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### *In this issue:*

Editorial.....	1
News from the CEO.....	2
Wardens Report .....	3
News from the South.....	4
News @ NaDEET.....	5-6
White lady spider preying on scorpion.....	6
Little Bugs News.....	7
Mountain Zebra Research update.....	8
News from Family Hideout.....	9
Namib in November.....	9
NamibRand Experience: Felix Lipov .....	10
Farewell NamibRand.....	11
Then and Now.....	11
Interesting Pictures.....	12

thus being surrounded by these pure landscapes and dramatic sunsets, definitely motivates each day.

You can look forward to updates from north to south with water management developments, upgrades to existing infrastructures, farewells and welcoming of staff members.

NamibRand has always been a very popular destination for research, filming and photography. We have hosted a few researchers, filming crews and photographers on the Reserve again the past year. We are happy that through their work our conservation efforts are shared with the rest of the world and sends out a positive message on environmental management.

We have also hosted our end of year Kgotla at Kwessiegat on 4 December 2015. It was a very well attended meeting and important management discussions were held. Wolwedans made delicious snacks and a meal after the meeting where every one socialized and caught up on recent events.

We are really excited to bring you our Christmas Edition filled with exciting news and updates from our neighbors and concessionaires and hope you will enjoy reading and celebrating our successes of 2015.

*Vanessa Hartung*

## *Looking back at 2015!*

This has been one amazing year. With all of its challenges and successes we have managed to achieve a lot in the past twelve months. I believe this is also a great time where we can all look back and realise how much we have grown.

So much happened since our last Barking Gecko which makes it the perfect time to reflect on the year as a whole. We are excited to reflect on many progressive developments on the Reserve which you can look forward to read about.

The saying “time does not wait for anyone” can perfectly summarize 2015. We can thus be at peace with how we spent our time. Time spent in nature heals the body, mind and spirit

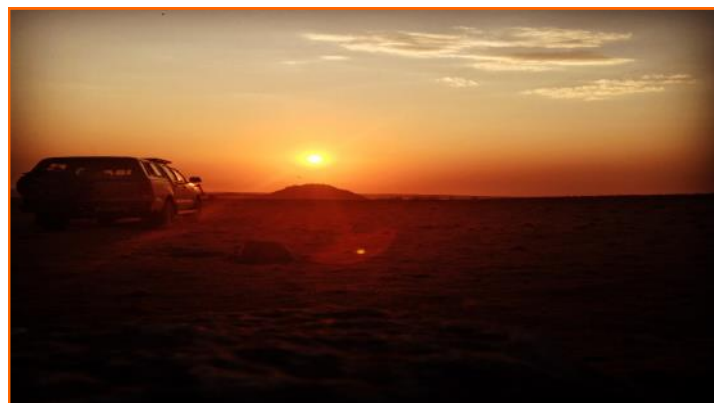


Photo: Vanessa Hartung

*Top: A beautiful NamibRand sunset from the famous music rocks on the Reserve.*

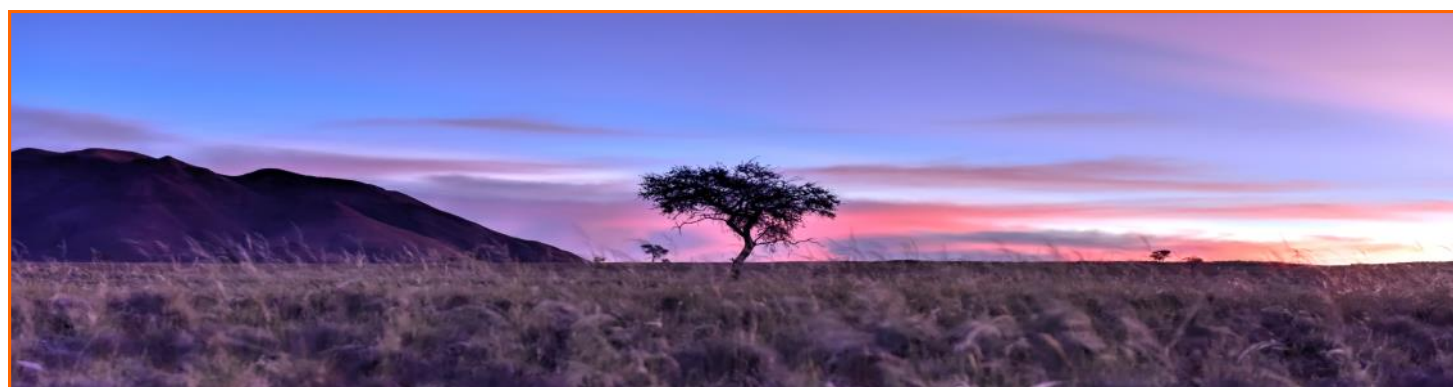


Photo: Felix Lipov

*Top : A beautiful sunset captured in the south of the Reserve by visiting photographer Felix Lipov during his stay at the Family Hideout.*

## News from our CEO



On the 24<sup>th</sup> of September we celebrated Mr Jakobus Kooper's retirement party at Aandstêr. Jakobus turned 61 in January 2015 and decided to retire this year to enjoy his golden years with his family in Maltahöhe. Jakobus started working on the farm Aandstêr, when it was still a fully-fledged agricultural operation in 1974. When Aandstêr joined the NamibRand Nature Reserve in 2000, Jakobus saw the transition of the land from intensive livestock farming to a fully restored ecosystem with conservation and tourism as the main land use. In his younger years he was involved in erecting fences for the encampment of livestock and then again as the supervisor in efforts to take down fences in an effort to restore the open wildlife-friendly landscape. He went from exterminating predators, having once killed a leopard with a rock in self-defence while guarding livestock, to helping with re-introduction of these animals back onto the land. We wish him all the best with this new chapter in his life. He will be missed.



Photo: Nils Odendaal

Top: NRR staff at Jakobus' farewell party at Aandstêr.

Water management takes up the bulk of our staff's time. One of the most challenging weekly jobs that our rangers have done until recently is to drive water, in storage tanks on the back of a pick-up truck and on a trailer, to strategic waterholes. Water was driven to Hyena and Kudu water, to provide for animals in these areas with no borehole or any other water source available for 20 km<sup>2</sup>. Our Control Warden, Quintin Hartung, and his team have been working hard to construct a 8 km pipeline from Sossusvlei Desert Lodge to a new waterhole near the old Hyena site. In addition, they have installed a new 4 km pipeline from Toekoms to a new waterhole near Kudu water. New water storage tanks, pumps and troughs were needed and this mammoth task is now almost complete. Water can now be pumped to these two important water holes, sustaining life in the areas and saving a large amount of wear and tear on our cars and equipment.

The Greater Sossusvlei-Namib Landscape Association (GSNL) is now a registered Section 21, not-for-profit, Company. Founding members of the GSNL signed the company documents and now serve as directors on the board of this legally recognised institution, an important step toward the long-term sustainability of our collaboratively managed landscape.

I was privileged to be invited to attend the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Conservation Forum in Nairobi, Kenya from

30 September to 2 October 2015. At this forum, IUCN members deliberated the Global Intersessional Programme and Regional Conservation Implementation Plan for the next five years. At this meeting it was decided to revive the regional representative committee for Eastern and Southern Africa and I was chosen to represent the IUCN members from Namibia.

A new staff and meeting room has been built at Keerweder by closing up a space that used to be used for a large refrigerated container. Staff now have a room where they can gather after hours to watch TV and where management can have a large space for hosting meetings.

Right: The newly built Staff entertainment room/meeting room.

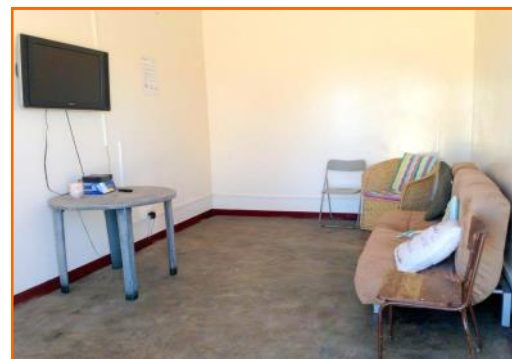


Photo: Vanessa Hartung

The lack of rain and the steadily worsening veld and grazing conditions over the last three years have turned the vast grassland on the NamibRand Nature Reserve back into barren gravel plains. While this is a natural phenomenon in the desert, it makes for especially hard living condition for our staff who have, over the past six months, experienced at least four major sand storms. We have recorded wind speeds in excess of 80km/hour and staff now sleep with rolls of masking tape next to their beds so that they can jump up at night to seal their windows in an effort to keep the sand out of the house. Let's hope that this unpleasant cycle is broken soon when we receive the first rains of the season.



Photos: Vanessa Hartung

Top: Sand storm on the Reserve. Picture taken at Keerweder.

We wish you all a great festive season and wish you a well-deserved rest. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Nils Odendaal





## Wardens Report

As we come to the end of 2015, we can look back at a good, productive year, despite the lack of decent rainfall on the Reserve and the country as a whole. We, as the Reserve management, achieved many of the goals we set out for ourselves in the beginning of the year. These include the first international fairy circle symposium that was successfully held on the Reserve in February, another successful game count done in May, we installed a link radio repeater on Satanskop to improve coverage in the south of the Reserve, and moved the Hyena and Kudu waterholes closer to the nearest respective water source, to highlight just a few. This all was done while still maintaining the day to day upkeep of the Reserve's resources. More recently, through the GSNL's game monitoring research project, we managed the re-capture some of the gemsbok and one of the mountain zebra that were collared in November 2013 and replaced or removed (in some cases) the collars. In total, three gemsbok and three springbok were collared on the Reserve. This is the first time that springbok were collared in the landscape and we look forward to seeing the data that the collars feed back as these animals migrate.

Photo: Logan Forrest



Top: Quintin with the collaring team at Draaihoek fitting a collar on a springbok.

In November, two lads, one a Nature conservation student at the Namibia University of Science and Technology, and the other an electrical apprentice at a copper gold mine in South Australia looking to do conservation volunteer work, joined the NRNR staff for short internships. Both Pinehas Iyambo and Logan Forrest have added great value to our team and have taken on and completed all tasks assigned to them with aplomb. While Logan's visit was short (he'll be back in Australia by the time this is published), Pinehas is still with us until mid-January next year.

Photo: Willem Rooi



Left: Students Logan and Pinehas checking and cleaning rain gauges.

We held our end-of-year Kgotla meeting at Kwessiegat on the 4th of December. The meeting, well attended by our concessionaires, was splendidly catered for by Wolwedans. After the meeting's formal proceeding, we all enjoyed a good "kuier" and delicious food.

On the day after the Kgotla, we hosted our NRNR staff Christmas party at Keerweder where we, Vanessa and I, cooked for the staff and gave out presents, and Nils thanked the staff for their hard work this year in his address to them.

Sadly, these two events also marked our (Vanessa and my) farewell to the Reserve. These were the last Kgotla meeting and staff party that we would attend on the Reserve.

As recent social media posts and emails announced, Vanessa and I have resigned from the Reserve and are moving back to Windhoek at the beginning of next year. NamibRand has been my home for the past five and a half years, and my career for my entire professional life, as short as that may be, so naturally I am a bit overwhelmed with sadness to be leaving, but at the same time I am optimistically looking forward to taking on new challenges and endeavours. Vanessa and I are very proud to have been part of such an amazing organization and know that it can only go from strength to strength in its role as one of the leading conservation organizations in the country.

Quintin Hartung



Top & Bottom: NRNR staff and staff children enjoying lunch at the year end Christmas party held at Keerweder.

Photos: Willem Rooi



## News from the South

Greetings to all from the deep south. It is hard to believe that there is another year under the belt, at least that's how one views it at this age! It does however astonish how quickly the time slips by. My "Brand New" Land Cruiser is already eighteen months old!!! ATTATA. Well I hope every one survived silly season and are all ready for a break. We have not really had a silly season in the south, things have run pretty smoothly, but I'll keep quiet till after Christmas.

So what has been happening in the south? One thing is sure, the drought has not broken and I won't destroy any one's optimism by mentioning the forecast in this forum. The giraffe are as mobile as ever and have lately been seen as a group of six around NaDEET and the Family Hideout, so it looks like they have hooked up again – maybe as a result of the new foliage on the Acacias. The zebras also seem to be handling their new home in the south and are often sighted. The other morning we arrived to pull the pump at Straussenwasser and found fresh, fresh leopard spoor at the pump! I assume a young male. We are looking forward to putting up the camera trap there when the pump is fixed. Porcupines have also been playing havoc both at Aandster and Boulders. All three were removed to unspecified far away places. Also a big surprise was a cattle egret on the front lawn, by himself. Looked like an adult male just going into breeding mode. Shame and he's in the Namib! I know the feeling.



Top & Right : A cattle egret at Aandster .



Staff accommodation has also seen a major upgrade during the last quarter. All staff houses now have a solar heating system installed in their homes and new gas cookers that include an oven. This as much to save gas on what are hopefully more efficient than the old ones, as much as enhance their cooking experience! We start with the process of painting the inside of their houses imminently. The staff have all voiced their appreciation.

All the main centers in the south, being Aandster, NaDEET and Springbokvlakte, have had weather stations installed. There is still a glitch with the one at Aandster and Springbokvlakte with the uploads which will be sorted out soon. The one at NaDEET is online if you want to see where all the rain is falling.

The new repeater installed at Satanskop has also improved our communication ability in the south.



Top: The new solar geysers installed at the staff houses.

The south has also, proudly maintained its Dark Sky status, as I am sure most of us have. I have also found it is important to talk around about it. If in town and asked where you work, try and get an opportunity to mention it. I have found it is a concept many in our area have never considered, and where more progress can be made. Ideally it should apply to the whole of the landscape area.

On a sadder note, our dear friend and mentor has left Aandster to retire in Maltahöhe. He lived and worked here for some 30 years and no one knew the area and understood its mechanisms like our friend Jakobus Kooper. He worked hard those years and we wish him a happy retirement a big thank you and a good laugh!



Left & Bottom: Jakobus Kooper during his time working on NamibRand Nature Reserve.



I am not going to talk about the weather we have had, it speaks for itself and we have all had sandstorms, damage etc. I am just going to sign off by wishing you all a very Happy Christmas, a festive New Year and all you can wish for in the New Year. I just want to leave you all with a smile on your face – For our German fellows!

Franziska took a load of goats to the Mariental Auction. She waited at the wash bay afterwards for longer than she felt she should, took off her shoes and climbed on the bakkie in all the excrement, with a hose and a brush. A couple of minutes later a guy she doesn't know from a bar of soap yells toward the kraals, "HEY! IEMAND KOM HELP HIERDIE DUITSE VROU!!!"

Cheers all! From the south.

Peter Woolfe



## NaDEET Centre

Thanks to the generous support from our donors, NaDEET Centre has been able to maintain its "Open Door Policy". This policy removes the burden of fundraising from the schools in low income areas as visitors to the NamibRand Nature Reserve who take a tour of NaDEET Centre are inspired to support the programme through donations.

This allows schoolchildren to pay only a portion of the actual cost of N\$880/person/programme. This past year, we have also fortunately formed a new partnership with the ACS Cobham International School – Namibia Project in the UK that was seeking for new learning opportunities for the school and community they have supported for many years, Kutenhoas.

During the Kutenhoas Primary School programme in October, Mr. Goeieman, the principal, had this to say:

"We take the environment for granted. We don't observe. We don't know what its components mean to us and how valuable they are. Now thanks to NaDEET we do."

In 2016, another school group and the Kutenhoas community will visit NaDEET Centre.



Top: Kutenhoas learners interacting with the area's biodiversity during their Dune Walk

We were also thrilled to have one of our former yearlong *weltwärts* volunteers, Samuel Pfenning, return. Inspired by his life-changing year at NaDEET in 2009-10, he organised a three week Namibia tour for students in Germany and Switzerland through the Initiative for Intercultural Learning (IFIL). The students stayed for two days and learned right alongside the grade 7 learners of Danie Joubert PS. This was a great opportunity for the two groups to learn each other's culture and exchange ideas about the environment.



Top: IFIL group members learning alongside Danie Joubert Primary School.

The IFIL group experienced the desert as a place of extreme and erratic weather, as the temperature can rise and fall by 20 degrees in one day. Summer, however, is felt when scorpions such as the Thick-tailed Scorpion – southern Africa's most venomous scorpion, appear by the numbers. Schoolchildren in no time became experts in spotting them and helping to carefully remove them from the accommodation areas. During the summer time nocturnal activity increases with many more sightings of the Dancing White Lady Spider and Namib Dune Gecko.



Top: The granulated thick-tailed scorpion found at the Centre.

## WaterWiseWashrooms

Construction of the new WaterWiseWashrooms has started at the end of October after the last group left for the year and progress is well on its way. These new washrooms are replacing the existing bathrooms that have serviced over 10 000 participants since 2003 and were due for a healthy upgrade. The old bathrooms were carefully dismantled to salvage materials and the beautiful mural paintings to be reused. These bathrooms will allow NaDEET to continue its education into efficient energy saving designs and water saving techniques and will be completed by the beginning of 2016.



Top: Precision dismantling of the old bathrooms.

Photos: NaDEET Photo Library

## RUG for Sustainability

Since September the RUG outreach team has visited all three of its project communities for some tree planting and mural painting activities to liven up the community and continue the spirit of environmental education.



(Continued on page 6)







(Continued from page 5)



Here we can see NaDEET staff presenting the painting to Gochas which for Nina Grahl, our current *weltwärts* volunteer, was a great opportunity to interact with the community on a more personal level. Furthermore, the tree planting activity was a huge success in all three communities especially for the children from Uibes who had fun planting the trees and learning how to take care of them. There was a great appreciation from the communities to NaDEET staff for being so active in their community.

*Faghan Poci*



*Top: RUG team presenting their murals to Gochas community .*



*Top: School learners from Uibes having fun with their tree planting.*

## ***Dancing white lady spider preying on scorpion.***

On the 17<sup>th</sup> September 2015, we were on a sky walk tour with our guest at Wolwedans Dunes Lodge. We always end the tour off with a surprise scorpion “hunt” where we look for scorpions with the aid of our UV light. We came across something most exciting and interesting, something nobody could ever imagine happening.

We found our scorpion with our UV light and contemplated the reasons of it glowing under the UV light, showing it off with the scorpion constellation in the southern sky. We studied all the detail that this magnificent ancient creature allowed us, and left it in peace to go on with its nocturnal activities.

On our way back, ending our tour, we decided to see if the scorpion was still there, which in fact it was, but just for us to

witness the most amazing sight ever. As we approached the scorpion, we noticed something is not the way it was and as we got closer we found it.

On top of the scorpion was a Dancing White Lady spider, showing who’s the boss. At that time the scorpion had already died and the spider turn out to be the winner in this contest. The skywalk turn out absolutely exciting when we find out that the White lady spider had killed the scorpion where we thought it should be the other way round.

We took pictures of the deceased scorpion lying still in the dunes, and the Dancing White Lady spider dancing around it triumphantly and all of a sudden escaping into its trap door. So now we were questioning ourselves, is the White Lady spider’s venom more lethal than the scorpion, or is it something else we do not know about.

On this note we would like to tell our nature lovers there are a lot of fascinating and exciting things happening at night, you should just take your flashlight and explore the dunes, and you will be amazed how much you observe.

Jacques Julius and Rudi Naibeb



*Top: Caught in the moment where a white lady spider is preying on a scorpion at Wolwedans.*

Photos: Stephan Brückner





# Little Bugs

## Little Bugs News!

### Little Bugs gets wheels!

Yes now the Little Bugs can sing “The wheels on the bus goes round and round” with a big smile on their faces. WE GOT A BUS!!

What a wonderful day it was when we could open the door of the brand new bus donated to us by Dave and Debra and see the appreciation on the Little Bugs’ faces, they loved it. The parents of the children coming from Sesriem and Neuhof have been driving huge distances every day to get their children to school and back. The school were fortunate enough to have a bus donated by donors from abroad and the months waiting for the bus to be released from the production line felt like years but at last in October the bus did the first round trip to school.

A big “THANK YOU” to all who made this possible and also to Moses our bus driver who is doing such a brilliant job getting the Little Bugs safely to school and back.

*Amanda Behr*



*Top: Proud learners of Little Bugs in their new bus.*

### Community Needlework Project.

Apart from Little Bugs, the ECD centre and Community School, Namib Sky Community Trust has now also started with a Community Needlework Project for the ladies (or men!) of the area.

Anybody from the area is welcome to join the project. Training is done and the material provided on each project. As soon as an item has been completed the person is paid for the work done and these items are then sold to guests visiting the area. All profit made is allocated to the school to assist with the running costs. In this way the whole community benefits from this project.

The project also assists in recycling as the handwork items are made by using bottle-caps, tins and empty water bottles. The project received a donation from Belgium which included sewing machines, material and accessories. After starting with

handwork the participants can then also receive training on the sewing machines to make items like aprons, pillow covers etc. The handwork items will stay a popular part of the project as the participants can take it home and finish the products in their own time at home. Each item is sold with a tag displaying the picture and name of the person that made it.

*Amanda Behr*



Photos: Little Bugs Photo Library

*Top, Middle & Bottom: Handmade products made by the participants in the Community Needlework Project. These items are sold at Namib Sky.*





# Mountain Zebra Research Update

## The NamibRand mountain zebra population in 2015

Individual-based monitoring of the mountain zebra population in the northern part of NamibRand has been continuous since 2010 and sufficient data are in hand to estimate the approximate size of the population in any current year. The population under discussion is the 'source population', the animals that the area at some point in the year, not the numbers present at any one time (which are best estimated using mark-recapture – see previous articles in Barking Gecko). The source population is important because its size determines genetic viability (rather than the numbers present in one part of its range). In addition, these are the group of animals which may range far beyond the Reserve boundaries that need to be considered as a unit for conservation management. The problem in carrying out estimates of the source population for any current year is that not all the information needed is in hand and so an element of prediction is needed based on historical data. This account outlines how, for the first time, we can carry out these predictions.

Photo: Morris Gosling



Figure 1. Mountain zebra at the Moringa valley waterhole. The left hand animal is NR463f who was first seen as an adult in 2012; she has been seen every year since and has also been photographed at the Porcupine waterhole.

The starting point for predicting numbers in 2015 is the average proportion of individual animals identified in one year that will also be identified in the following year. Using the information collected since 2010 we find that the average proportion of those identified that will be seen in the next year is 73.5%. From the camera trap images collected in the north (mostly at the Moringa, Porcupine and Hyena waterholes, see Fig 2) 449 individual mountain zebra were identified in 2014. Using the average value of 73.5% we can thus predict that about 330 of the 449 identified in 2014 will be seen again in 2015. But, in addition to these, some animals identified in a year are new (i.e. individuals that have never been seen before) and so the next step is to discover what proportion these are in the historical record.

The data show that in an average year, the 330 animals we expect to identify in 2015 will be about 66% known and 44% new. So we can thus calculate that there will be about 170 new animals and so a total of about 500 mountain zebra will be identified in 2015. However, this is not the end of the story because we know that a further category of animals are also present in any current year. These can be called 'uncatchables', animals that are temporarily outside the study area or too young to be

identified. These will eventually be seen in future years, IDs established, ages assigned and their presence in 2015 inferred by back-projection. But, in the meantime, historical analysis of 'complete' years shows that uncatchables comprise an average of 34.7% of the population. The 500 animals that we estimate will be identified are thus only about 65.3% of the total source population and adding the uncatchables brings the total source population for 2015 to about 767 mountain zebra.

It is difficult to express these numbers as densities because the largest part of the population spends much of its time in the Nubib Mountains along the eastern fringe of the northern part of NamibRand and the population is thus being monitored at its perimeter. The animals forage down the lower slopes of the Nubib mountains within the Reserve but are only rarely seen further out on the plains. However, bearing in mind these complexities, an approximation of the population range that is sampled is probably about 300 km<sup>2</sup>, including some land outside the north-west of the Reserve which mountain zebra use. If reasonably accurate, this yields an average density of about 2.2 mountain zebra per km<sup>2</sup>.

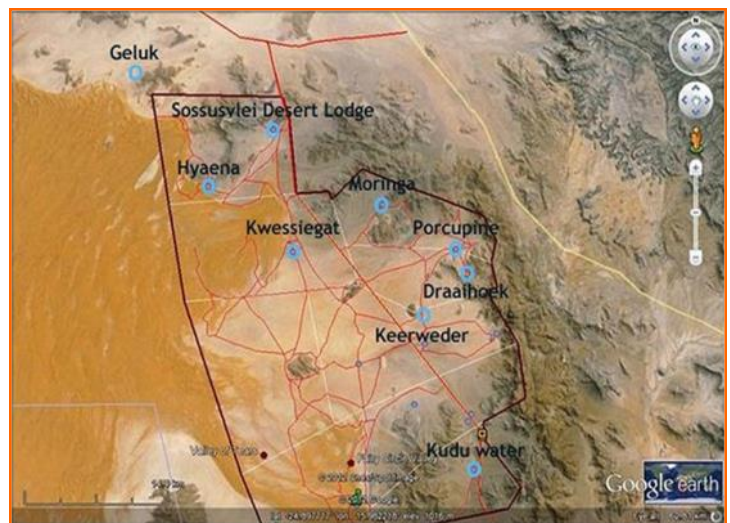


Figure 2. Map of NamibRand water holes mentioned in text and/or in previous reports. Adapted from a map prepared by Ann Scott.

The current estimate of a source population of about 767 animals in the northern part of NamibRand provides the most accurate picture of numbers to date. While these numbers are greater than previously known, this population is small in relation to the population size needed to ensure long term genetic viability. A priority for the future is to investigate connectivity with animals in the south of the Reserve, and of course with surrounding land holdings.

I am grateful for the support and collaboration of Nils Odendaal, Quintin and Vanessa Hartung and their colleagues at Keerweder and to Denis and Andreia Hesemans at Namib Sky Balloon Safaris on the farm Geluk. Thanks also to the Directors of NamibRand for permission to carry out this work and to the Rufford Foundation, Parc Zoologique de Montpellier, the Whitley Fund for Nature and the Namibia Nature Foundation for financial and other support.

Prof. Morris Gosling





## News from the NamibRand Family Hideout

2015 has been a busy and eventful year for us. It started with a bang when we opened our new campsite, christened Venus (see photo). The original campsite was given the name Orion, the naming inspired by our beautiful Dark Skies. Against expectations, we had over 140 nights' simultaneous bookings of Venus and Orion, just indicating how popular our campsites have become. Their contribution to the Reserve in terms of Park Fees has become not insubstantial and in terms of accommodation choice has nicely filled a market gap.

Thanks to Andreas Keding and his team, and of course to our Titus with friend Jeffrey, for their quality building work!

We are harvesting more and more of our magnificent sun's power, in that we have added a Solar hart geyser to Campsite Orion, more panels to the solar pump at our borehole, which more than doubled our water pumping capacity, a small solar system for a washing machine, and an extra little system for our Hideout guests to charge their cameras, laptops, phones etc. We also procured a Sun stove for our guests (see photo) to experiment with solar cooking.



Top: The sun stove used by Family hideout for their guests to experience solar cooking.

In June we had our Hideout waterhole moved and enlarged by a Reserve team, headed by Peter Woolfe – thanks very much, the game definitely seems to prefer the safer distance from the house! Animals are abundantly present there at the moment, to the delight of our guests, who can watch the antics of the mainly oryx, zebra and springbok at the waterhole while sipping a cold beer on the stoep!

The five Giraffe also regularly visit our waterholes (there is one near Orion too) and our Camelthorn tree belt – again to everyone's delight!

We finally replaced our fading workhorse, a VW Caddy, with a new Suzuki Gypsy, following the Reserve's lead, for the short but frequent daily run from Die Duine and back.

Many thanks go to all, especially to Titus for his hard work this year, and much-praised high level of service to our precious guests.

Wishing everybody joy and happiness over the festive season!



Top: Giraffes in the southern part of the Reserve.

Below is a poetic contribution, written recently as we long for rain.

Mandy Brückner

### Namib in November

*Oryx stand still behind the shelter of the shepherd's tree  
As the wild wind whistles through the withered branches  
Colors fade in the scorching midday sun  
As cicada buzz taunts my melting soul  
Nothing moves on the vast gravel plains  
Only the red sand whipped up and slamming into a nearby dune  
Just a blinking owl resting on its shady perch  
No cloud scuds over the pale blue heavens  
Mercifully the sun creeps westwards  
The day dies in a ruddy rush of color  
Sent on its way by the clicks and tweets of desert creatures  
Brilliant sparks of light in the black black sky  
Watch me silently as I sleep  
A new day is born  
Like crisp clean sheets  
Waiting  
Longing  
Promising...*

Poem by: Mandy Brückner



Top: A wandering oryx cooling down under a tree.



## NamibRand Experience

Being a native New Yorker, I'm used to big buildings, big lights and lots of people. When photographing, I seek to capture the moment, to take a snapshot in time which carries my experience and makes it timeless. Traveling to Namibia, I wanted an experience different than anything I had come to know from the big city. One of the highlights of that adventure was my visit to the vast expanses of desert and wildlife in the NamibRand.

I didn't know what to expect. I had never lived off the grid. Being in a place where electricity, hot water, phone service is an afterthought is a bit scary considering that I've hardly even gone camping. Nonetheless I knew that a visit to Namibia and the magic it offers would be incomplete without exploring the desert and the wilderness of the NamibRand Nature Reserve.

All around the world, there is a great deal of talk about efforts taken to conserve, yet the NamibRand Nature Reserve is the embodiment of that. It is a humbling experience to reflect that as compared to a zoo, here you are the guest and the animals are at home. There is hardly a soul to be found. Nature is pristine and untouched except for the footprints of the zebra, springbok, oryx and other native creatures. The sunsets look like paintings that should be framed on walls, until one realizes that indeed it is this vista of nature that was the inspiration for those paintings.

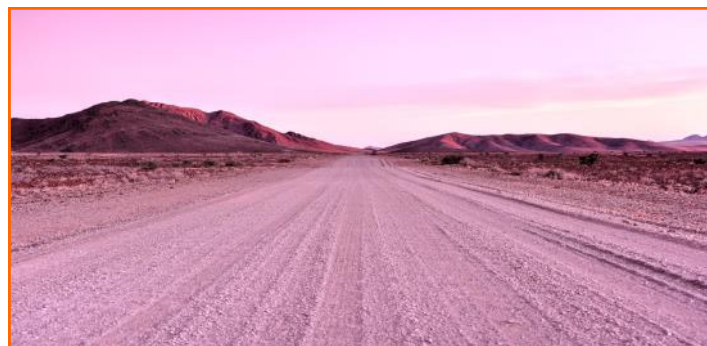
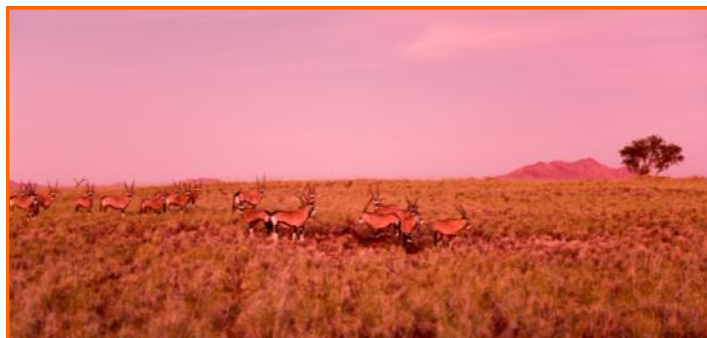
All that thought pales in comparison to the experience of night. As someone who has lived in a city all of his life, the sound of silence is an almost eerie experience. All the artificial noise from horns and cars and people are gone, leaving behind the wind and the wildlife to fill those gaps for me. For me the night sky would normally consist of the faint North Star which one might gleam on occasion. Yet here it felt like I was in an outdoor planetarium until I realize the irony of my words - a planetarium is a virtual rendition of the real dark night sky that lies above my head in the wild nature of the NamibRand.

With the power of my camera, I can capture new dimensions and experiences which others would fail to comprehend. For someone who has not seen nature in its purest form, it is a strange aberration relative to the cities they are accustomed to. Yet here in the wild, it is possible to capture the stars and the sky with their rich hues in the vast nebula. It is possible to see the earth and its place in the universe as man has experience for millennia and which only in modern times have we slowly forgotten.

Being in Namibia I am reminded of myself and how lucky and beautiful the world can be, but how very often we are blinded to it. Just as I look upon my surroundings with curiosity, an oryx will look back upon me over the field of fairy circles. At night, the springbok's eyes will sparkle with the reflection of my flashlight. All these, just a few meters from where I was staying.

Exploring the NamibRand gave me a taste of the endless waves of sand awaiting me at my next stop in Sossusvlei, this just after I had left the ghost town of Kolmanskop. All this as I am a world away from New York. Yet in the midst of all this, I can't say that I terribly missed home. I had found an inner peace in a magical part of the world. The gravel road beckons we forward. I lament it is so very far, but then again, that's part of what makes it so special.

Felix Lipov



Top : Pictures of the NamibRand landscapes and dark sky taken by Felix during his stay at Toekoms and the NamibRand Family Hideout in May.

Photos: Felix Lipov



## Farewell NamibRand

For the past five years Quintin called NamibRand his home until I joined him in 2013 and we started our life as husband and wife together.

It is not difficult to fall in love with such a majestic place and NamibRand will always have a special place in our hearts. We will always remember our first home together but we think it is now time to go out there and pursue new things.

We have made many friends and acquaintances that we will treasure for a very long time. We have had a lot of fun times in the desert and certainly made a lot of beautiful memories.

We sincerely thank NamibRand Nature Reserve and Nils Odenaal for all the support and opportunities awarded to us over the years. We are grateful and will keep building on these skills and experiences.

We are positive that we will have great replacement wardens who will keep on with the great conservation work NamibRand is doing.

One that note we would like to wish every one a Merry Christmas and a Prosperous New Year.

*Quintin & Vanessa Hartung*



Top : Quintin & Vanessa on a balloon safari in July.

## Then and Now!

Over the years after the big 2011 rains a lot has changed in the Namib. The landscapes are so much more different now then it was and there is visibly less grass at the moment. I received very interesting pictures from Dr. Ann Scott, our emeritus Environment and Research Warden, that clearly shows the change in the landscapes due to the little rain received in the past three years. It is always interesting to see as pictures can often tell a great story.

During a visit to the Reserve in October Dr. Scott took some amazing pictures of the landscape which can now be compared with how it looked back then compared to now.

*Vanessa Hartung*



Top: Jagkop in February 2011



Top: Jagkop in October 2015



Top: Losberg in April 2011



Top: Losberg in October 2015



Top: Ysterkop in May 2010



Top: Ysterkop in October 2015

Photos: Ann Scott

## Thank you

Many thanks to those of you who have contributed to this issue of The Barking Gecko by providing articles/information:



*Amanda Behr, Karin Behnsen, Mandy Brückner, Stephan Brückner, Logan Forrest, Morris Gosling, Quintin Hartung, Dennis Hesemans, Jacques Julius, George Kaura, Felix Lipov, Rudie Naibeb, Nils Odendaal, Faghan Poci, Willem Rooi, Ann Scott 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.

**KINDLY NOTE: Photographs are under copyright and may not be reused without the permission of the photographer.**

**NamibRand wishes everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!!!**



## Interesting pictures our animals, landscapes and sunsets

Photo: George Kaura



Top: Young leopard (*panthera pardus*) sighting by SDL ranger, in the Draaihoek area in October.

Photo: Trail Camera



Top: A clan of Five spotted hyenas (*crocuta crocuta*) captured at Porcupine waterhole.

Photo: Trail Camera



Top: A leopard (*panthera pardus*) at Porcupine waterhole.

Photo: Willem Rooi



Top: Beautiful white lady spider (*leucorchestris arenicola*) at Kwessiegat.

Photo: Trail Camera



Top: A group of lappet-faced vultures (*torgos tracheliotus*) at Moringa waterhole.

Photo: Karin Behnson



Top: A klipspringer (*oreotragus oreotragus*) seen at Gorrasis in May 2015.

Photo: Trail Camera



Top: A juvenile hartmann's zebra (*equus zebra hartmannae*) at Moringa water-

Photo: Trail Camera



Top: Two leopards (*panthera pardus*) captured at Moringa waterhole.

Photo: Willem Rooi



Top: Leopard (*panthera pardus*) seen by NRNR rangers at the cheetah rocks.

Photo: Vanessa Hartung



Top: The sunset behind Jagkop captured from Keerweder.

Photo: Felix Lipov



Top: A southern sunset captured by a visiting photographer.

Photo: Vanessa Hartung



Top: Promising clouds at Sossusvlei Desert Lodge in October 2015.

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