

# THE BARKING GECKO

April 2020

Vol. 21, No. 1



**FAMILY HIDEOUT 20 YEARS**  
**GREETINGS FROM THE CEO**  
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NEWS FROM NaDEET



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*"The poetry of the  
earth is never dead."  
- Anonymous*

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Tracy Robb





## EDITOR'S INPUT

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I had a different article typed up and ready to go for the first quarter edition of the Barking Gecko. One that spoke of the future and the potential that 2020 was promising and the fact that bidding farewell to 2019 was no great sadness for many. Then, just as I thought 'This is good', the world caught fire, the planet reclaimed its space and the jokes about panic buying toilet paper lost their humor and I was left wondering whether I could ignore it all and pretend it wasn't happening.

I've typed this up and you're reading it. So, ignoring this isn't happening. Murray and I have joked for years about the fact that if the world went crazy we would be safe in 'our' little corner of the desert in a small African country (whose name some people can't even pronounce). Turns out, we were wrong. The effects of COVID-19 have reached the desert. We haven't yet had infections; we haven't yet had to quarantine ourselves because of disease. We have however upped our 'social distancing' game and are even more anti-social than usual. I don't want to dwell on the fear mongering, the panic purchases that become regrettable in a week's time or even the heavy and long lasting effects this could (or will) have on Namibia's, as well as the global economy. I want to highlight something, that perhaps we forget too easily. The environment and the world are healing. There are pictures in

which it is evident that huge clouds of pollution are shrinking, the Venice canals are clearer (the sediment of the canals isn't being churned up as much as usual), animals are returning to places they haven't been seen in years. It is a light in this uncertain time. There is another light in this, which is the show of community and kindness that we are seeing, the rise of bigger picture thinking and the realization that it isn't just about us and that our individual actions may have immense ripple effects – it feels like the creation of a global village. It is at times like these that I am grateful for technology and the way in which it allows to stay connected both personally and professionally. It means that we are not cut off and it means that we can continue to check in with friends, family and colleagues; we can continue supporting each other and showing up for each other from a distance.

It is my hope and wish that we come out of this, on the other side better, stronger and more socially and environmentally aware. I hope that the Barking Gecko reminds you of the spaces that exists, just waiting to be explored when this is over and the magic and the necessity of wide open spaces.

**Lee Tindall**





# A WORD FROM THE WARDEN

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Those of us at NamibRand who are not directly involved with tourists are no strangers to isolation. It is not unusual for us to go months without seeing anyone other than the small team with which we work. What makes this easier is the fact that there is an enormous Reserve of over 205,000ha that we can traverse without any danger of infringing on any social distancing protocols. While there will undoubtedly be some hard times in the months ahead as the visitors come to an abrupt halt and put severe strain on the finances of the Reserve, we can take heart in the fact that we are not confined to small apartments with few opportunities to go outside. We are certainly in an incredibly fortunate position and our thoughts go out to any who find themselves in more trying circumstances.

While disaster circles the globe, we have our own ongoing disaster closer to home. It now seems that the Reserve will again receive insufficient rainfall to consider the drought broken. This will now be the eighth year that there has been less than 100mm across the Reserve. There have been some isolated rains in places across the Reserve throughout the wet season and some splendid flushes of green that followed. Some early rains in the Moringa Valley at the beginning of December caused the river there to flow with water nearly reaching as far as Kwessie

Dunes Lodge which was still under construction at the time. The resulting flush of grass was enough to bring herds of Burchell's zebra back from north of the Reserve as well as large groups of oryx and springbok. However, the lack of any follow-up rain meant that the grazing was fairly quickly exhausted and the animals were forced to move on. Some rainfall against the mountains around Toekoms and Verweg in January provided a respite of a few weeks before that grazing too was depleted. Fortunately, a few good showers around NamibRand Family Hideout, Horseshoe, DDR waterhole and into the Erioloba forest are covered in beautiful green grass as the result of rain at the end of January and beginning of February. In some places the grass is over knee height and understandably vast numbers of animals have gathered in these areas. Hopefully this grass will last a few more months as the forecast for the last month of the wet season is not very promising.

Our hope is that we receive some good late rains, the COVID-19 pandemic is quickly contained and the world can bounce back as soon as possible.



# GREETINGS FROM THE CEO

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**T**he NamibRand Nature Reserve Association would like to welcome Mr Ally Karaerua and Mr Uda Nakamhela as directors. Ally is the Chief Executive Officer of Natural Selection Safaris Namibia, who are also the owners and operators of the new Kwessie Dunes Lodge on NamibRand. Uda is the owner of the law firm, Nakamhela Attorneys. He serves as a trustee of the Aandstêr Trust, which is a member of the NRNR Association.

Sadly, &Beyond tendered their resignation as members of the NamibRand Nature Reserve Association in September last year. This means that Sossusvlei Desert Lodge will now no longer be part of the NamibRand Nature Reserve. The decision by &Beyond and their lodge to leave the Reserve was not an easy one. Members of the NamibRand Nature Reserve Board of Directors only decided to accept their resignation after the parties involved tried, unsuccessfully, to re-negotiate this membership agreement over the last two years. As a result, Mr Les Carlisle, who represented &Beyond's

interests on the NamibRand Nature Reserve Association, resigned his directorship. We would like to sincerely thank Les for his many years of service and for always proudly flying the NamibRand Flag.

Mr Martin Verwey has been appointed as Area Warden for Southern NamibRand as of the 1st of January 2020. Martin, his wife, Chantel and their daughter Marchel moved into the Aandstêr house in mid-December and spent some time renovating the house, settling in and getting to know the area. Martin, who is well known to the community of Southern Namibia, ran Maraun's Garage in Maltahöhe for more than 30 years. Although he has declared that he needs a break from fixing cars, he has agreed to help maintain our fleet of vehicles and stationary engines. We could not ask from a more technically apt person to be part of the NamibRand team and we wish Martin and his family many happy years on the Reserve.

Rainfall on the Reserve has been



Mr Uda Nakamhela



Mr Ally Karaerua

sporadic. While wide-spread, meaningful rain has eluded most of the Reserve, some places like the Die Duine and Stellarine have had good showers of more than 25mm that were followed up within two week of initial downpours with more rain. This means that those areas are now bursting with new grass and other vegetation, providing a much welcome relief for wildlife in search of food. See rainfall pictures published later on in this newsletter.

We hope that you all had a good start to 2020. One quarter of the year has already passed in flash. Challenging times for tourism and the economy are ahead with the global Corona Virus pandemic and we wish you all good health and prosperity for the year ahead.

We would like to thank you all for your interest and commitment to NamibRand. Our conservation project would not be the success that it is today, with you!

Yours,

**Nils Odendaal**  
Chief Executive Officer



From left to right. Marchell, Chantell, Martin, Marlise and Anrie

# NEWS FROM THE SOUTH

## INTRODUCING MARTIN VERWEY AND HIS FAMILY

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**M**y name is Martin Verwey. You may know me from Maraun's Garage, Maltahöhe. My story with the Namib started with my grandfather. He was the first owner of the farm Kleinbegin in 1938. He and his friend came here with the help of the Government for emergency grazing in the drought. At the end the Government put the farm up for sale. He and his friend bought a piece of land which is now known as Wêreldsend and Kleinbegin. There was nothing, no water and no fencing - they used all their skills to survive. My grandfather, a water diviner, showed a lot of people where the water is here in the Namib, with his Driedoring mik stok. Many of these boreholes and water points are still in use.

I was born in the Solitaire area where my parents owned the farm Donkerhoek. I grew up underneath the Namib sun and stars as a farm child. School was difficult because the farm was calling me back. During the drought in 1980 my parents had to sell the farm and move to Maltahöhe where they bought

Maraun's Garage. In 1991 I started working there. I qualified as a motor mechanic and construction plant mechanic. There I got to know NamibRand's people and vehicles. If I remember correctly, the first two were a Toyota Hilux 2.4 Diesel and a Toyota Stallion bakkie. Great people with passion for the nature. After 28 years the Namib Desert started calling me back. I contacted NamibRand and asked them to contact me if there were any position opening. After three years I got the call and was asked if I was still interested in a position at NamibRand. My answer was a definite yes. My wife shares my passion for the nature and living in a remote area. I am also a passionate freshwater angler and bee keeper. With three daughters, we as family love being out in the nature. Now the Verwey's are here and I am the Area Warden in the South, we would like to share years of experience and learn more from passionate people about the nature. Once the red dune sand from the Namib has got into your shoes, you will always return for more, and I'm sure that all of you will agree.





## NAMIBRAND FAMILY HIDEOUT

# 20 YEAR ANNIVERSARY

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When NamibRand started off some 30 years ago, visitors would be self-driving and stay in places like Gorrasis and Chateau. As the Reserve became more regulated and structured, and the concept of low impact / high quality tourism was identified as the preferred route, the need to have a family friendly and affordable place for the “locals” became apparent to us.

The idea was to find something like Gorrasis had been, with a limited self-drive route to go with it. The only place that was available at the time was the old windswept ruin on Stellarine, where the sand had blown dunes across the old farmstead. We decided to keep the “Kolmanskop” effect, but extensively renovated and extended the old farmhouse, yet some of those clay brick walls are still standing.

The Hideout was inaugurated 20 years ago by the founder of NamibRand, Albi Brueckner,

under the silhouette of the old gum tree still standing today. The house sleeps 10 and there is only one party at a time. Cleaning staff and guides will call on a daily basis, but essentially the guests are left in peace unless they book a guided activity. Who would have thought, that this “Duinehuisie” - as the old farmers used to call it – would become so popular and so dear to us. Sitting on the broad stoep at the Hideout and gazing over the endless plain, with the oryx coming and going to the waterhole, the world seems to still be in order.

The concept of “only you and the desert” has also become much treasured by our many repeat visitors who marvel at the idea of having the desert all to themselves. In line with the NamibRand Family Hideout’s mission to offer affordable entry to the NamibRand Nature Reserve, we’d contemplated for a number of years to establish a low impact exclusive campsite adjacent to the

actual Hideout. This was realised in 2009 with the inauguration of campsite Orion. Much like the Hideout, there was only one site and one party. The site is “en suite” with an ablution block built of wood and canvas on stilts - like so many other NamibRand structures. It also has some canvas roller- blinds attached to the shade roof for wind protection and a waterhole nearby.

As Orion became very popular very quickly and was forever booked out, we decided to add campsite Venus in 2014 on the other side of the dune out of sight and well distanced, tucked into a long valley. We used very much the same tried and tested building style with a birding waterhole. The two campsites weren’t able to satisfy the demand and in 2019 we added Jupiter, an even more special site with the attribute of being the only wheelchair accessible campsite in the country. It also features an elevated deck which can be closed with canvas roller-blinds when the wind comes up. Jupiter is located in yet another dune valley far away from the others and also has its own waterhole. So the only time guests will sometimes meet is when they do activities like a game drive or an educational walk.

Our guides are qualified in the desert ecology and can show our guest most wondrous creatures and desert phenomena on the walks and drives. Other activities include dune boarding and fat biking, climbing a koppie or a visit to NaDEET centre.



Celebrating 20 years of Family HideOut, February 2020





Animals returning, February 2020

Guests can also set off to explore on their own, always on the condition of not disturbing other guests either on foot, fat bike or on the self-drive, which is admittedly rather short, but includes some fun dune driving provided you let your tyres down. Getting rescued when stuck is costly.

Over the years the guest mix changed considerably. In the beginning it was mainly visitors from Southern Africa, but especially since the addition of the campsites, it is more frequented by adventure travellers from around the world who come with their hired roof tented 4x4's to experience the thrill of being completely alone under a thousand stars in our International Dark Sky Reserve.

In the initial years the Hideout was an insignificant contributor to the conservation efforts of the NamibRand Nature Reserve as the park fees were considerably lower than in the upmarket lodges. A few years back this was brought more in line, as our guests also get to enjoy the beauty of the Reserve. Today the accommodation charge makes up about 2/3 of the total paid by guests, while the remaining 1/3 goes to the Reserve. Some guests and agents find the park fee rather high initially, but once they've been there, we are having virtually no complaints. In fact the guestbook reviews are raving and complimentary and we've had a 5 star trip adviser rating for two years running.

With occupancies in especially the campsites running at very high percentages the contribution of the NamibRand Family Hideout guests to the Reserve is by now substantial, and that with a comparatively low impact in terms of staff and infrastructure. We manage to run the Family Hideout and campsites with 5 people. Thanks to the technology enabling online bookings the management/admin is confined to the two of us, while the other 3 are running the show on site.

In line with the NamibRand Nature Reserve's declared objective of also addressing community issues in addition to conservation, we have this year embarked on a "healthy meal for kids" initiative. Through our staff we identified the AME Centre Kindergarten in

Maltahöhe, who we now provide with a few healthy meals a week for their 40 odd kids.

To mark the occasion of the 20th anniversary we have in early 2020 extended the original Hideout House by considerably enlarging the kitchen and adding another bathroom and toilet as well as giving the whole house a facelift and adding solar power to all the rooms.

In conclusion we share the view with so many players in our industry, that sustainable tourism can become one of the backbones of our Namibian economy, and the beauty is, that it can be an everlasting resource if managed properly.

We feel proud and privileged to be part of realising this dream in our part of the world in the NamibRand Nature Reserve.

Andreas & Mandy Brueckner



During the Storm, February 2020



A hint of green, February 2020

# NEWS FROM NADEET

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Viktoría Keding

## Teacher trainings

The year started off with a flurry of activity at both NaDEET Centre on NamibRand Nature Reserve and the new Urban Sustainability Centre in Swakopmund. In February a group of 20 lower primary school teachers from the Hardap Region travelled to the desert for a week and tested out their sustainability skills. Two weeks later, sixteen Erongo Region teachers took part in the new teachers' workshop programme in Swakopmund. Highlights for both of these programmes focussed on learning about energy efficiency and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) game. At NaDEET Centre participants of course enjoyed preparing their meals on solar cookers while their colleagues in Swakopmund were challenged by the "Enviro Meal Game". Here teachers had to audit their food choice purchases for origin, packaging and overall impact.

The workshops were co-sponsored by our partner, EduVentures as part of the nation-wide EduLink project that aimed to train teachers at Centres throughout Namibia.

## Learner Programmes

Since then the Centre is again full of action with school classes visiting from throughout the region as well as from Windhoek. All of the schools are regulars and book their programme on an annual basis. This year we are embarking on setting up a new monitoring and evaluation system to receive better feedback from the impact of the programme in the long-term on participants. This goes in hand with our research from 2019.

The Urban Centre will soon launch its new 3-day primary school programme. The development of

the programme is in its final stages.

## Die Duine Homestead

The operational base for NaDEET as well as Tok Tokkie and the Family HideOut is undergoing a transformation. For many years the old Die Duine Homestead has served three growing operations to the best of its ability. It has however become too small. The joint aim for all operations is to improve the overall appearance and efficiency of the homestead as well as to improving the visitors experience. Joint infrastructure is being built including a new workshop and reception area.

## NaDEET Sustainable Garden and Educational Area

For NaDEET we have the additional aim to improve our sustainability by including a garden into our operations. The garden aims to produce food for the Centre programmes, but to also become part of the programme. Phase 1 of the garden has been constructed through the generous support of the Reinke Family from Ideal Spaten in Germany. This also includes an expanded and improved water system and solar electrical system to be able to meet the demand of increased cooling needs.

The project is taking time as it is being done on a low budget with a small team. But we are excited to share some initial photos. When the project is complete Die Duine will be hosting a hands-on information area about NamibRand, the International Dark Sky Reserve, Education for Sustainable Development and large landscape conservation. This will go together with the educational garden which will be open to programme participants as well as guests on NamibRand.





Die Duine Homestead shared storage facility with Solar panels for sustainable power



NaDEET Centre Manager, Vicki Endjala, with one of the participants



Harvesting homegrown peppers



Upcycled garden gate, welded by a volunteer at NaDEET



Big things coming to NaDEET



Water storage and borehole for the Die Duine Homestead



*Thanks to all the contributors for their contributions to this edition of the Barking Gecko. Thank you to Vicky Human for the assistance with this and lending her talent and skill to this newsletter.*

*As this is a newsletter for you, our readers, friends and colleagues of NamibRand Nature Reserve, we welcome feedback, ideas and input.*

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