

THE BARKING GECKO



Newsletter of the NamibRand Nature Reserve



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June Game Count

There's Always Something Interesting On NamibRand

During the past couple of months we have seen a lot of interesting and fun activity on the Reserve. We hosted visiting groups from the Namibia Nature Foundation (April) and EduVentures (May). Since March, several researchers have begun new projects or are continuing long-term research. In early June we all spent a very busy week with a Board meeting, the AGM and our bi-annual game count. Both the Board meeting and the AGM were productive and presented numerous opportunities to socialize with colleagues and friends.

We are excited about these activities and their success. This issue of the Barking Gecko contains more detailed stories about all the happenings mentioned above.

We are looking forward to more opportunities to interact with stakeholders, international researchers, important conservation partners and Reserve residents.

ENJOY!

Danica Shaw and Nils Odendaal



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The NamibRand Nature Reserve conducts a bi-annual game count in order to effectively monitor the plains game on the Reserve. These counts are conducted each year at the end of the dry season (October/November) and at the end of the wet season (May/June). This allows us to monitor, among other things, the seasonal migration of the plains game. It also allows us to keep a watch on population numbers, trends and the distribution of wildlife.

This year our end-of-wet season game count took place on the 3rd and 4th of June 2005. The event was hosted by the Sossusvlei Mountain Lodge and coincided with the Reserve's annual general meeting (AGM). Participation was excellent this year as land owners, concessionaires and other stakeholders attending the NamibRand Nature Reserve's AGM were also keen to help with the game count.



Nils Odendaal, Viktoria Keding, Albi Brückner and Jürgen Klein discuss the finer details of the game count routes.

Photo: Stephan Brückner

The preparation for the annual census began on the afternoon of the 3rd of June. Participants were briefed on the background, theory and methods for the count scheduled the following day. We were fortunate to have assistance for this briefing session from Dr. Chris Brown of the Namibia Nature Foundation. We feel that Dr. Brown's presence helped reinforce the validity and credibility of this vehicle-based survey methodology. His expertise also assisted us in answering any queries or uncertainties with regard to the survey methodology.

The actual count started early the next morning. The teams chosen to survey the eight routes, which cover the whole Reserve, started recording wildlife sightings at 07h00 in the morning. Most teams completed their assigned route by 12h00, after which the data that they collected was brought to Keerweder for analysis. The afternoon was then spent analyzing this information to extrapolate results for the whole of the Reserve. This work was compiled by Reserve

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management with the help of Dr. Brown.

Everyone who participated in the count then gathered at the Sossusvlei Mountain Lodge for a late-afternoon feedback session. Nils Odendaal presented the analyzed results of the game count, including actual sightings, population estimates, trends and distribution of wildlife (please see results later in this document). This presentation was followed by a question and answer session. Afterwards all those involved indulged in a sumptuous meal prepared by our hosts and enjoyed a sociable evening at the fabulous Sossusvlei Mountain Lodge.

In addition, we corrected inconsistencies in the results from the first game count conducted in December 2004. The results from the last count were underestimated as the species correction factors were not applied. These corrections therefore mean that the results obtained are much higher and in-line with the high numbers obtained during this count.

We were extremely pleased with results of the game count and would like to extend our special thanks to all those who helped to make this event a success. Peter Dunning and his staff from the Sossusvlei Mountain Lodge deserve special thanks for hosting and taking excellent care of us!

Nils Odendaal

Note: A detailed results analysis and report is available on request. Please email us at nrn@iway.na to obtain a copy.

Total Numbers of Game			
Species	No. Seen Under 500m	No. Corrected for Area	Total No. Corrected Species 2005
Gemsbok	801	3085	7405
Springbok	1351	4833	14016
Kudu	25	112	290
Steenbok	2	5	53
Burchell's Zebra	29	145	290
Ostrich	89	371	780
Blesbok	10	50	15*
Red Hartebeest	3	-	50*
Giraffe	-	-	3*
TOTAL	2310	8602	22903

*These figures are not corrected as population numbers are known

Call for Contributions

Please remember to send us your interesting tidbits, exciting stories, beautiful photos, comic relief or any other things which you would like to share.



Andreas Keding (third from left) helps participants estimate distance in preparation for the game count.



Photo: Stephan Brückner



EduVentures Tackles the Chowagas

The latest EduVentures expedition took place 30 May to 14 June 2005 in the Namib-Naukluft Park. NamibRand Nature Reserve provided logistical support for the group of 17 students, most of whom were hearing impaired and eight adult expedition leaders. EduVentures sponsors expeditions for young people throughout Namibia. The aim of these expeditions is to collect specimens for the National Museum while providing students with character building experiences in Namibia's beautiful natural areas.

The group spent a week and a half climbing and collecting insects, spiders, scorpions and other invertebrates in the Chowagas Mountains just inside the Park from the Reserve. The group arrived at Aandster on 1 May where they camped before packing and departing into the Park the following day. NamibRand assisted with logistical support in several ways. We provided supplemental transport into the Park, a 2500 liter water supply for the duration of the trip and a full-time staff escort equipped with a radio for emergencies. Two NamibRand staff members, Willem Booyzen and Jacky Vlees, spent 4-5 days each with the group, assisting where necessary and keeping daily radio contact with Reserve management.

Dr. Tharina Bird, the organizer and leader of EduVentures had this to say: "We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for the generous support you gave us during our latest EduVentures expedition. The value of that support cannot be underestimated – a fact that stood clearly in our minds throughout, from the planning through the execution stages. Everything from your side was well organized, and Willem and Jacky were excellent, contributing many positive aspects to this trip.

This latest expedition of ours was very successful. A large amount of specimens, some of which were very interesting, were collected by the group. It is still too early to give you any feedback as to the amount and variety of invertebrates that were collected, but I believe that we were able to reach our goal of around 1000 specimens.

I believe that, as with earlier EduVentures expeditions, the group of children enjoyed their time out in the great wilderness of the Namib Desert. At times the mountain was demanding and it took great strength and courage to overcome these demands. One of the expedition leaders suffers from vertigo and even she persevered and proved to us all that as a group we are strong and when required we get strength from our fellow expeditioners. After a grueling week and a half, we spend the

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two nights at the Sesriem Camp. As usual, this concluding activity concreted the group by providing the time out from a rigorous programme, allowing the children to experience the Namib in all of its true splendour.”

NamibRand Nature Reserve was extremely happy to provide the logistical support for this EduVentures expedition and we look forward to working with them again in the future.

Danica Shaw



Photo: Danica Shaw

Providing 2500 liters of water for the group sometimes proved challenging. Students and leaders often had to help free the stuck water tank!

News @ NaDEET

It is difficult to believe that 2005 is already at the half-way mark. NaDEET has had its full share of ups and downs this year. Fortunately, slowly, there is light at the end of the tunnel. As a very small organisation struggling to find funds and qualified staff (who also want to live here) we have been going through some organisational growing pains. Nonetheless the environmental education work continues and it is these successes that provide the energy to continue.



Groups at the Centre

NaDEET is going to be running at close to full occupancy this year. This is based on myself being the only educator. Since the beginning of the year, NaDEET has hosted nine groups at the Centre, six from primary schools and three from secondary schools. The groups are:

- Die Duine High School, Environmental Club, Walvis Bay
- Windhoek International School, Year 8, Windhoek
- Usakos Children's Home, Usakos
- DHPS, Grade 6, Windhoek (2 groups)
- UNESCO-Suiderlig High School Camp, Keetmanshoop (2 groups)
- Namib Primary School, Grade 6, Swakopmund
- Aranos Primary School, Grade 6, Aranos

The groups all participated in the full four-day programme except the UNESCO-Suiderlig High School Camp, which came for two 2-day programmes.

Challenges

I have been in Namibia long enough to know not to EVER complain about rain, but so far this year two of the groups got very, very wet. NaDEET Centre was built under the assumption (not a good one) that it doesn't really rain and IF it were to rain, there wouldn't be a group, etc. Well, the truly erratic and unpredictable precipitation in the Namib has proven this assumption to be totally wrong. Luckily, NaDEET has just received funding from the Namibia Environment Fund (NEF-NNF) to replace the shade cloth roof with something more waterproof.



Successes

One of the biggest successes this year has been the support from schools. Three schools that first came to NaDEET in 2004 have returned this year. It is very encouraging to have these schools continue to come to NaDEET and a good indication that our programme is fulfilling an appropriate educational need. A teacher from Die Duine High School wrote in his evaluation:

The programme was very good. Learners enjoyed it very much because of a lot of free response. It linked in many ways to information on life science and natural science in school. This programme also makes learners more self-confident and brings out their bright sides.

Namibian Environmental Education Certificate Course

NaDEET has also been involved again in professional development for adults. The Namibian Environmental Education Certificate (NEEC) course has been, since the beginning of this year, part of the Polytechnic of Namibia's College of Open and Life-long Learning Department. Within my capacity at NaDEET, I am one of two course convenors. Throughout the year there are four 4-day long contact sessions of which two have already taken place. Between contact sessions, participants are required to work on assignments that will help to improve the implementation of environmental education in their work. This course is extremely challenging for many participants as it explores not only 'new' approaches to education, but also questions our understanding of the cause of environmental problems throughout the country and the world. For me it is also a continuous learning experience, which has proven to be more challenging and time consuming than I anticipated.



Photo: NaDEET

Viktoria and a Grade 6 learner from Namib Primary School recycle used plastic bags into wastepaper bins.

Viktoria Keding





Namibia Nature Foundation visits NamibRand



The NamibRand Nature Reserve was proud to host the Namibia Nature Foundation (NNF) as part of their annual staff outing from the 8th to the 10th of April 2005.

Sixteen NNF staff members were accommodated at NaDEET. NaDEET and NRNR staff had an opportunity to brief the visitors on the work that is done both at the Centre and on the Reserve in general. The NNF decided to visit us this year as NaDEET is a NNF grant recipient and to visit Nils and Danica, who both previously worked for the NNF.

NaDEET had a chance to brief the visitors on the objectives and accomplishments of the Centre and spent the first morning taking the group for a walk through the dunes. This walk showcased the unique desert environment and wildlife on the Reserve.

In the afternoon, NRNR staff presented an overview of the Reserve and its activities to the group followed by a scenic game drive. The next morning on the way back to Windhoek, everyone took a drive via Wolwedans and Sossusvlei Mountain Lodge. The visitors were impressed with the successful tourism enterprises the Reserve has to offer and the friendliness and professionalism of staff.

The weekend visit by Namibia's largest environmental NGO was hailed by all as a success and the entire NNF staff expressed their appreciation and new found admiration for the Reserve on their departure.

We would like to extend a special thank you to all our partners for making this visit a success!



Photo: Robin Lines

NNF Staff enjoy their visit to NamibRand

Nils Odendaal



Desert Thoughts

Deserts, with their vast open spaces, desolation and timeless solitude, leave lasting impressions on most people after their first visit. It is perhaps the seductive contrast between the unrelenting silence and the vicious heat and dryness which produces such impressions. For all organisms, life in the desert is a challenge; for man, perhaps the greatest challenge is the solitude.

Barry Lovegrove

Research Update



The Reserve has seen research activity over the last couple of months, while several new projects just started in July.

Dr. Jankowitz from the Polytechnic of Namibia initiated a research project in late March. His project aims to determine if there is a poisonous chemical present inside fairy circles by measuring the growth and survival of *Stipagrostis ciliata* grass tufts inside and outside of two test circles. He is working in conjunction with Dr. M. van Rooyen from the University of Pretoria.



Photo: Hilde de Villiers

Golden moles on Die Duine have been receiving attention from Dr. Galen Rathbun from the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco. He arrived on the Reserve in June and was here to develop a successful radio-tagging method for golden moles. He hopes to

use the radio-tags to determine the movement patterns of the Namib Golden Mole (*Eremitalpa granti namibensis*). His specially made radio-tags are tiny, but he succeeded in attaching the transmitters to the backside of nine golden moles with adhesive glue. He was able to track the moles with these transmitters for a period between 7 and 20 days. The analysis of this preliminary study should be available sometime in 2006. Dr. Rathbun has spent a lot of time in Namibia, most recently studying the black mongoose and dassie rat in the Erongo Region.

Dr. John Kinahan and his wife, Dr. Jill Kinahan have been excavating a small area at the Hardrock Café on Gorrasis since mid-July. This is part of a larger study being carried out by the University of Dar es Salaam to determine the effects of climate on human settlement during the last 10,000 years. Preliminary artifacts found include !Nara seeds, seashells, copper and ostrich eggshell beads and most interesting of all, a human infant skeleton. The materials collected from this excavation will be subjected to radiometric dating and other laboratory tests. It is hoped the results will be available by mid 2006.



Photo: UCF

Dr. Jane Waterman, along with research assistants from the University of Central Florida, returned in July to Aandster to continue their studies on the Cape ground squirrel (*Xerus inauris*). It is hoped that this season's studies will provide the researchers with a better understanding of the social behavior and use of space in these animals. Previously, Dr. Waterman conducted studies on the ecology of the Cape ground squirrel which were reported over several issues of the Barking Gecko in 2004.

We look forward to the results of all these interesting projects!

Danica Shaw

From Toekoms to Aandster

From the “Future” to the “Evening Star”



In March this year we moved to the Aandster homestead in the southern part of the Reserve. This was something that we had been hoping for so we were very happy to make the 70 kilometre trek.

Before we moved, the house interior received a nice fresh layer of paint and the old “bright green” kitchen linoleum tiles were taken out and replaced with floor paint. The old NRNR office was moved to the front part of the house to better accommodate the junior staff. The new satellite telephone was moved from Toekoms and re-installed at our new home in record speed. We hope that the junior staff will get their own phone within the next few weeks. This is a huge improvement on the old farm line telephone, providing reliable service and internet access.

The management of the southern part of the Reserve and the supervision of the junior staff at Aandster is much easier and more efficient for Andreas. It also means that the driving of very long distances has reduced considerably. Viktoria also has reduced her driving distance to NaDEET, saving the Trust a considerable amount of funds.

On a personal level we are very happy as the time consuming drives in our professional lives have been reduced, giving us more private time in our home.

The surroundings of Aandster are aesthetically very special. We have plains, mountains and nice sand dunes all within a 20 minute drive of our home. We especially enjoy the dunes as we didn't have these at Toekoms. One of the most pleasing things for us is that we have moved away from the main road. This may seem odd as there is not a lot of traffic, but living next to the road, surrounded by fences did not give us the feeling of living on a nature reserve. At Aandster we have that feeling as oryx and springbok move close to our yard and we don't see any fences.

We have become the keepers of an airstrip which has already had local and international planes land there. There were only two planes thus far, but they make us proud.

Although the Aandster homestead is really great and home to quite a lot of birdlife, we do miss our Sunday morning bird viewing days at Toekoms. In the mountain habitat we often heard and saw Diedericks Cuckoo, Bokmakieries, Rosy-faced Lovebirds and a pair of Black Eagles.



Photo: Holger Keding

So with happy smiles on our faces we wake up in the mornings and look out of the window to see the beautiful Pro-Namib and say “We love Aandster”!

Andreas and Viktoria Keding



Sacred Nature

Benedicto: May your trails be crooked, winding, lonesome, dangerous, leading to the most amazing view. May your rivers flow without end, meandering through pastoral valleys tinkling with bells, past temples and castles and poets' towers into a dark primeval forest where tigers belch and monkeys howl, through miasmal and mysterious swamps and down into a desert of red rock, blue mesas, domes and pinnacles and grottos of endless stone, and down again into a deep vast ancient unknown chasm where bars of sunlight blaze on profiled cliffs, where deer walk across the white sand beaches, where storms come and go as lightning clangs upon the high crags, where something strange and more beautiful and more full of wonder than your deepest dreams waits for you— beyond that next turning of the canyon walls.

Edward Abbey

ATVs Reviewed



Photo: Justin Shaw

SML Guide instructs guests how to operate their ATVs.

ATV's, also known as quad-bikes, are often perceived negatively. In Namibia's coastal areas, uncontrolled quadbiking activity has gained a bad reputation for causing significant damage to the fragile ecosystem along the coast, in particular, nesting areas of the endemic Damara Tern.

Sossusvlei Mountain Lodge's ATV trail is done responsibly and with the utmost consideration for the environment. The staff is well trained and able to impress the sensitivity of the environment on guests.

Guides frequently take over the operation of the ATV's when guests get stuck or are unable to traverse difficult terrain. This ensures minimal disturbance and guarantees that everyone stays on the track, not taking unnecessary chances or veering off-course. The route itself follows soft and un-vegetated sand further minimising any potential negative impacts on the immediate environment. Along the route we encountered a group of oryx who were not in the least bit disturbed by our passing vehicles.

This route offers guests an opportunity to traverse the dunes and experience this unique area, which would normally be difficult to access. SML has put a lot of time and consideration into this high quality product, making it as eco-sensitive and fun as possible.

Nils Odendaal and Danica Shaw

“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”



Photo: Stephan Brückner

Impressive Student

Josea Kaumba, our nature conservation student from the Polytechnic of Namibia has been awarded a bursary from the Wolwedans Foundation. Josea completed the first practical session of his studies at Keerweder from January to June of this year.

During his time on the Reserve he spent a week at both NaDEET and Wolwedans to learn about their operations and activities. While at Wolwedans he met Stephan Brückner who was impressed with his abilities and positive attitude. The Wolwedans Foundation is assisting Josea to complete his studies with a monthly stipend of N\$1000. In exchange, Josea will spend his holidays and his second practical session working at Wolwedans.

We are thrilled that Josea has won this award and are happy that he will be spending more time on the Reserve, contributing his skills and enthusiasm to the Wolwedans Team.

Danica Shaw

Around the Reserve

In May Namib Sky Adventure Safaris invited us to take a balloon flight. The experience was truly incredible. It was thrilling to be able to view the Reserve from this new and eye-opening perspective.



Photo: Danica Shaw

Balloon shadow near Jagkop

We would like to thank Namib Sky for letting us share in this experience!

On the night of 20 July, during the full moon, a female leopard and her male and female cub killed five springbok at Vista water point on Aandster. The kills were discovered by Reserve staff members, Jakobus Kooper and Jacky Vlees, who reported the find to Andreas Keding. From their spoor the cubs appear

to be three to four months old. Two of the springbok were well fed upon, while the other three were not. Two carcasses had been dragged long distances from the water, one as much as 250m! From the amount of activity around the area and the condition of the carcasses we expect that the mother was teaching the cubs to hunt. We hope that these leopard will remain in the area and continue to thrive.

Mike Griffin from the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, Scientific Services visited the Reserve in late June. While here he found a straw-coloured fruit bat (*Eidolon helvum*) drowned in the reservoir at Swartkoppie, Aandster. This is the first known record for this species on NRNR. It is a migrant from the tropical forests of Central Africa. Most records of this species in southern Africa are from the southern and eastern areas with higher rainfall and a better supply of wild fruits, the bats' principal food. (This information was provided by Peter Bridgeford.)



Photo: Mammals of the southern African sub-region, Steiner & Simmers, 1990

Mr. Jürgen Klein is drilling for water near the Toskaan house. If water is found, the Kleins intend to renovate and bring the old house back to life. Mr. Klein purchased and refurbished an old *stamper* drilling rig. The first hole proved unsuccessful as the drilling team hit rock at a fairly shallow depth. The drilling of a second hole is now underway. During this drilling we have been carefully monitoring the giraffe, who do not appear to be disturbed by this increase in activity in the Draaihoek/Toskaan area. We wish Mr. Klein and his team the best of luck in finding water!

We are also planning the release of three new giraffe in the Acacia Forest area. In addition, we hope to fit one of the animals with a satellite collar in order to monitor their transition and adaptation to their new environment.

We will bring you a detailed update on these exciting events in the next issue of the Barking Gecko.

Peter and Marilyn Bridgeford have been back on the Reserve during July. Marilyn is helping out at Tok Tokkie Trails while Peter assists NaDEET in building their new rain-proof roof. We have enjoyed their company!

Danica Shaw and Nils Odendaal



Burchell's zebra near Jakopwater

Photo: Danica Shaw

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