

THE BARKING GECKO



Newsletter of the NamibRand Nature Reserve



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Volume 8 N° 1

A New Year on the Reserve

Best wishes to everyone for 2007 – although it is already April! We have had a very hot and dry summer, but despite the weather there has been a lot of newsworthy happenings and events.

Our giraffe population has increased by two youngsters, bringing the total to five. The NamibRand human family has also grown by three births over the past few months. The bi-annual game count was held at the beginning of December in conjunction with our annual Kgotla which provided an opportunity for the Reserve to come together as a whole after the busy tourism season. The remaining grazing from our wonderful rain last year and the lack of rain this season has presented a new challenge – fire. Reserve and concessionaire staff as well as numerous neighbours have fought several large fires, mostly in the south. Several Lappet-faced Vulture chicks were ringed by the Vulture Study Group and Reserve staff. Andreas Keding, Senior Ranger, travelled to South Africa to participate in the annual meeting of the Game Rangers Association of Africa. NaDEET hosted a new and improved Desert Guiding course from



NATH (Namibian Academy of Tourism and Hospitality) as well as several school groups. All these stories and others are included in this latest issue of the Barking Gecko.

The Reserve ended 2006 on a positive note, which has continued through to 2007, with little breathing time in between. We are proud of what we accomplished as a team last year and are looking forward to all the new challenges and plans we intended to tackle this year. We appreciate your continued support, participation and dedication to the Reserve – we couldn't do it without all of you!

Danica Shaw & Nils Odendaal



And Then There Were Five...

One of the most asked questions on the Reserve over the past couple of years has been – “When will the giraffe breed?”

We had a few clues from behaviour observed by one of our Nature Conservation students studying the giraffe, that they might be ready to breed in early 2005, however, actual mating was never observed. In addition, neither of the females seemed rounder than the other. To complicate the issue – the gestation period of giraffe is a very long 14-15 months. As we are unable to do any physical exams on the giraffe, our guess was about as good as anyone else's!

On 12 September 2006, Sossusvlei Mountain Lodge staff spotted a baby giraffe with the group. The baby appeared very new, certainly only a few days old, and they were able to get some photos. Reserve staff continued to regularly monitor the group. The following week, Nils and I were able to get quite close to the group in the vehicle and take both photos and video. Onduri, the slightly older and larger female, was the new mother. From these observations, it was obvious that the other female – Nandi – was also pregnant. With one thin and one round giraffe, it became very clear that another baby was on the way! The



Baby No. 1

Photo: C. Beevis

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new baby was healthy and the whole herd very calm and not disturbed by the vehicle. The baby was quite independent, moving between all members of the group.

Over the next several weeks the group was regularly sighted and the baby continued to do well.

On 31 October, SML reported that they suspected another giraffe birth, but were unsure as they only saw the male, Tate, and one female with one baby. Reserve staff spent the late morning into early evening investigating the sighting. Eventually, we were able to confirm by sighting all FIVE giraffe, that a second baby had arrived and was doing well. The family group remained very calm and easily approachable by vehicle.

For several months, it seemed that the group was fairly spread out – babies with mothers and Tate moving between. This has changed this year, however, and now all five are typically sighted in a single group. The youngsters often appear to be stashed together for safety. In addition, it has been extremely difficult to identify their gender.

We are keen for name suggestions – please send any ideas you have to us – at some later stage, when we are absolutely sure of their sex, we will chose names.



Photo: N. Odendaal

Baby No. 2

Our three giraffe have grown to five and we are thrilled!

Danica Shaw



Fires!

The record rainy season of 2005/2006 blessed us with abundant grazing throughout the region and much of this thick veld is still standing. As expected the good times can't go on for ever and it seems that this year's rainy season is back

to normal with much lower rainfall figures.

Good cloud build up for this rainy season has resulted in plenty of thunderstorms with a lot of lightning but unfortunately not the corresponding showers.

These dry-thunderstorms have kept the Reserve staff on their toes as frequent lightning resulted in several fires on the Reserve and neighboring properties. Staff have been out to fight fires near Sprinbokvlakte (three times), Excelsior, Geluk, Horseshoe, and Gorrasis and with amazing support from tourism concessionaires and our neighbors were able to catch all of these fires early before too much damage could be done.

Although we recognize that fire is a natural and necessary part of our ecosystem, the Reserve has a responsibility to monitor

fires and to fight those burns which are in danger of crossing to neighboring land or are a threat to infrastructure. All the fires which we helped put out fell into these two categories. We had to help extinguish them to prevent damage to our neighbors' grazing. Besides fighting fires as an act of good-will and co-operation with our neighbors, there is a law in Namibia which entitles those affected by an unchecked fire originating from a neighbor to lay criminal charges against negligent neighbors.

Fighting fires is not just an affair of sweat and tears, as these events tend to turn into impromptu social gatherings. Neighbors from far a field get a chance to get together and share interesting conversation, opinions, thoughts and a beer or two after the work has been done!



Photo: D. Shaw

Fighting fire on Springbokvlakte

Many thanks to our neighbors and to our partners on the Reserve for their assistance with these blazes – it was great teamwork!

Nils Odendaal

December 2006 Game Count



On 1-2 December 2006, the bi-annual game count was held on the NamibRand Nature Reserve.

This end of dry season count was a team effort by the entire NRNR community. Reserve management invited all interested parties to assist with the count. Route 6 was counted on the morning of Friday, 1 December, while all other routes were counted on the morning of Saturday, 2 December. All documents were handed out at an informational training session during the afternoon of Friday, 1 December. After all theoretical sections of the training had been discussed a distance estimate exercise was performed for interested participants.

Results of this game count are very interesting. With reference to the Reserve's three objectives an executive summary of data can be describe as follows:

Objective 1: Population Estimates

The oryx numbers have increased as predicted by the June 2006 Game Count Report. Numbers of springbok have gone down by 26% after a marked spike in June. Ostrich numbers have increased as well, compensating for and creating a more realistic trend than the unexpected low numbers counted in June.

Objective 2: Wildlife Distribution

The game in general was observed to be more evenly distributed throughout the Reserve due to the good overall grass

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cover caused by the exceptional rains in 2006. The general trend is that game has moved towards and congregated in the eastern sections of the Reserve, as is to be expected at this time of year.

High numbers of game were also observed in the dunes, as early rains fell in these areas in November 2006 and may account for the decreased number counted on the plains.

Objective 3: Population Change

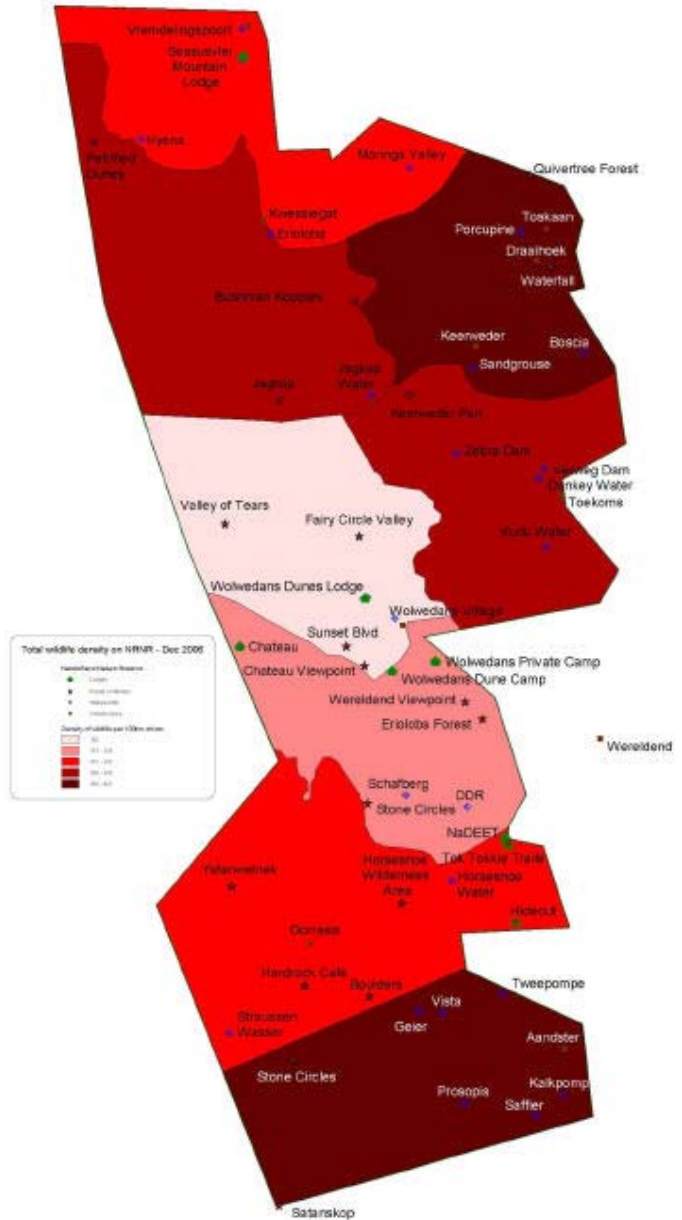
Although the overall wildlife population has declined by 3% compared to June 2006, the overall trend compared with November 2005 shows an increase of 18%. This discrepancy has to do with the vast migratory routes of the plains game which move deep into the Namib-Naukluft Park. After the first rains, these animals begin to return to NRNR, but not necessarily to the same place they were counted before. Boundary fences can also have an influence on the animals' migratory patterns and animals may have easier access to neighbouring farms than to the Reserve. Springbok populations have normalized after the marked spike in June which is probably due to migration and fatalities as predation on springbok increases in response to numbers.

NamibRand would like to thank everyone who participated in the December game count. Thank you to Wolwedans who again assisted with two teams. Thank you to Sossusvlei Mountain Lodge, Tok Tokkie Trails, the Family Hideout and Kwessiegat who provided a team each. The Hideout team drove all the way to Aandster in the morning to count Route 8. We would also like to thank Mr. Klein for providing his time and vehicle. Thank you to the counters who stood in the sun for several hours – we hope you enjoyed the count as much as we all did.

A special thanks to Nils Odendaal and Danica Shaw for hosting the training and for the effort put in to the analysis, mapping and graphing of data for this report.

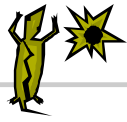
The full report is available on our website. Go to www.namibrand.com and click on the Library link.

Andreas Keding



Population Estimates - June 2006 & Dec 2006

Species	Dec-06			Jun-06			Percentage Change
	No. Seen under 500m	No. Corrected For Area	Total No. Corrected For Species	No. Seen under 500m	No. Corrected For Area	Total No. Corrected For Species	
Gemsbok	648	2,635	3,689	267	1,034	1,447	143%
Springbok	2,123	8,205	13,127	2,862	11,188	17,900	-26%
Kudu	63	321	834	44	224	583	43%
Steenbok	2	9	88	1	4	44	100%
Burchells Zebra	99	360	442	81	366	439	22%
Ostrich	225	864	951	48	194	213	369%
Blesbok*	11		18	0	15	15	20%
Red Hartebeest*	22		75	0	70	70	7%
Total	3,193	12,402	19,224	3,303	13,009	36,689	-3%



Sacred Nature

To go into solitude, a man needs to retire as much from his chamber as from society. I am not solitary whilst I read and write, though nobody is with me. But if a man would be alone, let him look at the stars. The rays that come from those heavenly worlds will separate between him and what he touches. One might think the atmosphere was made transparent with this design, to give man, in the heavenly bodies, the perpetual presence of the sublime. Seen in the streets of cities, how great they are! If the stars should appear one night in a thousand years, how would men believe and adore; and preserve for many generations the remembrance of the city of God which had been shown! But every night come out these envoys of beauty, and light the universe with their admonishing smile.

Ralph Waldo Emerson
Nature



News @ NaDEET March 2007

After a long summer break, NaDEET Centre is once again up and running. At the end of February we hosted our first group of school children from a local school in Rietoog. This is the second time that the school has visited NaDEET with the financial support of Sossusvlei Mountain Lodge. At the beginning of March we then hosted our first group from Karasburg, close to Namibia's southern border. The Karasburg Clean-up Club spent a week at NaDEET to learn about the desert and sustainable living. Their programme also focused on activities that they can do in their own community with the club.

At the end of 2006, NaDEET also hosted the Desert Guiding Course from the Namibian Academy of Tourism and Hospitality (NATH). The course was conducted by Marc Dürr and Peter Bridgeford. It was attended by about 15 people including NaDEET's environmental educator, Michaella. During this time, Richard Dreyer and a small team of carpenters came back and constructed an additional teacher/

staff house and shower with some remaining materials from the reconstruction of the main building. This has allowed us to convert our old teacher's house into



Photo: V. Keding

New staff/teacher house

another learner's house to accommodate larger groups. Many thanks to Richard for donating his time and to Wolwedans for once again helping us with skilled carpenters and supplies.

After a year-long break, we have completed another issue of NaDEET's mini-magazine, the *Bush Telegraph*. The Wetlands Group of Namibia approached NaDEET to develop an issue in conjunction with a teacher's resource book about water. Both materials were launched at World Water Day celebrations in Oranjemund at the end of March. We hope to secure funding for 1-2 more issues this year. Contact us if you are interested to receive your own free copy (nadeet@iway.na).

NaDEET has also increased its staff this year to meet our growing needs. We welcome Patience Mamili to our full-time environmental education staff. Patience studied Nature Conservation at the Polytechnic of Namibia in Windhoek. She completed her in-service training with us from July-November 2006. Another addition to our permanent staff is Martha Smit. Martha has been working for NaDEET on a casual basis for the past two years to help clean the Centre and office. She



Photo: NaDEET

NaDEET Staff: Patience Mamili, Michaella Phemelo and Viktoria Keding

continues to help keep our facilities clean, but her primary work is to take care of the youngest member of the NaDEET team – Alexandra Keding.

Viktoria Keding

Research Plans for 2007



The NamibRand Desert Research and Awareness Centre

at Toekoms has a busy year planned with a number of scientists visiting NamibRand to conduct research on various topics.

In early April, artist Alice Elahi from Pretoria, South Africa will be visiting the Reserve to paint our wonderful landscapes. This is Mrs. Elahi's third visit to the Reserve, although she has been painting throughout Namibia for many years.

Dr. Carl Albrecht will continue his research on fairy circles at the end of April. He has been conducting research on the fairy circles for several years and hopes to discover more about the link between termites and the circles.

Dr. Galen Rathbun and Dr. Jack Dumbacher from the California Academy of Sciences will be on the Reserve in June, searching for a particular sengi (elephant shrew). Dr. Rathbun is a sengi specialist and discovered a new species in Tanzania last year. The Round-eared Sengi (*Macroscelides*

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Round-eared Sengi—*M. proboscideus*

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proboscideus) is distributed from central Kaokoveld to the south-eastern Cape. In the collection of the National Museum in Windhoek there are two forms – a

light form collected on Farm Gorrasis, while the dark forms were collected on Farm Zwartmodder – to the east of NamibRand, on the other side of the Nubib Mountains. Dr. Rathbun suspects that the light sengis are in fact, a separate species. His and Dr. Dumbacher's research will focus on the collection of various individuals on NamibRand and Zwartmodder. Specimens will be then be subjected to DNA testing in the United States. We look forward to the results of this research – perhaps NamibRand will have its own unique species of sengi!

In August, we are expecting four biology students from Germany to conduct research on the Reserve over a four month period. Diana Grubert and Steffani Apenburg from Humboldt University in Berlin and Marian Siegert and Björn Klatt from the University of Münster. They are all working in conjunction with Dr. Ulrich Zeller from Humboldt University, who also runs a masters program at the University of Namibia. Diana and Steffani's research will focus on the effects of tourism on biodiversity, while Marian and Björn will be looking at spider and locust ecology. These studies form part of a broader study looking at establishing a visitors carrying capacity for the Namib.

Later in the year, Dr. Walter Tschinkel from Florida State University plans to conduct research on termites and fairy circles. Dr. Tschinkel visited NamibRand in July 2005 as a guest at Wolwedans and was fascinated by the fairy circles. He has studied the social biology of ants for some 36 years and strongly feels that the fairy circles are connected to termites, in particular to *Baucaliotermes hainesi*. His research will focus on the possible correlations between *B. hainesi* and fairy circles. This four month study should provide some interesting results.

Dr. Jane Waterman's ground squirrel research team have set up long-term residence on the Reserve at Aandster. With this move, the team seeks to broaden their study on Cape ground squirrels (*Xerus inauris*) and initiate research on the biodiversity of the Damara ground squirrel (*Xerus princeps*). Dr. Waterman has studied Cape ground squirrels at several locations in Namibia and South Africa over the past 18 years, but never in such detail in an arid environment like the Namib. She has been conducting some research at Aandster since 2002 and has collected interesting data on the colonies there. Dr. Waterman's team will be making use of the cottage at Aandster, which will be used regularly by students as well by as Dr. Waterman on her annual visit. Dr. Waterman is a professor at the University of Central Florida and is affiliated with the Mammal Research Institute at the University of Pretoria. Her students come from Namibia, South Africa and the United States. We look forward to a regular research

presence of the Reserve and wish them the best with this new endeavour.

Regular updates on research on the Reserve and the resulting reports will be included in subsequent issues of the Barking Gecko or in our library on our website. Please visit www.namibrand.com and click on the Library link to browse articles already posted.

Danica Shaw

2007 GRAA Meeting

During the annual general meeting of the Game Rangers Association of Africa (GRAA) hosted on NamibRand Nature Reserve in 2006, I became a member of the association. This prompted me to attend the 2007 AGM which NRNR kindly supported. The 2007 AGM was hosted at De Hoop Nature Reserve in the Eastern Cape and took place from 5 to 9 February. De Hoop is famous for its "Whale Trail," a trail along the coast which is world famous for exceptional whale watching.



We, that is my dear wife Viktoria and my well behaved three-month old daughter Alexandra, started our journey from Aandster on Saturday, 3 February. We were accompanied by Peter and Marilyn Bridgeford. Our two-car convoy successfully managed the first leg with nappy change and tea time, leading us to Aus where we visited the new tourism and information center. From there we drove via Rosh Pinah to the Orange River where Peter performed some magnificent driving stunts with his 2x4 bakkie to get to a nice shady spot on the bank of the river for the obligatory afternoon tea. From here we drove towards the grape farm of Aussenkehr where we stayed the night. The next morning we continued our journey by successfully crossing the Orange into South Africa to reach an old farm house/self catering cottage. We managed to include some bird identification and a dip in the pool before sunset after which we experienced the famous South African power cuts. As we are all used to having lights out after ten from the "good old days," this didn't disturb us much!

The last leg from Citrusdal to De Hoop on Monday, 5 February went without mayor mishaps except that finding an unoccupied and peaceful shady spot for tea became more and more difficult. After eventually finding a spot under a wonderful alien invasive blue gum tree we drove the last distance to the Potberg Environmental Education Center on De Hoop Nature Reserve to register for the AGM.

After Registration the general body of people met at in the open air dining area of the center to get to know one another. Peter Chadwick the Manager of De Hoop greeted everyone and gave a small introduction to the Reserve and what would be happening the next morning.

Tuesday consisted of talks and question and answer sessions

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with the emphasis on Marine Protected Area (MPA) conservation. As MPA is one of the new focal points for conservation in coastal regions, many stakeholders from the area attended the symposium for the day. Sessions ranged from a slideshow showing photographs from the west to the east coast, an information session about research on great white sharks, various fishing and fish resource scientific studies, a marine ornithological report and a report on environmental education in the area concerning MPAs. It was a really interesting symposium and we, as marine ignorant desert rats, learnt a lot about MPAs!

Wednesday daytrips had been planned for GRAA members to attend. Three trips were offered: a day walk along the coast and an inspection of a bat cave, an estuarine ecosystem tour or a small walk to the Ramsar site on De Hoop including a visit to the coast where a fish tagging procedure was currently operating. After the trips, interested parties could join a hike up the Potberg Mountain to view the Cape Vulture colony residing on the Reserve.

I joined the third tour and then made my way back to the Education Center for the vulture walk that started at 14:00. As it turned out I was the only one from the GRAA that was back early enough to join the vulture counting trip which is performed once a month by Kevin Shaw the ornithologist for the Western Cape Nature Conservation Board. Two of Kevin's assistants also joined us for the count. It was one of the hottest days in a long time in the Cape (the hottest I had known) and the hike up the mountain was pretty tough. We started as a group of four but only Kevin and I decided to push through to the "count rock" from where the Cape Vulture colony is normally monitored. Kevin had to go as it was his only chance for the month (as ornithologist he is getting paid for this) and I had to go as I had stupidly offered to help carry Kevin's backpack and I was too stubborn to let the warm weather get to me.



Photo: A. Keding

Kevin Shaw counting vultures

We arrived on the count rock after putting in two good breaks and waited for the vultures to settle so that they could be counted. They must be counted twice and it took some time as

they did not settle readily because of the heat or our presence. We stayed until we just had enough sunlight to get down the mountain. The walk back was pretty easy as it had cooled off, but we were desperately in need of a cold beer. After some real cape fynbos bundu bashing and a thorough tick removal we made our way back to Potberg to join the happy crowd of Game Rangers who had decided to drink cold beer instead of climbing up a mountain in the heat of the day. Although it was



Photo: A. Keding

Report by Tim Snow

a very tough walk, the vulture colony was impressive and a great experience, being the first one I had seen.

Thursday the official Annual General Meeting of the GRAA was held with reports given from the various portfolios. Tim Snow announced his retirement as the chair and Wayne Lotte was elected by the board to replace him. General issues were discussed concerning new blood in the Association and the problems faced by far off countries that are not able to attend to the AGM due to financial difficulties. The GRAA was closed with an awards ceremony and a gala dinner.

On Friday people met for breakfast for a last chat and information exchange before packing up and departing. As a conservationist I left the AGM with a positive feeling. It is of great value to exchange ideas, meet like-minded people and network within the broader conservation community.

Andreas Keding



Desert Thoughts

Taos

Desert light;
mauve and pink
ethereal and
motionless.

Desert light;
purple spires,
amethysts,
delighted with the home
of sight.

Desert light;
savage and
untenable.

Marjorie Agosin

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.





NamibRand Family Grows

The past six months have seen the birth of three new babies to members of the NamibRand family.

Alexandra Keding was born on 16 October, 2006 to Viktoria and Andreas in Windhoek. At birth she weighed 3.08 kgs and was 52 cm long. Alexandra is now almost 6 months old, has already traveled to Germany and South Africa and accompanies her mommy everyday to the NaDEET office!



Andreas, Viktoria & Baby Alexandra

Photo: Keding

Joshua Ruben Swanepoel was born on 5 January, 2007 to parents Esmerelda and Vernon and big brother Mark. He weighed 3.6 kgs and was the first baby to be born in 2007 at the

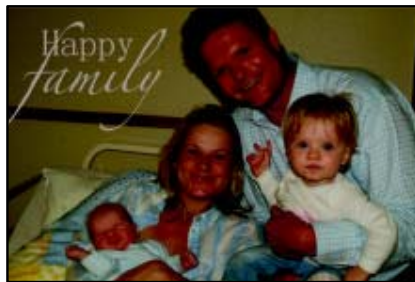


Photo: Swanepoel

Baby Joshua, Mark & Vernon

Cottage Hospital in Swakopmund! He is growing strong at Sossusvlei Mountain Lodge.

Theodor Albrecht Indongo Brückner was born in Windhoek on 26 February to parents Jana and Stephan and big sister Sophie-Marie. He weighed 3.5 kgs at birth. Theo made his first road trip to Wolwedans with his family when he was one month old! We look forward to seeing him more often.



Baby Theo, Jana, Stephan & Sophie-Marie

Photo: Brückner

Congratulations to all the proud parents and siblings! It is wonderful to have so many new little ones in the family!

Danica Shaw

December 2006 Kgotla



On 1 December 2006 the annual NamibRand Kgotla was held at Keerweder. The Kgotla is a forum for all stakeholders on the Reserve, particularly concessionaires, and provides an opportunity for everyone to come together and discuss issues affecting the entire Reserve.

This year, the Kgotla was held in conjunction with the briefing session for our December game count and was extremely well attended. Representatives participated from Sossusvlei Mountain Lodge, Wolwedans, NaDEET, Tok Tokkie Trails, the Family Hideout and the Reserve. The topics discussed included fire procedures, monitoring protocols, the new vulture restaurant and hide, the new Research Centre at Toekoms, and other day-to-day management concerns. It was a very productive meeting.

Following the Kgotla and the game count briefing a social braai took place, which gave everyone an opportunity to meet new people and catch up with old friends. Although we are all neighbors, in the midst of so much work and guests, we rarely have a chance to come together in a group. The braai and good spirit carried late into the night, although everyone was on time and in good form for the count the next morning.

Many thanks to everyone who attended the Kgotla – we look forward to the next opportunity to get together!

Danica Shaw

New Weather Station at Keerweder

Visitors, stakeholders and scientists alike are always interested in temperatures and other weather experienced on the Reserve. In the past only temperature, rainfall and general wind direction were recorded, all this manually and on a daily basis. Now things are really changing!

At the end of March Keerweder received its new scientific weather station. The station is a Davis Instruments Vantage Pro-2 that digitally records the following weather indicators: temperature, rainfall, wind speed, wind direction, humidity, barometric pressure, heat index, wind chill, dewpoint and temperature-humidity-wind index.

The station collects data which is sent via a wireless link to its consol, connected to the Keerweder computer. It sends data every 30 minutes, summarizes this information and automatically produces reports.

Visiting scientists often request weather data, as part of their research.

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Davis weather station

Photo: D. Shaw

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The weather station will now be able to provide an in-depth look at weather variables and eliminate the need for manual and less in-depth recording. We also hope to feed this data into the National Weather Bureau for their use. Maybe one day NamibRand will feature on the national weather report!

The weather station and its data is now linked to our website. For a daily weather report from Keerweder, visit our website on www.namibrand.com and click on the Weather link.

Nils Odendaal and Danica Shaw



The new desert guides

Photo: DurmBridgeford

NATH Desert Guiding Course on NamibRand

There is a song from the early days of the 20th century (can you still remember that century?) about "mad dogs and Englishmen going out in the midday sun." Well, it wasn't only Englishmen who braved the heat of the Namib Desert from 18 to 25 November 2006 to attend the Desert Guiding Course at the Namib Desert Environmental Education Trust (NaDEET) facilities. Twelve participants from all over Namibia travelled long distances to NamibRand Nature Reserve to attend the Namibian Academy of Tourism and Hospitality (NATH) course.

The Saturday evening after dinner, everyone sat around the fire getting to know one another and discussing various topics, including the program for the next day and week. At six the next morning coffee and rusks were available and by 06:30, the first walk into the dunes took off. This was to be the standard practice every morning – what Marc called "reading the desert newspaper." The cool, quiet, early morning walks on the dunes with their myriad tracks, opened a new world to many participants. By the end of the week, everyone could distinguish the various tracks and signs left on the sand by the nocturnal denizens of the desert. The days were long and hot and the only concession to the summer heat was a two-hour lunch break.

Under the new system the course is now called Guiding a Desert Tour. The course was the first to be presented according to the new Namibian Qualifications Authority (NQA) Unit Standards, which allows participants to be evaluated on readiness for assessment. Recognised assessors are appointed by the NQA to do the assessment.

In the case of the Desert Guiding Course the presenters are the 'driving school teachers' and the assessors are the 'traffic police' that certify the competence of the learner. Present projections done by the NQA foresee all guides in Namibia being officially registered by 2009.



The finer points of desert driving

Photo: DurmBridgeford

The levels of registration are:

- Level 1 – Local Guide (e.g. Brandberg).
- Level 2 – Regional Guide (e.g. Erongo region).
- Level 3 – National Guide. At this level a guide is deemed competent to guide throughout the country.
- Level 4 – Specialist guide.

Desert Guiding is a level 4 course and concentrates on the Namib Desert. The curriculum is outlined by the unit standard and adds on to the original Desert Guiding course. Additions include preparation of a desert trip, taking into account the special requirements for desert travelling. The obvious topics such as fauna, flora and emergency procedures are also covered.

The content of the course makes for an intense week of instruction. To give participants full value, various evening activities were planned. On this specific course we were lucky to have Siggie, from Twyfelfontein Country Lodge, in attendance. Lucky, because Siggie is an ardent amateur astronomer and he enthralled all participants with his knowledge of the stars and planets. Due to the course being held in November, we were lucky to get good sightings of the Andromeda galaxy. In addition to astronomy the participants were given a short presentation on the wilderness concept, NRR and the Vulture Ringing Project. All the evening activities tied into the curriculum in some way and rounded off the whole experience. Pit-fall traps were set up every night to be able to capture the nocturnal fauna that one usually does not see. The faunal bonus was the golden mole captured by Frans Haupindi from Tok Tokkie Trails.

The participants were evaluated throughout the week. Once weak spots were identified, the specific topic was reworked, until all participants were confident with the material. Most participants proved that they were ready to be evaluated by national assessors. Due to the fact that assessment criteria are stringent (80% or higher is required to be recognised as being proficient), the final assessment was not easy.

Participants arrived as strangers, stressed from their jobs and life in general, but the desert has a way of working on the soul and by the end of the week, the group had welded into a cohesive group of friends with a lively spirit. Everyone is thanked for their co-operation and hard work and for making the course a success. Despite the long hours and the heat, we had many laughs and even hugged a tree.

NaDEET centre is definitely a good venue for the course. Future courses should be held at the centre, as there is no

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interference from anyone, allowing participants to concentrate on the course. The NaDEET staff is thanked for their sterling efforts to keep everyone fed and watered. Marilyn Bridgeford is also thanked for her assistance in many ways.

Marc Dürr & Peter Bridgeford



Vulture Chicks Tagged on NamibRand

In late September, Peter Bridgeford, Coordinator of the Vulture Study Group conducted an aerial survey of the southern Namib-Naukluft Park to identify Lappet-faced Vulture nests containing chicks. In addition to the Park and with fuel sponsored by the Reserve, Peter also surveyed NamibRand with Andreas Keding. During the survey, they identified four nests with chicks on the Reserve and two inside the Park, close to Jagkop.

On October 5, members of the Vulture Study Group made their way to Keerweder for the night. Peter and Marilyn Bridgeford, Holgar Kolberg, Ben and Christine Slabbert, Mike and Ann Scott and NRNR staff made up the group that set out early on the morning of 6 October to locate the nests and tag the chicks. Vultures are now being marked with patagial tags and not coloured rings. For more details on patagial tags, see the September 2006 issue of the *Barking Gecko*.

Three chicks were tagged – one on Farm Dina, just on the other side of the fence at Twee Pompe, one near DDR and one in the Valley of Tears, west of Karl’s Dam. The fourth nest was located on Draaihoek, and while NRNR staff member Markus Tsaobeb had seen an egg in the nest several weeks before, by the time the tagging team reached the nest, there was no chick. It is suspected that the young chick was taken by predators (baboons or Martial Eagles) as the nest was uncharacteristically close to the mountains. The two chicks sighted in Park, close to Jagkop, were not tagged during this excursion due to time constraints.

Many thanks to the Vulture Study Group for their expertise and assistance in tagging the Lappet-faced Vulture chicks on NamibRand. We hope many will be sighted at the vulture restaurant!

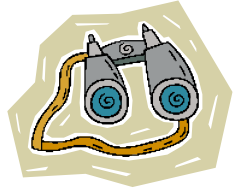
Danica Shaw



Keerweder staff

Photo: D. Shaw

2007 AGM and June Game Count



We would like to announce that the 2007 AGM and June Game Count will be held the weekend of 1-3 June 2007 on the NamibRand Nature Reserve. We plan to make the June game count a participatory event and hope you will be able to join us for these events. The more the merrier!

Radio-tracking Namib Desert Golden Moles

*This article is reprinted with the permission of *Afrotherian Conservation*. First printed in Number 4 (May 2006).

The Namib Desert golden mole (*Eremitalpa granti namibensis*) weighs about 25 g and occupies the vast dune seas of the Namib Desert in Namibia. These golden moles hunt down invertebrate prey while travelling on the surface of the dunes mostly at night, but also while swimming through the loose sand below the surface – thus our name for them: “dune sharks.” Their distinct spoor has been used to visually track their movements. However, individual recognition is not possible using spoor, so in 2005 we spent a month in the NamibRand Nature Reserve developing a radio tag. We are currently in the process of submitting a manuscript to a journal that describes our results, but in the meantime we present here some photographs illustrating how we radio-tagged the “dune sharks”.

Our tagged *Eremitalpa* appeared to be oblivious to their man-made tails; the very thin and flexible antennas never became entangled. The transmitters remained attached for at least seven days and up to 21 days, when they were removed or shed without harming the animals. With this successful method of attaching radio tags, detailed studies of the spatial and temporal ecology of individually identifiable Namib Desert golden moles are now possible.



Plate 1: No respectable free-ranging *Eremitalpa* would allow itself to be photographed like this captive. Note the absence of ears and eyes on the animal.

© G.B. Rathbun



Plate 2: Spoor of a Namib Desert golden mole going from sand swimming to surface walking and back to swimming.
© G.B. Rathbun



Plate 3: Radio transmitter built especially for us by Blackburn Transmitters (Nacogdoches, Texas 75961). They measured 12 x 5 x 4 mm and weighed 0.3 g. The 7.0 cm-long whip antenna is made of nylon-coated stainless steel fishing leader wire (7x7 Surflon Micro Supreme 20 lb. test). To maximize transmitter life (nearly 30 days), we used a three second pulse interval.
© G.B. Rathbun



Plate 4: Successful radio-tracking is dependent on having a transmitter attachment method that works. We coated a transmitter with cyanoacrylate adhesive (Devcon ZipGrip HV2200, product #44225) and then pushed the radio into the fur on the apex of the rump

(*Eremitalpa* is tail-less) when the animals were torpid. When the transmitter was seated against the rump, we immediately pressed the surrounding fur firmly against the radio.

© G.B. Rathbun



Plate 5: We kept newly tagged golden moles in a dark bucket for about 15 minutes before releasing them. It takes a dune shark about three seconds to disappear into the sand!

© G.B. Rathbun

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* Please note that the full research paper of Dr. Rathbun's research on the golden mole can be found on our website. Please visit www.namibrand.com and click on the Library link.

New Student on NamibRand

I was born on the 26th of February 1987 in a small town in the heart of Karas region called Keetmanshoop. I was



Photo: NamibRand

raised at a small communal area known as Vaalgras situated 125km east of Keetmanshoop. From the time I was five, I looked after my parents livestock—mainly cattle, sheep and goats until I started my academic career. During that time, I developed the enthusiasm for taking care of animals. I finished my primary school in Windhoek at Maarti Arthisaari Primary School and came back to the south to complete my high school at Suiderlig High in Keetmanshoop. As I approached grade 12, I searched for possible study courses outlined in the Polytechnic prospectus for 2006 to further my academic career at tertiary level. As I was paging through, I came across Nature Conservation, so I tried to find out more information about this course from my life skills teacher. She told me that it is about conserving biodiversity and because of my interest in animals, I decided to go for it.

As a nature conservator, I want to be one of the individuals to form the backbone of wildlife management in southern Africa. I would like to become a conventional ranger responsible for wildlife management in specific areas including: veld, water,

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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”

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veldfire and game management and patrolling.

I am currently in my second year and performing my in-service training at Keerweder on NamibRand Nature Reserve to fulfill the requirements for a diploma in Nature Conservation. So far, it is an interesting area to do research, surrounded by unique wildlife ecology. NamibRand Nature Reserve is one of the best places to go for students who wish to become involved with wildlife management and research one day. My student project focuses on ground squirrels and their behavior. I am having a great time here so far under special guidance by Reserve staff.

Gottfriedt Apollus



This young Spotted Eagle owlet is sighted regularly at the Keerweder homestead with his mother.

Photo: N. Odendaal

Photo Gallery



Photo: C. Bosch

This beautiful leopard was sighted in September 2006 on Weaver Mountain by Chantelle Bosch, Wolwedans guide, and her guests.



Photo: D. Shaw

This small-spotted genet (Genetta genetta) visited Keerweder in January 2007. It was a special treat to see him in daylight hours!



Weather Report

This summer on the Reserve has been hot and dry with little rainfall received.

Please see the table below which provides the maximum and minimum temperatures recorded in a month as well as the average maximum and minimum.

Month	Max	Min	Ave Max	Ave Min
Sep '06	40.5	5.0	35.6	11.2
Oct '06	43.5	2.0	36.9	13.1
Nov '06	44.5	5.0	38.2	16.4
Dec '06	43.0	12.5	38.8	17.6
Jan '07	46.0	12.0	41.0	19.4
Feb '07	45.5	13.0	39.6	18.1
Mar '07	44	10.5	39.6	18.1

Thank You!

Many thanks to those of you who contributed to this issue of the Barking Gecko—Viktoria Keding, Marc Dürr, Peter Bridgeford, Andreas Keding, Nils Odendaal, Galen Rathbun and Gottfriedt Apollus. I appreciate all your input—it makes for much more interesting reading!

Danica Shaw

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