

THE BARKING GECKO



Newsletter of the NamibRand Nature Reserve



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Great Beginnings

As winter begins to steal in on the air and the green desert grass has faded to gold, there is much to report from NamibRand. We hope 2009 has started off as well for you as it has for all of us.

The Reserve's new predators are thriving. The five male cheetahs in the north are successfully hunting and eagerly awaiting female companionship, while the cheetahs and leopards in the south are well settled and maintaining healthy (and safe) ranges. Major staff changes have taken place, which will lead NamibRand into a new phase. NaDEET has been very busy hosting groups, publishing a new activity book and winning media awards. NamibRand participated in an international conference and shared its experience with fledgling private conservation areas. The Reserve hosted a top photojournalist and will be showcased in an upcoming issue of Africa Geographic. The 2008/09 rainy season gave our flora and fauna a big boost. Interesting bird activity has kept resident "twitchers" very busy and excited. All these stories and others are included in this latest issue of the Barking Gecko – we hope

there is something for everyone.

We would like to thank all our supporters: landowners, concessionaires, partners, neighbours and friends. Without your continued support of NamibRand and your dedication to conservation, our task would be much more daunting. As we continue to move forward in maintaining the Reserve and developing and expanding its impact in conservation circles, we are grateful for the strong foundations behind us. We are looking forward to the remainder of 2009 and to all that we hope to achieve together.

Danica Shaw

Cheetahs Achieve Hunting Success



It has been a long walk to freedom and independence for the five male cheetahs from the Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF) first released on NamibRand in July 2008.

After the challenges of the first release in July and subsequent recapture in August of 2008, the CCF/NamibRand team took some time to formulate a new plan based on the experiences and lessons learned the first time around. The main hope for the second release was that the group would remain in the area and begin to establish a more localised home range, rather than leaving the Reserve to disturb neighbours.

On 9 December 2008, the males ventured off into the wild once again. Their chances of success were augmented by the introduction of Misty and Rosy; two captive female cheetahs brought down from CCF, and placed into the enclosed camp just a few days before the release. These females have been integral in keeping

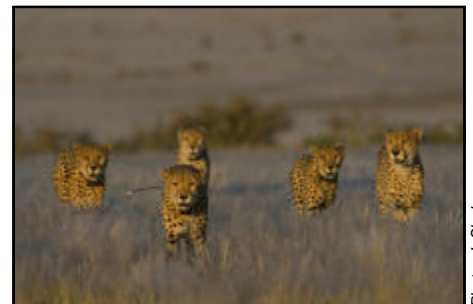


Photo: J. Siede

The five males—successful hunters at last.

the males in the Keerweder area. Although they are not suitable for release on NamibRand (Misty is almost 10 years old and Rosy is directly related to one of the males, Mushara) their

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presence is a continuing encouragement and draw for the males.

As far as their development into independent cheetahs is concerned, the males' progress has been inspiring. After some early hunting attempts, some successful others not so, the males finally decided in early February that supplementary feeding was not going to cut it any longer. From then on, the evolution of their hunting methods has been a key element to the research and information gathered by CCF. Instinct has played a major role in their advancement and slowly but surely their skills have improved to an almost "professional" cheetah level. Using the full potential of their range, the males have found a particular liking to the large Keerweder Pan, where the majority of their hunts take place.

Kia has been leading the others to the stage where supplementary feeding became a thing of the past in February. Interestingly, of all the kills witnessed, Kia has been the one actually making the kill, although it has been a team effort. They've developed strategies and other methods of hunting that have proved to be successful time and time again. While still far from pack hunting, their technique of chasing herds as opposed to individuals and working together has provided them with a much higher rate of success. They have acquired an interesting diet, mainly young oryx, which is still quite large-sized prey for a 60kg cheetah, but it provides days of nourishment for all five of the males. They've also had a few nice helpings of springbok, hartebeest and even a zebra! More recently, it appears as if Kia's success has finally started to rub off on the others and evidence has been found suggesting he's not the only one providing the group with a meal these days.



Photo: R. Thompson

Tisha and Shanti are offloaded on arrival at NamibRand.

New to the scene, two sibling females were brought down from CCF at the end of March, and are currently being primed for release. Ever since they were brought to Otjiwarongo at the end of 2006, Tisha and Shanti have

retained a wild streak that is now (in)famous amongst staff and volunteers alike at CCF. In a few weeks time, they will also be released into the wild and hopefully their rowdy dispositions will enable these young females to adapt quickly to their new home. They seem to be the perfect candidates and will also be closely monitored after release.

In addition to the intensive release and monitoring program for the previously captive cheetah from CCF, a family group of wild cheetah were also released in the Keerweder area on the 5th of January. This group consisted of a mother with three cubs, approximately 18 months old (two males, one female). Upon release near Keerweder, she and the cubs immediately made a large circular journey into the dunes, returning to the Keerweder area, where they were resident for several weeks.

Visual sightings confirmed that soon after arrival only two cubs remained with their mother. This is not unexpected as 18 months is the age at which they begin to separate. The two remaining cubs remained with the mother until March, at which time they also separated from her. The cubs were not collared, but the mother has a satellite collar and is regularly monitored this way. Since mid-April she has moved east over the mountains and is no longer on NamibRand.

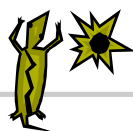


Photo: J. Slade

Cadbury and Mushara

The introduction of a cheetah population to this area of the NamibRand Nature Reserve has been beneficial for many other parties as well. The number of Lappet-faced and White-backed vultures in the area has been noticeably increasing, and overall scavenger numbers seem to be benefitting from the males' hunting successes. This is, of course, important for maintaining a balanced eco-system. Also, concessionaires have been encouraged to bring their guests out for cheetah viewing, where the message of conservation through education is enthusiastically passed on to people from around the globe. By informing people about the co-operative work done by the Cheetah Conservation Fund and the NamibRand Nature Reserve, the efforts of all parties involved will be noticed and the future of conservation, not to mention the success of Kia, Ra, Cadbury, Lindt and Mushara will continue to shine brightly.

James Slade, CCF



Sacred Nature

If I were to name the three most precious resources of life, I should say books, friends, and nature; and the greatest of these, at least the most constant and always at hand, is nature. Nature we always have with us, an inexhaustible storehouse of that which moves the heart, appeals to the mind, and fires the imagination – health to the body, a stimulus to the intellect, and joy to the soul. To the scientist nature is a storehouse of facts, laws, processes; to the artist she is a storehouse of pictures; to the poet she is a storehouse of images, fancies, a source of inspiration; to the moralist she is a storehouse of precepts and parables; to all she may be a source of knowledge and joy.

John Burroughs
"The Art of Seeing Things"



2008 and 2009 Rainfall Figures

Rainfall in 2008 was exceptional. 2009 got off to a late, but very good start as well, with almost every area receiving well over annual expectations between January and March alone. We hope that the high numbers will continue with the beginning of the next rainy season in late 2009.

Place	Total (mm) 2008	Total (mm) Jan/May 2009
Sossusvlei Mountain Lodge	244.5	212
Kwessiegat	152.5	143
Draaihoek	253.4	144
Keerweder	230	111
Toekoms	280.6	69
Wolwedans	252.4	88
NaDEET Centre	294.1	105.9
Die Duine	310.2	98
Gorrasis	176.5	108
Stellarine	241	79.5
Aandster	213	81

New Faces and New Directions



NamibRand's staff complement changed drastically in February and March of this year. New faces have joined the team while others have either moved on to new locations or completely new challenges.

New Windhoek Office

Nils Odendaal and Danica Shaw have moved to Windhoek in order to focus on the executive management of the NamibRand Nature Reserve. The Reserve has established a new office located at 36 Bismarck Street in Windhoek.

Working closely with Albi Bruckner, Nils now has the opportunity to fully assume the CEO responsibilities of the Reserve. With a base in Windhoek, we hope to strengthen NamibRand's partnerships with other environmental organizations and to increase our profile in the environmental sector.

Danica Shaw now works for the Reserve on a part time basis. New staff will share in taking over some of Danica's previous responsibilities. Remaining in her portfolio are the coordination of research on the Reserve, management of the NamibRand Conservation Foundation and the Research and Awareness Centre, production of the Barking Gecko newsletter as well as

other environmental and administrative duties.

New Wardens

We would like to welcome Mike and Ann Scott, our new wardens based at Keerweder, to the NamibRand Nature Reserve. After an initial hand over period in February, during which time Nils and Danica worked closely with Mike and Ann, they took over the day-to-day management of the Reserve on the 2nd of March.



Mike and Ann Scott

The Scotts have extensive experience in nature conservation, first in the employ of CapeNature where Mike was manager of De Hoop Nature Reserve in the Western Cape for 10 years, and thereafter as manager for the Overberg district. Prior to this he managed two freshwater fish hatcheries. At the same time Ann was employed by CapeNature's scientific services and communication sections. She also has previous experience in teaching.

Eventually, they moved into private conservation. On falling increasingly in love with Namibia they made a decision to relocate to Swakopmund in July 2003. As private conservationists they have been actively involved in compiling various management/nature-based tourism plans and related initiatives and in promoting conservation at a local level through bird-orientated working groups. Much of this work involves developing partnerships with conservancies, farmers and other local community representatives. In 2007, Ann earned her doctoral thesis on the conservation of the African Black Oystercatcher. They are currently coordinating the Namibia Blue Crane Project in the Etosha area and the NamPower/NNF Strategic Partnership on a national level.

We are thrilled that Mike and Ann have joined the NamibRand team. As NamibRand continues to promote and innovate private land conservation in Namibia, the Scotts will be an invaluable resource to achieving our strategic goals.

Farewell, but Thankfully, not Goodbye

Sadly, Andreas Keding has resigned as Senior Ranger at Aandstêr. Andreas decided to leave the Reserve to pursue a new position with NaDEET and a more integrated life with his family at Die Duine.



Andreas Keding

Andreas' last day as Senior Ranger was the 31st of March. He started his new job at NaDEET the very next day. Andreas has spent his first weeks

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upgrading the Wendy house at Die Duine into a suitable family home. Fortunately, Andreas has agreed to occasionally help the Reserve and our new ranger over the next couple of months to make the adjustment in the South go smoothly.

We would like to sincerely thank Andreas for his many years of hard work, dedication to NamibRand and supportive friendship. We wish him the best of luck and happiness in his new job and life with NaDEET. We are pleased he will still be part of the NamibRand community.

New Ranger

We would like to introduce our new ranger stationed at Aandstêr. Corris Kaapehi, who holds a National Diploma as well as a B-Tech in Nature Conservation, started work for the Reserve on the 14th of March 2009.



Corris Kaapehi

Corris is no stranger to NamibRand as he lived at Aandstêr in 2007. During that time he conducted research for Dr. Jane Watermann as part of a Southern African study on the ecology of the Cape ground squirrel (*Xerus inauris*). A paper on this work is due to be published later this year. While stationed on NamibRand, Corris also assisted the National Museum of Namibia by trapping large numbers of insects and arachnids for their collection. In 2008 he was employed by the museum to further this work. We are very interested in maintaining this link with the Museum and have encouraged Corris to continue his collections as well as a close working relationship with museum staff.

Corris was able to spend two weeks with Andreas Keding, completing a hand-over period and coming to grips with his new challenges. We welcome him to the NamibRand team and wish him all the best with his new position.

Nils Odendaal

Visit by Africa Geographic



Dr. Tim Jackson, zoologist, photographer and the Scientific Editor of Africa Geographic visited NamibRand from 15-20 March 2009. The purpose of his visit was to learn more about NamibRand in preparation for an article he is writing for the acclaimed magazine. Nils Odendaal spent time with Tim at Boulders. Both were present for the release of a female cheetah from N/a'an ku sê at Straussenwasser. During the remainder of his visit on NamibRand, Tim spent time with Hermann Cloete as well as Mike and Ann Scott, reaching all corners of the Reserve. His article is expected in the June 2009 issue of Africa Geographic. We are looking forward to the article and are excited about coverage in this award-winning conservation magazine.

Ann Scott



News @ NaDEET

NaDEET Centre

"I can only comment positively. It is an excellent programme which makes people more aware of the effects their everyday activities have on their environment. It is very inspirational towards sustainable living. Practical learning activities motivate all age groups. A very effective learning and living environment which promotes sustainable living." Mr. Mall from Sonop PS

Following the summer holidays, NaDEET Centre welcomed its first group of the year on 27 February 2009. The learners of Sonop Primary School from Mariental were the first to stay at the newly polished Centre. After the completion of the end-of-year maintenance procedures they also witnessed many changes to our educational programme.

At the end of 2008 NaDEET staff held a week long series of workshops focusing on NaDEET Centre and our environmental education programme. These meetings were aimed at better aligning the Centre's policies with NaDEET's Three-Year Strategic Plan and to add an even more interactive edge to our educational programme. Ideas for many fun, yet simultaneously valuable educational activities were developed. At the beginning of this year these ideas were finally developed into an array of activities which have been added to the programmes for different age groups. Some examples include the Waste Heat Experiment—a scientific experiment to compare the heat energy wasted by incandescent and compact fluorescent light bulbs, the Environmental Crisis Game—an audio-visual game matching sounds with environmental problems and finally the Measuring Our



Photo: S. Trappe

A learner from St. George's College investigating during the Waste Heat Experiment.

Environmental Footprint—information about the group's use of water, energy and waste is collected throughout the week and finally evaluated in the light of sustainable living.

A grant from the Royal Dutch Embassy to sponsor three groups from the Hardap Region including their transport has made it possible for NaDEET to focus its efforts on facilitating small rural schools to visit NaDEET Centre. Three of four visiting school groups to date this year were sponsored by this grant – Sonop PS from Mariental, Stampriet PS from Stampriet and St. Patrick's PS near Kalkrand. We were very satisfied with the general feedback we received from teachers, particularly referring to our hands-on, experimental approach of teaching and our cross-curricular involvement.

"Your interaction with the Namibian school curriculum was excellent. Almost all topics were discussed. You included some

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of the other subjects also which was great - Mathematics, Science, Craft, Home Ecology, English and Social Studies. I really think if this could be the way we could teach, the results would be much better. Learners had the theory and did the practical also.” Ms. Jossob from Sonop PS

Photo: S. Trappe



Environmental Educator Frederick Simasiku conducting the summary for the Measuring Our Enviro Footprint activity.

We are particularly pleased to announce that NaDEET Centre has already hosted several adult groups this year. These included the Safaris Unlimited Guide Training group, the second v o l u n t e e r conference of the “ w e l t w ä r t s ”

programme through the German Development Service (DED) in Namibia as well as our annual weekend outing of the Namibian Environment and Wildlife Society (NEWS) and the Botanical Society. As an environmental education organisation NaDEET is open to all interested groups no matter the age. Aside from attaining a perspective on sustainable living and education at NaDEET Centre adults are excellent vehicles for spreading the word of NaDEET throughout the country.

Environmental Literacy

We are thrilled to report that on 21 November 2008 NaDEET was among the proud recipients of the ‘Eco Media Awards Namibia 2008’. NaDEET was presented with the 1st prize Gold Award “for outstanding reporting on environmental subjects in the category of Publisher” to honour its contribution to environmental literacy through the youth-magazine *Bush Telegraph*. The prize, sponsored by Namibia Breweries, was awarded for the reporting in the 2008 issues “Climate Change” and “The Namibian Coast” (see the previous edition of *The Barking Gecko*). Viktoria Keding was present to receive the prize.

In addition, NaDEET has tackled a project that presents yet another milestone in the field of environmental literacy. We are proud to announce the upcoming release of our very first full activity book: *It’s Time To Change – Learning and Living For Nature*. True to its title, the book which is primarily designed for Namibian school children, offers 13 full pages of fun-filled activities in order to powerfully demonstrate the critical necessity for adopting a more sustainable lifestyle. It makes environmentalism come alive by illustrating solutions to environmental problems typical to Namibia and particularly focuses on the Namib Desert ecosystem. Readers are guided through the activities and information by the two main characters, Sustainable Sara and Addy the Horned Adder. While Sustainable Sara takes a critical look at many habits of the modern human; Addy the Horned Adder introduces the reader to the “lessons” we all can learn if we look to nature as a teacher. The book was written and developed by our director Viktoria Keding, who has previously produced an activity book

for the AfriCat Foundation. It was magnificently illustrated by Michelle Gaugler, a local artist from nearby Helmeringhausen. The first 5,000 copies have been printed with the generous sponsorship of Wilde Ganzen and deStEEN, two Netherlands-based organisations, and will be distributed to schoolchildren visiting NaDEET Centre as well as throughout the country.

Staff Changes

We are happy to welcome Andreas Keding back to the NaDEET team. In 2003, Andreas constructed the original NaDEET Centre. From March 2004-March 2009 he left NaDEET to follow his interest in nature conservation as senior ranger at NamibRand Nature Reserve. As NaDEET has grown over the past 5 years, our need for a technical expert has become acute. Together with personal needs of the Keding family, Andreas’ move back to NaDEET as Technical Director has come at the right time. He will work to improve and further implement NaDEET’s sustainable living technologies at NaDEET Centre and Base and begin work with communities on the practical application of sustainable living.

Capacity Building

The start of 2009 saw another addition to the NaDEET staff, Viktoria Endjala, a new Nature Conservation In-Service Training Student from the Polytechnic of Namibia. Vicky arrived in January and since then has made a profound contribution. NaDEET also hopes to gain knowledge from her research project “Comparison of Soil Movement in Vegetated and Non-Vegetated Areas” for the construction of buildings on sandy soils in the future.

Website

On a last note we would like to report on our website. It has been the project of our DED-weltwärts volunteer Stephan Trappe since his arrival in July last year. Since then the website has seen some major overhauls and is kept up to date with a current news story appearing at least a bi-monthly on the welcome page. We have also made it possible to download many of our resource materials such as the full collection of *Bush Telegraph* issues, our new activity book and all In-Service Training Student project reports available to date. Log on to <http://www.nadeet.org> to find out more.

Stephan Trappe



The cover of our new activity book.



Giraffe Goes Missing

In early February Keerweder junior staff reported that one member of our giraffe herd was missing. It was confirmed to be one of our original females and mother of one of the new, approximately six month old calves, born in 2008. According to our consulting veterinarian, giraffe calves can survive alone after about six months of age if necessary. It was advised that we play a waiting game for approximately ten days while closely monitoring the calf. Over the next week Reserve staff kept a very close eye on the young calf, monitoring its condition and hoping against hope that the mother might miraculously return. Unfortunately, she did not. However, we were relieved to see that the calf was eating, drinking and bonding with its other family members. Although it had a rough first week without its mother, the calf eventually managed to pull through and is now doing very well with the support of its family herd.

It is highly unlikely that the calf was abandoned and even though a thorough search covering a wide area was unable to locate any trace of the mother, it is suspected that she either became ill or perhaps fell and broke a leg in the mountainous areas around Draaihoek and Toskaan.

We were saddened to lose one of our old friends, but were extremely relieved that her offspring was both old enough and strong enough to overcome this loss.

Danica Shaw

New Releases and Ongoing Monitoring on NamibRand

Since January 2009, N/a'an ku sê have released an additional two cheetahs and one leopard onto NamibRand. The research team continues with tracking all the cats and gathering home range and activity data.

Carnivore releases are not an easy task and N/a'an ku sê has seen a varying degree of success in their releases. At this stage, where do we actually stand?

The first group of three cheetahs which was released in May 2008 has proven to be a complete success. The animals, two females and a male, have remained on conservation-friendly land only and regularly hunt springbok. Their nearly 780km² home range now includes the whole southern part of the Reserve between Schafsberg and Aandster as well as the adjacent farmland of Springbokvlakte, Exelsior and Saffier. These VHF-collared cheetahs have been sighted many times. Recently, a group of NamibRand guests was lucky enough to see them hunt a bat-eared fox at Straussenwasser.

On the other hand, a second group of cheetah had to be recaptured shortly after their release because they did not adapt to their new environment. They did not find the permanent water points in the area and also did not manage to catch prey.



Quite contrary to this scenario, a five year-old male leopard successfully found his way back into the wild on NamibRand in August 2008. The leopard first remained in the area between Schafsberg, Ysterwielnek and Gorrasis where he was released. He has since extended his home range deep into the Chowagas Mountains of the Namib-Naukluft Park. Because VHF signals are very hard to get from this elusive animal, often his presence can only be confirmed by spoor. He has a conspicuously larger toe on the right front foot. To locate the leopard in the future, N/a'an ku sê will mainly rely on aerial tracking conducted from a small aircraft. VHF signals are more easily obtained from a higher altitude.



Male leopard on his release.

Photo: N/a'an ku sê

Based on our tracking experiences in 2008 and to further improve post-release monitoring of cheetah and leopard on NamibRand, N/a'an ku sê has decided to employ GPS satellite collars with integrated VHF devices for animal tracking rather than VHF collars only.

The new technology has a major advantage – we can receive reliable GPS positions of the animals on a daily basis. The locations are transmitted via satellite and can be accessed by the researchers on any given day. Obviously, this makes it much easier to follow the cats' movements and assess their welfare.

In February 2009, a leopard female was the first to be released with a GPS collar. The leopard had been confiscated from appalling captive conditions by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism last year and N/a'an ku sê were tasked with her rehabilitation back into the wild.

She was finally set free from the transport cage just outside the Reserve in the Namib-Naukluft Park at Bushman Hill, but she quickly ventured off over the sand dunes to Losberg where she spent her first weeks of freedom. However, recently she has moved back closer to her release site and remains in the area of Ysterwielnek.

After three days of very intensive tracking, the female leopard was observed climbing a ridge near Ysterwielnek and appears to have settled in extremely well. Her immediate post-release home range already covers an area of approximately 620km². N/a'an ku sê's researchers also hope that she will now cross paths with the male leopard released in 2008 and that they will start breeding.

One month later, two cheetahs, a male and a female, were separately released onto the Reserve to further build up the initial cheetah population. Like the leopard female, both cheetahs were fitted with GPS satellite collars prior to their releases.

Sadly, the female died from yet undetermined reasons a couple of weeks after the release. This was a big surprise for the

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research team as she had been observed hunting springbok and drinking from water holes on several occasions. In addition, her local movements seemed absolutely natural. N/a'an ku sê are further investigating her death and a full autopsy will be carried out to establish the cause. When found, the cheetah showed no signs of malnutrition, dehydration, snake bites or any external injuries.



Photo: N/a'an ku sê

Male cheetah after release.

Similar to the unfortunate female, the male cheetah started hunting springbok successfully and found several of the permanent troughs on the Reserve. His story, however, has been extremely positive. After being released at Straussenwasser, the male progressively roamed

further north, eventually leaving the Reserve into the Namib-Naukluft Park. He even spent time around Sossusvlei for several days where one afternoon the researchers managed to observe him for longer than half an hour from no more than ten meters away.

As a whole, the majority of releases have been very successful and the learning continues. As the animals choose their own "wild way," N/a'an ku sê will continue following them. Together with the cheetahs released by CCF, N/a'an ku sê aspires to establish a healthy and viable breeding population of wild cheetah on NamibRand which can eventually sustain itself with a natural growth rate.

N/a'an ku sê would like to thank all NamibRand staff as well as James Slade of CCF for their tremendous support of our project.

NamibRand Participates in International Symposium

NamibRand Nature Reserve has recently had an opportunity to participate in an international conference on grassland conservation. The Grassland Foundation (www.grasslandfoundation.org) hosted its annual symposium "2009 Grasslands of the World" from 1 to 5 April in Lincoln, Nebraska in the mid-western United States. The meeting was well attended by local ranchers, government officials and members of the international conservation community. I was fortunate to be invited to participate in this conference and to deliver a key note paper.



Like grasslands worldwide, the Northern Great Plains in the United States faces a variety of threats and an uncertain future. A large scale government-led conservation effort such as a network of national parks or other publicly protected areas seems unlikely to develop. This has led to rising interest in potential private sector solutions. Fortunately, recent decades have witnessed an explosion of private conservation efforts worldwide resulting in an immense diversity of approaches and a growing body of lessons learned. This symposium positioned the Great Northern Plains in the context of the larger global private conservation trend. Using examples from Latin America, Africa, Australia, and elsewhere the aim of the conference was to review international private conservation developments, investigate creative private conservation approaches, and discuss potential applications to the Northern Great Plains.

The presentation on the NamibRand Nature Reserve was received well by all, but particularly by local ranchers. The practical aspects of NamibRand's history, management and financial independence as well as the lessons learned over many years provided ranchers with useful examples from which they can benefit in order to conserve and sustainably use their natural resources.

Other presentations included:

- *Global Developments in Private Conservation: Do They Apply to the Northern Great Plains?* by Jefferey Langholz, Ph.D., Monterey Institute of International Studies.
- *Conserving Mongolia's Grasslands: Challenges, Opportunities, and Lessons for America's Great Plains* by Richard Reading, Ph.D., Director of Conservation Biology, Denver Zoo.
- *The Worlds Temperate Grasslands: Towards a strategy for their Conservation and Protection* by Bill Henwood, International Task Force on Grassland Protected Areas, IUCN.
- *Key Issues of the Sustainability of Flooded Savannas in the Neotropics* by Almira Hoogesteyn, Ph.D., Independent Wildlife Researcher, South America.

A video of the NamibRand Nature Reserve presentation as delivered at the conference can be viewed online at <http://real.unl.edu:8080/asxgen/programs/misc/Grassland09-NilsOdendaal.wmv>

Participants were also fortunate to follow this meeting with a study tour and field trip to the Nebraska Sandhills, where we visited some innovative ranchers who are working towards integrating nature conservation into their livestock farming operations. For more

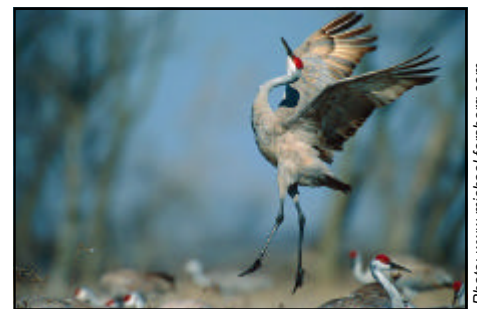


Photo: www.michaelforsberg.com

Sandhill Crane (*Grus canadensis*) dancing.

information visit www.switzerranch.com. Along the way were we also able to witness one of nature's greatest spectacles and

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view thousands of Sandhill cranes at their migration stop-over on the Platte River. Seeing these magnificent birds in such large numbers is a truly remarkable sight. Please visit www.ngpc.state.ne.us/wildlife/guides/migration/sandhill.asp for more information.

Overall, this was a very worthwhile experience. I feel that I learned a great deal from other participants and was able to share many of NamibRand's experiences in a valuable way. I would like to thank the Grassland Foundation for inviting me to attend and for completely financing my participation.

Nils Odendaal



Black Harriers in the Spotlight

Black Harriers (*Circus maurus*) are being reported fairly regularly on NamibRand (see *The Barking Gecko* November 2008, pp 9-10). This year a juvenile was seen at Aandstêr on 12 February and at the end of

March by Andreas Keding and on Stellarine on 15 March by his wife Viktoria. We had a good view of an adult circling close to the C27 road just west of Ysterkop on 17 March and then of an adult at the edge of Zebra Pan at sunset on the 19th. Andreas had two further sightings in April, namely on Farm Dina on 2 April and then at sunset on the Aandstêr airstrip on the 7th. An adult has also been seen several times at the quarry-pit near the Sandgrouse waterhole at Keerweder by James Slade and by the Scotts on 10 May.

What is so special and so interesting about these records? The Black Harrier is endemic to southern Africa, with the core of its population in the Western Cape and Free State provinces (Simmons & Brown 2006). Because of their reliance on mice populations which fluctuate with rainfall, harrier populations are also expected to fluctuate over time. The world population is estimated at less than 1500 birds, with a population of only <50 birds/5 pairs in Namibia, where it is classified as Endangered. In Namibia harriers make use of habitats such as desert floodplains and karoo scrub. The most northerly confirmed breeding site is near Kleinsee (19°S), in South Africa. Although there are no breeding records for the species in Namibia as yet, sightings of immature birds in the Hoanib and Uniab River floodplains by Steve Braine suggest that breeding could have occurred in both areas. Adults and immature birds have been seen by Dr. Rob Simmons just south of Grünau foraging over grasslands. This is an area that should be re-visited and checked for breeding. The recent sightings of juveniles on NamibRand are thus of particular interest.

How does one distinguish between a young Black Harrier (BH) and a young Southern Pale Chanting Goshawk (SPCG)? Morphologically they are very similar – both have long yellow legs, a white rump and barred tail, and a similar body size, manner of flying and fence perching. The differences are in the eye colour (dark in BH and pale in SPCG); the breast colour -

barred and rusty brown in SPCG; and especially the back colour which is very dark in the BH, contrasting with the pale unmarked underbelly.

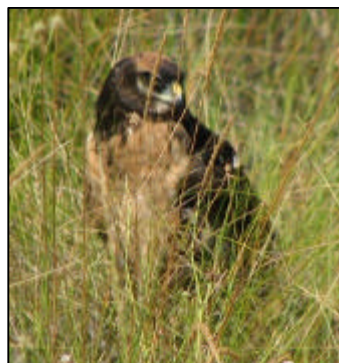
Dr Rob Simmons, acknowledged champion of this charismatic endemic species, has added our records to his data set and regards them as most valuable. He has used the sightings and some of our habitat photographs in talks to illustrate how useful they are for determining the unusual habitats that harriers visit. Rob reports that the first harrier in southern Africa was successfully satellite tagged on 11 October 2008. The tiny (12.5g) solar powered tag was attached to a breeding male on the West Coast. Further tagging is in the pipeline. Rob hopes that these tags will at least show us where the birds spend most of their time when not breeding.

Monitoring of Black Harrier populations in Namibia's north-western rivers and now at NamibRand as well is considered a priority, in particular to confirm whether breeding occurs (most likely in October-November). This is best done in wetter areas, at times when small mammals are abundant. Rob also suggests investigating roost sites for pellets in winter, which could confirm that the harriers are feeding on smaller birds. Black Harriers roost at sunset about 20 minutes before true dusk. They prefer rank grass, plentiful after good rains, and several individuals (up to five, but sometimes many more) often congregate together.

For further information on Black Harriers, please contact Rob at email Rob.Simmons@uct.ac.za. Postings of Black Harriers may be viewed on the Natural World website (www.natworld.org/blackharrier).

Ann & Mike Scott, Andreas Keding & Rob Simmons

Reference: Simmons R.E. & Brown C.J. 2006. Birds to watch in Namibia: Red, Rare and Endemic Species. Unpublished report, National Biodiversity Programme, Windhoek.



The juvenile Black Harrier (left) may be confused with the juvenile Southern Pale Chanting Goshawk (right).

Photos: R. Simmons

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.



Wolwedans Guides

Win Award

The guides at Wolwedans have always been strong supporters of the NamibRand Conservation Foundation's Adopt-a-Fairy-Circle Project. In 2008 alone, Wolwedans staff helped encouraged 67 of the total 75 adoptions of fairy circles. A third of the funds generated by the adoption of fairy circles is donated to NaDEET, a third to the NamibRand Desert Research and Awareness Centre and a third to other conservation and education projects.

Last year the trustees of the Conservation Foundation established the Conservationist of the Year award to be presented to the person who encourages the highest number of fairy circle adoptions. The award for 2008 was presented jointly to Wolwedans guides Charlton Goliath and Progress Kashandula. Mr. Goliath and Mr. Kashandula were presented with certificates and shared the prize of two books to further their guiding skills. The Foundation would like to congratulate both Mr. Goliath and Mr. Kashandula for their contributions and to sincerely thank all those who worked hard to promote the Adopt-a-Fairy-Circle Project this past year. Who will be the Conservationist of the Year for 2009?



Danica Shaw

We love our kind of work as it offers opportunities for combining all our interests including the conservation of wildlife and landscapes, birdwatching, people, travelling and exploring, creative writing and photography; and we hope that, in a small way, we can also contribute to the conservation goals of this remarkable nature reserve.

Ann & Mike Scott

The Changing Face of NamibRand

To date in 2009 Keerweder and Jagkop have had an average rainfall of 111.6 mm of rain. The majority of this rain this fell in February (92.8 mm), with 50 mm on the 8th.

The clothing of the landscape changed dramatically from green to greenish silver to silver to gold. Photos show Jagkop as viewed from Keerweder.

Ann Scott



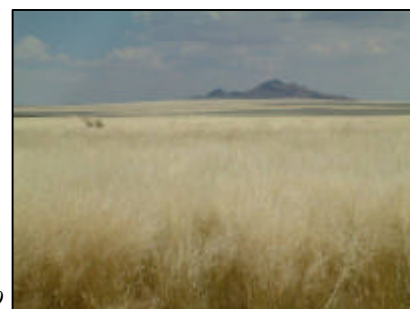
18 February 2009



4 March 2009



19 March 2009



11 April 2009

Photos: M. & A. Scott

Scotts Make NamibRand Home

Our move to NamibRand Nature Reserve in February-March 2009 is the culmination of a path which started in 1989, when we first began our many camping trips to Namibia from the Cape, regularly passing through the area and often stopping for a cup of coffee along the C27 at Bushmankoppie.

In April 2003 we first visited the Reserve properly for the Vulture Study Group AGM at Aandstêr, particularly memorable as the heavens opened spectacularly on the first night and nearly blew away a large marquee. We had made our acquaintance with Peter Bridgeford (our host, then working for NamibRand) through our mutual passion for vultures. As part of the programme we were taken on a field trip around the south, and there one of the participants from Zimbabwe summed it up: "I just can't get enough of this place and these landscapes!" Thereafter we joined Peter and his intrepid team on four October vulture ringing sorties in the Namib, staying over at Keerweder in October 2006.

In March 2008 we were able to get to know the Reserve more intimately while assisting with field work on the fairy circles. This was followed by work on the Tourism and Economic Development Plan (and Zonation Plan) during the second half of the year. In September 2008 we also assisted with the management of the Reserve during the absence of Nils and Danica, and by then our fate was sealed!



Desert Thoughts

A thousand fantasies
Begin to throng into my memory,
Of calling shapes, and beckoning shadows dire,
And airy tongues that syllable men's names
On sands and shores and desert wildernesses.

John Milton
1608-1674

From inaccessible mountain range by way of desert untrod
by human foot to the ends of the unknown seas, the breath
of the everlasting creative spirit is felt, rejoicing over every
speck of dust that hearkens to it and lives.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
1749-1832

New Adventures Ahead

I am Corris Kaapehi – a 26 year old, Herero-speaking guy, proud to refer to myself as the new ranger at the NamibRand Nature Reserve.

I graduated with a B-tech in Nature Conservation from the Polytechnic of Namibia and am just starting to pursue a career I love so much. After completing three years of a National Diploma in Nature Conservation at the Polytechnic in 2006, I got a job as a technician on the Ground Squirrel Project collecting data on the behaviour of Cape ground squirrels. This basically consisted of observing ground squirrels at their colonies and recording activities, behaviour and interaction. I did this work for about two and half years, of which 70% of the time I lived alone. I was based for a year at a privately owned farm in the southern Kalahari region, about 85km south of Dordabis. In 2007 I moved to the southern Namib where I stayed at Aandstêr with the same project until April 2008.

In order to keep sane in the desert observing squirrels day in and day out, I enrolled in the B-tech course in 2007. My research project focused on the Cape ground squirrel as a keystone species in the southern Namib. As part of my research I trapped small mammals, invertebrates and reptiles at sites where ground squirrels live and compared the results to sites without ground squirrels. For the remainder of 2008, I practically lived at the National Museum identifying the invertebrates I collected for my B-tech course research.

During my short life, the encounters I have had with animals and nature are so numerous that I could probably write an entire book about it. It all started with herding goats and sheep at the age of seven, hunting wild animals with dogs and 'assegai' at the age of ten and riding the savanna on horse and donkey back gathering our beloved cattle. I spent all this time in nature where I was born, raised and schooled, just south of the foot of

the great Waterberg.

In addition, my two and half years studying ground squirrels provided me with many shocking encounters – a puff adder and Cape cobra on the loose in the house, a porcupine in my bathroom and a brown hyena close to my camp at Aandster. Then there is also the night a porcupine came so close to me while I was sleeping that I woke up and mistook it for a hyena. I screamed so loud the dogs started barking 200m away at the Aandster house. And oh, there were the male ground squirrels I observed for days on end, I cannot even repeat what they do.

It is now 2009, and I am a proud ranger responsible for the general management of the southern section of NamibRand. Isn't that something? Seven weeks into the job and am liking it very much – pulling pipes, fighting fires, tracking cheetahs and leopard and getting stuck in the sand once. I have even spent some time in Maltahöhe procuring supplies. At Maraun's Garage I was unable to explain what type of engine oil I needed, the attendant suggested that I was the "Baas by Aandster" and totally clueless. Everyone started laughing and I kept hoping for a big hole in the floor to appear so I could escape from the embarrassment, but one never materialized.

Corris Kaapehi

Up the Losberg

On 11 March 2009 a small group set off to conquer the mighty Losberg, at 1978m the highest point on NamibRand. We were ably led by Andreas Keding, who has done the ascent several times. With us were Stephan Trappe a volunteer at NaDEET, and Andrea Rudminat a landscape ecology student from Germany, who is investigating the flora and geology of the area.

On the eastern side where we set off the altitude is around 1100m and one gains nearly 900m in height in reaching the top. This took five hours of heavy climbing over rocks and boulders, with little evidence of a path to follow. It was hot, and copious amounts of water were consumed *en route*. At the top a spectacular kaleidoscope of views in every direction awaited us. After the recent rains, beautiful wildflower displays and miniature succulent gardens were plentiful. We saw two family groups of three Verreaux's (Black) Eagles, some klipspringers, a large carnivore scat on top (possibly from the female leopard that is being tracked in the area?), some large (dead) white snails on the higher rocky slopes and a large Sociable Weaver nest in a quiver tree.

We took a different route on the way down, taking only three hours. My hiking boots had been threatening with mutiny for most of the way down, and half an hour from the parked



Photo: A. Scott

Spectacular views await those determined enough to reach the top.

(Continued on page 11)

Photo: A. Scott



The results of conquering the Losberg.

vehicle they finally collapsed.

Two days later Andrea, Paul Tsaobeb and I climbed "Loskoppie," a small foothill on the north-eastern side of Losberg (1319m high) and were rewarded once more with interesting plants, a Black-chested

Snake Eagle cruising by lazily, a Sociable Weaver nest in a moringa tree, three klipspringers and wonderful views of the greened dunes.

Ann Scott

Interesting Sightings

The past several months have provided Reserve inhabitants and visitors with interesting wildlife sightings.

Hermann Cloete found and photographed a tiny common quail chick close to the Keerweder Pan on 29 February 2009.



Photo: H. cloete

This little frog was heard calling after rain and found at the Keerweder homestead on 17 March 09 at 20h30. It is a Tremelo Sand Frog, which has been recorded in the Naukluft Mountains (Seely & Pallet 2008). This species has been seen and heard on Aandster after big rains as well as in the Nubib Mountains by Peter and Marilyn Bridgeford and Andreas and Viktoria Keding.



Photo: M. & A. Scott

From time to time during good rainy seasons, warthog appear on NamibRand. The warthog sightings on record for the NamibRand area as follows:

1. Three or four on Erfstuk around Easter in 2003 by Andreas Keding.
2. Three adults after the rains (March/April 2006) at Vista by Jackie Vlees; seen a week later going through the fence line over to Dina by Andreas Keding; reported a couple of times on Dina.

3. One (a male?) seen on Dina at the beginning of March 2009 by Andreas Keding.



Photo: H. Cloete

4. Two (large juveniles?) seen and photographed between Straussenwasser and Gorrasis on 15 March 2009 at about 08h00 by Hermann Cloete & Aldred Basson.

Vultures are seen regularly on the Reserve, and we are hoping that their numbers will grow with the recent increase in numbers of predators including cheetah and leopard. It will be interesting to see if any White-backed Vultures might breed here.

Among the high counts are the following sightings, all on 9 February 2009 (LFV = Lappet-faced Vulture; WBV = White-backed Vulture):

- Early morning: 27 LFV + 11 WBV near Satanskop (reported by Andreas Keding)
- 11h45: 12 LFV + 1 WBV at an oryx carcass believed to have been killed by a leopard, just west of Ysterkop (Scotts)
- 16h00: 24 LFV at a Boschia tree west of Zebra Pan (Scotts)



Photo: D. Shaw

Lappet-faced Vulture in flight at Sandgrouse waterpoint (Feb 2009).

This could give us a minimum estimate of 27-51 LFV + 11-12 WBV, depending on whether the group of 27 LFV observed at Satanskop in the morning could have moved up to the Zebra Pan area by 16h00; but there were 11 WBV with the Satanskop group and none with the Zebra Pan group.



Photo: H. Cloete

In early December 2008 Hermann Cloete and a group of Wolwedans guests witnessed an exciting encounter on the Keerweder Pan— a Cape ground squirrel colony defending its burrow against a Cape cobra.

“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”



NamibRand Picasso by Hermann Cloete.

Weather Report



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

* Please note May 2009 figures include

Month	Max	Min	Ave Max	Ave Min
Nov 08	38.3	9.0	34.3	15.5
Dec 08	39.5	9.4	35.4	19.6
Jan 09	40.5	11.4	35.4	17.0
Feb 09	39.9	17.7	33.2	20.6
Mar 09	36.7	8.9	33.4	16.3
Apr 09	35.7	1.6	32.0	14.1
May 09	30.1	2.4	25.5	6.6

up to the 17th.

Thank You!

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

Danica Shaw

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