

# THE BARKING GECKO

Newsletter of the NamibRand Nature Reserve

July 2003

Volume 4 N° 3

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## The New Arrivals

NamibRand has received some new residents to enhance its biodiversity. In plain language, some animal translocations and introductions have taken place in the last week.

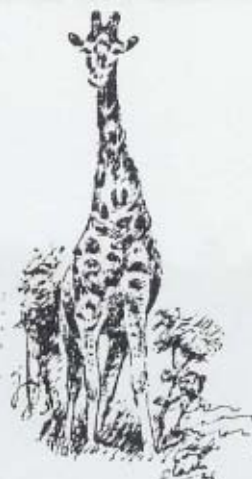
Firstly, we fetched 7 hartebeest at the farm Nomtsas, which is situated 50 km north of Maltahöhe. This reintroduction was felt to be necessary to enlarge the gene pool of our established hartebeest, as they have increased to about 30 from a few individuals and the danger of inbreeding therefore exists. The group comprises one grown bull, four adult cows and one male calf. They were transported in our two pick-up vehicles that were covered with mesh wire and material. All animals were sedated and the 3-hour journey went without a hitch. Unfortunately due to delays at Nomtsas, it was dark by the time we reached Keerweder for the release. The result was that the animals did not stay together upon release, as the first had moved off into darkness before the last got off the vehicles. However, all animals were seen on subsequent days and we hope that they will soon re-establish a family group.

A few days later, African Wildlife Services delivered three giraffe in a huge trailer, designed to transport the tallest of the African wildlife species. As luck or Murphy would have it they also arrived at night, again because of delays at Nomtsas. The

huge truck and trailer had hardly left the main road, when it started to have problems in the sand. After only a few kilometres, it was convincingly stuck and there was no way it could have been put in motion again, while the giraffe were still on the back. So we were forced to open up and release the animals right there. Needless to say, they also departed in different directions in the pitch dark that we have at new moon. Giraffe used to occur all over Namibia, before "civilized" man arrived on the scene and exterminated them in the greater part of the country. The re-introduction is thus one major step forward for conservation on NamibRand. Two of the giraffe found each other during the first night and started wandering off in a westerly direction. We had a difficult time stopping them just before they reached the dunes and then took them slowly back to the Nubib Mountains, where the habitat is favourable for giraffe. They are well adapted to semi-arid conditions and can survive here as long as they stay away from the dunes. The third giraffe is wandering around presumably in search of his two mates and should find them in the coming day or two. Let's hope that this daring re-introduction is successful and does not follow the path of our attempted cheetah re-introductions.

May I ask ALL on the Reserve to keep records of any sightings and to let us have them as soon as possible please.

Achim Lenssen



## Vulture experts flock to NamibRand

Never before, has there been such a gathering of professors, doctors, misters, madams and even a few ordinary people on NamibRand. The occasion was the annual workshop of the Vulture Study Group, which coincided with its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations.

NamibRand Nature Reserve hosted this prestigious meeting at Aandstêr from 13 – 17 April 2003. A rare shower of rain welcomed the visitors to the Namib on Sunday evening. However, this did not dampen the spirits of the delegates and their families, 73 people, who came from England, U.S.A., Kenya, Zimbabwe, Swaziland, Botswana, R.S.A. and Namibia. Whether this was the lamb on the

(Continued on page 2)



(Continued from page 1)

spit, the huge pot of potatoes or some of Namibia's finest in a can, a happy and excited atmosphere prevailed in the big tent.

The VSG representatives reported on their successes and failures throughout southern Africa the past year and the way forward. Drs. Munir Virani and Lindsay Oaks from Kenya and U.S.A. respectively, reported on what has become known as the Asian vulture crisis. In India, Pakistan and neighbouring countries, hundreds and hundreds of vultures have died of an unknown cause. Although the reason is being intensely researched, the answer to the catastrophic decline in vulture numbers has not been found.

On Tuesday evening some of the "old timers", who were instrumental in starting the VSG, John Ledger, Steven Piper, Peter Mundy and Russel Friedman reminisced about the early days.

On Wednesday, some of the delegates departed, but the majority stayed for the game drive on NRNR. The pleasant drive to admire the magnificent scenery, was enjoyed by all and some people could add a few new species of birds to their life lists. The sighting of a herd of about 500 gemsbok blew their minds.

Without the help so many friends, the event could not have been organised. Thanks to you all. A special word of appreciation to our sponsors: NamibRand Nature Reserve, Electro Repairs, Commercial Bank of Namibia, Clutch Esterhuizen, Jaco Steenkamp, Tok Tokkie Trails, NamibSky Balloon Safaris, Namibia Breweries, DHFL, and KPMG.

The workshop was organised by the VSG in Namibia.



Photo: Dirk Heinrich

Peter Bridgeford



## News @ NaDeet



If you haven't visited the Namib Desert Environmental Education Trust (NaDEET) Valley recently, then it is well worth a visit. Andreas and his team of builders have been extremely busy putting up the finest EE Centre this side of the equator!

As of the end of May, the main building (classroom and kitchen) was nearing completion and a platform, ablution block and toilet are standing. The first bucket shower was taken on 28 May with the first visiting group. The US based, volunteer teacher organization, WorldTeach, Viktoria's alma mater, came to NaDEET to hold their annual in-service training conference. Not only did they discuss their educational experiences throughout the country, but they also helped Andreas build. It is difficult to say 'no' to an additional 18 pairs of hands.

The first school group has already signed up to come in July. They will be coming from Aminuis, a small village southeast of Gobabis. The NaDEET programme for school and youth groups is currently being reviewed by the Ministry of Basic Education and will hopefully be approved by the Permanent Secretary shortly. This support from the Ministry will facilitate school visits, as our programme is during the school week. It will also open the doors for NaDEET in terms of collaboration on government activities and FUNDING!

One of NaDEET's aims is "to build capacity and know-how at all levels of the environmental education sector". To fulfil this aim, NaDEET is actively involved in the first-ever Environmental Education (EE) professional development course offered in Namibia: the Namibian Environmental Education Certificate (NEEC) course. Viktoria has been serving as a tutor for a group of eight professionals who are all involved in environmental education in their work. Course participants are from a variety of backgrounds, including community workers for different non-governmental organizations, teachers, community-based tourism officers and industry health and safety officers. As there is a serious lack of tertiary

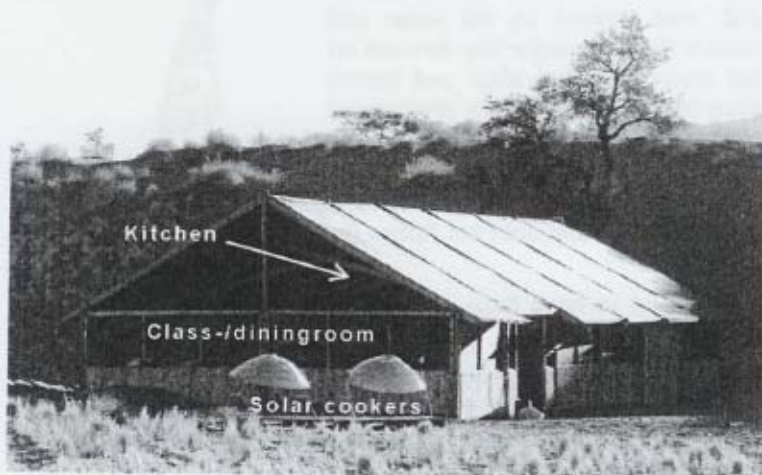


Photo: Andreas Keding, 4/6/2003

level opportunities in EE in Namibia, NaDEET's active participation is vital in building Namibia's capacity to effectively address environmental issues.

NaDEET is also currently developing its website, thanks to the kind help of Tok Tokkie friends in Switzerland. Check out any new developments at: [www.nadeet.org](http://www.nadeet.org).



## Photographing a Barking Gecko

Barking gecko – what a name! One cannot help imagining some dog-sized creature, but in reality, this gecko is tiny.

We were sitting on the porch of the Gorrasis farmhouse, a cold beverage in our hands, contemplating the afterglow of a marvellous sunset. We, that is Albi Brückner and three enthusiastic photographers: Amy Schoeman, Pompi Burger and myself, having just returned from a photo shooting trip in the southern part of NamibRand.

Then we heard it – the unmistakable “ceek, ceek, ceek” call of the barking gecko. We strained our ears and eyes and finally spotted the barking critter, poking its head out of its burrow, just a few metres away. However, our little gecko did not allow a close approach, simply vanishing into its hole when we tried to get close enough for macro shooting.

So out came the heavy artillery, that is the long tele-lenses: Pompi’s 600 mm and my 400 mm plus a flash mounted on the camera, since by now it had become dark. In order to find the elusive gecko again, let alone to be able to focus on it, a torch was set up on a chair, spotlighting the entrance of the burrow. Then Pompi and I sprawled on the ground, as close to the hole as our lenses would allow and waited, waited and waited.

Inside the house, we could smell it, dinner was ready, but the chance to capture a barking gecko on film was more tempting for us than the prospect of dining and wining.

Sure enough, our patience paid off after a while, when the gecko’s head appeared in the hole. Flash, flash – our cameras went off simultaneously, and off went the gecko as well. So, we took our photos in turns and successfully captured head and shoulder portraits of the mighty barking gecko.

And the dinner afterwards? Ah, that was delicious! *Burkhard Dobley*



**Note:** Barking geckos are terrestrial and nocturnal and live in burrows. Males call at night from the burrow entrances, attracting mates and proclaiming their territory. The call is a chain of clicks, “ceek – ceek – ceek”. The three species of barking gecko are all small and vary between 7 to 10 cm.

Editor

## Saboteurs strike at NamibRand

MON. (REUTERS)

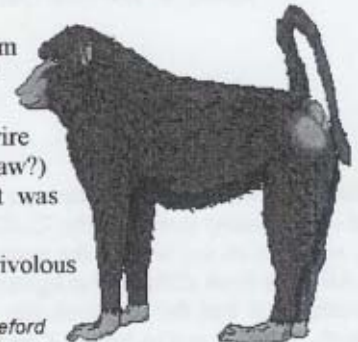
Disgruntled supporters belonging to PAPIO (POPULAR ARMY of PEOPLES INGRATE OFFICIALS) struck at the heart of NamibRand this past month. The sophisticated communication system linking the far-flung corners of the vast NamibRand Nature Reserve was put out of action.

Although PAPIO is alleged to have sabotaged the radio system, they have not claimed responsibility. Mr. P.Ursinus, the Namibian spokesperson for the group could not be contacted by telephone, even though he was seen sitting on a telegraph pole at Wêreldend. The representative at the United Nations, Mr. F Yew, only grunted when asked to comment.

Disregarding the danger from PAPIO followers, the abominable technicians, Kevin and Eddy from Walvis Bay, accompanied by a geriatric game guard armed with a blunt pocket knife and a fuzzy bearded teenager, climbed the harsh waterless Mnt. Losberg to repair the damage. On inspecting the site, they found that PAPIO had been responsible. One of the hungry troops had pulled out a wire from inside the sealed box containing the delicate radio apparatus. They managed to get a hand (paw?) through a ventilation hole and tested the wire for nutritional value. After chewing it off, it was discarded.

A spokesperson for NamibRand Nature Reserve who wishes to remain anonymous, said the frivolous report was partly true. Baboons of the species *Papio ursinus* had chewed through the wire.

*Peter Bridgeford*



### A request from the Editor / Publisher

The “Barking Gecko” gets more popular with every edition and the duplicating, copying and mailing becomes progressively more time consuming and expensive. We are now considering sending it out by electronic mail to those that have an e-mail address. It would be faster, less costly and less cumbersome.

Therefore, if you have an e-mail address, please let us have it.

Thank you.

### “Thoughts to remember”

TIME ...

... the only gift we receive not to just keep for ourselves, but blessed to pass on to those in the same frame of mind, good health and spirit.

Privileged to share with those that are less fortunate

...!!!

*Herman Cloeté*



## Interesting plants on NamibRand — part 2

CLUSTER FIG – *Ficus sycomorus* - Family Moraceae

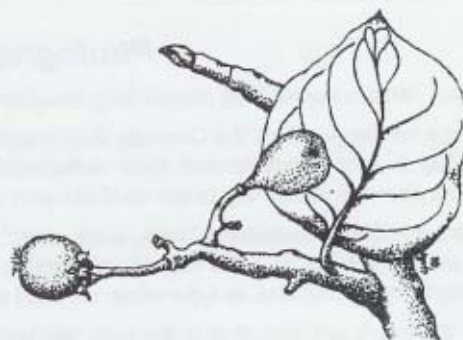
English: ..... wild fig, cluster fig, sycamore fig

German: ..... Sycamore

Afrikaans: ..... wildevy, trosvy

Damara/nama: ..... /nomas

Herero / Kwanyama: ..... omukuyu



The cluster fig can grow into a large, imposing tree with a magnificent, spreading crown, offering a lot of shade. Old trees can grow very large and develop buttresses in the roots.

The distribution of the tree is from southern Africa northwards as far as Israel. In Egypt, mummy cases have been found which have been made of the wood of *Ficus sycomorus*. It could be the same species as the sycamore fig that is mentioned in the Bible.

On NamibRand, cluster figs grow at the base of mountains such as Gorrasis and the Nubib, often in the riverbeds.

The leaves and figs are highly nutritious and are eaten by birds and mammals. Ripe figs have a reddish-yellow colour. They have a mild flavour and are not very sweet, but are edible. Over-indulgence, however, may lead to abdominal pain. The tree has various medicinal uses in different parts of the country:

The latex and a bark extract are used for chest and glandular problems, and a sore throat. An infusion from two hand-sized pieces of bark is used for diarrhoea. The bark is pounded, dried, pulverized and strewn over burns. The Kwanyama take bark extract, as well as latex, for congestion of the chest.

Trees in the genus *Ficus* are pollinated by parasitic wasps. Each species of tree, however, is pollinated by a species of wasp specific to that particular species of fig tree.

The flowers of all figs are enclosed within the fruit. A small hole at the apex of the fig, the ostiole, allows the wasp to enter. The tiny, impregnated, female wasp (only about 1 mm long) enters the fig to lay her eggs. At the same time, she pollinates the flowers with pollen, brought with her from other figs she has previously entered. She dies inside the fig after laying her eggs. Tiny galls develop around the larvae feeding on the fruit, which take about four months to mature then the wingless male wasp is the first to emerge. He fertilises the young female wasp and then enlarges the ostiole for her to exit the fig. The male then dies and the impregnated female emerges to repeat the cycle.

The carbon dioxide generated inside the fig during this activity, inhibits the fig from ripening. Usually birds and animals ignore the unripe fruit so the lifecycle of the wasp can be completed. Once the female has left the fig, it will continue to ripen as normal.

References: von Koenen, E. *Medicinal Poisonous and Edible Plants in Namibia* 2001 Klaus Hess Publishers, Verlag.  
Roodt, V. *The Shell Guide to the Common Trees of the Okavango Delta and Moremi Game Reserve*.

Louise Clapham



### The South Tour 2003

I would like to share my experience on the Namibian Academy for Tourism and Hospitality (NATH) southern tour with all of you. It started early Sunday morning, the 23.02.2003 in Windhoek at Kalahari Sands parking area. There I met the other guides and at 7:30 sharp, we were on our way to the mysterious south of Namibia. In the group were nine training guides and our lecturer Mr Rainer Iben. All were from different backgrounds and with differing expectations. For the first day, Mrs Helga Wagner and I were on the "day team" and had the responsibility of looking after the group as our guests and us as the guides. The route for the day was Rehoboth, Nauchas and to Namib Rest Camp. As all Namibians do, we enjoyed a BRAAI on our first night on tour.

Day 2 was reserved for Sossusvlei but we took our time to get there, so no waking up early. We had our picnic at Sesriem and made our way to Hammerstein Rest Camp. On the afternoon walk we looked at leopard, cheetah and caracal all kept in different cages. Next morning we drove past Duwisib Castle to Helmeringhausen, had a picnic under a camelthorn tree and then via Aus to Lüderitz. The accommodation was at the fabulous Nest Hotel with a unique dinner in the Chef's kitchen (only the 3<sup>rd</sup> group to do so).

Then the big day came for me to do my assignment, which was about diamonds, and there is no better place than at Kolmanskop (the Ghost Town). I thought I would do my speech only in front of the group which was with me, but it turned out that all the day visitors came by to listen to my assignment. With 40 spectators anxiously taking note, I was first nervous, but then handled the situation calmly and was rewarded by considerable applause. The afternoon was at leisure and I had a siesta. The day team in Lüderitz had organized a lovely sun downer at the Lagoon and it must be said that the weather at the coast was on our side, sunshine and blue skies.

The toughest day was day 5, departing 6:30 from the Nest Hotel to Bethanien to look at the Schmelen House, then to the Fish River Canyon via Naute Dam, where I did my short oral on the dam. We arrived in Keetmanshoop at 18.20 with just enough time for a

(Continued on page 5)



shower and to settle in, before dinner at the Canyon Hotel. We were all very tired, but still had our biggest laugh that evening at the dinner table. Our quietest member on tour until that night, Mrs Debbie Goosen entertained us.

Then came our last day, and that took us to Mariental for lunch at Wimpy's. The next destination was over Hoachanas to Dordabis where we stopped at "Ibenstein Weavers". During the last stage of our journey to Windhoek, we thanked everybody for a successful tour, especially Mr Peter Pienaar for his excellent driving. For me it was a great experience and the memories will be everlasting.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Mr Stephan Brückner for giving me the financial support to do my Guide Training with NATH.

*Operi, Guide at Wolwedans.*

## REPORT ON THE SECOND DESERT FIELD GUIDING COURSE

NamibRand Safaris held its second training course for guides at Wolwedans during the last two weeks of February, with the idea that at the end of the course, NRS could select guides to be employed permanently at Wolwedans. Those who were not selected, would still benefit from training and experience and receive assistance in finding alternative employment at other lodges.

On Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> Feb., two of us met the 12 participants at NRS office in Windhoek and drove them to Wolwedans. The atmosphere was very much one of excitement and anticipation and those who had never been over Spreetshoogte pass before, certainly enjoyed our lunch spot.

The course focuses on NRNR and desert adaptations of fauna and flora, but it also deals with the basics of ecology, botany, animal behaviour, ornithology, conservation, geology of the area, climatology, guiding principles, etiquette, basic first aid, and vehicle and road maintenance. Practical outings are included in the course, as well as practical exercises such as use of plant keys. Louise Clapham and Peter Bridgeford conducted most of the lectures, and the practical. Special thanks go to Peter for all his assistance, and to Marilyn for her late night patience scanning in illustrations for the study guide, and for providing sustenance on various visits! Many thanks also to those others who gave their invaluable assistance: Michael Whitelock and Tok Tokkie Trails (overnight trail); Ursi (first aid); Achim (desert sensitivity and sand dunes); Richard (vehicle and road maintenance); and Hermann (etiquette lecture and solitaire).

At the end of the course, the participants had to write a two-hour exam on the contents of the course, and do a practical exam on how to guide while walking. The highest mark was 89%, while the lowest was 44%. The course was extremely successful and a lot of fun, it was thoroughly enjoyed by all, including the organizer!

Wolwedans would like to welcome the new field guides: and NamibRand Safaris would like to welcome Lizl Maltitz to the Windhoek office.

*Louise Clapham*

## To Lure a Lark

October 2002 saw a team of dedicated photographers visiting NamibRand, namely Amy Schoeman and Doctors Pompi Burger and Burkard Dobiey. I guided them over the Reserve, aiming to catch wildlife and scenery with their cameras, some of which looked to me more like rocket launchers than camera lenses.



*From: SASOL Birds of Southern Africa*

One of the objectives was to get some good shots of the Dune Lark (*Mirafra erythrochlamys*), a bird endemic to the dunes in the southern Namib and quite regularly seen during the morning walks through the dunes on NamibRand. But – how do you lure them in front of the “rocket launcher” to get some prime shots??

Pompi knows how to lure “birds”. He, with his “cannon” and I equipped with CD player and loudspeaker vanished into the dunes one morning, placed the “cannon ready to shoot” and switched to track 33 on the CD player, sending out different calls into the dunes, purported to be calls of the Dune Lark.

Within minutes, four birds inquisitively congregated around the loudspeaker, even becoming aggressive at one of the five different calls. The different calls were quite distinctive.

In no time, Pompi had his shots in the box, some of them to be seen one of these days in the coffee table book, being produced by Amy on behalf of the NamibRand Conservation Trust (Foundation).

The lesson to be learnt? If you want to see a Dune Lark, turn on your CD player. Just make sure you play a disc to which Dune Larks will respond.

*J.A. Brückner*

## From the guest book at Gorrasis

A very sincere welcome to a new life. We thank you and hope you enjoy your refuge in the desert – Gorrasis.

*Mark and Charlie Paxton, 8.08.89*

## “Fairy Circle Owners”

- K. von Katte ..... Box 11520, Windhoek
- M. Thein..... Rva Graçiliano Antunes, 44630 Bahia, Brazil
- O. & S. Loots..... Box 86066, Windhoek
- S. Nienke..... CH-6374, Buochs
- B. Hammond..... 600 Highbridge Lane, McKinney, Texas 75069
- G. Saunders ..... Zebra River Lodge
- E. Ganss ..... Eichendorfstr 14, 60320 Frankfurt
- Mr De Buyscher . Box 90199, Windhoek
- N. Nicolas..... 68 Amelot, 70511 Paris
- Judy Paynter &
- Patricia Rehorn ... 6 Arroys Vista, Santa Fé, N.M. 87505
- Hilke Mauntz..... Alter Weg 1, 28870 Ottersberg
- Almuth Hermann Am Hirschhichel 25, 83026 Rosenheim



### ***A new world unfolding.***

Since working and living on NamibRand, Achim has wanted to show our employees, Markus, Abraham and Willem the sea. Most of us just cannot imagine that in this day and age, there are still people who have never ventured further than about 300 km from where they were born. Abraham and Willem had heard about the sea, the big, never-ending water, but they had no idea what this really meant, to look as far as the eye can see and there is nothing but water.

Finally the opportunity came. Achim was asked once again to help with the project to catch crayfish and collect as much information as possible on these culinary creatures. He asked Department of Fisheries whether he could take our three workers along. As this was in order, we told Markus, Abraham and Willem that on Friday 7<sup>th</sup> March they would accompany Achim on a trip through the dunes to the sea.

When Achim, Markus, Abraham and Willem returned from this unique journey on Monday afternoon and I saw the faces of our employees I knew that it had far exceeded their expectations.

On Tuesday afternoon, I relived with them everything they had experienced. As soon as I asked the first question, their minds no longer at Keerweder, wandered off through the dunes to the sea.

The dunes held all three of them in awe. Driving down a slip-face Abraham felt certain that the car would be stuck at the bottom and he just could not imagine that they would ever get out of that hole. Markus when hearing the rumbling when the vehicle "slid" down the dune, was sure that this noise came from the exhaust, which surely had "swallowed" too much sand. Willem was sure that the car would just overturn, as he could not imagine a car staying on "all fours" on such a steep decline. All three of them were certain that they would only reach their destination late that night, as the dunes just never seemed to end. Abraham was totally disorientated and told me that on his own he would never find his way back.

The first sight of the ocean struck especially Abraham and Willem with awe. Abraham saw the big water and then could not understand what was swimming on top of it. Achim explained that these were the waves. Willem got scared of so much water. As it was not the first time that Markus had seen the sea, he was more at ease, yet at Sylvia Hill the sea seemed to him different to that at Swakopmund, because at Sylvia Hill you saw either the dunes or the sea, but no houses.

The seals caught their attention and they loved to observe them for hours on end. They just could not comprehend these interesting creatures that can live on land, but at the same time feel so much at home in the ocean. What really boggled them was how well they could cope in the water, despite the huge waves crashing on top of them. Yet, the next minute, they were riding unperturbed on those very same waves. As a northerly wind was predominant, so was the stench that is so much part of the seals. Willem, Abraham and Markus were amazed that at times the seals bleated like sheep and at other times, were lowing like cattle.

The way the limpets, not having legs or arms, could move along on the rocks and not be washed away by the rough waves forever moving over them, remains a fascinating mystery. Achim showed them that, when putting a finger in the opening of the anemones, these creatures close up and hold onto your finger.

When the employees from Fisheries donned their diving suits, put on their flippers, placed weights around their waists and went diving among the rocks, our three watched open-mouthed. They, who only dared to walk in the water when the waves were receding and that only with trepidation, could not believe that any human being would be that brave – or that stupid – to let the water throw them about, as if they were mere corks.

We gave them our tent to sleep in, where they felt very secure. Abraham woke one night quite frightened as the sea sounded so angry, with the waves crashing down with such might. He was not sure whether the sea wouldn't reach their tent and just wash them away.

I then wanted to know what to them was their highlight of this trip. For Markus the sea was the most beautiful. Abraham just enjoyed everything, but he was amazed how the "Strandlopers" could live along the coast with only half-circular shelters made from stones, which served as their home. Willem's highlight was the seals and the way they slid over the rocks and glided into the water.

To sum it all up – a new world opened up for our three employees and they experienced all of this with open minds. What a better opportunity to show the people who work for us a bit more of the world than just the area where they work and live. This experience will remain with them for the rest of their lives.

*Ursi Lenssen*

"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"

### **Newsletter of the NamibRand Nature Reserve**

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