while I directed the AfriCat Environmental Education Programme. Andreas attended the DHPS in Windhoek and completed his tertiary degree in Nature Conservation at the Polytechnic of Namibia. I originally came to Namibia as a volunteer from the United States after receiving a degree in Environmental Studies from Bowdoin College. We hope that our contributions to the NamibRand Nature Reserve will be beneficial to not only the environment, but also Namibia's young generation.

Viktoria Paulick and Andreas Keding

Tsamma *Citrullus lanatus*

Cucurbitaceae – pumpkin family. Commonly known as: Tsamma, karkoer, wildewaatlemoen, bitterkalbas, or N!Ham. This is the Kalahari's famous source of water from veld food. In earlier days, the availability of tsammas determined the movement of Bushmen and transport drivers and the desirability of a trek through the Kalahari. This annual creeper, the growth habit, leaves and flowers of which are very similar to that of the well known water melon, had a wide occurrence in the arid parts of the entire Africa, Arabia, the Near East and India in earlier times. The fact that all five well-known wild *Citrullus* species are encountered in the Kalahari indicates that the tsamma is the progenitor of today's cultivated watermelons. All the *Citrullus* species easily hybridise with each other and are still planted widely in warm, arid areas. The round shape of the fruit is conducive to reproduction as it can change location relatively easily. The well-known semi-wild yellow-white indigenous makataan of the old Transvaal, from which such delicious jam or preserves are made, is one of its descendants.

Tsammas should not be confused with the bitter desert tsamma *C. ecirrhosus* of the Namib. The latter can be recognised by the leaves that curl backwards and the pale green fruit. The best-known sweet-sour melon food of the Namib is the endemic wonder plant, the !nara or butternut *Acanthosicyos horrida*. The word "*horrida*" refers to 2 m tall thorn thickets that are formed by the tangled leafless creepers. The greenish runners and thorns perform the role of the leaves and protect the round, thorny, yellow fruit (up to 300 per plant). Nara colonies that were planted by strandlopers (Hottentots) are still harvested today.

The outer layer of the Kalahari tsamma is harder than that of a watermelon and the pulp is firmer and more fibrous. This contributes to the fruit remaining edible for almost two years. It has a very high moisture content of 90 – 95%, contains important trace elements, but little Vitamin C and has a low calorie value. The calorie value of the pulp of 22 tsammas (± 11 kg) is equivalent to that of 1 kg of red meat. The abundant palatable flat brown seeds make up for the shortage of nutritional matter in the pulp, however, and are a source of calcium, magnesium, phosphorus, potassium, protein and fat.

Photo of tsamma from "Flowering plants of the Kalahari dunes" by Noel van Rooyen

The ever-stimulating debate regarding how to select the tastiest watermelon also applies to the tsamma. The runner of good and bad that bring forth sweet or bitter fruit need the eye of a connoisseur. The seeds of a bitter tsamma are apparently poisonous and the juice is a good laxative. Should the whole tsamma be cooked or roasted beforehand, it becomes more edible. It is much better, in any case, to heat the content of all tsammas, before using them.

More bad tsamma years than good tsamma years are encountered in the Kalahari. Tsamma production is greatly determined by the timing and succession of rain. Good early summer rain at the beginning of November, with regular follow-up rains until the end of December, results in a tsamma harvest that will make any watermelon farmer blush. In such years of plenty, the Bushman makes provision for the shortage in lean years by making tsamma storage sites in trees. The fruit is stored in high grass nests to protect them from animals and the sun, in particular. Tsammas are also stored in holes against cool dune slopes, and then covered with sand. These natural barns determine the Bushmen's direction of migration in the months to follow and the length of their stay in any one place. Under veld conditions, a tsamma can last for two years if animals do not damage it. It keeps best if the fruit is allowed to ripen well on the runner, until it acquires a greeny-yellow colour. If it is yellow all over, it is overripe and will go bad quickly. Tsammas that develop after late rains and have not swollen out well before the first frost, often cause an upset stomach.

A large variety of animals utilise the tsamma. The manner in which the fruit is opened often reveals which animal has eaten from it. Rodents only make a small hole, smaller birds must wait until other animals have removed the outer layer; the ground squirrel prefers only the pips; antelope species make uneven bites in the tsamma; and a brown hyaena breaks it into pieces. Utilisation of tsammas takes place throughout the year. The processing of tsammas in a Bushman camp is an interesting activity that produces a number of by-products. A tsamma does not necessarily have to be ripe before it is used. Young green fruit with their soft leaves make a tasty potherb. The thighbone of gemsbok (N!! Ha), sharpened at one end to resemble a chisel, and still round at the other end, is a handy implement in the processing of fruit.

As a delicacy, the heart of select tsammas enjoys preference. They can also be cooked like gem squash, and enjoyed at their best with butter and sugar. When there is a demand for pip meal, tsamma cake and water (juice), however, each fruit is hammered with the N!Ha head beforehand to loosen the pips. The pulp is manoeuvred through a hole and drunk or stored in the shell of an ostrich egg, while the pips are carefully kept to one side. The juice is only fit for drinking for a day, after which it is used as laundry water. Cooking makes the juice less sticky. Peeled tsamma pieces can also be cooked, while the pips and pulp are removed as they go along. The pulp is rolled and dried as tsamma cake, which is still edible for a long time afterwards. As a stew together with meat, it makes great food, especially if it is eaten in the hollow shell that serves as a plate.

Dried out tsamma shells are also used as jugs to catch rainwater. The pips are roasted, shell and all, and then ground fine to form a coarse pip meal. The meat is eaten just like this, together with a bit of the wettish pulp. The best way of eating it is with milk and sugar, mixing half of the quantity with thin, cooked mealie meal.

Article sent to Jürgen Klein by Peter Derichs

KEERWEDER – SNIPPETS OF HISTORY FROM THE SON OF DAAN TRUTER

Daan Truter who now lives in Windhoek, was born on Keerweder and told us the following.

In 1942, his father was granted a grazing license on the farms Jagkop and Vêrgenoeg, (the original name of the present day Keerweder). He was a driller and sank many boreholes in the area. At first, he could not find water on Vêrgenoeg, as he did not drill deep enough, which he only discovered later. Money ran out and he left the farm to work in a garage in Bethanie for a while. After his return, he found water and decided to name the farm "Keerweder", which translates as "Came Back Again". In 1947, he purchased the farm Keerweder, but not Jagkop, as it still had no water.

The original homestead was at the base of the Nubib Mountains, but the borehole was not strong and is now dry. The wind at times was unbelievable. Daan Truter tells of his mother once holding onto a laden wheelbarrow for fear of being blown away. From here, his father saw that lightning often struck at a particular spot in the plains. He deduced that it must be because of an underground aquifer, where he then drilled, but did not find water on the first attempt. In 1951, something made him return to this site, where he drilled deeper and there it was - the strong aquifer he had suspected, 150 metres below the surface.

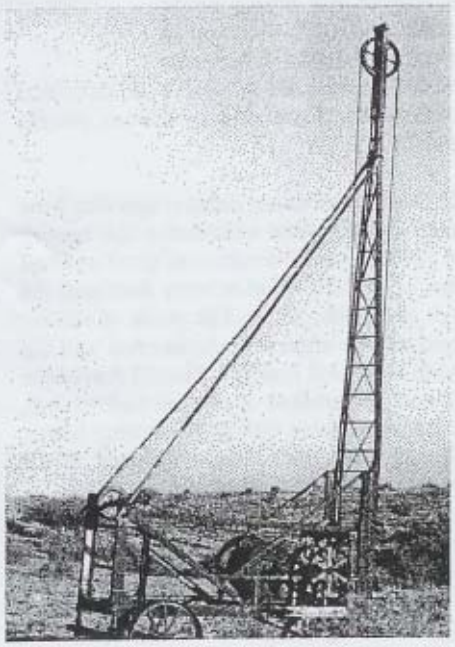
During the latter half of 1952 and the beginning of 1953, a new home, the present Keerweder house was built to a plan that his mother had seen in a magazine which had appealed to her. Stock farming was difficult on the edge of the Namib, there were always leopard in the mountains and spotted hyaena (wolves to the farmers) occasionally came in from the west. Droughts were a regular occurrence. Daan Truter build the present guesthouse himself using a shuttering system filled with a mortar mix. From 1969 to 1972, when the district road 826 was constructed in the area, he worked for the Roads Department.

He also told us about the lonely grave close to the Nubib Mountains, whose cement headstone is barely legible, although the grave is still neat. On it is the name "Maria Prins, born 02.05.1931 and died 14.12.1956". She was apparently the wife of James Boois, who was in the employ of Johannes Truter. She died of tuberculosis and her husband buried her in this beautiful place.

Johannes Truter drilled several good boreholes on Keerweder after he found how deep the water was. However, towards Jagkop the formations are soft, being solidified dune sand and after a time the holes had a tendency to collapse. This also happened to the borehole on the western edge of Keerweder, where the water table was at 226 m (742 feet). It collapsed in March 1964 and the area is now supplied by pipeline from the house.

In April 1986, the Truters sold Keerweder to Pieter Coetzee, who in turn sold it to C. Jacobs and finally to W. Achterfeld in July 1993.

Achim Lenssen



Machine used to drill for water in the 1960's
Photo: Peter Bridgeford

STORIES OF THE ANIMALS OF NAMIBRAND

After almost seven months at Wolwedans, I have returned from my last morning drive, the "Schafsberg Special". Half-horned Henry, the oryx was there to strut his stuff once more in front of my car, just in case I still didn't know who is boss at the waterhole. As a wildlife biologist (specialized in animal behaviour), I have grown fond of all the creepy crawlies on NamibRand. There are those whom you see every day and others of whom you might catch a glimpse with a touch of luck.

When I arrived mid July, Half-horned Henry, Oscar and Horny the Oryx were part of the usual crowd hanging around Wolwedans reception area. Henry, as his name states has one and a half horns while Horny only has one! Oscar is the older bull of the lot, always turning up with new scars from his nightly romps. Henry moved to the Schafsberg waterhole in November, where he has established his territory. The first week of January, he demonstrated his power in a magnificent fight. During the battle he was knocked to the ground, however, he quickly took to his feet and with a raised head, chased away his opponent. My guests had watched this spectacle in amazement, cheering Henry on under their breath. When the opponent fled, my two younger guests (age five and eleven) clapped and were proud of our winner.

Horny caused some concern when the first heat wave hit Wolwedans. He is also an older bull and had started to loose weight and condition drastically. He moped around base in a sorry state when I left for my short break in September. While away, I could only hope he would be fine on my return. Oryx are amazingly strong animals and of course, Horny pulled through. He regained his forces by slowly munching his way through the prickly pears and fodder grasses around the greenhouse. There is no mear of keeping this Houdini out of the receptio.. area, he walks straight past the Wolwedans kitchen with its new stereo blaring, not fazing him at all.

A few weeks ago, Horny took on the role of babysitter for the herd grazing around the Chateaux viewpoint. The herd consisted of approximately 15 adults and 10 calves. It was quite a silly sight to see this one-horned bull leading a trail of calves down the Chateaux viewpoint. After being haunted by these youngsters for a week, I believe Horny's conscience got the better of him and he was back at the base.

Another oryx called Elvis joined the crew around October, after putting on a great show for my guests. Elvis is a younger dominant bull that sure didn't mind his photo being taken. He was very intrigue by the car and the voice that talked to him from behind the steering wheel. Like Oscar, Elvis would walk up to the car and look at the guests with as much awe for them as they had for him.

Bella, the female oryx, was noticed the first week of October around the lodge. She was close to the end of her pregnancy, however caught our attention due to her bad limp. Bella's front left leg must have been slightly fractured or dislocated, as she cannot bend it at the knee any more. Around the thirteenth of October, she gave birth to a bouncing little calf. Ever since the calf was born, I have kept an eye on the two. She was in a very good condition and the calf grew tremendously. As she has problems keeping up with the calf, her companion female helped her out, always being by her side. Soon the two calves ran around together

Continued on page 5

under the watchful eyes of their mothers. After 21 days, the two females joined the herd again. The young were placed in a nursery herd. Lately, I have seen Bella lagging behind without her calf. She has lost a bit of weight, although she seems to keep up with the rest. As I haven't seen her for a while, I hope she is well and her calf will turn out to be one of the healthy remainder.

Apart from the oryx, we have also grown very fond of our "runway obstructions", the ostriches and their chicks. When I arrived, our proud parents strutted around the waterhole at base with their seven three-month old chicks. Although they managed to cross the runway safely, the chicks mysteriously started to disappear until only three were left. I noticed it coincided with there being no moon and hyaena prints being sighted on the main road to Wolwedans. As I am a bit of a hyaena fanatic, I thought it very clever of these carnivores to figure out that ostriches have very limited vision in the dark.

The three chicks grew up and were fledged around October/November. Still under the watchful eye of their dad, the chicks started to venture into the dunes towards DDR. Last week I sighted the three siblings in the valley south of Schafsberg. It is not hard to distinguish the three, as they are the only ostriches that don't run away at the sight of a car! As of the thirtieth of December, we have once again got proud parents visiting base with their ten tiny tots.

Of course, I could go on page after page about the animals that have been part of my stay here on NamibRand. I will miss them all, keeping their stories with me to tell friends and family abroad. They have enriched my knowledge of their behavioural patterns and could in future help their long lost, captive relatives in zoological parks around the world.

I would like to thank everyone on NamibRand and especially my Wolwedans colleagues for the great time I was able to spend out here.

Sylvie Veninga

A VANISHING ACT

It was Saturday afternoon, very hot with a breeze blowing that seemingly originated from an open oven door. I was crouching in the small patch of shade next to the rack that stores all my metal sections. While looking for something specific, my eyes were attracted by movement on the ground. Hundreds of harvester termites were carrying detritus to their entrance hole. The activity was amazing and fascinating. I pondered on what this could imply – was the long awaited rain coming at last? So many weather prophets make their predictions, after watching the ants or termites.

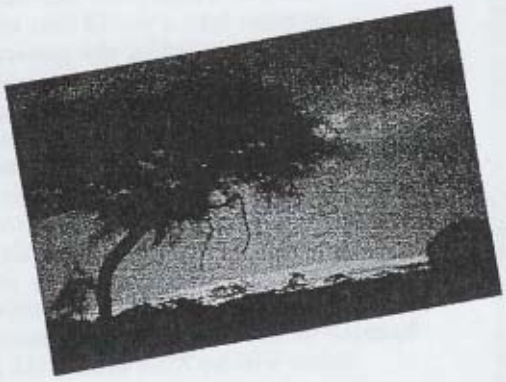
Along came one of the juvenile Mountain Chats, which have bred at Keerweder recently and which have no fear of us humans at all. They hatched and fledged in the workshop, where they saw us at close quarters several times a day. This little bird stood next to me on the ground and I thought how stupid you little fellows are. Surrounding you is the best nourishment you can imagine and all you do is look at me. Mental telepathy was positive and the little fellow picked up and swallowed one termite, paused, then another, paused and then went into a feeding frenzy.

What happened then really amazed me. Somehow, the termites sent out a message that spread like wildfire. All dropped what they were carrying and rushed back to their termitary entrance. The opening was too small to allow all of them to enter at one time and a little moving, wriggling mound formed over the entrance. A minute later, most were gone and the Mountain Chat could only pick up the few individuals who had been too far away to receive the alarm call.

How quickly also the clouds disappear when the west wind comes up.

Will it still rain?

Achim Lenssen



Congratulations!!!

To Markus, Abraham and Willem for having passed their practical examination on 13 February and being now in possession of their driver's license.

All three admitted having "jelly" legs when they alighted from the car after they were tested. What a joy to all of us when they were informed that they had passed. They deserve it, as they had learned and practiced hard for many months.
Achim, Ursi, Markus, Abraham and Willem together enjoyed a light meal at the Wimpy Bar, which was essential, as all their nerves had gone through a lot of strain.

Ursi

FROM THE GUEST BOOK OF THE DUNES LODGE – WOLWEDANS

I'll never forget this wonderful place! It's the land where I'd like my soul and people's souls that I loved come eventually to live in peace.
Here we found the true values: spirituality, sensibility and love for the little things. Thank you very much.

Emanuela, August 2000

Stumm, staunend – verstehen.
Die Erde ist ein Geschenk an uns.
Verlernen wir nie zu danken.

Unknown

THOUGHTS ...

... we are all watching the sky for clouds this time of year.
Some say a good rainy year, others are a bit pessimistic ...
As so many guests always ask when is a good or the best time to travel to Namibia. I always reply: "no better time than now, no better moment than the present moment in Africa!"
Driving around NamibRand the last four weeks is to know that we are so fortunate to be able to have this life style the kings and queens of this world will never know ...!!

Herman

MY DOOR IS ALWAYS OPEN

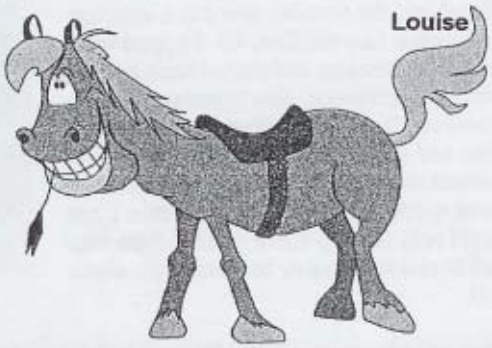
I like to say to my friends that my door is always open and that they are welcome in my house at Wolwedans at any time. There are those, however, who take advantage of such hospitality. The first unwelcome visit happened a few years ago, when I was very 'under the weather' with a particularly unpleasant virus and confined to bed. I failed to give the pony, Bramble, his usual afternoon feed and consequently he came looking for me. I heard footsteps on the stoop and a pony head appeared around the door. He looked at me in bed for a while and then his eyes beheld the pot plants on the far side of the bedroom. He did not hesitate to walk in and help himself to dinner since I was not going to provide it for him! At which point I decided enough was enough and chased him out to get some peace and save the houseplants.

The second unwelcome visitor was much more recent, and took the shape of our frequently visiting porcupine. He ended up sharing my bed, but this was not quite as prickly as it sounds! "Porcy" often feeds on the aloes in my garden but on this occasion, he came inside the house in the early hours of the morning, and decided the cat's food was more tasty. After unsuccessfully chasing the porcupine around both rooms of my house and hurling some very badly aimed shoes to try and persuade it to leave, Porcy took cover under my bed and flatly refused to come out. Needless to say, I decided to sleep elsewhere.

The cat, Ziggy, also has her own unconventional acquaintances. These include a striped polecat, which frequently comes to drink at the birdbath I built behind my house. Clearly, the polecat is not as enamoured with her as she is with it, because one evening she returned home smelling incredibly bad and proceeded to jump up on the bed next to me. All my most expensive bottles of shampoo, as well as the cat shampoo, could not remove that stink. It stayed for days!

A great 'caterwauling' noise awoke me one night and I went outside to find a furious great ball of fur in furious combat on my stoop. My own cat was locked in battle with an African wild cat, quite which was making the unearthly noise I don't know. When I appeared the fur ball broke up into the two cats and Ziggy came inside, the African wild cat was so intent on following her that I had to stand in its path to chase it out!

A rather sad visit took place about 6 years ago, following very strong east wind. I walked out in the morning to find an African Crake sitting on my stoop. (It can only be described as sitting because it was just too weak to stand). African Crakes do not belong here, but this unfortunate individual had been completely blown off course by the strong winds. Unfortunately, it did not survive, my attempts at force-feeding it with rehydrates and glucose failed to keep it alive. These unusual visitors to my house are what makes my home, and Wolwedans, such a special place to live in. The door will always remain open.



Louise

FROM THE GUEST BOOK AT HERMANN'S RUHE

Our longed for desert experience – the overwhelming silence, the steady wind of the afternoon, the open fire that warms us at night while we marvel at the stars –Hermann tells us stories from his childhood and family.

Thank you for the magic and our new treasure of uplifting memories.

Tom and Marlis Gardener, 9/1/2000

Lieber Hermann!

Ein Freund ist jemand, bei dem man laut denken darf! Es ist sehr schoen, das wir Freunde sind. Du bist ein besonderer Mensch.

In Freundschaft un Dankbarkeit.

Deine Hedi eund "Sebastian",8/1/2000

(A friend is someone in whose presence one may think aloud. I am glad that we are friends. You are a special person)

DESERT FIELD GUIDING COURSE
15 February – 27 February 2003

...A generation further...we need to open
the gates and doors for the new generation
to enter into a world that we prepare and that
was prepared by the generation before us...
we need to share the knowledge gained over the last twenty years.
(Sceptical?) about who let us through these gates and doors,
we observe with a closed eye and a wondering mind...
we were there as well; cannot remember if it was easy or difficult.
Twelve "new" generation students arrive, feel, feel for the
first few days. As time carries on get acquainted and
are more relaxed. I realize that this is great, this is good for
the new generation to willingly follow in our footsteps...
We are so fortunate that we can tutor and train them to maybe
become us in times to come. Great boys and girl, and these
times will be fond memories for us tomorrow...!

Herman

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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."

Website
www.namibrand.com