



THE BARKING GECKO

Newsletter of the NamibRand Nature Reserve



September 2014

Volume 15 N° 2



Photo: Stephan Sachse

Top: A beautiful landscape with ice crystals on the dune in the south of the Reserve - Winter Impression.

Warm Greetings!!!

I am happy to be back with another Barking Gecko issue. This has been a very interesting and exiting time on NamibRand Nature Reserve.

We have had quite an unusual winter with varied temperatures all around the Reserve. Moderate temperatures were experience on most days, nothing compared to a very cold winter in 2013.

We had some pleasant rain showers in mid September that cooled the Namib off quite a bit. On Thursday 18 September

we had some pretty low temperatures across the reserve.

It is lovely to see the new green leaves on the trees, kindly welcoming the warmer weather.

We surely hope this is the beginning of a very good rainy season as we have had plenty sightings of baby springbok and oryx, which is believed to be a sign of good rain.

Some other interesting activities that happened was our red hartebeest reintroduction in the south of the reserve. More about this also follows on page 8.

It has also been quite busy with researchers and filming crews visiting the Reserve. We had researchers doing projects like, assessing the utility and palaeoclimatic significance of sand ramps as palaeoenvironmental archives in Southern Africa, and also research on whether climate change drives an extinction risk in Namibian desert lizards? In particular the *squamata: lacertidae*, to name a few. We also had a BBC filming crew on the Reserve and they were filming the namaqua sandgrouse and various elements of their life history including potentially predation by lanner falcons and belly-wetting as well as bringing water back to the chicks. These research and filming activities are all quite interesting. I believe this is all proof that NamibRand is truly a very special place and where all the wonders of nature blooms at its best.

On a different note, I want to extend a big congratulations to our CEO, Nils Odendaal for his 10 year service to the NamibRand Nature Reserve. Nils has been an inspiration to us in may ways and may he continue to prosper in his position.

Vanessa Hartung

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News from our CEO

We held our 16th AGM on the 30th of May 2014 at the new picnic spot that was built on Draaihoek. The event was hosted by Wolwedans and a successful and well attended meeting was followed by our annual game count on the 31st of May.

News from the AGM is that our acting warden, Mr Quintin Hartung, has received the official approval from our board of directors to be promoted to control warden. We could not have asked for a more professional, dedicated and enthusiastic person in charge of the day to day activities of NamibRand and congratulate Quintin on this appointment! At the AGM our chairman and custodian, Mr Albi Bruckner, also thanked the CEO for his 10 years of service to NamibRand.

The results from the game count are discussed later on in this newsletter and we would like to thank everyone for continuing to support this important biodiversity monitoring activity. The best management approach for the Pro-Namib ecosystem is that of minimal interference (nature can take care of itself), but with constant monitoring so that management interventions can be applied if necessary. For example, if introduced animal species such as our plains zebra reach their sustainable population limit then intervention, such as the reduction of the overall number by live game capture, may be required.

The fact that the Pro-Namib ecosystem has been modified by the establishment of permanent water and the fact that it is an open system through which animals can migrate in search of better grazing is more reason to implement improved monitoring in the larger landscape. With this in mind, we have been helping the Greater Sossusvlei Landscape Association to adapt our game count technique for the larger area so that more effective wildlife monitoring can take place across the landscape. New game count maps have been surveyed, maps and resource packs are being finalized and we hope to have the first game count training workshops and the actual counts for the rest of the landscape before the end of the year. These additional game counts will add an additional 800,000 ha or area that is intensively monitored, making the total area where wildlife is counted almost 1 million ha (10,000 square kilometres) in size!

The NAM-PLACE funded Greater Sossusvlei Landscape Association is moving into a new phase of looking at the long term sustainability of this initiative. In line with this objective, the recent resignation of the NAM-PLACE landscape specialist for our area was seen as an opportunity to replace this position with a coordinator who is based within our landscape. The Neuhof Reserve has been chosen to fulfil this function and their staff will, as of October, take on the role of co-ordinating the activities of the Greater Sossusvlei Landscape Association. Using the staff and resources (such as housing and vehicles) from Neuhof is the first

step toward the sustainability of our association. Although they will be remunerated from left-over NAM-PLACE funding, the long term idea is that the members of the landscape association will ultimately pick up their costs.

A long anticipated milestone has now been achieved on the NamibRand Nature Reserve. The removal of the last section of road corridor fence at Toekoms is done! As previously reported a new motor gate (cattle grid) was completed in January 2014 and the establishment of this gate in the south of the Reserve then allowed us to remove the last section of fence. Congratulations must be extended to Quintin Hartung and his team for making this long desired dream a reality!

Our warden in the south, Peter Woolfe and his team, are also making good progress with the removal of unsightly, unused infrastructure such as old pump houses and water reservoirs at Twee Pompe and Grootpomp water.

We are honoured to be chosen by the natural history filming unit of the BBC, One Planet, for the filming of parts of a new wildlife documentary series on NamibRand. The BBC wildlife documentary "Planet Earth" as narrated by David Attenborough is internationally renowned and this new television series is planned to be the sequel of that highly successful program.

Nils Odendaal



Top: The removal of the corridor fence at Toekoms well in progress.



Top: Fairy Circles adding just the right amount of elegance to the landscape.



News @ NaDEET

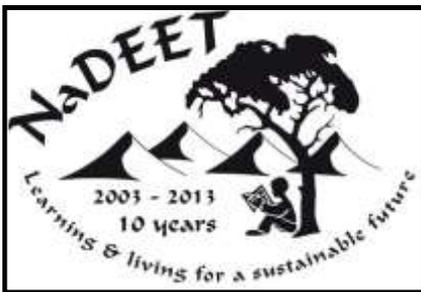
In the last issue of the Barking Gecko, we talked about the big move to our small office in Swakopmund. Since then, we have grown accustomed to our new home away from home, and moving our administrative operations to Swakopmund certainly has its advantages (Wi-Fi and cell reception to name a few). Nevertheless, those of us working primarily out of Swakop still miss the red dunes of NamibRand.

Our funded action from the European Union 2013-2016 to expand our reach to select communities in the Hardap region is now in full swing. We initially referred to this project as "Outreach" or "Hardap Region Action," but after a recent staff meeting, we've come up with a name we find a bit more fitting - "RUG for Sustainability." As you might have guessed, this name is an acronym, and stands for the three focus communities the project serves: Rietoog, Uibes, and Gochas. We thought the metaphor of a rug was also suitable. Rugs are interwoven and we intend to "weave" the principles of sustainable living into each of the three communities.

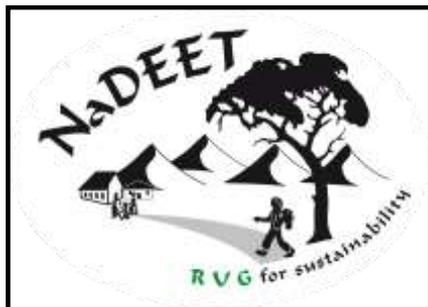
Since the project kick-off, NaDEET staff members have provided workshops on general sustainability and, most recently, waste management. Waste is a very big issue in two of the communities that are partaking in this action. Although they started to take action against this issue, the knowledge and awareness is vital as to what extent these projects will be successful. With this in mind, we addressed the waste issue in the communities using films and hands on practical activities covering the 5Rs of waste management (reduce, reuse, recycle, repair and rot (composting)).

Through this we also addressed the myth that littering creates employment. Lower primary learners recycled right away using paper to make bags, where others were given this a task as an ongoing project for the upper primary and youth. Upper primary learners are tasked with generating awareness posters and videos, and youth are expected to be even more creative and present their recycled projects when they visit NaDEET Centre this August.

Mackenzie Nelson



Right: The NaDEET logo with the new RUG concept slogan.



Top: Rietoog community hosts a solar cooking competition!



Bottom: Uibes schoolchildren making recycled paper bags.

Photos: NaDEET photo library



News from the South

Greetings to all from the south! Since the last edition there have been some exciting developments down here and some changes.

Lee and Murray Tindall who were managing Excelsior, have recently moved from Excelsior to Neuhof where their main function will be to activate the conservation management plans for the property. I'm sure every one will join me in wishing them every success in their new venture. They have been replaced by Gordon Fouche.

Aandstêr has last month taken delivery of two new vehicles, a Toyota Land Cruiser and a Suzuki Gypsy. These are to replace the old Cruiser and the Stallion bakkie. The Gypsy is attracting a lot of attention, a small well priced little workhorse, perfect for routine jobs around the Reserve, and very economical. We have recently started the process of removing some of the obsolete infrastructure down here. To begin with, we are demolishing the old pump house and reservoir at Tweepompe. I don't think the person who built it, probably Broer Louw, ever

(Continued on page 4)

(Continued from page 3)

intended it to be demolished – this stuff was built to last! The breaking down will probably take longer than the time it took to build. Next we will start on the pump house and reservoir at Groot Pomp.

Of major significance is that we have finally signed a Memorandum of Understanding with our neighbours to the south of Springbokvlakte, Khumbis. We have since identified several places where the fence line will be opened between the two properties, in total about 4 kilometres. These areas are old migratory routes for the Namib gemsbok and springbok populations, as clearly demonstrated by the poor condition of the fence in these areas. Work on opening up these sections commenced the mid-August.

Other good news is that MET have nearly completed construction of a permanent camp in the Park to the south west near Kanaan. This will mean constant monitoring of traffic entering the park and moving north into the Sand Sea Heritage area. Its good to see some pro active initiatives taking place in the park as it is good to see government investing in conservation.

The southern family of giraffe seem to be flourishing and getting more adventurous in their movements. They have been seen at Stellarine, and recently passed by the Aandstër home-
stead! The latest report puts them near the Horseshoe camp. The two calves are looking healthy and growing apace.

We have prepared the outside vegetable garden for planting in August. sweet melons, water melons, cucumber, squash and leeks will all make up part of the menu. I would also like to try potatoes again. So, watch this space!

That’s all the news from the south – good to see Boulders nice and busy!



Left: Casual workers busy with the removal of reservoir at Twee pompe.

Right: The relocated giraffe wandering around in the south of the Reserve.



Left: The new Suzuki Gypsy that replaced the old Stallion on Aandstër.

Right: The Twee pompe reservoir at a different angle during the removal process.



Desert Serenade

I am sitting on top of a hill overlooking the deserted houses of Toekoms. It is a calm afternoon, the late sun spreading his liquid gold onto the bush grass and bathing the mountains in copper. There is nobody around, meaning: no human soul, but countless souls of a different kind.

Back to the wild

I can’t stop taking pictures. Back in Germany, they will remind me of the Namibian glow, of a landscape that every day shortly before dawn falls in love with the dying sun. Though this is not my first time on NamibRand. Since 2008 I keep coming back like under a spell to this magic land of fairy circles and enchanted souls.

It’s the call of the cheetah that first lured me as a volunteer into this country. We used to catch problem cats on farmland and to release them on NamibRand into the wild. Never will I forget that rainy morning, when we opened the cage for a big male leopard in Horseshoe Wilderness Area. He was suspicious and in a bad mood, so, when all went still, he wouldn’t come out ... Finally, convinced that there is no immediate threat to his life, that massive head of his pops out of the bars. The cat stops, listens. Still no trace of a menace, but still those scents. I wonder where on earth those tears in my eyes may come from? All of a sudden, I understand: The stranger in this landscape is me, the two legged, not him. He belongs here like the age-old

mountains, like the yellow plains and the blue skies. Yet, he doesn’t dare to run.

Now, the decision is made. Two smooth strides, and he’s on the ridge next to the cage. Two more, and he’s safe. His glance back to us is no more than a blink. But we all get the message: This is my land. Not yours

Barbara Imgrund



Left: Barbara on a hike into the mountains.

Right: A Kudu bull spotted by Barbara around Toekoms



Photos: Barbara Imgrund

Little Bugs

Exciting news for Little Bugs!

The children of the Little Bugs school have recently experienced an exciting move! From the initial building at the back of Namib Sky Balloon base the non-profit school was established in, they have now moved to the new buildings, which includes a brand new home for the Little Bugs bunnies, a beautiful green playground for the kids, and the first new classroom.

Traditional schools design focuses on management – schedule, budget, and efficiency- and leaves little room for creativity in the design process. We believe the importance of the physical appearance of a school or learning centre should not be minimized. A school building that is attractive and responds to and is consistent with the design and context of the neighbourhood, builds a sense of pride and ownership among students, teachers, and the community. More than other building types, school facilities have a profound impact on their occupants and the functions of the building, namely teaching and learning. Children in various stages of development are stimulated by light, colour, the scale of their surroundings, even the navigational aspects of their school.

Here, in our new school, everything has been designed for children, to give them a secure and stimulating environment. The interior is visually comfortable and stimulating by integrating natural and artificial lighting, and incorporates colours that stimulate or soothe, depending on the space function. Flexible spaces with different activities offered allow children to get up, move around, reconfigure themselves into smaller groups, or join other activities. Everything has been thought to encourage their autonomy, invite self-expression and enhance their creativity.

The outdoor learning area helps to expand their understanding of the world around them. Completely enclosed, with plenty of shade, it provides barriers that protect our children from plants, wildlife and sun. They feel and are safe and secure at all time. Their playground not only allows running, climbing, sliding and balancing but also contains places to dig in sand, play in water, investigate animal life, grow seeds and vegetables, or even ride their tricycle!

All different spaces are structured at Little Bugs, yet flexible. They can be recognised by children, for quiet or active play, but can be rearranged by children for their own activities. Little Bugs is also going green: the children now have a special recycling area, and we are planning to integrate renewable energies like solar thermal and photovoltaics.

All these new changes delighted the children, including the arrival of their new teacher. Charlotte Van Cutsem arrived from Belgium, and the Little Bugs fell in love with her immediately. Many exciting new things are still also on the way. The second classroom and the office are busy being furnished and the kitchen and eating area will be soon operational.

The Little Bugs family wishes to thank everyone involved for their participation and generosity from both the international

community and the local businesses, thanks to NamibRand for generously donating and starting us on our way to the full solar electricity system for the school.

We know that the caring community we are all a part of will continue this wonderful partnership, changing the lives of the wonderful children in our area.

Nancy Dupont



Top, Middle and Bottom: The newly built school building and children enjoying the new school and all activities.

Photos: Little Bugs photo library

Wolwedans Attracts International Fashion House

Get “The Look” for Yourself

We’ve always known that Wolwedans is one of the most striking locations on earth, but once again, the world has shown that it agrees with our view!

With the latest issue of “The Look” magazine, readers can admire the distinct beauty of the NamibRand Nature Reserve. The pages are a collage of vivid colours, crafty layout, gorgeous models and an outstanding portrayal of the location. The magazine published images secured by Paul Kehl Zurich, the PKZ fashion house.

The fashion house visited Wolwedans in 2014 to take some exquisite shots of their fashion line. Identified by their production team as a scenic location of note, Wolwedans did not disappoint. With vast open spaces, piercing blue skies and mesmerizing multi-coloured dunes, the photographers had the perfect backdrop for an array of photographic exploits. The combination of skilled artists behind the camera, attractive personalities beyond the camera and magnificent landscapes surrounding the camera, resulted in an exceptional photo shoot with a uniquely Namibian flavour.

To view the eye-catching ensembles for yourself, visit the Wolwedans website:

<http://www.wolwedans.com/fashion/>

Or simply visit the Wolwedans Facebook page:

<http://www.wolwedans.com/fashion/>

Magdalena Wakolele

In order to solidify the link between people and wildlife, members of staff were divided into teams bearing names of animals from the Reserve. These were: Cheetah, Leopard, Kudu, Oryx, Springbok, Zebra, Ostrich and Giraffe. Each team prepared its own slogan and theme chant in advance. With shouting, cheering, singing and stomping, team spirit filled the air.

Activities included athletic challenges such as 100-meter sprints, relay races and shot put. Team-based sports, such as ring net, dodge ball, volleyball and soccer also featured on the programme. In addition, participants were required to prove their mettle in intellectual activities. Teams were handed a multi-stage quiz with sections on Wolwedans, the NamibRand Nature Reserve as well as interesting puzzles, riddles and questions on logic.

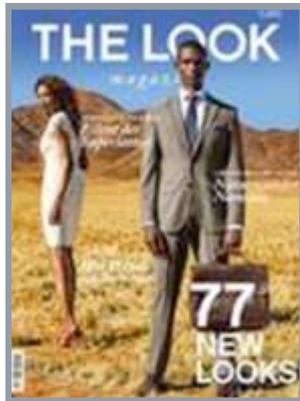
The event provided recreation from hard work, allowed for leaders to be identified from among their peers and created a platform for cultural differences to be bridged through positive social interaction. The occasion created a conducive environment, in which people from every walk of life could better learn to work with one another, thereby improving their teambuilding skills. Indeed sport is a wonderful social tool; it encourages cultural exchange and cooperation, increases self-confidence, instils self-discipline, reduces stress and causes participants to learn new sporting techniques. When a team fares poorly, the members learn to be more understanding of failures and mistakes. As with any other sports activity, the Winter Games helped to stir a more optimistic outlook among the members of staff.

The games ended in the evening with a festive party and handing out of prizes. Awards were given for: the best team overall, the best teamwork and the best team spirit. Congratulations to team Kudu for being the overall winners. Team Ostrich came in second and were rewarded for their exceptional teamwork. In terms of cheering and laughter, team Zebra cut the other teams down to size.

Given that Namibia’s population is a mix of numerous races and tribes. Respecting differences among people groups is crucial for the development and unity of the country. This is pivotal to Wolwedans’ stance as a “Long Run” destination. The Winter Games successfully proved that sports can be used as a medium to bring people of different cultures together in a cheerful and fun way.

Moritz von Hase

Photo: Paul Kehl Zurich



Top: Cover pictures of The Look magazine, taken at Wolwedans.

Winter Games at Wolwedans Social Cohesion through Cultural Diversity

“Mens sana in corpore sano” – Juvenal
“A healthy mind in a healthy body”

For the first time in the history of the NamibRand Nature Reserve, the entire staff of the Wolwedans Collection congregated at “The Village” to celebrate the inaugural Wolwedans Winter Games. The event was an eruption of sports, games, team-building exercises and mentally stimulating activities.



Top and Bottom: Wolwedans and Keerweder staff participating in the Wolwedans winter games.

Photos: Wolwedans Photo Library

Annual 2014 Game Count

Summary

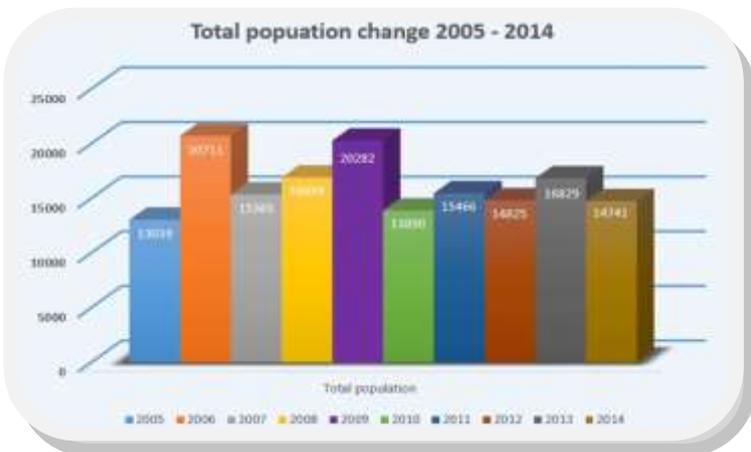
The NamibRand Nature Reserve annual game count was held on the 31st of May 2014 and was well participated by concessionaires, landowners, and Reserve staff. The results of the game count show a significant drop in wildlife numbers across the Reserve this was most likely as a result of the isolated and widespread distribution of the rainfall in the previous rainfall season, with much of it falling outside of the Reserve, resulting in better grazing elsewhere to which the wildlife migrated. The overall population estimate decreased by 12.39%. Estimated oryx and springbok numbers went down by 6.96% and 22.05% respectively. The wildlife distribution results show that most of the migratory species like springbok and oryx were concentrated in the south of the Reserve (Zone 8 and 10). The oryx densities were also high in Zones 3 and 4 as these area also received relatively higher rainfall during the past rainfall season.

The more widespread distribution of plains zebra shown in the game count results is testament to the fact that plains zebra have been wandering farther south on their own account.

Even though no kudus were seen during the game count, sightings of big herds, including young ones, have become all the more common around Draaihoek and Toekoms, giving testament to a rising population after the drop in numbers in 2013. One must also keep in mind while the game count method employed is good for estimating larger numbers of common plains game, it less suited to other species such as kudu and steenbok.

On the 24th of June 2014 we conducted a total zebra and hartebeest count to supplement the game count figures. The plains zebra numbers increased by 10% and the hartebeest number went down by 3.43%. Even though there was a slight drop in hartebeest numbers this year, the number is still above 200 which is still quite high because of their restricted grazing area in the north of the Reserve.

The graph below show the total long term population estimate changes.



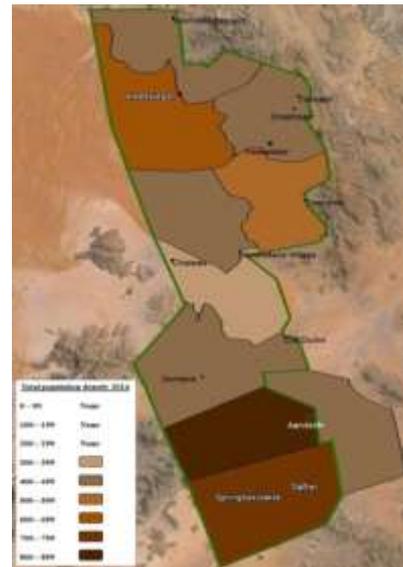
The table below shows the total number of game seen under 500m during the game count and the estimated numbers derived from calculating the relevant species and area correction factors into the number seen.

Total estimated numbers of game (Zone 1-10; Jun 13 - May 2014)					
Species	Jun-13		May-14		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	1943	10087	1762	9385	-6.96%
Springbok	997	5919	772	4614	-22.05%
Kudu	1	11	0	0	-100.00%
Steenbok	0	0	0	0	0.00%
P. zebra*	174	320	173	352	10.00%
Ostrich	81	285	50	193	-32.27%
Hartebeest*	159	204	2	197	-3.43%
Total	3355	16826	2759	14741	-12.39%
Giraffe**(*)		6	1	2	-66.67%
Ludwigs Bustard**	48	177	30	120	-32.20%
Ruppel's Korhaan**			27	76	

* Numbers are known

** Not included in count

The map below shows the total wildlife distribution during the game count.



Quintin Hartung



Top: A group of oryx at the Kwessiegat waterhole.

Photo: Theo Allofs

News From Keerweder!

On the weather front, the past winter was moderately warm, with the temperature dropping below 0°C only once at Keerweder during the winter. The first rain of the new season fell as early as September and we're hoping that this is good omen lots more to come this summer.

In April, we hosted a fire drill at Keerweder. The drill was attended by Reserve and concessionaire's staff and representatives from the Neuhof Reserve. The workshop comprised of a theoretical session, presented by myself, followed by a practical session during which the firefighting equipment, knowledge and skills of all attendees were tested. The next fire drill is scheduled for October.

In May, we replaced the batteries of the radio repeater on the Losberg Mountain. Vanessa and I caught a lift up the mountain with a helicopter which was quite exciting.

The corridor fence that was once along the C27 on the farms Verweg and Toekoms is now a thing of the past. After the motor gate was moved to the southern boundary fence on the C27, we have removed the total of over 30km of corridor fence line. This is a great feat achieved as the animals now have ample space to roam on both sides of the main road without getting caught in the fence. To add to this, an MOU was recently signed by the CEO of the Reserve and the owner of Kumbis to open up the fence between the Reserve and Kumbis to facilitate wildlife migration.

In July welcomed a new employee to the Reserve, Willem Rooi. Willem is based at Toekoms and operates from Keerweder.

Regular sightings of Hyena tracks continue to be the norm in the northern part of the Reserve. So too, sightings of coalitions of cheetahs. In the Beginning of September we saw a group of six cheetahs at Toekoms. The guides have also reported seeing similar sized groups of cheetahs on Draaihoek.

On the 17th of September I saw a large female leopard on Draaihoek. This was my first leopard sighting in quite a while, so it wonderful to see the majestic creature again.

On a more tragic note, the Reserve has been hit by a spate of rabid Jackals. To date, we've had to euthanized 10 rabid Jackals. We've asked all concessionaires to be on the lookout for sick animals, so as to try and eradicate the threat.

Quintin Hartung

Right: Willem Rooi, the newly appointed field Ranger to NamibRand Nature Reserve.



Photo: Vanessa Hartung



Top: The helicopter flight to top of the Losberg to replace the batteries of the radio repeater.

Photo: Vanessa Hartung



Midde: The Kumbis gate where the removal of the fence commences.

Photo: Quintin Hartung



Top: The hartebeest in the release boma with John Bernstein looking on.



Left: Participants in the April fire drill busy putting out a fire to test all fire fighting equipment.

Photo: Vanessa Hartung

Interesting Pictures



Top: A pied crow (*Corvus albus*) caught on the camera trap at Moringa waterhole.



Top: The big Giraffe (*Giraffa camelopardalis*) bull still at Draaihoek caught on camera at Porcupine waterhole.



Top: Big group of Kudus (*Tragelaphus strepsiceros*) at captured drinking at Moringa waterhole.



Top: A kudu (*Tragelaphus strepsiceros*) bull and cow drinking at Moringa with a few springbok (*Antidorcas marsupialis*) in the background.



Top: A group of Klipspringers (*Oreotragus oreotragus*) at the Moringa waterhole.



Top: Group of our illustrious hartmann's mountain zebra (*E.z. hartmannae*) at the very busy Moringa waterhole.

Photos: Bukeye Camera

Photos: Bukeye Camera

Thank you

Many thanks to those of you who have contributed to this issue of The Barking Gecko by providing articles/information: Theo Allofs, Nancy Dupont, Quintin Hartung, Barbara Imgrund, Andreas Keding, Paul Kehl Zurich, Mackenzie Nelson, Nils Odendaal, Stephan Sachse, Moritz von Hase, Magdalena Wakolele, and Peter Woolfe.

We would also like to thank all those who so generously share their photographs and interesting sightings!

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.

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