

THE BARKING GECKO



Newsletter of the NamibRand Nature Reserve



November 2008

Volume 9 N° 2



A Time for Reflection

As 2008 winds down and we all wait for the sky to darken and the rain to fall, it is a good time to report on all the events, successes and challenges we have experienced this year.

The past several months on the Reserve have been both exciting and challenging. We worked with two partners to re-introduce several cheetahs, with varying degrees of success. Our giraffe population doubled and we had some very interesting bird sightings. The Burchell's zebra population was decreased with a very successful game capture operation. A group of conservationists visited NamibRand from America's great plains and we experienced one of their own projects first hand. The Reserve developed a Tourism and Economic Development Plan to see us into the future. NaDEET continued to instil the principles of sustainable living in Namibia's youth. Researchers initiated interesting projects to help us learn more about NamibRand, while a new weather station will keep track of temperatures, rainfall and other indicators in the south. Aandster installed a new solar system and is now almost

completely independent of its fossil-fuel burning generator.

All these stories, plus a few more are covered in detail in this latest issue of the Barking Gecko. We hope you will enjoy it.

We would also like to take this opportunity to thank all of you for your continued support of the Reserve. The NamibRand team has achieved many of the goals it set for itself this year and acquired new heights to aim for. As we move forward with new plans and ideas we always appreciate your interest, input and especially your enthusiasm for the work we do here. We wish you all the very best for the holiday season and a wonderful start to 2009. We look forward to a new year of full friendship, collaboration and accomplishments in the name of conservation.

Danica Shaw



Artwork: H. Cloeté

Freedom on NamibRand

Six cheetahs and one leopard have been released into the south of NamibRand since May 2008. N/a'an ku sê's researchers are tracking them on a daily basis and so far things are looking good.

Second chances are not something everyone gets to experience, some only get one chance at life and some hardly get any chance at all. This is why N/a'an ku sê, together with the Ministry of Environment & Tourism (MET) and NamibRand, is dedicated to helping animals by giving them a second opportunity for freedom.

Large carnivores in Namibia often come into conflict with local farmers and these cases need to be dealt with for the benefit of both farmers and animals.

In May 2008 N/a'an ku sê Wildlife Sanctuary (www.ecotourism-namibia.com) started a translocation and release project for cheetahs and leopards.



(Continued on page 2)

In this issue:

A Time for Reflection.....	1
Freedom on NamibRand.....	1
Desert Thoughts.....	2
2008 AGM and Game Count.....	3
Giraffe Herd Doubles.....	4
Fire Season.....	4
Second Chances.....	5
WWF Project Visits NamibRand.....	6
2008 Game Capture Successful.....	6
News @ NaDEET.....	7
Sacred Nature.....	8
Aandster Receives New Solar System.....	8
New House for Tsaobeb Family.....	8
2008 Research Season.....	9
Black Harrier Sightings.....	9
Tourism & Economic Development Plan.....	10
NamibRand Networks in the US.....	11
Expanding the Conservation Landscape.....	11
New Weather Station at NaDEET.....	12
Damara Rockrunner on NamibRand.....	13
Weather Report.....	13

(Continued from page 1)

The project aims to capture and collar problem animals and relocate them into areas where they will no longer be a nuisance. After an animal has been collared and released, a team of



Photo: N/a'an ku sê

N/a'an ku sê team tracking released cats

researchers track the animal on a daily basis by use of radio-telemetry. The team also checks for spoor and other signs of the animals. This work is necessary and very important in order to monitor their health and to assess whether the release was successful.

At the moment N/a'an ku sê's main release site is at NamibRand. So far six cheetahs and one leopard have been relocated and released onto the Reserve or the neighbouring Namib-Naukluft Park.

The first group of three cheetahs, including one male and two females, was released at Straussenwasser in late May. Since then the group has settled in very well and established a home

range of approximately 1,200 km² spanning the whole south-western area of NamibRand, parts of the Namib-Naukluft Park as well as conservation-friendly farms south of the Reserve. The cheetahs have been sighted regularly, not only by the researchers, but also by guests visiting NamibRand. The research



Photo: N/a'an ku sê

One final look back before running for freedom.

team is delighted to see that they are hunting, appear healthy and stay out of harm's way.

Much the same can be said about N/a'an ku sê's second release, a five year-old male leopard. He became a serious problem on a cattle farm near Windhoek earlier this year and needed to be translocated to avoid further conflict. Then, on a foggy August morning, the leopard was released into the Gorassis Mountains.

He has since made his new home in the rocky ridges of Chowagas and Ysterwielnek leading up north to the Stone Circles and parts of the Horseshoe Wildness Area farther east.

His current home range encompasses some 175 km², but despite this much smaller area (as compared with the cheetahs), tracking the leopard proves more difficult due to his elusive nature. Sometimes it even requires the use of indirect methods such as footprint identification. However,



Photo: N/a'an ku sê

Dr. Rudie van Vuuren releases cheetahs onto NamibRand.

he can still be located on a regular basis and the team believes he might have recently started mating with a resident female.

After two very successful releases, hopes were high when the team returned to the NamibRand area for a third release. This time it was a female cheetah with her two sub-adult cubs. The group was released in the Namib-Naukluft Park near Straussenwasser in mid-September. Unfortunately they never found the water nearby, nor did the mother start hunting springbok as was expected. Consequently, the mother rapidly lost weight and energy and the cubs separated from her. One of them succumbed to dehydration and the other was never seen again. Soon even the mother was too weak to hunt. The team then made the decision to recapture her and bring her back to N/a'an ku sê. Time will tell whether she can be released again. These results were unfortunate, however, one should bear in mind that the long-term survival of these animals is much greater if they are relocated to predator-safe areas such as NamibRand and the neighbouring national park.

Nonetheless, with a lot of very hard work and tremendous support from NamibRand this project has come a long way in a short amount of time. N/a'an ku sê is now looking for the much needed funding in order to fit future release animals with GPS satellite collars. This would make the work a bit easier and the team would be able to get more information from the animals. The future is looking bright and N/a'an ku sê hopes to release more animals that deserve a second chance. What place could be more suited for freedom than the beautiful landscapes of NamibRand?

Florian Weise

**Editor's note: A map of NamibRand is available on our website at www.namibrand.org if readers would like to consult place names.*



Desert Thoughts

Whatever evaluation we finally make of a stretch of land, however, no matter how profound or accurate, we will still find it inadequate. The land retains an identity of its own, still deeper and more subtle than we can know. Our obligation towards it then becomes simple: to approach with an uncalculating mind, with an attitude of regard. To try to sense the range and variety of its expression – its weather and colors and animals. To intend from the beginning to preserve some of the mystery within it as a kind of wisdom to be experienced, not questioned. And to be alert for its openings, for that moment when something sacred reveals itself within the mundane, and you know the land knows you are there.

Barry Lopez
Arctic Dreams



2008 AGM and Game Count

NamibRand's AGM took place on 6 June 2008 at the Wolwedans Dune Lodge. It was a very productive meeting and was well attended by all stakeholders. Attendees enjoyed a bit of social interaction after the meeting over sundowner drinks and snacks.

The Annual Game Count was held early the following morning on 7 June. The turnout was phenomenal. Sossusvlei Mountain Lodge and NaDEET provided a team each. Albi Brückner and Sabine Braun drove all the way to Aandster to count Route 8. Mr. Klein again brought his support team and Christiane Berker provided a group for the Kwessiegat route. Wolwedans was, as always, fully involved with three teams.

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

Oryx numbers compared with June 2007 have decreased by a slight margin to an estimated 3,258, while the springbok population increased significantly to an estimated 12,451.

Objective 2: Wildlife Distribution

Wildlife was observed to have been evenly distributed throughout the Reserve due to the excellent overall grass cover as a result of the good but late rains. Large oryx numbers were reported shortly before the count from within the Namib Naukluft Park (NNP). As the rains arrived late and occurred well into the NNP, many animals, especially the oryx, remained in the park for a longer time. The usual migration to the east observed in previous years was only in its beginning stages at the time of the count. In general fewer herds were seen, but many territorial bulls were observed. The springbok population remained on the Reserve, especially in the Gorrasis Basin, and did not move as far into the NNP as the oryx did. Due to the late start of the migration some of the more western lying routes have seen significantly more animals than in previous years. For example, there was an almost 90% increase in animals counted per 100km driven as compared to 2007 on Route 3 (Kwessigat area).

Objective 3: Population Change

Although there was fluctuation in total numbers of certain species, the total number of animals showed no change in comparison with 2007 results. While some participants this year might have expected more animals on their routes, other routes made up for this by having a much higher count than in previous years.

Even though great variations are observed on the routes, it is quite interesting to see that the overall wildlife trends are stable. Often it may appear that there is less wildlife, while the data shows a different trend. The percentage change between 2007 and 2008 is 0%. This trend illustrates that there is relative stability within our ecosystem.

While we are statistically seeing approximately the same amount of animals when we conduct a count, the population based on actual sightings is on the increase. This is to be expected with the continuously good rainfall years we have had.

To evaluate the impact on grazing we use biomass as a standardization between species, to compare oryx and

springbok numbers. We are beginning to see a trend in the correlation between the biomass of oryx and springbok. As the springbok biomass increases, the oryx biomass decreases and vice versa. This is determined by the carrying capacity of a piece of land. An area can support a total amount of biomass which can consist of a variety of different ratios between oryx and springbok.

At the moment NRNR can still sustain the current population of animals we have. As we open up fences to neighboring farms, thereby increasing the total area, the animals can also migrate and disperse in leaner years, which is the expectation in a desert environment.

NamibRand would like to thank everybody who participated in the annual game count this year. Your participation ensured the success of this year's count. We look forward to the 2009 count and its results.

Andreas Keding

Fig. 1 – Total number of animals seen per 100km (Note there is no change compared to last year)

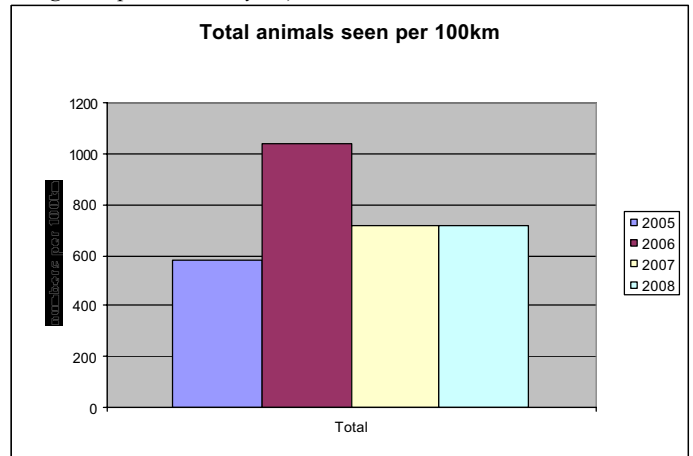


Fig 2. – Total population estimates

Total Numbers Of Game			
Species	No. Seen Under 500m	No. Corrected for Area	Total No. Corrected for Species June 2008
Gemsbok	636	2,327	3,258
Springbok	1,974	7,782	12,451
Kudu	6	29	75
Steenbok	4	17	174
Burchell's Zebra	116	556	668
Ostrich	61	238	262
Blesbok*	8		20
Red Hartebeest*	28		80
Total	2,833	10,950	16,988
*population known			



Giraffe Herd Doubles

NamibRand's original group of three giraffe, re-introduced to the Reserve in 2003, expanded its numbers with the birth of two female calves in late 2006. As Tate, our lone male, was seriously outnumbered and to

increase the genetic diversity of the herd, an additional two males and one female giraffe were introduced in late April 2008.

These newcomers arrived on a specially built truck from the Stampriet area. Staff from African Wildlife Services arrived with the giraffe at Keerweder late on the night of 28 April. The long-necked travelers spent the night in the truck at the homestead and once the sun rose, were very curious about their new home. NamibRand staff prepared a temporary holding boma near the Porcupine waterpoint on Draaihoek which the giraffe were



Giraffe transport parked at Keerweder.

Photo: N. Odendaal

released into early on the morning of 29 April. The new giraffe are all two to three years old and were very hesitant to leave the safety of their transport truck. Once they clambered out into the boma they spent the day acclimatizing to the Reserve and recovering from their journey.

The newcomers were released into the wild that same day at dusk and calmly left the temporary boma for their permanent home. The following morning, Reserve staff helped the meet-and-greet process by herding the youngsters towards the existing giraffe herd. The two groups bonded rapidly and the radio collar, fitted to the young female to monitor and control their movements in case of flight, was thankfully not needed. This collar was removed in early September.



Photo: N. Odendaal

Giraffe leave the temporary boma for their new home.

While the new giraffe were being closely monitored, a guide from Wolwedans reported sighting a giraffe calf. Upon further investigation from Reserve staff this sighting was confirmed on 3 June and it was

established that the other older female was also pregnant. This second calf was born six weeks later on (or around) 27 July.

Carrying capacity estimates have determined that the area can support a herd of approximately 15 adult giraffe. Although the area is well vegetated and large enough for more, drought and leaner years need to be taken into consideration to ensure healthy survival of the herd. As the herd will naturally expand, plans are being considered to re-locate a portion of the group to the southern part of the Reserve.

In the span of three months, our small group of giraffe doubled

into a herd of ten individuals. All the giraffe are continuing to thrive in their northeastern corner of the Reserve.

Danica Shaw & Nils Odendaal



Photo: G. Tucker

One of the new calves.

Fire Season

Fire can affect the entire community of an area - fires in the Namib burn fast and can spread over several thousand hectares within a short time span. Our farming neighbors rely on grass for their livelihood. If a fire breaks out, you can count on the entire "neighbourhood" pitching up to combat the fire. While a lightning strikes may start a grass fire, it is the unpredictable and very strong winds that come with rainy weather that can suddenly turn an harmless situation bad. These winds can blow up to 40km per hour and this is then the speed the fire front will move. Although fires are a natural part of the environment it is very dangerous and hazardous to just allow it to burn uncontrolled. One of the reasons for us to combat fires is that neighboring farms can take legal action if they see that a fire is allowed to spread onto their land without an effort to control it. NamibRand policy is to try and minimise harm and reduce risk to property by fire.

The first two fires which occurred this year before October, were caused by human error on neighbouring land. We helped fight these two fires and no serious damage to infrastructure took place.

The end of October saw a week of rain clouds and thunder storms coming in over Namibia - a big concern for all farmers and land managers. The tremendous amounts of grass from the good rains this year and the tendency it has to combust when hit by lightning creates a potentially dangerous situation for the area. NamibRand was hit by its first and only fire to date on Saturday the 25th October. Lightning struck the north side of the Horseshoe Mountain and smoke was reported by Tok Tokkie. A few minutes before the report came through, we had been asked to assist with a fire on neighboring land and had already loaded our tanks. A Wolwedans transfer from Boulders had also seen the fire and had reacted quickly by dropping off three staff members while the vehicle fetched backup. These three men



(Continued on page 5)

(Continued from page 4)

contained the fire to the foot of the Horseshoe using their wet shirts as fire boppers (a bopper is a wet cloth, rag, piece of rubber or other device used to kill a grass burn by beating). When I arrived on the scene the wind had quieted down and the fire was slowly creeping up and around the mountain. Thanks to the much appreciated manpower that arrived a bit later from Wolwedans, Tok Tokkie and Keerweder, the fire was soon contained and under control. After making sure that the fire would not cause any harm the whole team was eager to help on the other reported fire. By this time the sun had set and luckily, as we arrived closer to the second fire, it had already been contained. It could be an interesting rainy season – so let's hope for the best.

Andreas Keding

Second Chances

NamibRand's resident cheetah population swelled to eight when a group of five male cheetahs from the Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF)



arrived at Keerweder on 20 July 2008. This move was the culmination of several years of discussion and a year of intense planning. CCF and Namib Rand worked closely with the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) to plan the release. This was the first time a structured re-introduction program has been attempted with previously captive animals.

The group consists of two sets of two brothers (Lindt and Cadbury and Kia and Ra) and another individual, Musharaf. Before their arrival on NamibRand the six-year-old male cheetahs were housed in a 50 ha camp at Amani Lodge, near Windhoek, for the past three years. They have been a part of CCF's long-term research studies and, as part of the transport process, were anaesthetised for sample collections to determine their overall health and genetics. At the same time all of the cheetah were fitted with monitoring collars – three with radio collars and two with a satellite-radio combination – to be able to closely monitor their movements and the adjustment to their new environment.

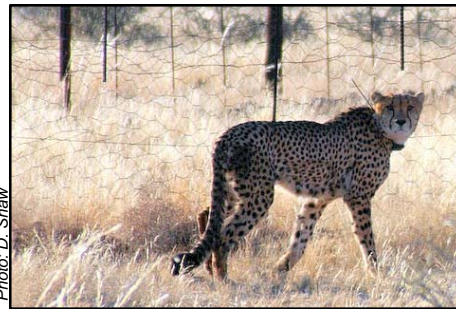
Upon arrival at NamibRand, the cheetahs were placed in a 2 ha holding pen near the Keerweder homestead. Just after sunrise on 28 July, NamibRand's newest group of cheetahs was released into the wild after six years in captivity.



Team preparing cheetah for release into holding boma after arrival on NamibRand.

The group of onlookers from NamibRand, the CCF, Amani Lodge and a film crew from the UK were expecting a long wait for the

cheetahs to leave their enclosure. However, with a bit of prompting by Olivier Houalet, their caretaker for the past three years at Amani, and Dr. Laurie Marker, they took their first steps to freedom.



Eagerly awaiting release.

All five cats moved swiftly up to the top of Dino Hill and surveyed their new home. From there they moved southeast to spend their first night in the foothills of the Nubib Mountains.

Although the cheetahs were constantly monitored over the next four weeks via their satellite and radio collars by a team of dedicated experts, we were unable to prevent their passage over the Nubib Mountains where they ventured onto commercial farming land. Unfortunately, this caused considerable distress to our neighbours, particularly when the cats decided to hone their hunting skills by killing two prize Damara stud rams. The farmer was compensated by CCF and NamibRand, however, the damage had been done. Even though the group killed the rams, they did not eat them nor hunt any other animals and were losing weight and condition. After a lot of deliberation, it was decided that the cheetahs should be brought back to the Reserve to ensure their continued safety, health and well being. They were darted on 23 August and returned to Keerweder.

A 50ha camp joining onto the existing holding boma was constructed behind Dino Hill and the cheetahs were given this larger camp to better acclimatize to the environment before a second release is attempted. This camp is the same size as their former home at Amani



Released and surveying their domain from Dino Hill.

Lodge and ensures that the cheetahs have sufficient space to be comfortable.

While this first attempt was not successful, the CCF/NamibRand team and the cheetahs themselves certainly learned a great deal through the experience. It is important to remember that this type of release has never been attempted before. A second release is now scheduled for early December. The cheetahs will again be closely monitored, with less direct contact and a smaller team. To prevent a second passage over the Nubib Mountains old fences have been repaired and staff will be placed in strategic locations if monitoring establishes that the cats are trying to venture over the mountains. We are optimistic that this second release attempt will be more successful and that these beautiful animals will find a permanent home here in the wide open spaces of NamibRand.

Danica Shaw



WWF Project Visits NamibRand

The Northern Great Plains or prairie of North America, covering an area of almost 73 million hectares, is one of the least protected places on Earth with a mere two percent under wildlife conservation. The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) has established the Northern Great Plains project to restore the great American prairie. The vision for this region spanning five states within the US and two Canadian provinces is to restore a “healthy and well-managed landscape that conserves all native species through a combination of conservation areas and ecologically sustainable agriculture.”

WWF seeks to achieve its conservation goals for the Northern Great Plains by working with and through several different projects and organizations. As part of this work, the WWF has undertaken to bring stakeholders on educational visits to Namibia. The first visit was in June 2007 when a small group made up of representatives from WWF, the Grassland Foundation and the University of Nebraska visited NamibRand. The group was thrilled about their experience on the Reserve.

This first visit was so successful that a second WWF group visited NamibRand on 19-20 June 2008 with representatives from WWF, the American Prairie Foundation, the Fort Belnap Indian Reservation and the Grassland Foundation. The group arrived early morning at Sossusvlei Mountain Lodge where they enjoyed tea and a presentation by Reserve staff. They then continued via nature drive to Wolwedans where they spent the afternoon exploring the dunes and over-nighted. A tour of the south was the schedule for the following day with a stop at NaDEET for tea and a presentation. After a picnic lunch at Boulders the group departed from Aandster.

The group thoroughly enjoyed their visit and experiencing our unique conservation project. During the rest of their time in Namibia they visited both commercial and communal conservancies, tourism ventures and met with numerous conservation specialists in Windhoek. These types of visits highlight the importance of building international linkages. Perhaps, more importantly, they emphasize the achievements of NamibRand as a private conservation initiative and our contribution to global conservation efforts. NamibRand looks forward to continued collaboration and exchange with the WWF and all its partners in the Northern Great Plains.

Danica Shaw



WWF-NGP group at NaDEET.

Photo: D. Shaw

2008 Game Capture Successful



In order to reduce grazing pressure on the environment, our resident and non-migrating Burchell’s zebra population has been reduced by 46 animals. A successful game capture operation was completed from 30 August to 3 September 2008. This work was done by Dr. H.O. Reuter and his team from African Wildlife Services.

As done in the past, a capture boma was constructed near the main road on the farm Verweg to facilitate the easy loading of animals onto transport trucks. The capture boma was designed in such a way that the walls of the enclosure were hidden by shrubs and natural cover, allowing the animals to be herded into the funnel shaped enclosure by a helicopter without noticing the canvas walls. Once inside the boma, a series of curtains were then closed behind the advancing animals to prevent them from turning around and escaping. People inside the boma helped herd the captured animals farther forward into the enclosure, so that they could be loaded onto the waiting trucks. Once on the trucks, the animals were tranquilized to calm them for the journey to their new home.

Care was taken to keep family groups of animals together both during the capture and on the trucks, so that their social framework would stay intact once offloaded at their new homes. The animals captures were transported to the following new owners / homes:

- 1) Joggie Briedenhann / Hartbeesloop = 11
- 2) Diethelm Metzger / Kamab = 17
- 3) Reiner Ling / Covdray = 7
- 4) Tangeni Erkana / Ovingi = 11

It was our intention to reduce the zebra population by approximately 50 animals so as to ensure that the remaining population would prosper in the area. Unfortunately two animals succumbed to capture myopathy and had to be euthanized. For the overall capture effort this is an acceptable loss as live capture operations typically factor in a loss rate of at least 5% of the total number of animals caught.

We estimate that approximately 200 Burchell’s zebra now remain on the Reserve, a sufficiently reduced population which can now be left to grow for four to five years.

The radio collar fitted to the female giraffe that arrived in April this year was also removed by veterinarian Dr. H.O. Reuter.

While we had the expertise of the game capture team on hand, Reserve management took a decision to cull the exotic blesbok



Helicopter herding zebra in the capture boma.

Photo: D. Shaw

(Continued on page 7)

(Continued from page 6)

on the Reserve. Blesbok are not indigenous to Namibia and the Reserve has wanted to remove them for some time. It did not prove economical to do a live capture of the blesbok, as the capture costs would have exceeded the potential income. The culling of animals is a less than ideal solution, however, the meat was put to good use to feed the ever-hungry cheetahs. A small number of blesbok were not removed as they could not be found at the time. Estimates now put this surviving population at seven individuals, comprised mostly of males. As the core breeding group has been removed, we are hopeful that these animals will not breed successfully.

Nils Odendaal



News @ NaDEET

November 2008

“Thank you so much for all of your hard work to make our visit to NaDEET a success. I was truly impressed by NaDEET as an organization and all of you as its staff. You are some of the hardest working, most energetic and most fun people I have met. I think the concept of NaDEET is brilliant and you are executing it beautifully.” Ms. Lucy Marcil, Peace Corps Volunteer, Catholic Aids Action, Walvis Bay

At the beginning of November, NaDEET Centre hosted its last group for the year. We have again proudly hosted 20 groups (approximately 700 children and adults) since February this year. It is wonderful and encouraging to receive such warm positive feedback as stated by Lucy Marcil above. At NaDEET, we strongly believe that we are all role models for sustainable living which includes having positive attitudes and working hard. One of the most gratifying aspects of our work is seeing happiness and satisfaction in the eyes of a child after a day of learning at the Centre.

This year many of our participants were from returnee schools. This included several schools that are funded on an annual basis. Sossusvlei Mountain Lodge, our northern most neighbour on NamibRand Nature Reserve, supported four classes again this year including three from the local schools Daweb J.S.S and WJD Cloete J.S.S. They also sponsored a group of learners from D.C. Frederick P.S. from Bethanie for the first time.



Photo: J. Hausiku

DC Frederick learners with environmental educator, Frederick Simasiku.

These children come from very poor backgrounds and education levels. Although NaDEET is only 250 km from Bethanie, it was the farthest that any of them had ever travelled. Even the driver had never travelled so far and took

more than 5 hours to complete the trip.

Access to vehicles and funding for transport remains a barrier for many schools in Namibia to visit NaDEET Centre. Thanks to the on-going transport support from the Wolwedans Foundation, Cambridge Primary School in Aranos has been able to continue to come to NaDEET Centre for the past several years.

“As usual the welcoming at NaDEET is always warm... [During the programme] the kids learn about their environment. Namibia needs scientists and with the foundation laid by NaDEET, the



Photo: S. Trappe

Learners from Walvis Bay Catholic Aids Action working hard on an activity.

nation and especially the rural areas are benefiting a lot.” Mr. Ismael Tuneeko, teacher Cambridge Primary School

To support our work at NaDEET Centre, we also produced two issues of the children’s magazine, the *Bush Telegraph*, in 2008. The first issue was sponsored by the Climate Change project of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism and the UNDP. The issue was such a success that the project has also commissioned a poster to accompany the *Bush Telegraph*. This poster will be finished early next year. The second issue was also funded via the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, but this time through the Namibian Coast Conservation and Management (NACOMA) Project. The issue focused on the Namibian Coast and was done in conjunction with the newly launched “Coastodian” logo. The *Bush Telegraph* continues to be distributed as the official children’s supplement of the Namibian Environment and Wildlife Society (NEWS)’s *Roan News*. It is also available as a downloadable file on our website – www.nadeet.org.

This year NaDEET once again partnered with NEWS to host an environmental essay contest. This year’s contest was held in the Erongo Region and was about the impacts of mining. The winning school from Walvis Bay won a free trip to NaDEET Centre which was sponsored by the Rössing Foundation and Langer Heinrich Mine. NaDEET and NEWS were both very excited to have such strong support from the mining industry for this contest. This contest also aims to alleviate the transport problems for schools.

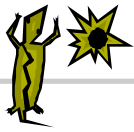
At the NaDEET base we have almost completed our renovation and improvement project. This construction project saw the addition of two more bedrooms, a new kitchen, dining room, communal recreation room and improvements to our existing bathrooms. This renovation project was an important step in NaDEET’s three year strategic plan which aims to have the organization stronger and more self-sustainable. We were also very fortunate to receive the support of the British High Commission and a private individual to fund a solar electricity system for our base. Previously we had relied on the electricity system of our neighbours, Tok Tokkie Trails, but with

(Continued on page 8)

(Continued from page 7)

increased usage, it was time for NaDEET to have its own system. We are now able to fully implement sustainable living in all aspects of our work.

Viktorija Keding



Sacred Nature

I have a friend who feels sometimes that the world is hostile to human life – he says it chills and kills us. But how could we be were it not for this planet that provided our very shape? Two conditions – gravity and a liveable temperature range between freezing and boiling – have given us fluids and flesh. The trees we climb and the ground we walk have given us five fingers and toes. The “place” (from the root *plat*, broad, spreading, flat) gave us far-seeing eyes, the streams and breezes gave us versatile tongues and whorly ears. The land gave us a stride, and the lake a dive. The amazement gave us our kind of mind. We should be thankful for that, and take nature’s stricter lessons with some grace.

Gary Snyder

*“The Place, The Region, The Commons”
The Practice of the Wild*

Aandster Receives New Solar System



In August, after long anticipation, Aandster received a new solar system to upgrade and overhaul its electrical facilities after many years of service. The old 36V system was a mixture of second hand and loaned equipment from various sources, installed by various people with various methods and materials. For sometime, Aandster had eight solar panels on loan from NaDEET which they needed returned this year. This and the urgent need to reduce on fossil fuel consumption triggered the planning and purchase of a brand new state of the art system which almost eliminates the need for a generator at Aandster. Several big changes were made to the system.

The old generator, probably older than the oldest inhabitant of Aandster, was sold due to the non-existence of spare parts. This was replaced by a reconditioned Hatz

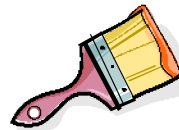


Photo: A. Keding

New solar panels at Aandster.

generator from Keerweder. This “new” generator came with a 24V charger for the new 24V battery bank and a 4000W inverter plus a new eight panel solar system was purchased. The old wind pump pipes and cylinder at the second Aandster borehole that was giving us constant trouble was removed and a Grundfos SQ Flex pump installed, which runs off the new system. All the Aandster inhabitants are very happy with the new system and Jakobus Kooper said “*Nou moet ons nie meer so baaie sukkel nie!*”

Andreas Keding



New House for Tsaobeb Family



Markus Tsaobeb is the NamibRand Nature Reserve’s longest resident. Born in January 1957 he grew up on the farm Vreemdlingspoort, where his father was employed at the time. After working for various farms on what was later to become the Reserve, he officially joined as a staff member in 1988. Initially based at Wolwedans, Markus moved to the old farmhouse at Verweg when the farm was purchased in 1994 . Since then Marcus and his family have been living in that house, which was hastily erected as a temporary shelter by the original owners in the early 1970’s. As the house was never meant as a long-term residence, it was not very well constructed and numerous repairs have had to be done over the years to keep it habitable.

The commissioning of the Research Centre at Toekoms meant that valuable equipment such as solar power systems and furniture is now housed there. This requires more security as the Centre is only occasionally occupied due to seasonal visits by scientists. The Reserve decided to build a new house for Markus and his family to the north of the existing houses at Toekoms. Two birds were killed with one stone by this move: Marcus gets a well deserved new house and a permanent presence at Toekoms increases the level of security at the homestead.

Work on the new house started in June 2008 and is now almost complete. In order to save costs, building took a bit longer than normal. The structure was built using the skills of a local brick layer from Maltahöhe with Reserve staff assisting when and where possible. The three bedroom house has a large kitchen and lounge area, a bathroom as well as a large covered veranda (*stoep*) with an attached outdoor cooking area. The house was built from the beginning with input and hard work from Markus and the rest of our staff with numerous responsibilities ranging from making the bricks, digging the foundations, driving building sand and many more. Although this building was slow going and had to be done in between normal Reserve work, the involvement of Markus and our staff has created a fierce pride in their work and a special interest in and ownership of the building.

We wish Markus and his family many happy years in their new home!

Nils Odendaal



2008 Research Season

This year's research schedule was quieter than last year, but no less productive. This season continued to explore the fairy circle mystery with old friends, NamibRand's starry skies were digitized and lizards danced for science.

Dr. Walter Tschinkel from Florida State University continued his research on fairy circles started in 2007 with a new study focused on the dynamic nature of fairy circles. As we know, fairy circles are dynamic – new circles develop while older circles can deteriorate and disappear. In order to establish a baseline for further studies, Dr. Tschinkel made use of the fairy circles adopted through the NamibRand Conservation Foundation's fairy circle project for two reasons:

1. People typically choose a well-formed and distinct circle to adopt.
2. All adopted circles have GPS coordinates.

The research, conducted by Mike and Ann Scott during March 2008, revisited each circle adopted. The Scotts evaluated the percentage of vegetation growth, measured the diameter and took photographs of each circle. This information was entered into a database and will form the basis of a long-term study.

Dr. Carl Albrecht continued his on-going research on fairy circles from a distance with the assistance of Reserve staff. We measured and photographed chosen circles and took soil samples which will be analyzed in South Africa.

A master's student from the University of Witwatersrand in South Africa visited the Reserve in March to conduct a behavioral study on the Namaqua chameleon (*Chamaeleo namaquensis*). Unfortunately, after only a few days of trying to locate specimens, he decided there were not enough animals for his research purposes and he returned to South Africa.

In late August and early September Bernd Pröschild, a night sky photographer from Germany visited the Reserve to photograph our starry skies. Mr. Pröschild's work forms part of The World at Night (TWAN). According to the official TWAN website (www.twanight.org) this special program, sponsored by UNESCO and the International Astronomical Union (IAU), seeks "to create and exhibit a collection of stunning photographs and time-lapse videos of the world's most beautiful and historic sites against a nighttime backdrop of stars, planets and celestial events. The eternally peaceful sky looks the same above all the landmarks and symbols of different nations and regions, attesting to the truly unified nature of Earth as a planet rather than an amalgam of human-designated territories."

While on the Reserve, Mr. Pröschild spent several very cold nights at the mercy of the elements, typically photographing for twelve or more hours. The results – both



still and time-lapse shots – are breathtaking and show a different side of the Reserve, one typically left to the nocturnal denizens of NamibRand.

The photographs and time-lapse videos of NamibRand will form part of an international travelling exhibition in 2009 and a virtual exhibition on the TWAN website. The still and time-lapse images captured on NamibRand are unfortunately much too large to email or to post to our website, although some of them can be viewed on the TWAN website under "Namib Desert."



Photo: B. Dworkin / M. Wilen

Wedge-snouted lizard (*Meroles cuneirostris*)

Dr. Barry Dworkin from Pennsylvania State University School of Medicine in the US and his wife, Maria Wilen from Uppsala University in Sweden, are currently on the Reserve researching homotopic (occurring at the same place on the body) conditioning in the Wedge-snouted lizard (*Meroles cuneirostris*). They are examining the thermal protective reflex (TPR), a withdrawal reflex, which organisms (including humans) exhibit when they come into contact with a hot surface. The TPR is exhibited in the Wedge-snouted lizard as its thermal dance. If this phase of the research goes well, they plan to return next year for a more in-depth neurophysiological analysis of this mechanism in the lizards. We wish them the best of luck as they capture and test lizards at Kwessiegat through the heat of summer.

The 2009 research season is shaping up and we look forward to working with all the researchers and students who help us understand NamibRand a bit more, whatever their specialty.

Danica Shaw

Black Harrier Sightings



In April while driving from Aandster towards the C27, I was complaining to my passenger about all the Lark-like Buntings flying out of the tall roadside grass and into our radiator. I suddenly saw a strange dark bird that seemed, on first impression, to be a small and slender Pale Chanting Goshawk. Looking against the rising sun it was difficult to see exactly what it was. The bird swooped low towards the ground and flew just above it for some time before swerving to the left and continuing on its path. I saw a white

(Continued on page 10)

(Continued from page 9)

rump, but also that the bird was black. I had not seen this bird before and tried to make as many mental notes as possible. Diving into the first bird book I found I came to the conclusion that it had to be a Black Harrier.

I incidentally saw Peter Bridgeford that same day and reported this sighting to him. He thought it very unusual and said in a Peter kind of way that he would say it wasn't possible unless I was 100% sure. This rocked my confidence to a certain degree until the next day when Nils Odendaal reported the same bird at the same place I had seen it. I had another sighting a few weeks later (it might have actually been the same bird) near Granite and then again two weeks later near Swartkoppie, where I managed to get a photo. The last reported sighting in the south was in June by myself and Mike and Ann Scott. Vernon Swanepoel from Sossusvlei Mountain Lodge reported several sightings between April and June in the north. One of Vernon's sightings was particularly interesting – he observed a Black Harrier chasing and catching a Lark-like Bunting. This was the first reported sighting of such an incident. Wolwedans reported regular sightings between Jagkop and the old campsite until July.

These sightings are exciting because the Black Harrier (*Circus maurus*) is an uncommon bird. While they do occur as far north as the Uniab Delta and the Hoanib flood plain, the most northern confirmed breeding site is at Port Nolloth in South Africa. According to the Sasol Bird Guide the Black Harrier is an "uncommon resident in the southwestern parts of its range, but outside the breeding season it wanders to the northern and central regions." So this is exactly what happened – it seems that some Harriers liked our region of the Namib this year and visited for a while.

The interesting sightings caught the attention of Dr. Rob Simmons of the FitzPatrick Institute at the University of Cape Town as the abundance of them was a bit out of the norm. The only other confirmed sighting on NamibRand was from 2000. As no Black Harrier nests have ever been reported from Namibia and given the number of sightings so close to the breeding season, we all hoped that with our grass cover/ rodent population this year the Harriers might have stayed and bred. Unfortunately, they disappeared from NamibRand and presumably went back to their normal breeding grounds. Too bad, but maybe next time.



Andreas Keding



Illustrations from: Newman's Birds of Southern Africa, K. Newman 1997.

Tourism and Economic Development Plan for NamibRand



As part of the process of developing a Tourism and Economic Development Plan (TEDP) for NamibRand Nature Reserve, a workshop was held at NaDEET on 16 September 2008. It was attended by 18 participants and facilitated by Dr. Chris Brown of the Namibia Nature Foundation. The workshop was based upon the results of a previous stakeholder meeting in Windhoek in April 2007, and aimed to set the scene for the next 10-15 years. The objectives of the workshop were to receive feedback from the stakeholder consultation process; discuss the feedback and various recommended options; and analyse the discussions to decide on the way forward. The results of the workshop will be presented to the Board, who will take the final decisions.

Key principles that emerged from the workshop were that stakeholders have shown a huge commitment to the conservation of NRNR, and that the interests and credibility of NRNR are the primary issue. The principle of expanding the activities of existing concessionaires is supported, as opposed to introducing new ones. The proposed developments are regarded as modest and slightly expanded, adding both value and diversity. Although rules and regulations are necessary, there is also a need for flexibility; procedures and systems should be reviewed regularly in order to promote transparency and inclusiveness. The present cohesiveness and spirit of collaboration should be maintained, and the "big picture values" kept in mind. Stakeholders may have different agendas but should show more tolerance as all are sharing and benefiting from the Reserve. In the interests of sustainability, any new developments or activities require Board approval; Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) with a focus on water/energy usage; sighting in an appropriate zone; and annual environmental/social audits.

In terms of fundamental issues, key proposals were to increase the total number of guest beds from 100 to 170 (1/1000 ha), keeping the maximum to 20 beds/locality; and also to look holistically at staff numbers, vehicle numbers and related impacts on the development footprint. Existing activities should be diversified in order to keep guests on the Reserve for longer periods, e.g: with walking/mule trails; multi-day trails and specialist activities (desert safaris/training). Proposed new developments include an upmarket fly camp by Sossusvlei Mountain Lodge (8 beds); a small villa/training facility (16 tourist beds) and family homestead (beds not part of tourist allocation) at Kwessiegat; a balloon camp, possibly combined with either of the above two options; a family villa at Wolwedans (6-8 beds, not part of tourist bed allocation); a BEE/community campsite near main road, run by the Reserve (20 beds); expanded bed-nights at Tok Tokkie (from 10 to 20

(Continued on page 11)

(Continued from page 10)

beds); a campsite at the Hideout (16 beds) and a (BEE) base camp plus small tented camp/lodge at Aandstêr (16 beds). New activities include a combined concession by the Reserve into NNP, possibly comprising 4x4 trails, walking/horse/mule trails, access to the Sossusvlei area and joint resource management. NaDEET in partnership with Reserve Management will develop an annual environmental and social audit system for the Reserve as a whole.

A final draft of the Tourism and Economic Development Plan is now being circulated for comments and corrections to all stakeholders. It is hoped that the final plan will be adopted by the NamibRand Nature Reserve Board of Directors at their next meeting set to take place in December 2008.

Mike and Ann Scott

*Mike and Ann Scott through their company, African Conservation Services, were hired to assist in developing the TEDP for NNR.

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
Networks in the US**



During our family holiday in the US this past September, we took the opportunity to re-connect with our WWF-Northern Great Plains colleagues – the American Prairie Foundation (APF) in Montana and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) headquarters in Washington, DC.

The American Prairie Foundation is embarking on a similar journey to the NamibRand Nature Reserve. The Foundation is in the process of purchasing commercial ranches and utilizing existing public land to establish a large conservation area bordering the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge in eastern Montana. “The mission of American Prairie Foundation is to create and manage a prairie-based wildlife reserve that, when combined with public lands already devoted to wildlife, will protect a unique natural habitat, provide lasting economic benefits, and improve public access to and enjoyment of the

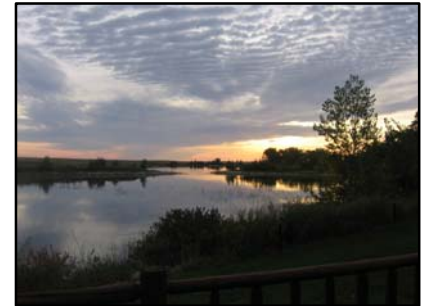


APF's bison herd

Photo: N. Odendaal

prairie landscape.” (www.americanprairie.com)

We had an opportunity to visit both field staff and directors on the American Prairie Reserve (APR) and to experience firsthand the workings of this ambitious conservation project. The beauty of the prairie and its wildlife was inspiring, especially the opportunity to experience their ever-growing herd of bison. Because our situations are so similar, this ongoing exchange gives both organizations the opportunity to share experiences and learn from each other. Visiting the APR was a truly wonderful experience and we would like to especially thank Sean Gerrity (APF President), Bill Willcutt (Wildlife & Reserve Manager) and the rest of the APF staff for all their hospitality.



Prairie sunrise

Photo: D. Shaw

In Washington, DC, at the invitation of Gina De Ferrari, WWF's Northern Great Plains coordinator, we were privileged to be able to address an interested audience from WWF, the US State Department, the US Forestry Service and other conservation organizations. This was an ideal networking opportunity for NamibRand and we will continue to foster a working relationship with these contacts in the international field of conservation. We would like to thank Ms. De Ferrari and the WWF for the opportunity to speak about NamibRand.

Danica Shaw

Expanding the Conservation Landscape

In hyper-arid ecosystems wildlife can only thrive in vast open systems. The larger the area, the higher the potential for the re-establishment of high game populations. Fences currently limit the migration potential of wildlife and in some cases even cause death to animals trying to cross.

In line with the NamibRand Nature Reserve's objective of re-establishing natural ecosystems and to further conservation in the area the Reserve is entering into collaborative, joint wildlife management initiatives. The NamibRand Nature Reserve has the opportunity to be the core of a proposed large conservation landscape and be seen as a model initiative, which helped to re-establish conservation in the southern Namib region.

This initiative is being achieved on two fronts:

The Pro-Namib Nature Conservancy

Several neighbouring farms to the south of NamibRand have conservation and low impact tourism as their primary land use and present an opportunity to form a nature conservancy.

A conservancy agreement has been signed with the farms Excelsior (8,090ha), owned by Drifters Safaris, and Dina (12,310ha), owned by a group of South Africans, headed by

(Continued on page 12)

(Continued from page 11)

Lydia Ellis. The Pro-Namib Conservancy (still to be officially registered) will be one of Namibia's largest freehold conservancies with an area of 192,600 ha.

The core purpose of this conservancy is to create a large and open area for the benefit of wildlife. No other rights, as are normally negotiated with freehold conservancies, such as traversing rights, access rights or hunting rights have been negotiated.

This conservancy is of particular importance to the Reserve as the conservancy area forms a larger buffer around the southern border of the NamibRand. This is important as we would eventually like to use the area to move some of our giraffe population there in a few years time with the knowledge that they will be "safe."

Several cheetahs and a leopard have also been released in the south of the Reserve by N/a 'an ku sê earlier this year, which would not have been possible without the co-operation and partnership we have fostered with these neighbours.



Greater Sossus-Namib Co-Management Area under the Private Protected Areas Association of Namibia (PAN)

The NamibRand Nature Reserve is a founding member of the Private Protected Areas Association of Namibia (PAN) and is actively promoting this collaborative initiative for the benefit of wildlife and a fence free Namib.

PAN comprises a membership of land owners and legal custodians who have come together to form a not-for-profit association to promote and facilitate sustainable landscape management, biodiversity protection and socio-economic growth, through the establishment and management of private protected areas, based on the philosophy and principles of sound conservation.

The vision of the Association is to promote, support and facilitate private protected areas in Namibia as relevant, viable and competitive forms of land use that address both national conservation and socio-economic development goals.

The purpose of the Association is to create a platform for members to communicate amongst themselves and with other professional bodies, share experiences, collaborate and build an increasingly professional membership for PAN management. Members will also engage in dialogue with government on issues of mutual interest and benefit, including that of collaboration and co-management across private – state protected area boundaries.

The main objectives of the Association are:

To support its members to wisely manage landscapes, ecosystems, catchments, biological diversity, wildlife and other

natural resources under their custodianship.

To facilitate highly professional, innovative and forward-looking approaches to protected area management and land uses such as eco- and nature tourism, education and research.

To establish communication and information sharing mechanisms between members and with other relevant professional bodies, and to disseminate good practices and new, innovative ideas.

To support the establishment of local "Chapters" of the Association where members form local co-management approaches to address issues that would benefit from cooperation, such as landscape and biodiversity management, removal by mutual consent of artificial barriers impeding the natural movement of wildlife, security and anti-poaching, monitoring and research, marketing of agreed Chapter attributes, etc.

To advocate on behalf of private protected areas, PAN and its members and to collect, analyse, interpret and disseminate socio-economic and ecological data and information that demonstrates the competitive advantage of private protected areas over other forms of land use.

To dialogue with government, primarily but not exclusively through the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, on issues of mutual interest and benefit, including on collaboration and co-management across private – state protected area boundaries, with the aim of, where appropriate, establishing strong public-private sector partnerships and useful institutional mechanisms.

Nils Odendaal & PAN

New NamibRand Weather Station at NaDEET

"Nothing has really happened until it has been recorded."

Virginia Woolf

A new automated weather station has been commissioned at the Die Duine homestead, under the care of NaDEET. Temperature, humidity, barometric pressure, wind speed and direction, ultraviolet ray intensity as well as rainfall are now digitally collected and stored by an Oregon Scientific WMR200 weather station.



(Continued on page 13)

“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”

(Continued from page 12)

Although we would have liked to install this equipment at the Centre itself, internet access is required and so the station has been installed at the NaDEET office. This will allow us to post data to the internet along with other established weather stations on the Reserve at www.namibrand.org/weather.htm. We hope to have the website portion of this new weather station up and running early next year.

The new equipment is under custodianship and will be operated and maintained by NaDEET.

Nils Odendaal

Damara Rockrunner on NamibRand



For some time now, Senior Ranger Andeas Keding, has heard the Damara Rockrunner in the gorge near the Boscia waterpoint east of the Keerweder homestead. A couple of years ago, he and Viktoria actually played the Rockrunner’s call in the area and it was answered. Unfortunately, he was never able to visually confirm their presence.

On 23 June, Wendi Haugh, a visiting birding enthusiast from the US hiked into the gorge and had a wonderful sighting of a pair. This unique sighting is exciting as the given distribution for the Damara Rockrunner is normally limited to central Namibia.



Nils Odendaal

Illustration from: Newman’s Birds of Southern Africa, K. Newman 1997.

Weather Report



The table below 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
Mar 08	36.8	13.3	32.6	18.1
Apr 08	32.9	6.8	29.7	11.8
May 08	32.6	0.0	27.0	6.3
Jun 08	28.9	-3.8	25.0	2.9
Jul 08	29.6	-3.5	23.9	4.0
Aug 08	31.8	-1.0	26.4	7.3
Sep 08	35.4	2.0	30.0	19.3
Oct 08	38.2	4.1	34.0	13.4
Nov 08	37.9	9.0	34.2	14.5

* Please note November 2008 figures include up to the 24th. Rainfall figures for 2008 will be included in the next issue of the Barking Gecko. The Reserve has received some rainfall in October and November—Keerweder has recorded 4.6mm. All inhabitants of NamibRand await the rainy season with great anticipation.

Thank You!

Many thanks to those of you who contributed to this issue of the Barking Gecko—Viktoria Keding, Florian Wiese, Mike & Ann Scott, Hermann Cloete, Andreas Keding, Nils Odendaal. Your input and stories are always appreciated!

Danica Shaw

Newsletter of the NamibRand Nature Reserve

Editor:
Danica Shaw
Environment & Research Warden
P.O. Box 131, Maltahöhe, Namibia
Phone: +264-63-683026
Email: info@namibrand.org



Windhoek Office
P.O. Box 40704

Website: www.namibrand.org

IF YOU WISH TO SUBSCRIBE TO “THE BARKING GECKO”, PLEASE CONTACT THE EDITOR AT THE ABOVE ADDRESS.