



# THE BARKING GECKO

Newsletter of the NamibRand Nature Reserve



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Photo: Quintin Hartung

*A dazzling rainbow at Keerweder brings the promise of rain.*

## ***New Year heralded by early rains***

We would like to take this opportunity to wish you a happy and productive 2011. The new year has been accompanied by early rains throughout most of Namibia. After a blistering hot build-up with temperatures topping 40°C, NamibRand Nature Reserve has received its share of this benison, with up to 136 mm recorded in January (at Boscia). The landscape is already responding with bright flushes of green, which are quickly populated with game. With the promise of more rain to come, hopes are high for a good season.

This update on summer news and events is introduced by our CEO Nils Odendaal, with a special word of welcome to our new ranger, Quintin Hartung. Sadly, we take leave of Marc Dürr, well-known founder of Tok Tokkie Trails, conservationist and avid vulture ringer.

On the historical side, we start with the story of Albi Brückner's unique "Adopt-a-fairy-circle" Project, moving on to Belia van Lill (Bruwer's) happy reminiscences of early days at Stellarine (now the Family Hideout), the birth of the Wolwedans Collection and the grave of Maria Prins on Keerweder. Other concessionaire news includes an update on developments at Aandstêr, "sightings in fours" from Sossusvlei Desert Lodge and a visit by a Japanese film crew at Tok Tokkie Trails, while Magic Touch Films continues its investigation of the mysterious fairy circles.

We look at our endemic Dune Lark, wonderful sightings of leopards, wild cheetahs and other predators, a surprise twist in the adventures of Stompy the mountain zebra, an update on giraffes – with a new calf at Draaihoek. These items are capped by a variety of sightings and our photo gallery, contributed mainly by our readers.

Thank you all for your ongoing interest and these invaluable contributions. Please keep on sending them in!

*Ann Scott*     *A huge male leopard seen recently on Toskaan.*



Photo: Ian McCarthy

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## More on rain!

Early rains have fallen throughout most of Namibia. NamibRand has received its fair share, with a maximum of 136 mm recorded at Boscia for January, compared to 29 mm for the same period in 2010. Although the rainfall has been patchy and localized, as is usual for this hyper-arid habitat, the landscape is already responding with bright flushes of green, which are quickly populated with game. With the promise of more rain to come, we are hoping for a good season. Some of the available rainfall data for January 2011 are indicated below and in most cases, the figures are considerably higher than those for January 2010.

Ann Scott

Station	Jan. 2011	Jan. 2010
Moringa	52	28
Porcupine	115	42
Draaihoek	107	29
Cobra	77	33
Jagkop	56	28
Keerweder	79	54
Boscia	136	29
Toekoms	54	104
Horseshoe	46	
NaDEET Centre	90	45
NaDEET Base/Die Duine	116	33
Vista	74	
Aandstêr	44	
Gorrasis	62	
Satanskop	50	



Rapid vegetation changes after the rain at NamibRand in the south (above) and the north (below).

Photos: Jürgen Klein (bottom left) & Ann Scott

## News from the CEO

Best wishes for 2011! We genuinely hope that the new year will be a great year for everyone, both personally and professionally! The new year has started off with wonderful rains in the interior of Namibia and the NamibRand Nature Reserve has also received excellent rains in January. If predictions are anything to go by then this rainy season will once again be a bountiful one!

We welcome Quintin Hartung to the NamibRand family. In January 2011 Quintin was appointed as ranger for the Reserve. He will initially be based at Keerweder and will assist with the day to day management of the Reserve. His hands-on skills are particularly in demand and he will spend most of his time out in the field with our field rangers to assist and supervise some of the more technical conservation duties.

Quintin was the best overall Nature Conservation student at the Polytechnic of Namibia in 2009 and received a bursary contribution from the NamibRand Conservation Foundation for the past two years (see p4). In return for this financial aid, Quintin did his last in-service training with the NamibRand Nature Reserve from June to November 2010. We are happy to report that he has passed all his courses and is now a fully qualified and certified Nature Conservator. Several visiting researchers, staff and other stakeholders have commented



Quintin Hartung, NamibRand's new ranger.

Photo: Ann Scott



Rain showers over the Losberg Mountain (above), and the Losberg reflected in an almost full gravel pit near Sandgrouse (below).

Photos: Ann Scott

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(Continued from p2)

on Quintin's ever-friendly, helpful, enthusiastic and professional demeanour. The need to nurture and promote young professionals such as Quintin in Namibia is critical in helping to ensure that we continue to have competent custodians for our environment!

We also bid a sad farewell to Annelie Cloete who has been at the helm of the Sossusvlei Desert Lodge since June 2009. Marcelino Henckert who has been assisting Annelie for the past few months also moved to a new post at &Beyond at the end of January. Annelie and Marcelino are stalwart supporters of NamibRand and we will miss their valuable input at our regular Kgotla meetings!

Welcome to Dave and Megan Waddington who arrived in early January to take over the reins of the Sossusvlei Desert Lodge. We hope that you will enjoy living in our desert paradise and look forward to working with you! We also welcome back Dr Barry Dworkin and his wife Maria Wilén, who are furthering their research on thermoregulation in wedge-snouted lizards. Maria will also be conducting an archaeological study on the rock art sites at Vreemdelingspoort.

Nils Odendaal

## December 2010 Kgotla

On 2 December 2010 we had our last Kgotla for the year. It was held at the NaDEET Centre and was a huge success, with an almost 100% representation. NRNR wardens, Mike and Ann Scott led the proceedings and guided the participants through the different topics on the agenda, all of which were thoroughly discussed, and decisions were achieved with mutual agreement. After the formalities were settled, we all joined in for a group photograph. Refreshments were made available, compliments of NamibRand Nature Reserve. The NaDEET staff then treated us to a wonderful solar cooked dinner, and we gathered around a small fire to socialize. A heartfelt thank you goes to NaDEET for hosting the event and to all who attended the meeting.

Quintin Hartung



Photo: Kolja Lichtenhaefer

The December 2010 Kgotla at NaDEET was well represented by enthusiastic participants.

## NRNR staff news

### Staff Christmas party

On 4 December 2010 we had our annual NamibRand Nature Reserve staff party at Keerweder. Custodian and Chairman of the Board, Mr Albi Brückner and CEO Mr Nils Odendaal also attended the event. Nils did the welcoming and Mr Brückner gave the field rangers a motivational speech to prepare them for a desired



Photos: Ann Scott

NamibRand staff and their families enjoy their Christmas get-together, with beautiful singing by the children.

in to sing a few lovely Christmas songs, after which Nils Odendaal on behalf of the NamibRand Nature Reserve gave each field ranger a Christmas gift and an extra gift for the year's hard work. After the gifts were given out, we sat down for a tasty lunch, which the wives of the field rangers had helped us prepare. A special thank you goes to Mr Albi Bruckner and Nils Odendaal for attending the get-together and to Mike and Ann Scott for organising the event, and to all those who prepared the food.

Quintin Hartung

### Children's awards

Readers will be interested to hear that two of the NamibRand staff children, Josleen Hansen (Grade 2) and Jacqueline Rooi (Grade 1), each won an award for their Environmental Studies at Daweb Abraham Tsaobeb and Sara Tsaobes; and Combined School, Maltahöhe in December 2010. Well done to these two aspirant nature conservationists and their parents!



Photo: Ann Scott

Left: Josleen Hansen and her proud parents, Abraham Tsaobeb and Sara Tsaobes; and (right) Jacqueline Rooi and her mother,

Ann Scott



"Bizzy Jizzies" by Hermann Cloete

## In memory of Marc Dürr



*Marc Dürr sharing the secrets of NamibRand, on Tok Tokkie Trails.*

On 27 October 2010 Marc Dürr passed away, following many years of fighting an incurable cancer disease with admirable courage and hope. Marc was one of the cornerstones of the NRNR Project through pioneering during the 1990s the then novelty of guided dunes and desert walks under the name of Tok Tokkie Trails, which - to this day - enjoy the support of nature lovers from all over the world. It was on NamibRand that Marc identified his first hobby of hot-air ballooning under the supervision and guidance of Eric Hesemans and which he practised for many

years. There too he discovered his love for endangered species, especially vultures, which he ringed and thereafter monitored together with his friends and colleagues on NRNR at the time, Peter and Marilyn Bridgeford. He was the loving and caring father of his two children, Sheena and Craig, with whom he spent much of his time during his last years, together with his wife Elinor.

To Elinor, Sheena and Craig we extend our sympathy in this time of sorrow and wish them strength in the future.

*Albi Brückner  
(together with the NamibRand "family")*

## **"Mystery" supports nature conservation, environmental awareness and education!**



How can "mystery" support conservation? Simply by adopting "fairy circles" on the NamibRand Nature Reserve! Fortunately, the origin of the so-called fairy circles remains a mystery until today and - hopefully - for many more years to come, although a number of scientists have been trying for years to establish their origin, coming up with a number of different answers, ranging from termite mounds to

zebra dust baths or even UFO landing sites.

1990 saw the NamibRand Nature Reserve (NRNR) Project still very much in its infancy, while the NaDEET (the Namib Desert Environmental Education Trust) Project had not even been visualized at the time. Another need for NRNR, respectively its initiator, was to raise funds for the purpose of acquiring adjoining farmland which had been identified for incorporation into the NRNR conservancy area. Lastly, the concept of raising these funds had to be ingenious in order to attract the attention of people with open minds to - in those times - somewhat unusual projects.

Originally the idea was to offer identified 50 hectare pieces of land to conservation-minded people who would not hesitate to pay a somewhat exorbitant price for that ("their") land. To make these transactions legally watertight - e.g. to protect that land against possible later claims of ownership from whomever (e.g. heirs) - our legal advisors recommended against such a scheme.

After looking at a number of other options, the idea of "adoption" was born, whereby individual people are offered the opportunity to "adopt a fairy circle" of their choice. This circle is numbered and recorded by latitude and longitude under that person's name in NRNR's records, and physically marked by a small clay disc on site. Currently already seven people have buried the ashes of their loved-ones in "their" fairy circle. Also, every year in August a widowed lady from Berlin comes to Wolwedans to spend time with her deceased husband on their adopted fairy circle.

Since 1999 well over 800 fairy circles have been adopted by people, who have visited NRNR from all over the world and who associate themselves with the aims and objectives of NamibRand. This represents a cash contribution in excess of N\$300,000 (equal to some USD 45,000 or EUR 30,000). Presently, the cost of "adopting" a fairy circle is N\$500 (USD70 or EUR50). Already in 1997 the NamibRand Conservation Foundation (NRCF) was founded to receive donations and grants to be applied in support of nature conservation, environmental awareness and education. The NRCF is controlled by independent Trustees. When the project "Adopt-a-fairy circle on NamibRand" got off the ground in 1999, NRCF became the indicated administrator thereof. Apart from contributing N\$60,000 towards NaDEET's costs of setting up their training centre on the farm "Die Duine", 30% of NRCF's annual income is donated to NaDEET to contribute towards their operating expenses. The balance of NRCF's income supports a number of other projects related to nature conservation and environmental awareness, education and research.

In conclusion, the NamibRand "family" says THANK YOU SO MUCH to all those who have supported the aims and objectives of NRNR in the past through the adoption of a fairy circle. It is our sincere hope that this will continue unabated into the far future.

*Albi Brückner (Custodian)*

*Ed. (note of clarification):*

*Funds raised by the NRCF are not used for the day-to-day management of NamibRand Nature Reserve, but for projects as chosen and approved for the NRCF's independent board of trustees.*



*Jeff and Linda Millington, from the United States, proudly stand on the fairy circle they "adopted" for their daughter, Virginia.*

Photo: Ann Scott

Photo: Beate Schumann



## ***Belia (van Lill) Bruwer revisits the Family Hideout***

This very touching guest book entry was written by Belia Bruwer (née van Lill), who grew up in the original farmhouse, now the NamibRand Family Hideout, which she visited in June 2010.

*Contributed by Mandy Bruckner*

28 June 2010

Dear Friends!

What shall I say ...? When I was a little girl of five, I moved with my dad, Attie, my mom, Aggie and my two sisters, Alida and Mart, to this dearest place. My father was farming here with karakul sheep, and before him his brother, Jacob, and before him my father's father, also called Jacob van Lill.

My parents created an oasis here, green and lush, amidst the arid desert! We had fruit, we had vegetables; my dad taught me to swim in the dam; here I learned to ride on my little bicycle ... a pink one. We had dogs, we had cats. Once our cat had her kittens underneath my bed ... more or less where the front door goes out on the patio from the lounge now! In the outer building I was always playing school with myself (my sisters were six and eleven years older than I). Constantly I was teaching my "class" there. Today I am a teacher ... To my delight the "braaiplek" (barbeque) is now very near to where my dad, a real lover of nature, animals, farming – a poet as well, was always braaiing "liewer" (liver) and "nier-tjies" (kidneys) and the crunchy "vetdermpie" (intestine). There we had wonderful evenings together with his brother, Andy, and his family, who stayed on Die Duine very nearby. Dad loved his gemsbokke, and never allowed hunters to mess around. Mom Aggie I will always admire for creating a real home for our family in this dear little house, turning the separator in the cooler herself, and making butter from the cream, cooking us marvellous meals day by day, always strong, even in sandstorms!



*This old picture of the Stellarine (Hideout) house was "extracted" by Nils Odendaal from the 1995 movie "Albi's Arche". The Hideout was renovated by the Brückner family in 1999.*



*Photo: The Family Hideout*

*The "Duinehuisie" has been beautifully renovated and is now known as the Family Hideout. Note the large, attractive verandah.*

Often many visitors were received here, especially during June. Dad used to scare them by driving most skillfully over the dunes in his own 4x4 roads which are still used today, visitors screaming at the



*Photo: The Family Hideout*

*The original "Duinehuisie" (dune house) in 1995.*

back of his Land Rover! We even had a "foefie-slide" in the dunes, our very own, built by Gerhard, husband of Alida, my eldest sister. We would sometimes always pack some oranges, biltong and "wors" (dried sausage) and off we went for the day into the dunes – enjoying ourselves in the quiet beauty of the Namib – my birth place, my beloved desert.

Today ... Dad and "Ousus" (sister) Alida are already gone to heaven. Mom Aggie turned 80 this year; Mart and I remember with tears of sadness, but also of laughter about the good old days. Mom and Dad's eight grandchildren, also grown-up by now, grew up with many anecdotes about "Die Duine" – as we also called Stellerine (The Hideout). For the first time in many years some of our family slept over again in our "Duinehuisie" (dune house). What a privilege granted to us by our almighty heavenly Father! How thankful I am for the Brückners who restored the house so beautifully! May God's special blessing always be on this place as many, many others come to share in the peace and tranquillity here.

Just one or two last thoughts as I sit and write here by the "olielampie" (paraffin lamp), which is still here after almost 49 years. The framework of the swing which Daddy built for me is still standing beside the house; the absolute symbol of his love for me! And the "donkey" (wood stove), of course ... for regular hot water those days. Our voices are silent here now, but many others enjoy the beauty and rest here with laughter and delight.

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Now my husband and children have also met our old "Duinehuisie", as Mom called it, her "palace" ... The walls built by Grandfather and uncles are crumbling, but our memories will last for ever. Mom is not here to cater any more, and Dad's Land Rover is gone ... but we shall return D.V. to admire the beauty of God's creation! All honour to Him.

*Belia (van Lill) Bruwer & family*

## ***The history of the Wolwedans Collection***

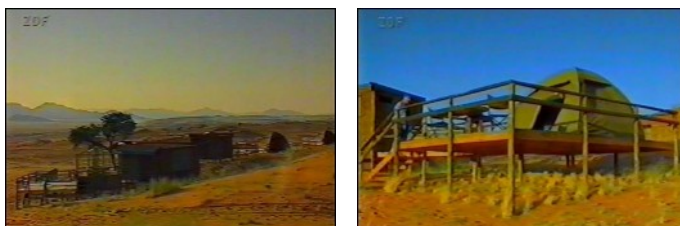
Wolwedans, or the Wolwedans Collection as it is now officially referred to, is operated by NamibRand Safaris (Pty) Ltd. Born out of the original NamibRand Nature Reserve concept of Albi Brückner, the Wolwedans tourism venture was started by his son Stephan Brückner. Stephan was only 13 years old when his father bought the first farm in the area. Growing up in Windhoek, he had ample time to visit the farm and camp on the dunes. Later Stephan went to Berlin to study economics and completed his Masters in Business Communications in the early eighties. Upon his return his father gave him the opportunity to develop a tourism-based business on their farm named Wolwedans. And so the story began.

What was initially only a rudimentary site for those visitors with a real spirit of adventure and a willingness to camp out in the wild, evolved into the first tented camp being built in the early nineties. Aptly named Dune Camp, it catered for a maximum of 12 guests and was situated on a 250 m-high dune about 3 km from the old Wolwedans farmhouse. Guests arrived at the farmhouse and were driven up to the lodge.

The nearest accessible water was extracted from a borehole at the farmhouse. Another borehole was later sunk next to the first and, as all windmills were removed due to their negative visual impact, an electric pump was installed. Electricity is provided by a diesel generator at the farmhouse and currently runs for a few hours in the morning and afternoon. The electricity generated is used for the camps, to run the laundry



Photo: NamibRand Safaris



*The Dune Camp at Wolwedans: (above) as it is today, after renovations; and (below) in 1995—taken by Nils Odendaal from the movie "Albi's Arche".*

facility, the power tools of the carpentry department and the mechanic's workshop that services and maintains their 16-vehicle fleet. A massive set of 90 batteries and inverters was installed in the late nineties to power the then already extended farmhouse, office and staff accommodation. This area is now referred to as the Wolwedans Village. Since southern Namibia is very sparsely populated, it was never planned for the national power grid to extend beyond the small towns in the area. Of these, Maltahöhe is closest at 160 km, or just over two hours' drive from Wolwedans. Therefore the facilities evolved in such a way that the generator powers the farmhouse only, while all camps and lodges run on solar power for lighting and refrigeration, using gas for cooking. There are no power plugs at the camp and lodge sites, but the staff are happy to charge guests' camera batteries, etc. at the Wolwedans Village.

The Wolwedans Collection now consists of five small and elegant safari camps in the heart of NamibRand Nature Reserve and caters for a total of 44 guests, with different expectations and preferred levels of comfort. The intimate Dune Camp now caters for a maximum of 12 guests and has recently been refurbished.

*Carl Swart*

*Source: The Global Ecosphere Retreat Certification. An explorative study on how new adaptive sustainability management practices influence the strategic planning and management at Wolwedans, Namibia. Research Report, The Graduate School of Business, University of Cape Town by Carl J. Swart, December 2010.*



*Wolwedans Reception in 1995—taken by Nils Odendaal from the movie "Albi's Arche".*





*Ludwig's Bustard, captured in flight by Hermann Cloete.*

## News from Aandstêr



Photos: Peter & Franziska Woolfe

### **The story of Maria Prins's grave on Keerweder**

*NamibRand has long been puzzling about a grave at Boscia, on Keerweder. The wording on the stone indicates that Maria Prins was born on 2/5/31 and died on 14/12/56, at 25 years of age, with a text (Ps. 62 V2). There is a second, unmarked grave next to Maria's one. Erik Barnard has kindly been sleuthing its origins, and provides the feedback below.*

Daantjie Truter was a young boy when Maria Prins and her husband James were working for his father Johannes (who now lives in Windhoek). James was his father's farm help ("handlanger"), helping with the water drilling operations, the drilling rig ("boormasjien"), and was also responsible for doing the pelts of the karakul lambs as was the case in those days. They came from Swartkoppe, near Upington. It is an agricultural or irrigational area, consisting of farm lands under irrigation.

James's wife (Maria) died of tuberculosis (TB) and was buried at Boscia. James stayed on at Keerweder for another four years and then moved on to a farm, Soho, near Aranos. I think that wraps up that story quite substantially. Now that I have located Daantjie Truter I have more questions to ask him. He works at a mining concern at Otjisonondo, 240 km north of Windhoek.

Thanks again for your cooperation in this very interesting project.

*Erik Barnard*



Photo: Ann Scott

*Maria Prins's grave on Keerweder.*

Preparations at Aandstêr for it to become the new reception for clients staying at Boulders are well u n d e r w a y .

Renovations to the main house have transformed not only the house but the entire atmos-

phere of the Homestead. The garden area in front of the building is being developed and the lawn has recovered remarkably well. The airstrip has also been lengthened to accommodate larger planes. There are still a few more things that need to be done and then we will be ready to open the doors to welcome the first clients.

A new pipeline to the Swartkoppies tanks is currently being installed. It will replace the old 25 mm pipe with a 40 mm pipe, and hopefully give the delivery of water a significant boost, and reduce the all too often occurrence of air closing the system. The new pipe is being installed along the "middle-mannetjie" (centre) of the road in order to minimize impact and hopefully encourage the regrowth of vegetation along the centre. Double tracks look so much better than roads!

Our vegetable garden, although restricted to the area under the vines for the moment, has been keeping us supplied with lots of fresh organic produce. The fruit trees seem also to be responding to a little "TLC" (tender loving care) and look to give a good crop soon.

We have received some rain so far this season, ranging from 9mm to 20mm, a good start, but we shall need some follow up soon. Some places are developing a green tinge, around Groot Pomp and Straussenwasser particularly.

We wish everyone a fantastic 2011.

*Peter Woolfe*

## Japanese Film Team at Tok Tokkie Trails



Photos: Tok Tokkie Trails

*The Nippon Television Network Corporation filming at Tok Tokkie Trails.*

A film team from Nippon Television Network Corporation visited Tok Tokkie Trails in mid December 2010. The Japanese crew filmed for an animal show which is broadcast weekly in Japan. The highly popular show

called, "Sekai no Hate Made Itte Q!" which can be translated as, "Travel to the ends of the Earth", attracts about 100 million viewers every week. The show lures a very broad audience to the television. From old to young, whole families in Japan want to follow the main character of the show, a girl named Imoto Avako, on her trips out into the world to discover the fascinating cultures and animals of the earth.

At Tok Tokkie Trails at NamibRand Nature Reserve, Imoto discovers the amazing inhabitants of the Namib. The viewers of the show will certainly be amazed at the fantastic strategies the animals of the Namib have found for adapting to their life in the desert, where water is a scarce treasure and temperatures can be quite variable. Among the survival specialists filmed are the Grant's golden mole, the rarely seen Brain's blind legless skink, the white lady spider, different species of toktokkies (beetles) and Koch's barking gecko, to name a few.

Imoto, the heroine of the show, who has really big eyebrows and striking, irregular teeth, also spent a night out in the desert and experienced this unique feeling of endless calm surrounded by a pristine landscape. A Nintendo game, a comic and many merchandising items are available in Japan featuring Imoto's adventure's at the "ends of the Earth". Maybe a toktokkie from Namibia will soon also appear amongst them.

*Barbara Wayrauch*

**Tok Tokkie Trails** 

## 4 Leopards and 4 Moons

When visiting &Beyond Sossusvlei Desert Lodge, guests experience sheer solitude, romance and privacy. Scenic nature drives uncover the small creatures of the desert, and words simply cannot describe the surreal beauty of the landscape that unfolds around you. Safaris in the Namib Desert are an entirely different experience from a Big Five adventure in the Sabi Sand; however, guests recently staying at Sossusvlei Desert Lodge were thrilled to see four leopards in one day! There have been more and more frequent sightings of leopard and cheetah in NamibRand Nature Reserve. And not only that, but these guests also witnessed the four moons of Jupiter through the 12-inch telescope in our private observatory. What an incredible desert safari!

*Marcelino Henckert*



Photos: Christine & Henry Steven

*"We have travelled to a lot of places in Southern Africa especially to see leopard, but unfortunately did not find one. Luckily we have seen four leopards in one day during our stay at &Beyond Sossusvlei Desert Lodge!" (Christine & Henry Steven: &Beyond Guest Book)*

## Chasing fairies at NamibRand Nature Reserve

*Tales from the filming of the documentary, "The Mystery of the Fairy Circles", a co-production between [www.epofilm.com](http://www.epofilm.com) and [www.magictouchfilms.com](http://www.magictouchfilms.com).*

It was the fairies that brought the two of us to NamibRand Nature Reserve. We are making a film about fairy circles and the riddle of how they form. Despite the fact that several eminent scientists are working hard to solve the problem of what causes them, there still seems to be no definite answer to account for this strange and rather beautiful phenomenon. Ants and/or termites seem to be the most likely culprits but we have heard several other theories. A couple of the favourites were meteorite strikes or the Americans testing their secret laser weapons by firing at the Namibian desert

*(Continued on p9)*





Ian McCarthy and Wolfgang Knoepfler of Magic Touch Films are probing the mysteries of fairy circles.

(Continued from p8)

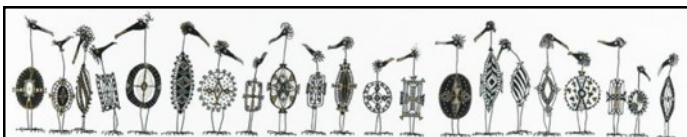
from space. One person (who spoke only under a guarantee of anonymity) confided in us that one moonlit night he had actually seen a small group of the fairy folk dancing in the light of the full moon in the centre of one of the circles. Apparently he was moved to tears by the beauty of their high clear voices as they sang. It wasn't long after that conversation that we had to carry him, snoring loudly, to his bed.

The beauty of NamibRand Nature Reserve and its wildlife deeply impressed both of us. Every dawn and dusk would find us out looking for things to film, and we found plenty. Bat-eared foxes rewarded our efforts and we got some beautiful shots of them feeding on termites in amongst the tussocks of dry grass. We were bemused one morning to see a Pale Chanting Goshawk running around on the ground pecking away like a farmyard chicken. It was only when I looked through my huge telephoto lens that I realised the goshawk was feeding on termites, pecking them up one by one.

We were very lucky (thanks to the sharp eyes of some of the rangers) to find a big male leopard and get some lovely shots of him sitting out the warmth of the morning at an outcrop called Cheetah Rocks (see page 1). Later on in the same morning I was filming termites and ants which were very active in the sun. Through the macro lens these tiny creatures' world was suddenly revealed in all its ferocity. We filmed ants mounting a raid on the termites and dragging them away to their nest, still fighting and struggling until they were butchered. They made the leopard look like a sweet and gentle pussy cat.

Our one disappointment was that we never managed to film the moonlit dancing of the fairy folk. But, we have not given up yet and we will be back in the rainy season 2011 at NamibRand Nature Reserve.

Ian McCarthy



## The Dune Lark – our own Namib endemic

The Dune Lark is the only bird that can truly be said to be resident in the central Namib sand dunes. For this reason, it is known as a "Namib endemic". It lives entirely on the dunes, moving only a short distance into the adjacent



The Dune Lark is a true Namib endemic, occurring nowhere else in the world.

interdune valleys. The Dune Lark is not known to drink water, relying on its food for its needs. It feeds on seeds of plants found on the dunes (e.g. *Stipagrostis* grasses) and insects that live in and close to these plants – ants, locusts, beetles, caterpillars and termites. Breeding takes place mostly in January and February, after rains. Chicks are fed almost entirely on insect material. The Dune Lark is normally solitary, or occurs in pairs or in small family groups. The species is territorial, the male advertising its territory by singing from the ground or an elevated perch or in aerial display, often circling over its territory. At NamibRand this attractive little bird is a delight to observe in the dune areas.

Ann Scott

Photo taken by a Hideout guest in November 2010: Paul Donald, RSPB - Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, UK.

Photograph contributed by Mandy Brückner

## Leopards in the limelight

Some of the recent sightings of leopards on NamibRand in 2010 include (1) a large male (photographed by Morris Gosling on 14 October 2010 [p10] and Ian McCarthy on 25 October 2010 [p1]), and (2) a female (photographed by Morris Gosling on 14 October 2010 [p10]) and a female and cub, or two cubs (photographed by Ann Scott on 8 November 2010 [p10]).

### Comments by Florian Weise (N/a'an ku sê):

"For the male, I did a facial cross-check with other leopards that I've worked with in the last three years and, based on that (using dimensions of cheek bones, skull width and height etc), I guess him to be 8-9 years old, he's certainly fully grown and in his prime and certainly beyond the 5-6 year mark when the face is still somewhat elongated; at seven years they usually start growing into the full width of the skull.

For the other two, my best guess right now is that what you've encountered could be a male and a female cub, hence the slight difference in facial development; but just as you say, it could well be a mother with one cub - the behavioural response to your arrival is only a rough indicator (*the individual*

(Continued on p10)

## N/a'an ku se research report for NRNR October/November 2010



For 2010, N/a'an ku sê concluded its field research activities on NRNR on 3 November. Simultaneously, the ten camera trap devices used for a pilot study in the southern part of the Reserve were demounted. Relevant image data from the camera trap pilot study

were submitted to NRNR management in November 2010. Moreover, Lappet-faced Vulture image data were submitted to Peter Bridgeford to aid vulture monitoring.

### Camera trap pilot study

Total sampling effort during the pilot study was 578 trap nights, using ten Rogue Stealth Cameras with infra-red flash and triggered by motion sensor. Camera positions were Ysterwielnek, Gorrasis, Straussenwasser, Dina border fence, Stone Circles, Prosopis, Vista, Horseshoe Waterpoint, Horseshoe Neck, Aandstêr and DDR.

### Mammalian carnivore species (no. of independent recordings) recorded during southern pilot study

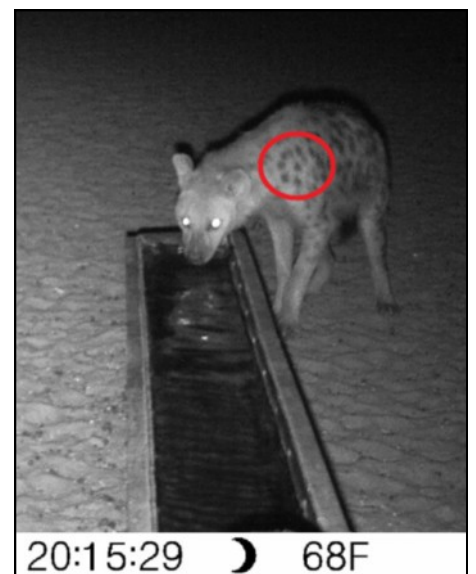
Aardwolf (4), African wild cat (2), bat-eared fox (17), black-backed jackal (59), Cape fox (27), leopard (3), slender mongoose (3), small-spotted genet (2), spotted hyaena (11), striped polecat (14); no cheetah or brown hyaena were recorded during the pilot study.

### Avian raptor species (no. of independent recordings) recorded during southern pilot study

Black Eagle (1), Black-breasted Snake-eagle (1), Booted Eagle (1), Lappet-faced Vulture (5), Martial Eagle (1), Secretarybird (7), Southern Pale Chanting Goshawk (1), Spotted Eagle Owl (7).

Camera trapping was considered a success, with ten mammalian carnivore species and eight avian raptor species recorded (see above). The largest group of spotted hyaenas observed was three, and five black-backed jackals. At Straussenwasser four Lappet-faced Vultures were recorded feeding on a hyaena kill. One specific hyaena was recorded several times at both Prosopis and Straussenwasser waterholes (see photo on right).

(Continued on p11)



Male spotted hyaena photographed on a camera trap at Prosopis on 25 September 2010 and 10 October 2010.

Photo: Morris Gosling



This large male leopard, estimated at 8-9 years old, also features in the photograph on page 1.

Photo: Morris Gosling



(Continued from p9)  
on the right ducked away while the one on the left remained relaxed).

Unfortunately as leopards vary vastly in character (our male and female cub here at N/a'an ku sê respond entirely differently to stimuli), it could mean that one is just a lot more nervous than the other (if they were two cubs). However, one would expect the mother to be more calm as she would have encountered people on several occasions already and be experienced with such situations."

Photo: Ann Scott



Above: Is this the same individual as one of the two below, which appear to be a female (left) and cub; or possibly two cubs?

On 28 January 2011, we were checking some spoor in the watercourse south-west of the Keerweder homestead with Quintin Hartung when all of a sudden a young leopard burst out from beneath an overhanging *Boscia* bush and bounded away.

This is a timeous reminder to us all that we need to be especially cautious, with these increasing numbers of large predators on the Reserve!

Ann & Mike Scott



(Continued from p10)

So far, this male remains the only hyaena for which spot pattern analysis was feasible. However, on a separate occasion, a pregnant female hyaena was recorded at Prosopis. Spotted hyaenas were recorded singly, in duos as well as in a pack of three. The latter were recorded feeding on an oryx kill at Straussenwasser over the course of three days.

#### **Carnivores (study animals)**

##### **N030 & N031 (Cheetah males)**

Male N030 was captured on Hammerstein on 18 October 2010. The animal was handed over to N/a'an ku sê and provided with water at Aandstêr. Subsequently, the male was released again at Vista waterhole and has since remained on the Reserve. The last ten locations of the male were around Straussenwasser and it was observed during two unsuccessful springbok hunts there. Previously, a springbok kill could be confirmed at Boscia waterhole. This particular male has covered a minimum distance of 1 127 km since release in June (interdownload GIS distance analysis). There is no new information on uncollared cheetah male N031 after the group split up shortly after release at Aandstêr.

N/a'an ku se would like to thank everybody at NamibRand Nature Reserve for excellent co-operation during 2010 and we wish everybody a Merry Christmas, Happy New Year and successful 2011!

*Florian Weise and the N/a'an ku se research team*

#### **Recent sightings of cheetahs**

Paulus, the foreman of Neuhoof Reserve (immediately to the east of Draaihoek/Toskaan), reported seeing a single cheetah with two cubs about 200 m from him near the Welverdiend/Neuhoof boundary on 5 January 2011, approximately 2 km north of the Neuhoof base. This is the same area in which Swen Bachran (the owner) saw five cheetah in late December 2010. I assume the cheetah would be a female accompanying the cubs and it would seem they in fact saw this female.

*Michael Beckingham*



Photo: Ann Scott

*Five uncollared (wild) cheetahs were spotted at Draaihoek on 31 December 2010!*

On 31 December 2010, NRNR field ranger Abraham Tsaobeb was excited to report five cheetahs feeding on a fresh springbok kill at Draaihoek. We subsequently confirmed that these were wild individuals, without collars – apparently three large juveniles and two adults (see photo bottom left of this page). It is encouraging to see that wild cheetahs are moving through the area and continuing to survive.

*Ann & Mike Scott*

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## **Mountain zebra Stompy abandons plains zebra and rejoins his own species!**

Readers of the last Barking Gecko may recall Stompy, who has become NamibRand's most famous mountain zebra through the dubious behaviour of associating with plains zebra. In the previous Barking Gecko article (Vol. 11 [2]) I discussed the conservation significance of this association because of the possibility for hybridization between mountain and plains zebra in NamibRand, something that we know can happen from events in the Kaross enclosure in Etosha National Park.

Well, the latest news about Stompy is that the prospects for hybridization are dramatically reduced because Stompy has rejoined his own species. The evidence for this comes from photographs taken by one of the camera traps being used to study the NamibRand mountain zebra population. These show Stompy visiting Hyaena Water in the north-west of the Reserve, in the company of another mountain zebra—not just once but repeatedly over at least three months up to October.

*(Continued on p12)*



Photo: Maria Wilén



*Above: Stompy at Kwessiegat in February 2010.*

*Below: Camera trap image of Stompy (left) visiting Hyaena Water in the company of another mountain zebra.*

(Continued from p7)

Not only is Stompy with a mountain zebra but his companion may be a young mare. Mountain zebra are not always easy to sex in camera trap images but this seems most likely. In any case, he was with the same companion over the three months and this new individual – not seen previously – has been given the less interesting name of NR181 (NamibRand/Right side/number; Stompy's real name by the way is NR001m – the 'm' is because his sex is known).

If NR181 is a mare, the new observations are doubly interesting. Mountain zebras sometimes chose mates in bachelor group which are joined by both young males and females when they leave their birth groups at around two years of age. So perhaps Stompy joined a bachelor group after leaving his plains zebra group, met NR181 there and has now left to form a breeding group with her.

Why did Stompy abandon his plains zebra companions and decide he was going to be a mountain zebra after all? It is probably relevant that he had a number of fighting injuries, so appeared to be coming out worst in combat with the dominant plain zebra stallion illustrated with Stompy in the last Barking Gecko. This is not surprising because plains zebra are significantly larger than mountain zebra and body size is an important factor in the outcome of contests. Perhaps Stompy eventually gave up after losing fights with one or more plains zebra stallions in competition for the mares in their breeding groups.

In any event, these observations record the first known case where a mountain zebra has joined a plains zebra group and then rejoined his own species, perhaps even starting his own breeding group. They also show the importance of following known individuals for understanding mate choice decisions and for assessing the chances of hybridization between the two zebra species in NamibRand.

Of course we do not know at this stage if Stompy will stay with his new companion (mate?) or if he will rejoin a plains zebra group. Watch this space!

*Dr Morris Gosling*

## Giraffe update



Photo: Dorothee Klein

*The tiny new giraffe calf with its mother at Draaihoek on 31 January 2011.*

We are pleased to report that a brand new giraffe calf was seen at Draaihoek by Jürgen and Dorothee Klein on 31 January 2011!

*Ann & Mike Scott*

All four young giraffe translocated to N/a'an ku sê Wildlife Sanctuary on 1 September 2010 (see The Barking Gecko Vol. 11 [2]) are doing well. The photograph on the right was taken by a Stealth Camera in December 2010.



*Florian Weise*



*Spectacular view from Sunset Boulevard (left), and plains zebras near Losberg (right; photos Ian McCarthy [Magic Touch Films]).*



## Interesting sightings and photo gallery

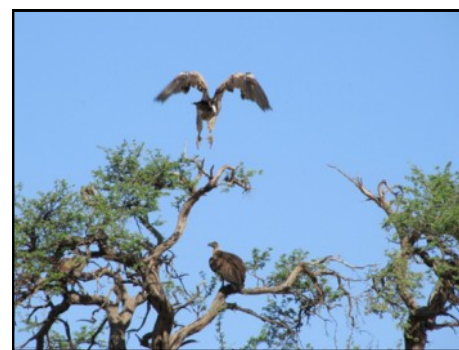
Thank you all for your interesting contributions—we invite your comments and assistance with species' identifications!



*NamibRand had its own spectacular "fireworks display" at Keerweder on Old Year's Eve (photos Ann Scott).*



*Unusual views of Lappet-faced Vultures near Satanskop in 4 mm of fog / rain on 22 January 2011—100 vultures in all (left); and White-backed Vultures (right) at Die Duine (photos Franziska Woolfe).*



*Bibron's gecko (photo Morris Gosling).*



*A magnificent Cape Cobras (photo Quintin Hartung).*



*Péringuey's adder (sidewinder) (photo Vinte Mendes).*



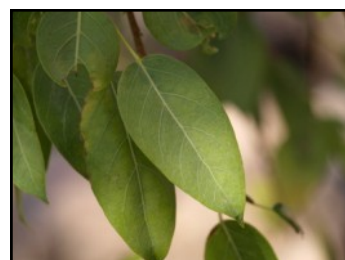
*This Egret came and paid us a short visit at Wolwedans after the lovely splash of rain (16mm) on 24 November 2010 (photo Vinte Mendes).*



*Secretarybird, N/a'an ku sê stealth camera (contributed by Florian Weise).*



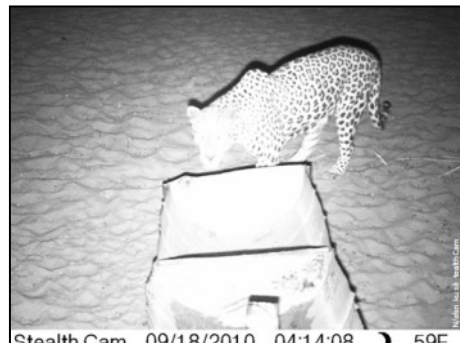
*Eurasian Oriole (female or juvenile?) at Keerweder (photo Ann Scott).*



*Ficus cordata (Namaqua rock-fig, haartvy, Hertzfeige): "strangled" trunk form (above; photo Ann Scott) and heart-shaped leaves (below; photo Sean Gibson).*



## More sightings and photographs



More treasures from N/a'an ku sê's stealth cameras: kudu at Gorrasis (left); the first evidence of spotted hyaenas hunting in a pack of three at NamibRand? (at Straussenwasser; centre) and a secretive leopard (right; contributed by Florian Weise).



Tadpoles of the marbled rubber frog at Draaihoek (photo Ann Scott).



Red velvet ticks make their bizarre appearance after rain (photo Ann Scott).



Variegated skink (above) and Western three-sided skink (below) (photos Ann Scott).

### Erratum: locality of armoured cricket

In the previous issue of The Barking Gecko, NaDEET submitted two photographs of an armoured cricket. The caption states (incorrectly) that they were taken on the foothills of the Losberg, whereas it was in fact found on the summit when Viktoria and Andreas Keding went there with some of their volunteer staff. Apologies for this error.

### Thank you

Many thanks to those of you who have contributed to providing articles for this issue of The Barking Gecko: Erik Barnard, Albi Brückner, Mandy Brückner, Morris Gosling, Quintin Hartung, Ian McCarthy, Nils Odendaal, Mike Scott, Carl Swart, Belia van Lill (Bruwer), Barbara Wayrauch, Florian Weise and Peter Woolfe; and to all those who have submitted interesting sightings and photographs, and provided editorial inputs. A special thank you to Nils Odendaal for his assistance with the production of this edition.

The Barking Gecko is your newsletter and, as always, your contributions in terms of news and views, short reports, comic relief, artwork and photographs are much appreciated!

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