

THE BARKING GECKO



Newsletter of the NamibRand Nature Reserve



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Off to a Great Start

Best wishes for 2008 – we all sincerely hope it is a stellar year for everyone, both personally and professionally! The wonderful rainfall received in February throughout the Reserve has certainly started 2008 off on a very positive note.

The past year has been an interesting and busy one for the NamibRand Nature Reserve. Predator sightings were extraordinary – cheetah were spotted on and around the Reserve as well as regular sightings of leopard in the Draaihoek/Toskaan area. The vulture hide and restaurant and the NamibRand Desert Research and Awareness Centre were officially opened and the events were covered well in the media. Three vulture chicks were ringed. NRNR’s annual game count was very successful and provided insight into population dynamics. The NamibRand family grew again with the birth of Hayley Odendaal. More solar power installations are cutting down our dependence on fossil fuels. The 2007 research season was very productive, with the establishment of a permanent base for ground squirrel researchers as well as six other short-term projects. NaDEET had a very good year and continues to strengthen. The details of all these stories can be



Photo: V. Keedina

Oryx and a stormy sky in the Horseshoe area.

found in the following pages of this edition of the *Barking Gecko*.

We would like to thank everyone for their interest in and support of our conservation efforts here on the Reserve – we cannot do it without you! Our team achieved a great

deal this past year and we are excited 2008 has started so well. We look forward to all 2008 has to bring, but especially to working with all of you to continue to conserve this exceptionally beautiful corner of our world.

Danica Shaw

Cheetah Return to the NamibRand Area

On the 28th of July 2007, I spotted a male cheetah directly on the main road about 50m from the car! The sighting was on the C27 just past the Waterkop homestead in the sharp bend in the road heading south towards Wereldend. The cheetah was standing right in the road and then fled east, jumped over the fence and headed into the Nubib Mountains. Unfortunately I did not have my camera with me, as is usually the case with such a sighting. I quickly radioed Keerweder to report the sighting and asked our student to bring the camera. However, by the time the camera arrived the cheetah was long out of sight. We did manage to photograph its spoor.



In addition to this sighting, Sossusvlei Mountain Lodge also had a good sighting of a cheetah in the latter part of August 2008. Vernon Swanepoel from SML reported that their guide Vitalis picked up the tracks at Cheetah Rocks on Toskaan and followed them towards the Toskaan house. After passing the turn off to the Quiver Tree forest, he found a fresh Ostrich kill and then 15m farther on, a cheetah resting under a bush. The cheetah was much more skittish than the area’s leopards. Soon after this incredible sighting another cheetah kill was found near the manager’s house at SML.

These sightings are very good news and although we expected

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that the cheetah would eventually return on their own, we did not think it would happen so soon! As the ecosystem continues to recover we will keep our fingers crossed and eyes open in the hopes that we will see more cheetah returning to the area!

Nils Odendaal



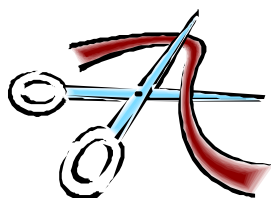
2007 and 2008 Rainfall Figures

After the incredible rainfall in 2006, 2007 was extremely dry by comparison, with rainfall returning to its expected levels. January and February of 2008 have seen some levels exceed total rainfall for the whole of last year!

Place	Total (mm) 2007	Total (mm) Jan/Feb 2008
Sossusvlei Mountain Lodge	61	62.5
Kwessiegat	71.5	31.5
Draaihoek	27.1	118
Keerweder	47.1	75
Toekoms	40.3	121
Wolwedans	32	86.8
NaDEET	66.6	154.5
Tok Tokkie Trails	38.5	116
Stellarine	73	116.5
Aandster	50.5	141

Its Official

In July 2007, two new points of interest on the Reserve were officially opened, one offering a home for researchers and the other a buffet for vultures.



The NamibRand Desert Research and Awareness Centre at Toekoms and the vulture hide and restaurant were officially opened on 6 July. Members of the media, landowners, concessionaires, and neighbours were invited to attend the events. Journalists from the Namibian, Republikein and Travel News Namibia participated, as well as Dr. Chris Brown from the Namibia Nature Foundation and Dr. Joh Henschel from the Gobabeb Training and Research Centre. The guests from Windhoek arrived on an early flight on the morning of 6 July and were welcomed by Sossusvlei Mountain Lodge staff for tea and a tour of their facilities. The group then proceeded to the vulture hide, where they joined other concessionaires and neighbors.

At the vulture hide, Peter Bridgeford, Chairman of Vultures Namibia opened the event by speaking about the importance of



Photo: D. Shaw
Official opening of the vulture hide

officially opened the hide.

From there the group made their way to Toekoms where Danica Shaw, Environment & Research Warden gave a short talk on the aims of and hopes for the Research Centre and handed over to Albi Brückner for his comments and the official opening. After a tour, visitors enjoyed a delicious lunch on the Toekoms stoep.



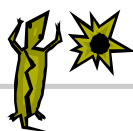
Photo: N. Odendaal
Official Opening of the Research Centre

Guests over-nighted at Wolwedans and the group enjoyed lively sundowner and dinner discussions which carried on late into the night.

Both events received quite a bit of attention in the press. It was a great opportunity to thank all those involved in the projects and give a NamibRand experience to new visitors. We look forward to building on these new relationships and to similar events in the future.

We would like to thank all our guests, especially those who joined us from off the Reserve, and to Wolwedans and Sossusvlei Mountain Lodge for making these events possible.

Danica Shaw



Sacred Nature

...we need to go to the earth, as the source whence we came, and ask for its guidance, for the earth carries the psychic structure as well as the physical form of every living being on the planet. Our confusion is not only within ourselves; it concerns also our role in the planetary community. Even beyond the earth, we need to go to the universe and inquire concerning the basic issues of reality and value, for, even more that the earth, the universe carries the deep mysteries of our existence within itself.

We cannot discover ourselves without first discovering the universe, the earth, and the imperatives of our own being. Each of these has creative power and a vision far beyond any rational thought our cultural creation of which we are capable.

Thomas Berry

"The Dream of the Earth: Our Way into the Future"
The Dream of the Earth



2007 Game Count

This year's annual game count was held on the NamibRand Nature Reserve on the 2nd of June 2007.

Veteran game count participants will note the reference to the *annual* game count and may ask: "Why is there now only one count?" In the past an end-of-dry-season count held in December, as well as an end-of-wet-season count held in June were conducted each year. Typically only one count per annum is required to monitor wildlife numbers. Our bi-annual counts were initially set-up with the primary goal of developing the new methodology as well as to document the east-west migration of wildlife in the area. With the aid of data collected from previous game counts our methodology has now been sufficiently fine-tuned to enable us to confidently conduct only one annual count. Good data has also been obtained to accurately document the annual east-west wildlife migration.

The resource management decision to drop the end-of-wet-season count was done in consultation with senior Reserve staff and under the guidance of conservation biology experts from the Ministry of Environment and Tourism and the Namibia Nature Foundation.

It was decided that the annual game count be scheduled for June each year to combine it with the Reserve's annual general meeting, making an ideal opportunity to hold a community participation game count.

Data collected by participants of this year's game count was collated and analyzed, bearing our three core objectives in mind:

Objective 1: Population estimates

There are an estimated 4,295 oryx and 9,013 springbok on the Reserve.

Objective 2: Wildlife distribution

The highest density of wildlife was in the east of the Reserve, while the vegetated dune belt had the lowest density of game.

Objective 3: Population change

Compared to June 2006 most areas showed a marked decrease in the overall wildlife population, only the northern parts of the Reserve showed an increase in wildlife.

It is interesting to note that while oryx numbers are back up to what they were before the extraordinarily high rainfall season in 2005/6, springbok numbers have decreased to a more normal level. The population estimate is now closer to figures recorded before the good rains fell in 2006.

In the case of oryx a marked exodus from the Reserve followed the good rains as animals were able to spread out across good grazing in the larger area. Numbers are now once again higher as oryx are retuning to the Reserve in search of permanent water.

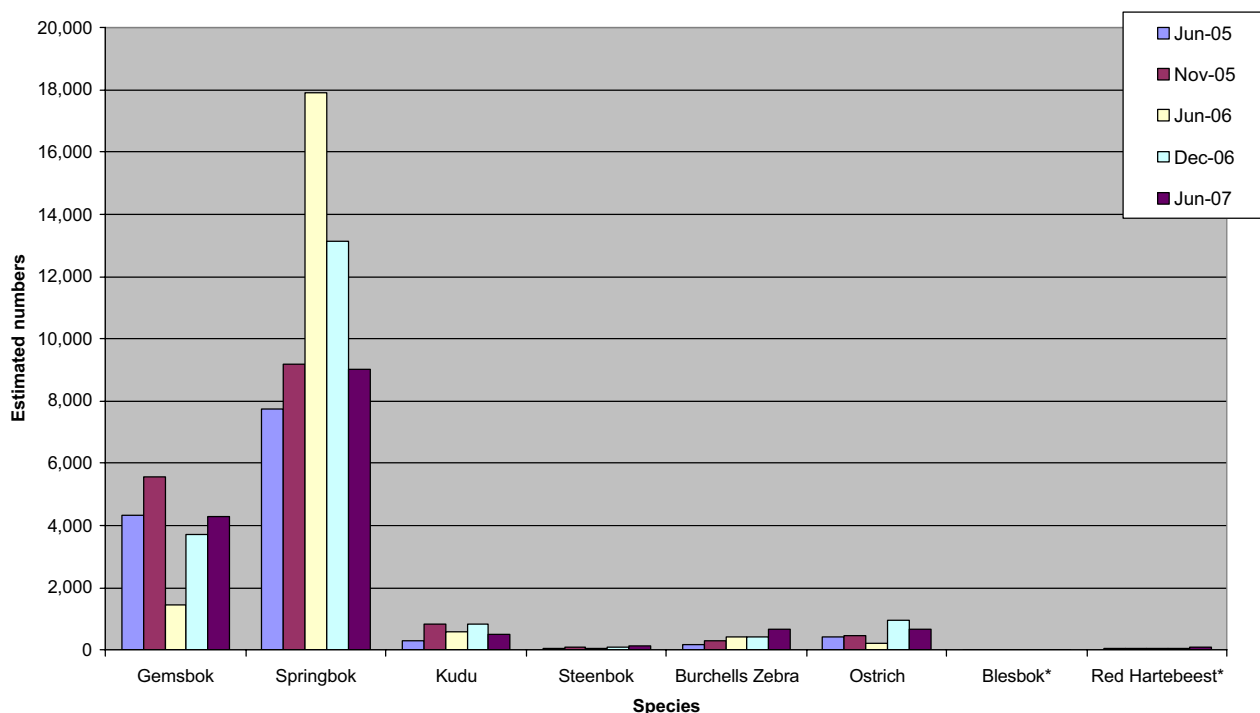
Springbok numbers exploded in response to the good rains and their population estimate almost doubled from December 2005 to June 2006. The return to a more normal level on the Reserve can be attributed to animals migrating out of the area as well as an increased predator population, which typically follows a few years after the good rains in response to increased prey numbers.

Game counts are invaluable to resource monitoring and as always we would like to thank all those who helped with this game count. The success of our game count effort is dependent upon the participation and generous time contribution from all our stakeholders.

Nils Odendaal

From the graph below we can see that wildlife numbers have now returned to more normal levels – comparable to figures from previous years when less rainfall was recorded.

NamibRand Nature Reserve Game Count - Comparative Totals





Leopard sightings on NRNR

Driving towards the Draaihoek waterhole in December I noticed some Ostrich feathers lying on the ground. On inspection it was a freshly killed Ostrich. It was killed by one of Africa's large predators, a leopard! We saw that it had not eaten much, and so figured that if we returned in the evening, we would have a chance to see the leopard.

When we returned in the evening, we found two leopards sitting up on a rock, in great view in the afternoon light. While watching them we caught a glimpse of a male higher up on the same rock outcrop. Three leopards in one afternoon!

In 2007 we had a total of seven leopard sightings. This year we have already had more than ten sightings! Most of the leopard activity has been around the Draaihoek area. We believe that there are four leopards that we are seeing – we can tell from the tracks. There is a big male that moves out towards Cheetah Rocks and Moringa Valley and a smaller male that we only see up in the top of Toskaan/Draaihoek. This male is the most shy, perhaps because it still moves into farming areas. Then there are two females (a mother with a nearly fully grown female cub.) These are the main leopards on Draaihoek, and they move out towards Bushmankoppie some times. We see the tracks almost daily in those areas.

This has been an exciting time for us with all these predator sightings. We also saw a cheetah and a brown hyena. But more than the excitement, it is also reassuring to know that conservation here in the eastern Namib is successful.

Our latest sighting was at Bushmankoppie again, of the two females. It has been a couple of years since we have had good sightings there, as the area has been dry. These leopards were completely relaxed, and the cub came out to have a look at us. We managed to see this pair there on four separate drives.

Vernon Swanepoel



News @ NaDEET: A Review of 2007

2007 ended with a celebration. Our last school group at NaDEET Centre was Hoeksteen Primary School, which won our essay contest. Their visit at the end of October coincided with our 4th birthday party. Together with the Hoeksteen Primary children and teachers, we celebrated four successful years of programmes at NaDEET Centre.

The contest was held in the middle of 2007 when NaDEET joined forces with the Namibian Environment and Wildlife Society (NEWS) to host an essay contest entitled 'Apathy and the Environment'. Schoolchildren from the Southern regions of Namibia were invited to participate. Many children entered and wrote interesting essays about their local environments and the challenges that they face. First prize was given to two girls, Talitha and Ashley, from the same school in the far southern mining town of Rosh Pinah. The prize was a free trip to NaDEET Centre.

Overall it was a busy year for NaDEET. At the Centre we hosted a total of 20 school groups with just over 700 participants. Since opening, we have now hosted a total of 3000 schoolchildren and adults at NaDEET Centre. Many schools continue to visit NaDEET year after year. In addition to our regular schools, such as Daweb in Maltahöhe, the DHPS in Windhoek and Danie Joubert from Mariental we had new groups from Karasburg, Bethanie, Nauchas and the Waldorf School Windhoek. At the end of the year we hosted the Namibian Academy for Tourism and Hospitality (NATH) Desert Guiding Course at the Centre. Two NaDEET staff members took part in the course and honed their desert knowledge.



Photo: H. van Koerlen

Waldorf School Windhoek—identifying small nocturnal animals caught in catch and release traps.

We have also developed several new educational materials for use at NaDEET Centre including our own identification guide, a professionally printed version of our 'Sustainable Living Journal', posters and models.

NaDEET staff members also spread the message of sustainable living through solar cooking at a Peace Corps-hosted workshop for community members. NaDEET gave a lively presentation on solar energy and the physics behind how a solar cooker and oven can actually work. Participants at this workshop included Peace Corps volunteers and their counterparts from rural villages throughout the country. Each community member at the workshop received a donated solar oven. The workshop has also had positive impacts for the Centre, as we have received requests for bookings for school and youth groups from several of the participants.

Together with my family, I attended the World Environmental Education Congress (WEEC) in Durban, South Africa. I gave a presentation that reviewed the design and programme objectives of NaDEET Centre after four years of implementation. The Congress was attended by over 1000 worldwide participants.

For 2008, NaDEET Centre already has fifteen school groups booked. We have made many improvements to the Centre over the summer break including a new solar deck and solar water heater for the kitchen. Before our first group arrives at the end of February, we must still complete several maintenance jobs. We have also received funding to develop and print an activity book about sustainable living and the desert. We look forward to another challenging and successful year of environmental education.

Viktoria Keding

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.





Keerweder Joins the Solar Age

In this age of global warming and rising fuel costs, Keerweder can finally boast a state of the art solar power system.

Ten 200 watt panels installed in September 2007 provide enough electricity for almost 75% of the homestead's energy needs. While the solar panels greatly reduce our dependency on the generator for power, it cannot be completely abandoned in favour of solar energy as our water is too deep to pump without it. Overall our fuel consumption has been significantly reduced and we are thrilled to minimize our carbon footprint. The main house and guesthouse already have solar hot water systems in place.

Ever improving solar technology will hopefully lead to a future free of noisy, fossil-fuel consuming machines. While the replacement of pumping equipment takes time and significant investment, the Reserve will strive to use alternative energy where finances and technology allow.



Photo: N. Odendaal

2000W of solar power at Keerweder

Nils Odendaal

2007 Research Season



This past year saw a great deal of research on the NamibRand Nature Reserve. In 2007 researchers established a long-term presence on the Reserve at Aandster, we hosted both old and new friends and several new species were discovered.

Dr. Jane Waterman from the University of Central Florida has been studying Cape ground squirrels in Southern Africa for over 20 years. Her team has had a number of long-term study sites in the region and has been visiting Aandster for short periods of study over the past several years. Due to interesting observations and a desire for more in-depth study, Dr. Waterman and her team have established a long-term research



Photo: S. Edwards

Cape fox pups at the Jagdersdam squirrel colony

site on Aandster. Since March 2007, the Aandster cottage serves as a residence and research station for various students and Dr. Waterman when she visits each winter. Full-time

research student, Corris Kaapehi established the station and has since been joined by Sarah Edwards. The research team also hosted a Nature Conservation student from the Polytechnic of Namibia in 2007.

In June 2007, Dr. Galen Rathbun from the California Academy of Sciences returned to the Reserve in search of the Round-eared sengi (*Macroscelides proboscideus*). Sengis, also known as elephant shrews, are Dr. Rathbun's speciality and he is credited with discovering several new species. He was joined by Dr. Jack Dumbacher, also from the Academy and Jack's wife, Tiffany Bozic. Several different forms (dark and light) of the species exist and the project's aim was to determine if the different forms are simply colour morphs of one species or actually distinct species.

The team stayed at the Research Centre at Toekoms, trapping around Keerweder for several days. While other species of interest were found, no *Macroscelides* appeared in the traps. During the next phase the team then travelled to the other side of the Nubib Mountains, and spent several days on Farm Zwartmodder where they were more successful in locating *Macroscelides*. Gorassis was the final destination and trapping was conducted on the gravel plains in the area. The researchers were successful, trapping *Macroscelides* along with other species. The majority of animals were released alive, although others were collected for DNA sampling and museum specimens. Testing is currently underway at the California Academy of Sciences and we look forward to finding out if our *Macroscelides* on Gorassis is, in fact, a new species.



Photo: G. Rathbun

Macroscelides proboscideus—Round-eared sengi

You can find more in-depth information on this project on our web library – www.namibrand.org/library.htm

In July 2007, two student researchers from the University of Münster began their research on NamibRand. Both students were conducting research as part of their diploma thesis. Björn Klatt's research focused on the biodiversity and hunting methods of spiders, while Marian Siegert's project focused on the taxonomic identification of locusts. Both studies seek to determine how biodiversity is linked to the vegetation structure. The students spent three months conducting their research and collecting specimens. Björn collected a total of 344 spiders, representing 25 different spider families and two new possible species! Marian collected 260 locust and his identification is still underway. They were both very successful and we look forward to their final results and thesis work once completed at the end of March 2008.

The National Botanical Research Institute (NBRI) conducted a

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Adenia pechuelii on NNR

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survey of *Adenia pechuelii* (elephant's foot) in July. Sonia Loots from the NBRI spent about a week surveying these slow growing endemic succulents as part of a national survey. Some individuals are estimated to be over 100 years old. *Adenia* are a conservation concern and are listed on Namibia's Red List. *Adenia pechuelii* is a Namibian endemic and according to Loots, "was recently classified as Near Threatened (NT) on the IUCN

Red List, indicating that the species is one category short of being threatened with extinction." *Adenia* are threatened by, among other things, illegal collectors. It is our sincere hope that the NBRI is successful in their efforts to catalogue, study and conserve this interesting species.

Jan Breitreuz, a geography student from the University of Trier, arrived on the Reserve in September 2007 to conduct a thesis study comparing the socio-economic characteristics of the major land-use options of farming and tourism, as well as effects of land-use change in the Namib region. Jan spent almost two months conducting his research – mainly one-on-one interviews – with area farmers, tourism operations, staff, landowners and other stakeholders. He covered a wide area and interviewed numerous people. His results are expected sometime early this year.

Fairy circles were the subject of another study this past year. Dr. Walter Tschinkel from Florida State University and his wife, Vicky conducted research from mid-October to mid-November 2007. Dr. Tschinkel has studied the social biology of ants for over 36 years and first visited Namibia in 1970 to conduct research on tenebrionid beetles at Gobabeb. He returned with his family in 2005, visiting Wolwedans as a tourist, when he became intrigued by the fairy circles and the possibility that they are caused by an endemic harvester termite species identified as *Baicalioterme hainesi*.

Dr. Tschinkel's initial research indicated that there were no correlations between *Baicalioterme hainesi* nests and fairy circles. While such a discovery might phase less experienced researchers, Dr. Tschinkel took this in his stride and continued his work,



B.hainesi soldiers defending a broken tunnel

Photo: W. Tschinkel

changing his focus to the construction and architecture of the foraging tunnel system of *B. hainesi*. The incredibly interesting results of this study are in the process of publication, however, please visit www.namibrand.org/library.htm for a copy of the pre-press paper, complete with photos.

Drs. Gretel and Noel van Rooyen also visited the Reserve for a short time. Dr. Gretel van Rooyen has conducted research on fairy circles for many years, most recently with Dr. Jankowitz from the Polytechnic of Namibia in 2005 and 2006. Her aim was to meet with Dr. Tschinkel and discuss the origins of our mysterious fairy circles.

The 2007 research season was very busy and productive. Toekoms hosted almost all visiting researchers and it seemed everyone went away with good results, leaving us with a better understanding of NamibRand's environment. In addition, Drs. Rathbun, Dumbacher and Tschinkel took time out from their hectic activities to present talks to interested parties on the Reserve. Guides from Wolwedans and SML, staff from NaDEET and nature conservation students attended and benefited from these presentations.

The 2008 research program is shaping up nicely, with numerous requests. At this stage, there is no active promotion of the Reserve as a research destination although there are plans to do so. Scientists have been approaching us on word-of-mouth promotion only. We look forward to continuing to work with world-class scientists and build our Research Centre.

Danica Shaw

Reserve Appoints New CEO

After years of spearheading the NamibRand Nature Reserve from its humble beginnings to an internationally renowned model of private conservation, Albi Brückner has decided to step down as Chief Executive Officer. As custodian of the Reserve, he will continue to serve as Chair of the Board of Directors. Nils Odendaal was appointed acting CEO in June 2007 and formally appointed CEO as of 1 March 2008. Nils has been working with Albi during the interim period and they will continue to work closely over the next several months to complete the transition.

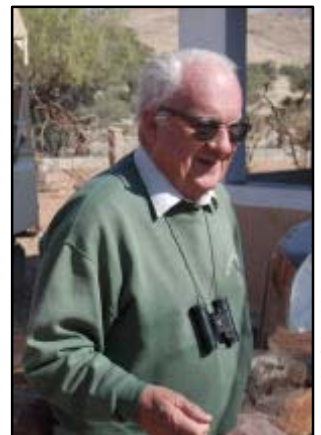


Photo: N. Odendaal

Albi Brückner—founder of NamibRand Nature Reserve

There is no way to adequately express our admiration for Albi and his wonderful dream that became NamibRand. His vision, dedication, tenacity and altruism regarding the Reserve have made it the success it is today. He has invested over twenty years—and money, sweat and perhaps even tears—in the Reserve. From his purchase of Gorrasis in the early 1980's through massive rehabilitation efforts to the respected nature reserve it is today, there is no doubt it has been—and will continue to be—an interesting and incredible journey. We hope that as Albi steps down from his daily CEO duties that he is able to take the extra time to enjoy the beauty of NamibRand or to simply dream.

We all look forward to continuing our work together for the future of the NamibRand Nature Reserve.

Danica Shaw



New Member of the NamibRand Family

In August the NamibRand family welcomed its newest member.

Hayley Shaw Odendaal was born in Windhoek on 21 August 2007 to very proud parents Nils Odendaal and Danica Shaw. She weighed 3.6 kg and was 54 cm long at birth. At the age of two months old, she became an international traveller when she flew to the United States to visit family. Hayley is now six and a half months old and has settled into life on NamibRand. Despite the heat, she is a wonderfully happy desert child!



Photo: D. Shaw

Hayley Odendaal



Vultures on NamibRand

This season, three Lappet-faced Vulture chicks were ringed on NamibRand.

On 4 October, Vultures Namibia conducted an aerial survey of a large portion of NRNR. We were looking for breeding Lappet-faced Vultures and the easiest way to find the big nests, always in the tops of trees, is from the air. Vultures Namibia had just completed an aerial survey of the Namib-Naukluft Park and from Sossusvlei it was a short flight to Vreemdelingspoort. Most trees on the Reserve are found in the dunes from south of Jagkop to north of Aandster. We concentrated on this area. We had hoped to find several occupied nests, but were disappointed. Only one chick was spotted during the survey. However, NRNR staff found two other occupied nests during routine patrols on the Reserve.

About two weeks later, on 15 October, Marc Dürr, Marilyn and I drove to Keerweder after completing the ringing in the Tsondab area. We stayed in the guesthouse, thanks to Nils and Danica. That afternoon we drove to Aandster to meet Jakobus Kooper and Jackie Vlees, who took us to a nest they located. Here we ringed and tagged a large chick. The following day we ventured into the dunes northeast of Wolwedans and found our chick from the survey. Lothar Menge (Nature Conservation student) and a student from Germany accompanied us. We made it back to Keerweder, packed and on the way home, went to Draaihoek with Markus and Abraham Tsaobeb, who had been monitoring the nest they located and ringed the last chick.



Thanks to NamibRand for their cooperation and to Nedbank and Swart Grant Angula who supplied funds for the aerial survey. Nedbank funded the transport costs.

Peter Bridgeford—Vultures Namibia



Photo: A. Keeding

Jackie Vlees and Jakobus Kooper with tagged vulture chick



Desert Thoughts

Above me the clouds roll in, unfurling and smoking billows in malignant violet, dense as wool. Most of the sky is lidded over but the sun remains clear halfway down the west, shining in under the storm. Overhead the clouds thicken, then crack and split with a roar like that of cannonballs tumbling down a marble staircase, their bellies open – open late to run now – and the rain comes down.

Comes down: not softly, not gently, with no quality of mercy but like heavy water in buckets, raindrops like pellets splattering on the rock, knocking the berries off the junipers, plastering my shirt to my back, drumming on my hat like hailstones and running in a waterfall off the brim...

For five minutes the deluge continues under the barrage of thunder and lightening, then trails off quickly, diminishing to a shower, to a sprinkling, to nothing at all. The clouds move off and rumble for a while in the distance. A fresh golden light breaks through and now in the east over the turrets and domes, stands the rainbow sign, a double rainbow with one foot in the canyon of the Colorado and the other far north in Salt Wash. Beyond the rainbow and framed within it I can see jags of lightening still playing in the stormy sky over Castle Valley.

The afternoon sun falls lower; above the mountains and the ragged black clouds hangs the new moon, pale fragment of what is to come; in another hour, at sundown, Venus too will be there, planet of love, to glow bright as chromium down on the western sky. The desert storm is over and through the pure sweet pellucid air the cliff swallows and the nighthawks plunge and swerve, making cries of hunger and warning and – who knows? – maybe of exultation.

Edward Abbey
Desert Solitaire



2008 AGM and Game Count

The 2007 NamibRand Nature Reserve's ninth annual general meeting took place at Wolwedans Dune Camp on the afternoon of 2 June. The meeting was well attended by stakeholders and their guests. After the meeting everyone enjoyed mingling around the fire and a delicious dinner. We would like to thank everyone for their participation and Wolwedans for hosting us.

This year, the AGM is scheduled for the weekend of 6-8 June 2008. Exact dates and times have not yet been finalized. However, the annual game count is scheduled for the morning of 7 June and we invite all stakeholders and other interested parties to join us.

Scheduling the game count and AGM the same weekend allows everyone to participate and helps us to get the NamibRand community directly involved in resource management. We look forward to seeing all of you – be sure to bring keen eyes, warm clothes and of course – sunscreen!

Seven Good Years, Seven Bad Years



Since I moved to the desert in 2003, the rain has always been pretty good on NamibRand Nature Reserve. Although some places were dry (as a desert usually is), most areas received good rains starting with the 2000 rainy season before my time. These rains established a good grass cover in most places. I must admit that I very quickly got used to this exceptional grass cover. It is like once you have driven a nice plush new model Merc, it is difficult to revert back to the old third hand Mazda 323 you first started off with. Nevertheless, rainfall has nothing to do with affordability but with good old Mother Nature. She does what she wants and there is "nothing you gonna do about it!" As with the seven good and seven bad years that have been documented in older publications, everything seems to go in cycles. Looking at the 2007 and January 2008 rainfall statistics, it looks like the seven bad years have started, which makes sense as the good rains started back in 2000.

The good grace of Mother Nature in previous years gave us great herds of oryx and springbok. But nature also thinks of the other animals. In 2007 and early 2008 almost no rain fell and many of the older and weaker plains game became predator food. We have had nice sightings of leopard, mainly in the northern parts of NamibRand, whilst one hyaena was seen by my wife Viktoria. This one was galloping parallel to our airstrip where Viktoria was on foot with baby in pram and dog. The hyena was probably for a dinner invitation to a nearby carcass and (luckily) did not take interest in my family. Otherwise the hyenas in the area left plenty of tracks and were the cause of some mischief with our equipment—primarily the plastic covering for the Boulders Camp building materials, stored at Vista, which was visited and dragged around almost every night. (Richard, the man in charge at Boulders, will sing a song

of this one day).

Jackals have been seen more often than not, which is a good sign for the Reserve as it indicates a healthy ecosystem. We hope that they stay with us and do not move onto the neighbouring sheep farming properties! Some Cape fox had young in the squirrel colony researched close to Aandster house which was entertaining for the researchers, Corris and Sarah, as it was something different to the squirrels.

Recently I had some interesting encounters. Chris, a friend from the USA, who is currently volunteering at NaDEET joined me on a Saturday morning patrol. Before I get to my story, let me tell you about Chris. Although he claims to have bad luck – especially in playing cards, he has more than made up for it in game viewing.

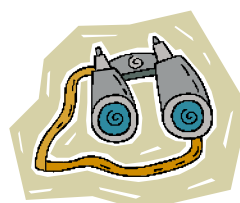
A few weeks ago, Chris was building the new solar cooking deck at NaDEET Centre when he saw a steenbok standing close by. Instead of running away, he (the steenbok that is) walked onto the newly built deck, not a meter past Chris, walked inside the main building, through the kitchen into the classroom. There he tried walking on a mattress, but found it to be weird footing, drank half of a huge bowl of water, said "Cheers!" and walked off. Quite an amazing experience I must say.

So needless to say, I was very happy on this Saturday morning to have Chris accompany me on a water checking round to Schafsberg via Straussenwasser and Gorrasis. It did not take long for Chris (and me as a witness next to him) to get lucky. We had just gone over the dunes past Prosopis and as we approached the Groot Pomp vlei we saw about 20 oddly striped oryx without horns that looked like horses. They turned out to be some plains zebra that had come over the dunes to check out the good grass as it had not rained in their usual 'hunting' grounds on the Keerweder Pan. For us in the south this is a very special sighting!



We continued on to Straussenwasser, and spotted five members of a jackal family very close to us, but too lazy to move. Then came Gorrasis where we went to the top of the Sand dam. I wanted to see if there was still water there—the dam has slowly been leaking out water under the old dam wall since the end of 2005, creating some permanent pools. This of course attracts much wildlife.

We parked the Cruiser and walked up to the dam wall. As a really good ranger, I left my binoculars behind so that if someone in the car wanted to look at something they could have. This turned out to be not so clever (no medicine for stupidity is there?) especially as no one was at the car. I spotted a bird that I suspected of being a Damara Rockrunner, but unfortunately it eluded me and my un-binocularized eyes. Chris in the meantime did some real American rock searching and called out "leopard". I immediately looked where he was pointing but that was too much for the elusive cat and it slinked away quickly. So while Chris had about three seconds of a sighting, I had maybe one second of leopard butt!



(Continued on page 9)

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Nevertheless it was quite exciting, as we were on foot and it was only about 70m away from us. It was also Chris' first leopard sighting in the wild. This was the only leopard I have seen in the southern part of the Reserve for a very long time.

Here the story ends for now, but hopefully it remains a good one.

Andreas Keding

Disclaimer: This article was written in January 2008. The author takes no responsibility for unexpected rainfall that fell after he wrote this article and /or may still come before, during, within or after the end of the rainy season.



Aardwolf spotted in their den on Aandster

Photo: A. Keding



Solar Heated Water for Toekoms

In 2007, the NamibRand Conservation Foundation received a personal donation from Ron Asprey to cover the cost and installation of a solar hot water system for the Research Centre at Toekoms. Ron Asprey is a shareholder in NamibRand Desert Trails and has spent quite a bit of time on NamibRand.

The solar system replaces a gas system that proved volatile in 2006 when visiting researchers used the gas system, against our advice, in strong East wind. When NRNR staff arrived at Toekoms, in response to an emergency radio call, the gas bottle was close to exploding. Fortunately no one was injured and there was no property damage. Suffice it to say that the solar hot water system has proven to be more user friendly and will also harness our wonderful Namibian sunshine, keeping researchers clean and warm.



Toekom's new solar hot water heater

Photo: N. Odenndal

The NamibRand Conservation Foundation – and certainly all present and future researchers to Toekoms – would like to thank Ron Asprey for his generous contribution. His donation expands the existing solar installation, allowing Toekoms to operate entirely on solar energy!

Danica Shaw

New Gecko Species Discovered



During the 2006 rainy season, Dr. Miles Paul, Sossusvlei Mountain Lodge astronomer and retired biologist, discovered an interesting gecko which he was unable to identify.

Eventually a photo of the gecko was sent to Professor Bill Branch. Dr. Branch is a reptile expert and the Curator of Herpetology at Bayworld in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, but was unable to definitively identify the gecko from the photo. He visited SML two times in early 2007 to collect specimens. DNA testing was conducted on the first specimens and during the second visit Dr. Branch was lucky, capturing a male, female, juvenile and hatchling. The DNA information, as well as the distinct colouring which completely changes with age, indicates that the gecko is a new *Pachydactylus* species.

According to Dr. Branch, "There is massive upheaval in the *Pachydactylus* serval-weberi complex, which is a group of small rock crack-living geckos. In my field guide in 1998 it comprised 4 species, but in a major revision I co-authored with Prof. Aaron Bauer (Villanova University, USA) in 2006 we recognized 21 species, eight of them new, and now realize that there are additional undescribed species, including the new species from Sossusvlei [Mountain Lodge]."

Dr. Branch is travelling to the United States this month to finalize the description of the new species. We look forward to more information about this interesting discovery and particularly, its name.

Danica Shaw



Photo: W.R. Branch

New Pachydactylus sp. hatchling—its distinctive colouring may keep predators away by mimicking blister beetle markings



Photo: W.R. Branch

New Pachydactylus sp. adult

“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”

2007 Nature Conservation Student

Hi, my name is Lothar Menge. I completed my third year Nature Conservation in-service training at Keerweder during July – October 2007. While on the Reserve, as part of my studies at the Polytechnic of Namibia, I conducted a water demand management study.

I was born and bred in Windhoek. As my father grew up on a farm and my uncle is a farmer, we visited both farms frequently during my childhood, and I just loved wide, quiet and open spaces. This instilled in me a deep respect for wildlife and nature.

I began my primary education at the German Higher Private School. When I was nine years old, I was treated for a brain tumour, the effects of which have mainly damaged my hearing and balance. I finished my high school at the Delta Secondary School Windhoek in 2002. After my schooling I did a practical year at the base of Youth With A Mission in Brakwater, where my calling for nature became very clear. I believe every person has a special calling from God and should follow it to develop his full potential.



Photo: Menge Family

Lothar at Keerweder with Oreo

So I started my Nature Conservation Diploma at the Polytechnic in 2004. I completed my first in-service training at REST (Rare and Endangered Species Trust), just north of Otjiwarongo. I enjoyed working

with and caring for the damaged birds at REST. At home I have changed our family garden into a more sustainable succulent garden, and have a good variety of aloes and other succulents which are close to my heart. I love my home country very much and want to be part of the conservation of Namibia so that future generations can also benefit from our beautiful country.

Lothar Menge

** Lothar was an exceptional student and his project received outstanding marks. His water demand management study*

focused on the installation and monitoring of water meters at key water installations throughout the Reserve. His work will assist us in continuing to monitor our most precious and limiting resource – water.



Weather Report

The table below provides the maximum and minimum temperatures recorded in a month as well as the average maximum and

Month	Max	Min	Ave Max	Ave Min
Apr 07	36.2	5.2	32.3	14.8
May 07	33.3	4.1	28	11.4
Jun 07	28.8	-1.4	23.3	4.2
Jul 07	29.6	-0.2	25.7	7.5
Aug 07	32.5	-0.9	26.7	6.3
Sep 07	37.4	3.5	31.9	10.6
Oct 07	38.2	5.3	31.8	13.0
Nov 07	39.0	10.4	33.6	15.8
Dec 07	40.1	10.6	34.3	16.3
Jan 08	39.9	14.4	36.3	20.3
Feb 08	39.3	16.5	34.2	20.8

Thank You!

Many thanks to those of you who contributed to this issue of the Barking Gecko—Viktoria Keding, Vernon Swanepoel, Peter Bridgeford, Andreas Keding, Nils Odendaal and Lothar Menge. Your input and stories are always appreciated!

Danica Shaw

Newsletter of the NamibRand Nature Reserve

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