



THE BARKING GECKO

Newsletter of the NamibRand Nature Reserve



December 2013

Volume 14 N° 3

This Perfect Place!!!

NamibRand—the perfect place to delight in spectacular sunrises, cold mornings, sunny days, and of course beautiful sunsets. This is a majestic place.

It is indeed a privilege to be the new editor to the Barking Gecko newsletter. I can certainly boast about the wonderful experience that this magical place has given me in the past few months. It is a huge privilege to take over from Dr Ann Scott. She did a great job with the Barking Gecko in the years she was editor. Thank you for a job well done Ann.

This issue also promises more information on rain figures, the game count, preparations for the fire season and NaDEET's 10 year celebration.

Although rain is the hot topic this time of the year, not a lot of rain can be reported. Rain received so far this year (April - October) was a small average of 2mm. The total rainfall recorded at Keerweder for the respective period is only 3mm, NaDEET recorded 7.5 mm and Wolwedans reception recorded 18.5 mm.

This has truly been a memorable year and as surreal as it may seem, it is almost over. A pleasant festive season to everyone and may the new year be filled with joy, peace and beautiful sceneries.



Photo: Vanessa Hartung

Sunset over Jagkop from Keerweder



Photo: Vanessa Hartung

On the Wolwedans dunes



Photo: Quirion Hartung

Sunset from the Keerweder airstrip after a cold, foggy day

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News from the CEO

Our acting warden, Quintin Hartung and his wife, Vanessa, who is our new Environment and Research Warden, have settled into their new positions well and the NamibRand Nature Reserve continues to lead the way in sustainable biodiversity conservation in Namibia. With this changing of the guard at NamibRand we took the opportunity to renovate the warden's residence at Keerweder and the house now features a fresh coat of paint as well as a remodelled and updated bathroom.

On the 7th of September Andreas Bruckner, John de Almeida, Kerstin Klein and Quintin Hartung formed the NamibRand Nature Reserve mountain biking team that took part in the first ever N/a'an ku se Wild Dog fundraiser race. They did exceptionally well and finished as the third overall team! Read more about this later on in this edition.

The below average rain fall received in the 2012/2013 rainy season has resulted in deteriorating veld and grazing conditions. Fortunately, the fact that we have been working on opening the greater landscape by removing fences to our neighbours has resulted in a more stable and robust ecosystem in which animals can migrate in search of suitable grazing. It is therefore interesting to note that the overall population of oryx has increased by 35% from an estimated 7,296 in June 2012 to an estimated 10,087 animals in June 2013. This is an indication that veld condition outside of the Reserve is worse than in our area and that the availability of water is a major drawing card. Springbok numbers have remained relatively stable. The springbok population estimate for 2012 is 6,069 and in 2013 the estimate was 5,919 animals. The latest game count results are discussed in more detail later on in this newsletter and a report can also be downloaded from the library section on our website (www.namibrand.org/Library.htm).

Our NAMPLACE funded study of the movement patterns and land uses of oryx, springbok and mountain zebra in and around the Greater Sossusvlei-Namib Landscape is now underway and satellite monitoring collars have been deployed on a number of mountain zebra and oryx throughout the landscape. We look forward to gaining insight into the movement patterns of these animals in response to land uses and climatic conditions and will keep you posted via *The Barking Gecko* with emerging results.



Photo: Jana Bruckner

Meagan is in charge of the horse trails at Wolwedans



Photo: Karley Drumm

Oryx in numbers at the waterhole at Kwesssiegat

In an effort to diversify activities on the Reserve, guided horseback riding is now being offered at Wolwedans. A new tourism concession has been awarded to the Namibia Horse Safari Company who operate this venture in partnership with Wolwedans. Various options are available, suitable for novices or experts, ranging from short one hour rides, sunset or sunrise rides, longer day rides to multiple day rides. These excursions are offered to guests under the expert guidance of trained horse guides, supported by backup crew from Wolwedans who take care of all other logistical arrangements on the Reserve.

NaDEET celebrated their 10th birthday this year. A celebration with the NamibRand community took place on the 7th of December at the NaDEET Centre. We would like to congratulate NaDEET for the remarkable achievements and successes of the past decade. We are extremely proud to have Namibia's premier environmental education and awareness institution on NamibRand!

We wish you all the best of luck in wrapping things up for the end of the year. Have a blessed Christmas break and a good start to the New Year! Experts predict an above average rainy season, so let's all hope for the best!

Nils Odendaal



Photo: Jana Bruckner

Guests on a horse trail at Wolwedans

Magnificent Dakota DC3 at Keerweder Airstrip

On Thursday, 24 October 2013, the peace and quiet of our desert was somewhat interrupted by the magnificent Dakota DC3 which landed on the Keerweder airstrip. Wolwedans Dunes Lodge was a two night stop during the course of a group of overseas guests' southern Africa safari with Rovos Rail. What makes this aircraft so special, apart from its size which our landing strips are not used to, is the history behind it.

The Douglas DC3 made its first flight on 17 December 1935 and by 1945, when production of this aircraft ceased, an estimated 10 639 had been built by the Douglas Aircraft Company. The Dakota, a name given by some of the World War II Allies to a military version of the Douglas DC3, was used extensively during the war.

One of its roles was the support to armies by transporting supplies of all kinds, carrying personnel and evacuating casualties. It also participated in airborne invasions by towing gliders containing troops and equipment, dropping paratroops and following up aerial re-supply of the troops on the ground.

In July 1942, 2000 C47A-DKs were ordered for the US Army Airforce from Douglas Aircraft Company's Oklahoma City Plant. In 1944, the Douglas Dakota DC3 was transferred as a Douglas Dakota MK111 from the USAAF to the Royal Canadian Air force until the war was over. She returned to Canada in 1946 where she served in various units until 1953 when she became a ground instructional aircraft.

In 1958, she was retired from the RCAF and sold to the Beldex Corporation in the USA. After an overhaul she was registered in 1959 with the Freeport Nickel Company then exported to Cuba to the Moa Bay Mining Company.

She returned to the USA in the 1960s and passed hands from the Freeport Sulphur Company to the International Telegraph Corporation in the United Kingdom and then to Keegan Air Frame where she was operated by Trans-Meridian Air Cargo for a decade.

Keegan sold her in 1974 to Sandriver Safaris in South Africa. During a scheduled flight between Sishen and Johannesburg in 1975, a baby girl was born on board and named 'Delaney' – a name the aircraft carries to this day!

By 1986, she was standing engineless and inactive at Rand Airport near Johannesburg. In 1988, the aircraft was registered to Avia Air Charter at Wonderboom Airport near Pretoria where it underwent an overhaul and operated until the closure of Avia in 1995. They sold her to Debon Air where she was refurbished and painted in blue and white with a large 'Delaney' on the cabin roof.

In 2002, Rohan Vos of Rovos Rail purchased the aircraft from Debon Air. It underwent an extensive refurbishment, inside and out, with a new business-class configuration of 21 very comfortable green leather seats, and now sports the green and cream trim of Rovos Air.

Quintin Hartung



Photo: Stephanie Habert

The Dakota DC3 on the Keerweder airstrip just before take off



Photo: Judith Schulze

The proud crew as they get ready for take off



Photo: Stephanie Habert

The Dakota DC3 taking off



Photo: Janine Brauckhoff

The NamibRand family, with a few new members of the Wolwedans team

Kgotla at the New Wolwedans Picnic Spot

The Kgotla management meeting, held on a quarterly basis was the perfect occasion to try out the new Wolwedans picnic spot on Draaihoek. On a nice cloudy afternoon this was the perfect place to be. The meeting was well attended by a few new faces and also Keerweder landowner Christopher Braun and his girlfriend Janine Brauckhoff, who were visiting NamibRand from Germany.

Highlights discussed in the meeting a discussion of the healthy predator population on NamibRand which seems to be growing. Quite a few sightings of cheetah have been made in the last few months. Specifically two sub-adults often seen at Verweg. These cheetahs are suspected to be the cubs of the three cheetahs released on Aandstêr in August last year.

There are quite a few developments by concessionaires in their individual operations. Research activity is still going strong on the Reserve this time of year. There is also a lot of development on water installations, including the construction of new waterholes. This is essential, especially because we have not had a lot of rain. Nils Odendaal gave a brief update about the NAMPLACE research project. The funding for the research project came through and NAMPLACE are now putting satellite collars on oryx and mountain zebra in order to monitor their east to west migration.



Photo: Vanessa Hartung

View from the new picnic spot on a nice cool and cloudy afternoon

General management matters discussed also entailed an update on the International Dark Sky project, rainfall monitoring, water installations, roads, off-road driving and vehicles, communication and radio procedures, aircraft and fire procedures, training courses, guide/ranger meetings, and development updates from concessionaires.

We thank everyone for their enthusiastic participation, with special thanks to Stephan Brückner for the venue and also to the Wolwedans Team for preparing the site and providing great snacks and nice cold drinks. Everyone enjoyed the social time following the formal meeting.

Vanessa Hartung

Have you met Stephanie and Judith?

Hi there, we are Stephanie Haberl and Judith Schultze from the Humboldt-University of Berlin. We are both students of Integrated Natural Resource Management. In order to avoid the nasty cold autumn weather in Germany we secretly plotted to conduct some research for our final master theses here in Namibia. As you can see, our plans worked out well and we were the residents of Toekoms from the end of September to the end of November.

So, what do two girls from the city, white as sheets, research in the middle of the desert in Namibia you may ask? Here is what we were up to at NRNR: Stephanie looked into possible land use conflicts which may arise between conservation areas and proximate farm land or game ranches for instance. What are the advantages and disadvantages of being next to a nature reserve and how are existing issues approached?

Judith's excuse for staying on NRNR was to look closer into what is done inside the reserve. Her topic focuses on the resource management of the Reserve itself and the tourism concessionaires. How do these operations affect the region in terms of its ecology, economy and socio-economy? What is done to design the operations inside this private conservation area sustainably? And furthermore, how can they be evaluated and maybe even improved?

As you can see, quite interesting stuff if one is into the sustainability and resource management topic. We found that NRNR is an excellent case study to base our research topics on.

Furthermore, we have already found some inspiration for possible PhD topics to research and write about, like *goggas* at Toekoms or animal droppings in our front garden. Imagine, the two girls from the big city, a cup of coffee in their hands, starting their day with identifying spoor in the garden and around the house, thinking of all kinds of animals (of course only the biggest and most dangerous ones) that could have passed the house while they were asleep. But we had many other adventures too, like an invasion of commando worms, relocating big spiders from the bedroom (of course only after identifying them first with our *Time to Identify* booklet from NaDEET – thank you!) and being thrown out of bed by Quintin and Vanessa at a most unearthly hour to come and watch a cheetah having springbok for breakfast 800m from Toekoms while still wearing our pajamas. You see, the big animals weren't so far from our house after all!

But back to our masters work! For the sake of our research we visited different stakeholders and neighbours of the NamibRand to conduct interviews with them. This took us to many beautiful places and we met a lot of very interesting, charming and entertaining people. We learned loads about the history of the area, farming and tourism in and around NRNR, but also had braais along the way, enjoyed sundowners and game drives, tasted a variety of Namibia's finest meat and cuisines, were touched by the African sun, loved the outstanding landscape and simply had a good time. All for the sake of our research of course!!

Good bye NamibRand, it was a pleasure meeting you all!! We hope, one day, we will be lucky enough to come back and have another braai with you.

Stephanie Haberl and Judith Schultze



Photo: Judith Schultze and Stephanie Haberl

Stephanie and Judith in the dunes!!!

Love Story with a Leopard

“Nico, there’s a leopard looking at us.” This is how our love story with a leopard began end of August 2013. Tok Tokkie Trails is usually not so much about the big & hairy, but about the small & amazing. But, of course, to see a leopard at a safe but still close distance is the



dream of every walking safari! And our guests on that day lived this dream. Both, humans and leopard were so stunned by the encounter that they just stared at each other for a minute. Nico Visser, a seasoned guide with a lot of time spent at NamibRand Nature Reserve, is still spellbound by the encounter. He had never seen a leopard on the Reserve before!

Leopards are usually shy and secretive. They avoid encounters with humans. Therefore, it is an amazing stroke of luck to see a wild leopard in broad daylight and to walk with it for an hour! After the first moment of surprise, the leopard decided to accompany the group for a while! Apparently, he had no clue what to make of the two-legged creatures he had stumbled upon. Was he trying to figure it out? At NamibRand Nature Reserve leopards, and other animals, hardly ever see humans and they have nothing to fear from them. Then, after a long while of mutual astonishment, the leopard decided that the strange creatures were of no special interest to him and vanished into his mountains.

But this was not the last we saw of leopards. During the following weeks, we found a couple of carcasses that were obviously the result of a leopard’s successful hunt. One night we even heard the screams of a springbok at a distance. It all cumulated in a leopard being spotted close to a camp. For safety reasons and in order not to habituate the leopard, we now changed camps for a while. This was to the great disappointment of many of our guests, who wanted to see the leopard as well. Leopards do not normally attack people, but it is better to be safe than sorry. Quintin Hartung, control warden, and Peter Woolfe, warden at NamibRand Nature Reserve slept out at the camp and tried to spot the leopard. To no avail. Looking at the picture of the leopard, Florian Weise, carnivore researcher at N/a’an ku se, concludes that he is very probably a youngster that has just left his mother trying to find his place in life. Obviously, he has found it somewhere else, as we have not seen him nor his spoor again.

Unfortunately, it seems our love story with a leopard is over. We would like to thank the NamibRand Nature Reserve team, especially Nils, Peter and Quintin, and Florian Weise, for their assistance!

Barbara Wayrauch
Tok Tokkie Trails

Thanks to our guest Vincent Martinez for sending us this amazing picture!

Wolwedans chosen to feature in ‘Africa’s Finest’

Wolwedans Collection of Camps has been handpicked to feature in *Africa's Finest*, a brand-new coffee table book celebrating the top 50 sustainable safari lodges and camps in Africa. Taking a deeper look at what it really means to run a sustainable and eco-friendly safari operation in Africa, the authors aim to simultaneously celebrate both the beauty of those camps that are run right and thereby add value to the preservation of their environment and its people, but to also expose the beast of the safari industry: 'the safari eco-pirates, cowboys, money launderers, green-washers and fence-sitters'.

Colin Bell, the co-founder and former CEO of the pioneering African travel company Wilderness Safaris, and founder of Great Plains along with environmental scientist David Bristow have teamed up to launch this revolutionary new book: *Africa's Finest*. The book is the result of over two years of field work and writing. Illustrated with photographs taken by over 50 of Africa’s top photographers and in collaboration with a group of independent environmental scientists it is part reference, part coffee-table book.

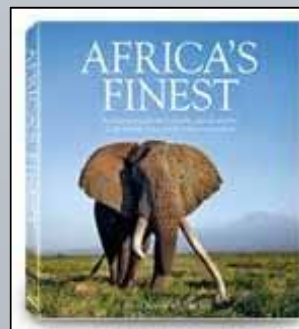
What this means in effect is that with *Africa's Finest* a critical study of tourism in African has been undertaken resulting in an eye-opening book - which educates and delights at the same time. The book includes a check-list of sustainable practice, alerting the novice to look out for environmentally unfriendly practices - literally the other side of the coin often found hiding behind the shiny facades of glamorous lodges praising themselves as being premiere ecotourism destinations.

Bell & Bristow on what they hope *Africa's Finest* will achieve: 'We hope it will become a game changer in the safari tourism industry in helping to reverse many of the negative trends and declines in Africa’s wildlife. We believe *Africa's Finest* will become a valuable tool for travel consultants who sell Africa and for potential travellers to Africa to help them decide where they should stay.'

Through the book's outstanding photography & field work it tells remarkable stories about Africa's remaining untouched wildernesses, but among these is a more sombre tale; the book's foreword by Morne Du Plessis, WWF South Africa's CEO, points to the cover photo of a giant tusk: 'this very elephant is dead (probably from a poacher’s bullet), and possibly all large-tusked elephants in the wild will be shot out in the not-too-distant future along with all wild dogs and possibly most free-roaming lions and cheetahs.'

The book's intention is to give hope and solutions for conservation, ways in which we can all contribute to the changing world to conserve what's left of Africa's wilderness.

Jana Brückner



News from the South

Greetings to all from the south of the Reserve, I trust everyone is well. Things down here have progressed well over the last couple of months, after what was a surprisingly mild winter.

The building work at Aandstêr is for the most part complete, and the job of cleaning up after the builders is complete. All the rubble resulting from the building activity has been removed from around the homestead and the garden restored to give the place a somewhat tidier look. The homestead is much improved as a result the various alterations and improvements that have taken place and I'm sure the impression tourists get when arriving here will be a positive one.

Work to upgrade the various water holes in the south has also progressed, with new constructions at Straussenwasser, Kalkpomp and Aandstêr Water on Saffier. Two other water points on Springbokvlakte were completed by the by the end of November.

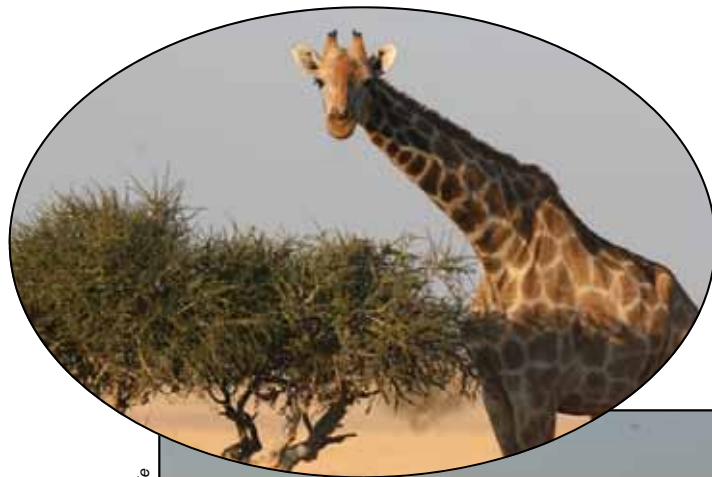
We have been keeping an eye on the giraffes that were released in the Duwisib River and they seem well settled in and relaxed. They have been moving up and down the whole river complex, as far as the release point in the east and the southern waterhole on Dina in the west. It also appears that the two older females are pregnant, although probably as a result of activity before their release as the two young bulls that were released with them are too young. Hopefully early next year we will have some new additions.

The outside gardens at Aandstêr have all been planted so for those of you that will be around over the festive season we should have lots of fresh organic produce available. We have planted the usual watermelons, *spanspek*, *mielies*, cucumbers, squash and butternut and have added sweet melons and leeks this year. Will let every one know what is available and when. We are also looking forward to a good grape harvest this season.

Really good news is that Boulders has been humming this last couple of months, with almost daily flights in and out at Aandstêr and the yard sometimes taking on the aspect of the Maerua Mall car park. Let's hope that tourist interest in the Reserve continues into the New Year.

We at Aandstêr wish every one a wonderful Christmas and all you may wish in the New Year! Time flies, it feels like I last wrote that just a couple of weeks ago. In the meantime let's hope for a good rainy season! We got away with it this year, but another year like that could be disastrous. Cheers from the south.

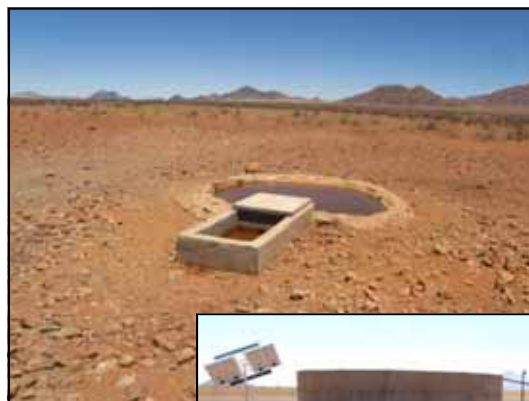
Peter Woolfe



Photos: Peter Woolfe



Giraffes relaxed in their new home



Photos: Peter Woolfe

Top to bottom: New water hole, Aandstêr Water, on Saffier; new water hole at Kalkpomp; and new water hole at Two Pumps on Springbokvlakte.

Wild Dog Challenge Fundraiser

The wild dog mountain bike challenge was organized by Na'an ku se to raise funds for wild dog conservation. It was held on the 7th of September 2013 at the Neuras Estate. It was a fun filled event with the excitement of the bike ride challenge, great entertainment and good food.

There were five teams who entered for the mountain bike challenge, including one volunteer group. There were also a lot of helping hands. Leah Llach was the main organizer of this event and she surely did a good job.

Andreas Bruckner, John de Almeida, Kerstin Klein and Quintin Hartung, formed the proud NamibRand team. They did exceptionally well. They finished 3rd in the 40km race, which took them through the spectacular mountains and rivers on the farm and at the latter stages of the race they had to carry their bikes down a cliff and into a canyon which led them back to the main road for a 3km sprint to the finish line.

Andreas was named MVP (most valuable player) of the event at the ensuing award ceremony for his excellent leadership skills shown throughout the race. This sure made all of us proud.

There were also a few rather memorable activities that took place during the race. Participants had to face a few challenges at each water point along the race. The teams had to stack up rocks, complete a questionnaire, guess an amount of stones in a bottle, they had to act out a few movie scenes and what I think is most interesting was they had to dance the famous "Gangnam Style". This performance can be viewed on:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XKnwAZ97nt8>

All the participants had a lot of fun and I am sure they cannot wait for next year to have just as much, if not more fun again.

Quintin Hartung



A picture of the NamibRand Team (A. Brückner, Q. Hartung, K. Klein and J. de Almeida) before the race

Current Status of Research: Enigmatic Fairy Circles

The pace of research into what causes enigmatic fairy circles that are relatively common in Namibian arid grasslands seems to have hotbed recently. Fairy circles are large (approximately 7

m diameter) barren circular patches that occur by the millions along the eastern edge of the Namib Desert. These barren patches are strikingly regularly dispersed within a narrow band about 100 km inland from the coast that is associated with between 52 and 135 mm of rainfall per annum. These circular features have fascinated scientists and the public for several decades and contribute to the tourist appeal of the region. This fascination is of global extent. Google finds over 57 000 web sites mentioning the Namibian fairy circles!

Over the last few years at least three publications have been proclaimed by the media to have found the answer! In January 2011 leakage of hydrocarbon gasses from the soil was suggested to eliminate grasses in the barren patches by Yvette Naude and colleagues at the University of Pretoria. Then in January 2012 carnivorous ants were suggested by Mike Picker and colleagues at University Cape Town to undermine grass roots and result in the death of grasses through dehydration. More recently (March 2013) Norbert Juergens at the University of Hamburg concluded that termites harvest grasses from the barren patches and suggested that this was a type of engineering undertaken by termites to decrease grass utilization of water and make the soil habitat wetter to enable termite burrowing. These gas and faunal explanations are now being challenged by a suggestion of a less direct mechanism that puts the grasses at center-stage.

Based on evidence that the circles appear and disappear, sometimes over just a few years, it was suggested in June 2012 by Walter Tschinkel (Florida State University) that the fairy circles may emerge as a consequence of vegetation patterning. Indeed, vegetation pattern is common in many parts of the world, resulting in clumps, barren spots and stripes of vegetation. These patterns are set up as a consequence of competition between plants for water that results in the spacing of the plants. For example, savanna trees space themselves apart due to competition. However, a savanna tree also provides a habitat for other plants to grow around and under it. For example, the tree may provide shade, food for animals and result in wetter soil under the tree. This "nurses" other plants resulting in plants clustering together in clumps that are separated from other clumps. These patterns are well known to ecologists, some of who have produced mathematical models simulating the emergence of such pattern in vegetation. Such models may also be used to predict the occurrence of barren patches such as fairy circles, as done by Fernandez-Oto and colleagues in June this year.

Building on these vegetation patterning ideas, we published a paper supporting the idea that the grasses space themselves apart due to competition (<http://www.plosone.org/article/info:doi/10.1371/journal.pone.0070876>). We suggest that the barren circle represents a resource reservoir that provides nutrients and water that the plants on the edge of the barren circle monopolize for their own benefit. This suggests that the plants may be inadvertently engineering a resource supply that enables grasses on the periphery of the barren circles to grow taller than other grasses. We do not rule out the participation of ants and termites, but suggest that these are attracted to the barren patch where the lack of plants ensures a greater supply of moisture. We found that the location of the circles was highly

(Continued on page 9)

(Continued from page 8)

predictable on the basis of just three environmental characteristics, one of which was rainfall. As a consequence we suggest that the circles may emerge and disappear in some areas depending on localized variations in rainfall.

Mike Cramer (University of Cape Town)

Nichole Barger (University of Colorado)

Little Bugs New Library

The Little Bugs love story time and now they can also enjoy story time at home with their family. Research on developing literacy and in particular, developing a love for reading and books is largely dependent on having access to books and being part of a reading culture from a young age. Most of our Bugs have not had access to age appropriate books at home until now. Since the beginning of the new term, Little Bugs now has its own library box filled with children's books! Every Tuesday and Saturday the kids get to choose a book to take home for a few days, before bringing it back to exchange it for another. At home the parents can read them bed time stories or just spend some quality time with their children. We hope this will encourage our Bugs to love reading and that this will be a skill that will help throughout their school careers and into their adult lives.

For the duration of the third term, the Little Bugs have the chance to learn a lot from our new volunteer Kathi Gerten. Kathi comes from Cologne, Germany and arrived in the desert in September.

Once upon a time, not so very long ago the Little Bugs were just going about their day playing and learning when out of nowhere a rather strange car arrived at Sossusvlei. Travelling inside the car there was an amazing family who have been driving around the world for thirteen years already! Pampa and

Tehue, the oldest two children showed the Little Bugs a video of all the places they had visited in the strange old car.

Liezl Hoving



Some of the Little Bugs enjoying books from the new library



Kathi Gerten with one of the Little Bugs

Photos: Little Bugs

Guide and Rangers' Corner Rare sighting in the NamibRand Nature Reserve

It was early in the morning of 14 November 2013 when my guests and I went on a balloon safari, the weather was acceptable and this gave us opportunity to go with a game viewer to the take off site. Driving in such inhospitable environment one has to look around and wonder at the magnificent and spectacular rays of the sun as it rises.

While driving, at a distance of approximately 300 m I spotted five cheetahs running towards Losberg from the Jagkop waterhole, I stopped the car and switched off the engine. My guests on board were curious to see these endangered species. Unfortunately the distance could not allow us to take pictures of the unusual sighting. What amazed me the most was to see the oryx chasing the cats, acting in a defensive manner. We stood there for a couple of minutes hoping to see them closer.

We eventually had to carry on driving, my guests couldn't stop looking backwards, they were impressed by the oryx's behavior, trying to attack the cheetahs in a defensive manner. The best would have been a digital camera with long lens!!

Compiled by Simon Hamola and edited by Lucas Mbangi
Wolwedans Field Guides



Giraffe Translocation

On Sunday, 14 July 2013, we relocated four of our giraffe to the farm Excelsior as requested by the NamibRand Nature Reserve Board of Directors. H.O. Reuter and his game capture team arrived on the Saturday evening. On the Sunday morning we went out to look for the giraffe between Keerweder and Boscia, where they'd been for the last two weeks, but as Murphy's Law would have it, they were nowhere to be seen. We then went to Draaihoek and located five of the giraffe, including the two females and two juveniles just north of Porcupine waterhole. As Dr. Reuter did not have a helicopter for the darting, we darted from the vehicle.

We used the NRNR double cab as the darting vehicle, and the NRNR single cab carried the team who were responsible for trapping the animals with ropes once they were anaesthetized. The vet then administered the antidote after which the animals are guided into the transporting crate and taken to the truck. So the process went on for all four giraffes and when all were safely put into the truck, they were transported to the Farm Excelsior to be released into the release boma built near the Excelsior house.

The plan was for the giraffes to stay in the release boma for at least a day or two, but they had other plans and broke out of the boma that same night. Luckily they ran west towards Saffier and eventually settled down and slowly made their way back to the rich array of *Acacia* trees northeast of the Excelsior house where they have now made their home.

Quintin Hartung



The giraffe being caught with a rope to be given the antidote.



The giraffe being escorted into the trailer



Photos: Vanessa Hartung



The giraffe locked into the trailer



The giraffe were then moved into the transport truck

Photos: Vanessa Hartung



News @ NaDEET

NaDEET had another successful year with 32 groups participating in the Centre's Environmental Education Programme. That number includes 15 returning schools that have already been at NaDEET before. Moreover, 12 of the 32 groups visited NaDEET Centre for the first time and were sponsored by our Environmental Education to Empower Namibian Communities to Improve their Living Conditions action funded by the European Union (EU). With the last EU sponsored group visiting in November the three year project will be complete by December this year. One of the aims of the project was to have every school in the Hardap Region come to NaDEET at least once and we have succeeded in fulfilling this aim!

In September two NaDEET staff members went on an outreach to Gibeon and Mariental to introduce and distribute *It's Time to Grow* (ITTG), our latest environmental learning pack. Pre-primary and Grade 1 teachers were invited to attend presentations on NaDEET's work in general and on details about how the ITTG-pack can contribute to pre-primary-school environmental education lessons. They were given a chance to complete and thereby familiarise themselves with the four booklets on Water, Sun, Recycling and Animals & Plants. Attending teachers were also asked to give critical feedback on the publication and evaluate the relating activities.

The *It's Time to Grow* learning pack was also funded under the European Union (EU) grant. With this outreach we managed to deliver environmental education to almost all the schools in the Hardap Region.

From 16 – 27 September 2013 three NaDEET staff members attended the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification Conference of Parties 11 (UNCCD COP 11) in Windhoek. NaDEET was invited by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism to have an exhibition stand at the Namibian Pavilion. This offered us the opportunity to showcase the activities we do to address desertification and land degradation and to present our publications (*Bush Telegraph*, *It's Time to... series*) to numerous people.

Several NaDEET staff have just returned from an outreach trip to the Kavango Region. Seven sustainable living workshops were conducted during this outreach with community members in remote rural villages. All were impressed by the solar cooker and fuel efficient stove. During this first time visit for NaDEET to the Kavango Region, staff were exposed to problems in other parts of the country and potential stakeholders and partners for future environmental education work.



NaDEET outreach to Gibeon and Mariental



Okavango outreach: solar cooking lesson for community members in the Kavango



School group from Stampriet Primary School doing a "power of the sun" activity

Photos: NaDEET Photo Library



Katharina Ebeling

Ed: NaDEET is 10 years old this year, as reflected in the new logo (left)—more of this in the article on page 12.

Celebrating 10 years NaDEET Centre

On 24 October 2013 NaDEET Centre turned 10 years. What started out as a small project in a dune valley near the Die Duine Homestead has turned into an internationally renowned Environmental Education Centre with 11 staff members including employees, volunteers and student interns.

Reflecting on and celebrating the last ten years on current NaDEET staff embarked on a team building week to Swakopmund beginning on Monday, 21 October. Our programme included several workshops that focused on evaluating NaDEET activities and projects as well as a look ahead.

The first of two field trips was led by Mr. Jürgen Klein, owner of the Salt Company and NRNR landowner, where NaDEET staff was shown the full production cycle of the salt works and a station where Pacific Oysters are grown while making additional use of the ocean water that is pumped into the salt fields. We could also see the company's own guano islands where high quality guano dung is harvested to be exported to fertiliser manufactures all over the world. This was an excellent example of a holistic business approach.

During a visit at the Ministry of Environment and Tourism NACOMA Office in Swakopmund we got the opportunity to discuss current developments in nature conservation and particularly the Dorob National Park with local project leaders. On Thursday, Peter Bridgeford, former NRNR Warden, took us on a tour to Sandwich Harbour. Along the way he shared with us his tremendous knowledge of the coastal bird life and of the natural environment.

A 10 year birthday party was held to bring together former and current staff, student interns and even volunteers from as far as Australia. It was a great opportunity to celebrate and thank supporters of NaDEET for their contribution over the years.

Katharina Ebeling



Jürgen Klein explaining salt production to NaDEET staff



NaDEET Staff at Sandwich Harbour



NaDEET's 10 year Celebration!



Swakopmund NACOMA—NaDEET staff at the NACOMA office



Directors Andreas and Victoria Keding with Peter Bridgeford at Sandwich Harbour



NaDEET's director Viktoria Keding with staff at the NaDEET exhibition stand

Photos: NaDEET Photo Library

Photos: NaDEET Photo Library

NamibRand Game Count June 2013

Teamwork was once again the essence of the day as all concessionaires, landowners, neighbours and NRNR staff joined in to participate in the game count in June. The game count briefing, which included a theoretical presentation, discussions and handing out of game count files to the different teams, was held on the 31st of May at the Wolwedans Private Camp prior to the AGM and the count was done the following day.

Even though this year's rainfall has been exceptionally low, with an average of $\pm 20\text{mm}$, the effects of the last two years of good rainfall can still be seen, as the numbers of the plains game are still relatively high. The effects of this year's rainfall will probably only be seen next year or the year after.

The tables below shows the number of animals counted in the 10 zones this year and the numbers compared to last year.

Table 1

Total estimated numbers of game (Zone 1-10; Jun 13)		
Species	No seen under 500m	Total no. corrected for area + species
Oryx	1943	10087
Springbok	997	5919
Kudu	1	11
Steenbok	0	0
P. zebra*	352*	352*
Ostrich	81	285
Blesbok*	3*	3*
Hartebeest*	204*	204*
Total	3581	16861
Giraffe*	6*	
Ludwigs Bustard**	48**	

* Numbers are known

** Not included in count



Photo: Vanessa Hartung

Zebras relaxing by the Keerweder waterhole

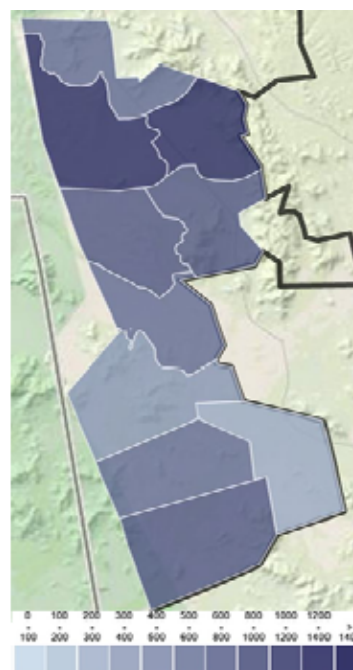
Table 2

Total estimated numbers of game (Zone 1-10; Jun 12 - Jun 13)					
Species	Jun-12		Jun-13		Percentage change
	No. Counted under 500m	Total no. corrected for area + for species	No. Counted under 500m	Total no. corrected for area + for species	
Oryx	1380	7296	1943	10087	38
Springbok	1208	6069	997	5919	-2
Kudu	4	41	1	11	-74
Steenbok	0	0	0	0	0
P. zebra*	273	470*	174	352*	-25
Ostrich	160	765	81	285	-63
Blesbok*	0	7*	0	3*	-57
Hartebeest*	177	177*	159	204*	15
Total	3202	14825	3355	16861	14
Giraffe**		6*		6*	0
Ludwigs Bustard**	41	116**	48	177**	37

* Numbers are known (adults)

** Not included in count

The map below shows the wildlife distribution on the reserve during the June 2013 game count.



The results of this year's population estimates for oryx showed a record number of oryx estimated (10078) since the game count was initiated in 2005, while the springbok numbers have also stayed relatively high, only decreasing by 2% from last year. The number of kudu on the reserve has dropped a lot, which is a direct impact of the low rainfall this year, as the kudu are very water dependent. The plains zebra numbers are down this year as a result of the game capture that took place in October 2013. 88 zebra were sold and 14 were relocated to the south (Springbokvlakte), whereas the hartebeest numbers have reached an all-time high of 204.

Quinton and Vanessa Hartung

Fire Drill on NamibRand

On 11 November and 21 November 2013 fire drills were held at Keerweder. The principal objective was to get everyone ready for the fire season.

NaDEET, NR Family Hideout and NamibRand staff attended the drill on 11 November 2013 whilst Namib Sky, Wolwedans and Tok Tokkie Trails attended the session on 21 November. All concessionaire attendants had brought all their firefighting equipment along to ensure that it is all on standard and operates properly.

The fire drill exercise consisted of two sessions, a theoretical session and also a practical session. In the theoretical session Quinton Hartung explained the Reserve's policy on veld fires and how the firefighting procedure works and what to do in the instance of a fire. The most important points discussed were:

- **A fire should be reported immediately to the Wardens at Keerweder, and if they can't be reached, Peter Woolfe (Aandstêr) should be contacted.**
- **It must then be established as to whether the fire is natural or human induced.**
- **If a natural fire is not a threat to human lives or infrastructure; it should be monitored and not be fought unless it becomes a threat.**
- **Off-road driving should be avoided unless authorized by Reserve staff.**
- **If a fire occurs, channels of communication should always be kept open. For all communication radio contact should be made to the Fire Control Centre (usually Keerweder, unless stated otherwise) and further communication will commence from there.**
- **Those fighting the fire should have the correct gear, drink lots of water and should be trained on how to fight a fire.**
- **It is important that all firefighting equipment is used correctly (e.g. fire beaters).**

A great deal of important information was taken from the theoretical session and was very well used during the practical session. During the practical session a fire was made for all the participants to fight using firefighting units and fire beaters. Everyone was encouraged to hydrate during water breaks as the weather temperature competed with the fire's heat.

A few technical glitches occurred with the firefighting units which proved once again that these units should be tested regularly and kept maintained and ready to use when the need arises. All participants eagerly participated and became very excited about fire fighting. Everyone received an opportunity to use a fire beater and to also extinguish the fire with the firefighting units.

Vanessa Hartung



Namib Sky, Tok Tokkie Trails and Wolwedans staff during the practical session



NaDEET, NR Family Hideout and NR staff during the practical session



Photos: Vanessa Hartung

Mountain Zebra Research on NamibRand

Monitoring has continued on the mountain zebra population on NamibRand with camera traps placed at three key water holes in the north (Hyena, Moringa and Porcupine), and, in collaboration with Dennis Hesemans, at a water hole on Farm Geluk outside the north-west of the Reserve. The main technique employed is to identify individuals from camera trap images using variation in their stripe patterns and then to analyse population changes from the records obtained on individuals over time.

At the time of writing (November 2013) I have identified 336 individuals in the current year from these four water holes. More work remains to be done and some indication of how much comes from the proportion of the animals seen in 2012 that have been re-sighted: there were at least 493 animals known in 2012 and, of these, 329 (67%) have been identified so far. The numbers presented here are thus a progress report and all will increase as further data are collected. It should also be emphasised that they refer to the NamibRand 'source population', the numbers that visit the Reserve as part of their movements; not all of these animals are present at any one time. We now know that there are movements between the Reserve and Farm Geluk to the north but even larger-scale movements undoubtedly occur to the west into the Nubib Mountains and beyond.

The mountain zebra study on NamibRand has now been ongoing since 2010 and we can start to answer questions about long term trends. While the numbers known to have been alive in 2010 and 2011 may change a little as further information is collected, such change will now be relatively small. (I back project the lives of individuals as they are discovered and so 'adults' - defined as those over 2 years old - which are detected for the first time in 2013 must also have been as alive in 2011). Results to date show that at least 480 animals were alive in 2010 and 541 in 2011, an increase of 13%. It is important to try to tease apart the proportion of the increase due to any net movement into the Reserve and any increase due to reproduction. So ages are estimated when animals are first identified and, when they are less than two years old, their births are assigned to calendar years to give approximate birth rates. This procedure gives a total of 53 births in 2011 which is about 11% of the total in the preceding year. This rough



A breeding group of mountain zebras at the Moringa waterhole

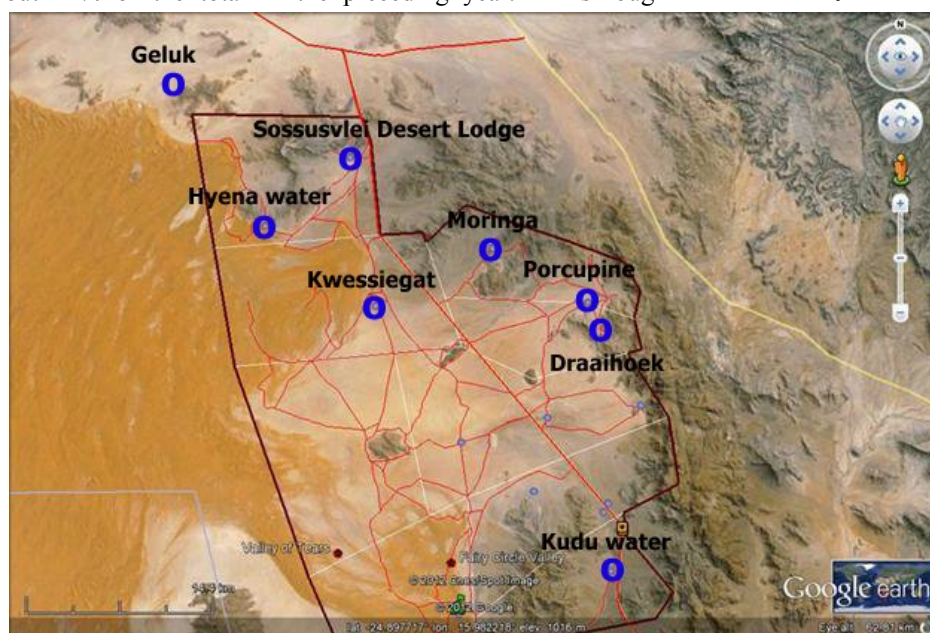
calculation employs a number of approximations but it does show that a large proportion of the increase could be due to reproduction.

The ability of mountain zebra to move between water holes is a key aspect of their survival in an arid environment and information about such movements is important for conservation management. Further information has been collected as monitoring continues and an example of such movement is that between the water hole at the western end of the Moringa valley and the Porcupine water hole 9 kms to the south. Since 2010, a total of 398 individuals have now been seen at Moringa (not all at the same time ...) and 204 at Porcupine. The 'connectivity' between the two can be calculated from the number seen at both, 110, as a proportion of the number seen at either, 492, or 22%. Some movements between water holes occurs when animals find a water hole is dry and move on to the next available. But this is not the only factor and information from other sites shows that mountain zebra move between water holes even when water is available at both; and they continue to visit water holes even when they are dry for quite long periods. This suggests that water is only one part of the explanation for their movements: other factors may be spatial patterns of forage and, even more intriguing, the need to maintain a memory map of water sources that can be used when needed.

I am grateful for the support and collaboration of Nils Odendaal, Ann and Mike Scott, Quintin and Vanessa Hartung and their colleagues at Keerweder, to Dennis Hesemans at Namib Sky Balloon Safaris on the Farm Geluk, and Vitalis Mushongo who has helped transport images from NamibRand on their way to the UK.

Thanks also to the Directors of NamibRand for permission to carry out this work and to the Rufford Foundation and the Namibia Nature Foundation for financial and other support.

*Morris Gosling
NNF Mountain Zebra Project and
Emeritus Professor
Newcastle University, UK*



*A map of NamibRand waterholes
(prepared by Dr Ann Scott)*

Rare Bird Sighting at the Family Hideout

A repeat visitor to the Hideout, Dr Paul F. Donald, Principal Conservation Scientist, International Research Team, RSPB (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds), U.K., chose to spend his 50th birthday on 13th November back with us. In his own words: "[We] can't wait to be there again, our favourite place in our favourite country!"

We were privileged to host Dr Donald for three nights over his special birthday. As it happened, Lady Luck was with him on the big day, as a little bird well-known to him in his native England, an Ortolan Bunting, paid him a visit on the stoop of the Family Hideout! This species has apparently not been recorded as ever having been seen in this part of the world. A native of most European countries and western Asia, the Ortolan migrates in autumn to tropical Africa, returning at the end of April or beginning of May. Seeds are the natural diet, but beetles and other insects are eaten when feeding young. The Ortolan's conservation status is listed as "Least Concern".

Wikipedia states: "In September 2007, the French Government announced its intent to enforce long ignored laws protecting the bird. For centuries, a rite of passage for French gourmets has been the eating of the Ortolan. These tiny birds—captured alive, force-fed, then drowned in Armagnac—were roasted whole and eaten that way, bones and all. Ortolan hunting was banned in France in 1999, but the law was poorly enforced and it is thought that up to 50,000 Ortolans were killed each year."

We were alerted to the rare sighting on 17 November by another previous Hideout guest and bird-lover, living in New York. "Small world! This morning Anders received this message from the rare bird alert of southern Africa. It brought back the wonderfulness of the Family Hideout.

Wow, this species was never really on my radar as a potential for Southern Africa!

News has filtered through overnight of an **ORTOLAN BUNTING** that was seen by Paul Donald on Wednesday, 13 November 2013, at NamibRand Family Hideout (which is here: 25°17'14.12"S 16° 4'5.45"E). The bird was apparently seen briefly on the veranda of the lodge there and then disappeared just as quickly, but has been photographed and there is no doubt about the identification!

This is a migratory species which does come into Africa but probably doesn't come much further south than Ethiopia and, to the best of my knowledge, there are certainly no records south of the equator. It is a new species for the Southern African sub region without a doubt – just a pity that it is going to be difficult to get updates on this bird and know whether it is twitch able or not.

Not sure whether I am excited or depressed about this news, but it's certainly a monster find in terms of Southern African birding – well done Paul!"

Mandy Brückner



Photo: Paul Donald

Ortolan Bunting at NamibRand Family Hideout



Photo :<https://encrypted-tbn2.gstatic.com/images?>

Ortolan Bunting—photo library

Interesting Sightings and Photo Gallery



Left: Beautiful sunrise as seen from Horseshoe Camp (Stephanie Haberl). Centre: The view from the Losberg on a very cloudy morning (Quintin Hartung). Right: Abraham Tsaobeb posing next to a huge Moringa ovalifolia tree (Quintin Hartung).



Left: Bat eared foxes are so much more visible with so little grass (Quintin Hartung). Centre: Cheetah calmly feeding on a springbok carcass near the Verweg dam (Stephanie Haberl). Right: The cheetah leaves his meal (Stephanie Haberl).



Left: A very curious mongoose (Quintin Hartung). Centre: Giraffe bull (Quintin Hartung). Right: Oryx calf born during this dry season (Quintin Hartung).



Left: Wildlife queues patiently at the Keerweder waterhole (Vanessa Hartung). Centre: Red hartebeest, oryx and a secretary bird at the Keerweder waterhole. (Stephanie Haberl). Right: Close up of the secretary bird. (Stephanie Haberl).

News from Keerweder

This year will definitely be remembered for the little rainfall we've received, with an average of 20mm recorded throughout the Reserve in 2013. The impact of this becomes more and more evident with the plentiful vegetation we had after the good rains in 2011 and 2012 increasingly fading with each passing month. We can now be glad that we sold a quarter of our bulky grazers, the Burchell's Zebra, last year, and are now left with approximately 352 (which includes this year's foals) on the reserve. That number of 352, includes the 14 zebra that were relocated to Springbokvlakte last year and about 18 zebra have also been spotted around the Die Duine and Gorrasis area, so the population has spread out a bit.

In contrast to the extreme heat we receive during our summer periods, this year's winter brought some very cold patches where we had to endure below freezing conditions on a few occasions. The winter as a whole wasn't particularly cold, but on the days that the mercury did drop into the minuses it, it was very cold.

In other news, normal business proceeded, with a few pumps that had to be pulled, repaired and re-installed. Two new waterholes were built in the north, one being the Ohorongo water built at the old Wolwedans camp site, and the other was built on Verweg.

The Ohorongo waterhole was built to replace the waterhole near the Wolwedans village and move the animals away from the village and airstrip. The Verweg waterhole was built for a similar reason, to replace the old water trough around the dam which was too close to the main road, and to move animals away from the main road and corridor fence. Both these waterholes (and a few others in the south) were built using the cement donated to the reserve by Ohorongo Cement. The Wolwedans waterhole was thus named "Ohorongo Waterhole" to show our appreciation of the generous donation.

It has been predators galore on the Reserve this year. Leopards and cheetahs have been spotted all over the Reserve on numerous occasions throughout the year. To name a few, a leopard has been seen quite often around the Horseshoe area and has also visited the Tok Tokkie camp on a few occasions; two cheetah were often seen on Verweg throughout the year, a leopard has been seen quite often at Boscia, five Cheetah were spotted on Springbokvlakte and a leopard at Satanskop, and there has been a cheetah seen on a kill at Wolwedans and near Sossusvlei Desert Lodge. Hyena tracks have also been seen on a daily basis around the Keerweder – Bushman Koppie area, and Vanessa and I saw a Brown Hyena near SDL one night in November.

This all is an indication that we have a very healthy population of predators on the Reserve, but does not serve well with our sheep farming neighbours, who have been up in arms about "our" predators crossing over to the wrong side of the fence. Let's hope that the plentiful springbok, oryx and hartebeest keep "our" on the right side of the fence.

We have also started taking down the corridor fence on the Farm Verweg, after the motor gate was removed and rebuilt at the southern Reserve boundary.

I wish the entire Barking Gecko subscribers and all involved in the Reserve a wonderful festive season, a Merry Christmas and prosperous New Year.

Quintin Hartung

Photo: Judith Schulze



Another beautiful view of the sun setting behind Jagkop

Tracking Oryx and Mountain Zebra in the Greater Sossusvlei-Namib Landscape Area

On the 22nd and 23rd of November, as part of the Greater Sossusvlei Namib Landscape (GSLN) Conservation Initiative under the NAMPLACE Project of MET, nine Hartmann's Mountain Zebra and nine oryx were collared throughout the landscape in the following sections: Ganab, Tsondab-Naukluft, Sesriem-Sossusvlei-Elim and NamibRand Nature Reserve and the Chowagas Mountain Range areas.

On the Saturday, the team consisting of Dr. Mark Jago, Kenneth /Uiseb and Jan du Preez (helicopter pilot) picked me up at Keerweder with the helicopter and we took off to dart and collar two Hartmann's Mountain Zebra on the reserve, and three oryx. We started off by collaring one oryx on Draaihoek, and then did the two Mountain Zebra on Toskaan. We then went south-west into the park and collared an oryx near the Chowagas Mountains before collaring the last oryx on the Reserve near the Gorrasis house. After we finished with the animals on the Reserve, the team continued to Sossusvlei to collar the last batch of animals there.

(Continued on page 19)

(Continued from page 18)

The movements of these collared animals are now followed by the GSNL members on the African Wildlife tracking website where the all the movements are downloaded on a daily basis. With this project, we'll now be able to study the population densities, movement patterns and land uses of oryx, and mountain zebra in and around the GSNL, which is a great step forward in our conservation efforts.

Quinton Hartung



A mountain zebra being immobilised to fit a satellite monitoring collar



Kenneth Uiseb fitting the collar



Bell Jet-Ranger helicopter used to immobilize wildlife



An oryx being immobilised to fit a satellite monitoring collar



Collared Oryx on NRNR

Photos: Quinton Hartung & Kenneth Uiseb

Thank you

Many thanks to those of you who have contributed to this issue of The Barking Gecko by providing articles and information: Jana Brückner, Mandy Brückner, Katharina Ebeling, Morris Gosling, Staphanie Haberl, Simon Hamola, Quintin Hartung, Andreia Hesemans, Liezl Hoving, Lukas Mbangu, Doug McCarty, Nils Odendaal, Judith Schulze, Barbara Wayrauch and Peter Woolfe.

We would also like to thank all those who so generously share their photographs and interesting sightings! Thank you to Ann Scott, Danica Shaw and Nils Odendaal for editorial inputs.

The Barking Gecko is your newsletter and, as always, we invite you to keep on sending us your contributions of news and views, short reports, sightings, artwork and photographs.

KINDLY NOTE: Photographs are copyright and may not be re-used without the permission of the photographer.

Season Greetings from NamibRand

*The NamibRand staff and
Management wishes you a Peaceful
festive season and a Prosperous
New Year!!!*



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