

THE BARKING GECKO



Newsletter of the NamibRand Nature Reserve



October 2004

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Finding Home on NamibRand



We can hardly believe it has been five months since Nils first started on NamibRand. His time here as well as several short visits Danica made in June and July were crucial for our transition. The timing of our start dates was planned so that we could have two months of overlap with outgoing management.

At the end of July, both the Lenssens and the Bridgefords retired to the coast and will spend the next years soaking up cool sea air and enjoying themselves! Of course we know they will be keeping active with a million projects.

We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to Achim and Ursi for making our transition period on the Reserve as pleasant as possible. They did an excellent job briefing us on the management and daily activities of the Reserve. They also shared their vast experience of living in the desert with us so we could make the change from life in Windhoek.

The past few months have been quite an adventure for us. We started new challenging jobs, packed up and moved to Keerweder, and most exciting of all, got married in Swakopmund on the 3rd of July. We also had an incredible trip to the USA to celebrate with Danica's family and friends. Our time since the beginning of August has been spent renovating the house, unpacking and finding our feet. We have been meeting with concessionaires, landowners and other stakeholders to establish working relationships and lines of communication. In order to enhance our work, Keerweder now has a satellite telephone and an internet connection! Please feel free to phone us at (063) 683026 or email nnr@iway.na. A new pipeline is under construction to supply Keerweder with additional water. We are tackling the numerous day-to-day challenges that present themselves – broken pumps, off-road drivers, equipment repairs, record keeping, and staff management. Several long-term projects are developing and we are excited about the possibilities!

We are thrilled to have joined the NamibRand Nature Reserve team and look forward to the future and all its promises. Since moving here we have experienced wonderful things – desert sunrises and sunsets, a young and curious leopard, thunderstorms and hectic winds. We have met many new and interesting people and caught up with old

friends and acquaintances. There are so many more experiences waiting out there for us – the Reserve shares its wondrous uniqueness, beauty and secrets with us everyday.

Nils Odendaal and Danica Shaw

In this issue:

Finding Home on NamibRand	1
Spotings.....	1
Desert Thoughts.....	2
Under Namibian Skies (Part 2 or 3).....	2
Hoodia Under International Protection.....	3
Weather Report.....	3
News @ NaDEET	4
How Many Are There?	5
Desert Meets Glacier.....	5
Sacred Nature.....	6

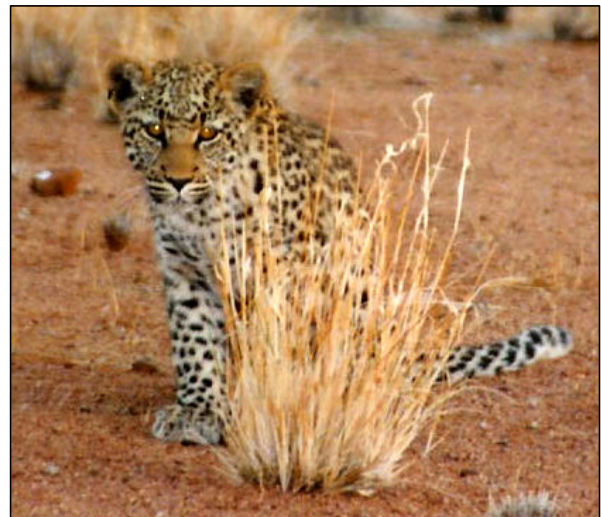


Photo: Patricia Rehorn

Spotings

In late June, while on an afternoon drive on Toskaan, we had a special sighting.

My mother was with us, visiting from the USA. As we drove through a small dry river bed, there was a movement to the left of the vehicle. My mom was the first to spot it and

(Continued on page 2)

(Continued from page 1)

guessed it was a cat. Nils stopped and I looked back just as the creature passed through a patch of sunlight – there were spots – it was a young leopard! We inched forward and spotted him about 500m away peering at us through the shrubs in the river bed.

As we patiently waited we were rewarded – eventually he relaxed enough to stand up and take a long look at us. He was about eight months old, not fully grown, but missing the fuzziness of younger cubs. He would look at us for a long time, then strain his neck to both sides, looking for his mother who must have been among the rocks behind us. He was extremely curious and after a short time he began to stalk closer to us. Sometimes creeping along the ground, other times attempting to hide behind clumps of grass or small shrubs – confident we didn't see him. Once in a while he would check for his mother, but was definitely not afraid. He seemed enthralled by us.

Over the span of 45 minutes he crept up from his original position of 500m away to just 5m from the vehicle. My mother was the only one of us with a camera and took some incredible photos. Eventually, he had enough of examining us and streaked back to the river bed with gracefully speed, disappearing in the twilight.

We realize how fortunate we were to spend a bit of time with this beautiful animal and will treasure the experience. Perhaps his natural sense of curiosity will ensure regular sightings. We can only hope...

Danica Shaw



Desert Thoughts

In the desert the most urgent thing is – to wait.

The desert does not kindly take to those who tackle it at breakneck speed, subjecting it to their plans and deadlines. It soon takes its revenge and makes them pay dearly for their presumption. Instead, the desert welcomes those who shed their sandals of speed and walk slowly in their barefeet, letting them be caressed and burnt by the sand.

If you have no ambition to conquer the desert, if you do not think you are in charge, if you can calmly wait for things to be done, then the desert will not consider you an intruder and will reveal its secrets to you.

Alessandro Pronzato



Under Namibian Skies

Part 2 of 3

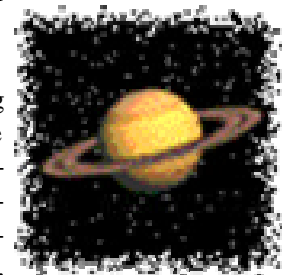
Every night the Milky Way would arch above me like a majestic, magical cloud. I would begin my 'Tour of the Universe' by showing guests the visible planets through the telescope. Saturn is always a favourite; the big, gas planet with the beautiful ring system that would float on

water if thee were an ocean big enough! And Jupiter, magnificent Jupiter, the largest planet in the Solar System with its four Galilean 'moons' whizzing around it. Indeed, Jupiter is bigger than all the other planets put together! Another gas planet, its day lasts a mere eight hours because it spins so incredibly fast! Venus, the brightest object in the sky after the Sun and Moon, will always be found in the direction of the Sun; after sunset it is called the 'Evening Star,'

and before sunrise it is known as the 'Morning Star.' This is because it *is*, in fact, closer to the Sun than we are. Then there was red Mars, quite a small object in the sky, yet subject of much media attention at the moment, with our little robots scurrying around on its surface. The remaining planets, Mercury, Uranus, Neptune and Pluto, were not visible at night during my stay as they were daytime objects.

Many people are surprised to discover that the Sun is in fact just an ordinary star, like all the stars you see in the night sky. It appears big in the sky simple because it is closer. If you were to travel to any of the stars in the night sky and look back at the Sun, it would appear as a distant point of light, like any other star in the night sky. Indeed, all the stars would appear to be in different places. The Constellations (named patterns of stars) would all look different. This is because the night sky is a three-dimensional sphere, and all the stars within this sphere are at different distances from us. I think my favourite constellation in Namibia was Canis Major, The Great Dog, partly because it *does* actually look like a little dog, yet mainly because he reminded me of my dog, Toby, thousands of miles away back in England. Orion was resplendent overhead, containing the great Orion Nebula; a nursery for newly forming stars, but Taurus (the Bull) and the famous Pleiades, or 'Seven Sisters.' We must not forget either, the Magellenic Clouds; two little 'satellite' galaxies orbiting around the larger Milky Way galaxy. The Large Magellenic Cloud (LMC) lies at a distance of 150 thousand light years away and the Small Magellenic Cloud (SMC) is over 200 thousand light years away! When I say that they are 'little galaxies,' each one still contains millions of stars!

Several guests asked me what I felt about the possibility of life existing elsewhere in the Universe. A Hubble Space Telescope long-exposure photograph reveals a fingernail-sized portion of the night sky. Within this minute area are hundreds of tiny white,



(Continued on page 3)

(Continued from page 2)

blue and orange fuzzy patches. It resembles a child's 'flick painting,' except onto the blackest canvas imaginable. Each of these 'fuzzy blobs' is a galaxy, containing hundreds of billions of stars! So, I would reply, "If there was only one planet in each galaxy that contained life, and if only on in a million of those planets contained intelligent life, then the Universe would be literally alive with *billions* of civilisations." Given that, I think my belief is clear.

Caroline Bevis, March 2004



Hoodia Under International Protection

The annual meeting of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) recently took place in Bangkok, Thailand from 2-14 October. CITES is administered by the UN Environment Programme. It seeks to control the international trade of certain species and find solutions which will "conserve the earth's rich heritage of biological diversity while supporting the sustainable development of local communities and natural economies," according to Secretary-General Willem Wijnstekers. Currently CITES consists of 166 member countries and protects approximately 5,000 animal and 28,000 plant species.

The species that CITES protects are categorised into three Appendices – I, II and III.

- Appendix I species are threatened with extinction. Trade in these species is only permitted in exceptional circumstances.
- Appendix II species are not necessarily threatened with extinction, but their trade is controlled in order to ensure they are not over-utilized.
- Appendix III species are protected in at least one country which has asked for assistance in controlling the trade.

Namibia was involved in several proposals with other African countries. One of the outcomes of this year's meeting directly affects the status of certain plants on NamibRand Nature Reserve – several *Hoodia* species have been added to Appendix II.

There are numerous species of *Hoodia* throughout Southern Africa – there are 10 species alone in the Namib. *Hoodia currorii* is found on the Reserve and other species



Photo: Danica Shaw

may yet be identified. Succulent collectors are interested in *Hoodia* species and while some species are widespread, others are not. It is often difficult to distinguish between species and those with small populations are threatened by wild collection.

There is however, another, much greater threat.

Hoodia species have been widely used by the San people as traditional medicine. They have multiple medicinal uses, but the most interesting of these to the world-wide market and pharmaceutical companies is the ability to suppress appetite. P57 is the active compound isolated from *Hoodia gordonnii* which suppresses appetite. The Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) in South Africa isolated and patented P57. CSIR has licensed the rights for further development and the establishment of a sustainable production system to Phytopharm. Phytopharm, in turn, has sub-licensed the development and global commercialization rights to Pfizer. The economic potential for national economies and indigenous people is high, although the potential for more illegal trade is also increased.

Some *Hoodia* appetite suppressing products are already offered on the herbal medicine market. The material which is currently in trade is most likely from wild sources. Wild harvesting involves cutting off portions of the plant above ground, damaging it. Fortunately, cultivation trials in Namibia and South Africa are underway.

Due to the commercial possibilities for the plant and the potential for over-utilization of wild populations, Namibia, South Africa and Botswana proposed that several species be added to Appendix II. Hopefully, the CITES listing and further development of cultivation techniques will ensure that economies and people will benefit from *Hoodia*, while protecting its wild populations.

All *Hoodia* species are protected in Namibia and require prior authorization for harvesting and trade. If you are aware of any illegal gathering or harvesting of *Hoodia* on NamibRand, please report it to the Control Warden. We would like to ensure the healthy survival of *Hoodia* on the Reserve.

For additional information on CITES, please visit www.cites.org.

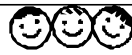
Danica Shaw

Weather Report: Rain Rain Rain



NamibRand has been benefiting from the rain in Windhoek. Early in the morning on 21 October, after a windy night, rain fell in patches throughout the Reserve. The rest of the day was cold, windy and promised more rain, but by the following morning the clouds had disappeared.

Clouds gathered in the sky again during the day of 23 October and in the evening after sunset, there was a beautiful lightening display and lovely thunderstorm. We all had a wonderful nights sleep! These two storms brought the Reserve measurements of 1 – 12 mm. We hope this is the beginning of a good rainy season!



News @ NaDEET:

2004 Comes to a Successful Close

At the end of NaDEET's second year of operation, I can be stressed or relaxed. Stressed because of what must still be done or relaxed because of what has already been achieved. I choose the latter.

In August 2002, the following aims were formalised for NaDEET:

- To provide a non-profit environmental education service for the learners and educators of Namibia based in the beauty and magic of the Namib Desert.
- To build capacity and know-how at all levels of the environmental education sector: focussed on addressing relevant environmental issues, supporting the Namibian school curricula and practicing hands-on experiential learning and learner-centred educational methods.
- To engage in education, advocacy and awareness of the critical role of sustainable living in a finite, semi- arid environment.

Let us explore how the following aims have been fulfilled to date.

NaDEET CENTRE

In 2004, 501 people have participated in the NaDEET Centre programme from 17 different groups (14 school groups, 2 youth groups, 1 adult group). 35% of these groups came from the South, 32 % from Windhoek, 27% from the Erongo Region and 6% all the way from the Oshana Region. More than half of the groups were grade 6 and 7 classes while 44% were secondary school learners. All participants engaged in sustainable living through hands-on experiences in alternative energy and water conservation. The Namib Desert was the ideal setting for meaningful environmental learning as participants compared their own lifestyle choices with the unique adaptations of desert life. Participants were challenged to explore viable changes to their current lifestyles that would benefit the environment and humankind. One teacher from Aranos wrote, "We were very much impressed by your warm hospitality, the conducive environment surrounding the Centre, your systematically planned programme and activities, the content of all the lectures and materials presented as well as the delicious food from the kitchen". Another teacher from Swakopmund commented, "The programme is an integration of both science, social studies and maths subjects. Topics covered are things that are in the school curriculum. We hope and know that they will remember this for a lifetime. THEY HAVE LEARNED FOR LIFE".



Photo: Viktoria Keding

Grade 7 learners from Hermann Gmeinde making recycled paper fire bricks

AT-SCHOOL-PROGRAMME

Due to limited funding, the At-School-Programme was only fully carried through with one school, Aranos Primary School. The grade 6 and 7 learners visited us in April this year and decided as a group to address the litter problem in their community. They prepared a drama and a litter pick up campaign to which they invited all grade 6 and 7 learners from Aranos' schools to participate. NaDEET also attended and participated in the litter pick up. At the end of the day, the group had more than 20 large bags of rubbish.

EDUCATIONAL MATERIAL DEVELOPMENT

The *Bush Telegraph* youth magazine entered its fourth year in 2004. The three issues produced (one for each school term) were Vulture Conservation (March), Kingdom Plantae (July) and World Ozone Day (September). The number of subscribers has continued to increase to over 6 000 readers nationwide. One teacher has written, "I find your magazines very helpful in my classroom. The magazines are colourful and they also have the exercises and competitions for learners to take part in. The content is always relevant. I would therefore congratulate all your staff members for your good work." The *Bush Telegraph* also continues to be distributed by the Wildlife Society of Namibia as their children's magazine.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND CAPACITY BUILDING

Michaella Phemelo, a second year Nature Conservation student at the Polytechnic of Namibia, completed a six-month in-service training with NaDEET from January to June this year. She then stayed on for another 6 months as an assistant. During her time at NaDEET she has gained practical experience in environmental teaching, sustainable living, EE Centre management, presentation, computer and administrative skills.

NaDEET also had two short-term volunteers. Both are out-of-school Namibia youth who wanted to learn more about the Namib and environmental education.

I have also attended the annual Environmental Education Association of Southern Africa (EEASA) conference in South Africa. This is a wonderful professional development opportunity for me as through interactions with other environmental education practitioners many experiences and ideas are shared.

NETWORKING

NaDEET continued to be a strong networking partner nationally, regionally and internationally. NaDEET has participated in several Namibian Environmental Education Network (NEEN) activities including their AGM and via their newsletter. NaDEET has also supported the following programmes and organisations through EE services and advice: Succulent Karoo Environment Programme (SKEP), Eco-Schools, Namibian Environmental Education Certificate (NEEC) course, and the Directorate of Youth (Ministry of Higher Education, Training and Employment Creation). We have also produced three of our own newsletters, the *Golden Mole*, to inform supporters and stakeholders about our on-going activities. Finally our website continues to be updated regularly and can be viewed at: www.nadeet.org

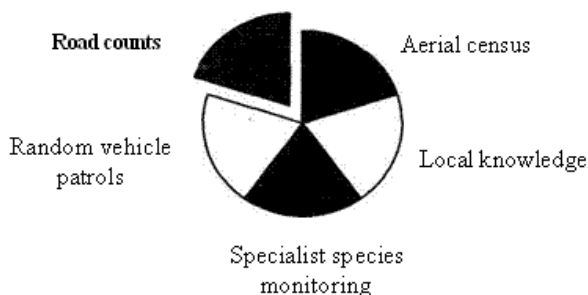
Viktoria Keding

How Many Are There? A New Game Count Method for the Reserve

Over the past 12 years several game censuses were held on the NamibRand Nature Reserve. Aerial strip-width censuses are highly effective and were the most commonly used method. However, this type of census is extremely expensive. Due to various factors, including lack of resources and the high cost of aerial censuses, no official census has taken place on the reserve since August 1999.

The need for a low-cost, repeatable game census survey method on the NamibRand Nature Reserve is essential. An internationally recognized, "vehicle-based road count" survey method has been proposed and is currently in the planning stages. We plan to conduct these counts on a bi-annual basis to facilitate in-depth knowledge of the Reserve's game populations and other natural resources. This method will not yield good results for all species, especially smaller secretive animals, nocturnal animals, and animals in mountainous areas where there are no roads. It is also recognized that other monitoring methods (e.g. aerial census, random vehicle patrols, specialist species monitoring) and local knowledge are also important sources of data. Our philosophy is that the vehicle-based road counts will augment rather than replace or compete with these other methods and initiatives.

Synergy between different monitoring approaches



The vehicle-based road counts will help the Reserve achieve the following management objectives:

1) Estimate the numbers of game in any management area - How many animals are there?

It is important to know how many animals there are so that we can manage our populations.

2) Produce game distribution maps - Where are the animals? Some areas have higher concentrations of animals, this can change seasonally or with rainfall. Knowing this will enable us to plan better.

3) Monitoring population change over time - Is wildlife increasing or decreasing?

We need to know trends in populations so that we can manage wildlife numbers effectively.

Our aim is to hold bi-annual game counts, in late November / early December (end of the dry season) and again in late May / early June (end of the wet

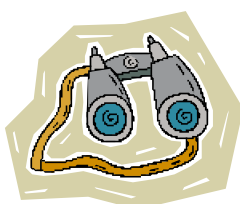


Photo: E. Parker—WWF

Vehicle-based game counts represent a low cost, sustainable method of regularly estimating game populations.

season). As mentioned, planning for the first vehicle-based road count is underway, and we hope to hold the first count the weekend of 3-5 December 2004. Stakeholders such as landowners, tourism concessionaires and the Ministry of Environment and Tourism will be invited to assist.

Nils Odendaal



Desert Meets Glacier

On our trip to the USA in September we were invited to hold a presentation for interested park staff at Glacier National Park.

Glacier National Park is located in northwestern Montana, bordering on Canada and along with its Canadian counterpart (Waterton Lakes National Park) is the first trans-boundary Peace Park to be established (1932). It has also been designated as a World Heritage Site. The area of the park is approximately double the size of NamibRand and during the high season employs hundreds of seasonal staff. The permanent staff is approximately 200.

We were asked to discuss conservation in Namibia generally and then to discuss NamibRand Nature Reserve in more detail. We developed a 30-minute presentation with these aims in mind.

Approximately 50 people attended the presentation. These included the Deputy Head Park Ranger, the Park's Public Relations Officer, botanists, park rangers, librarians, museum staff, a visiting school group and many others.

The presentation was lively, with several interruptions for questions from the audience. The presentation, including the question period at the end, lasted about an hour. Afterwards we were approached for more one-on-one question time and expect to have some further correspondence.

We were informed by park staff at the time that the presentation was very interesting – they were amazed at the size of our staff

(Continued on page 6)

“THE WILDLIFE OF TODAY IS NOT OURS TO DISPOSE OF AS WE PLEASE. WE HAVE IT IN TRUST AND MUST ACCOUNT FOR IT TO THOSE WHO COME AFTER US”

(Continued from page 5)

and the uniqueness of the ecology. We received further feedback after our departure that the presentation was a success and people were talking about it for many days.

In conclusion, we felt this was an extremely useful exercise in promoting the Reserve internationally. Further relations might develop from this, but certainly we were able to raise the awareness of American conservationists.

Glacier National Park is a stunning area with incredible mountains and spectacular views. There are numerous activities for visitors including, hiking, kayaking, and horse trails.

For further information on the Park, please visit <http://www.nps.gov/glac/>

Danica Shaw



Sacred Nature

I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work
of the stars,
And the pismire is equally perfect, and a grain of sand,
and the egg of the wren,
And the tree-toad is a chef-d'oeuvre for the highest,
And the running blackberry would adorn the parlours
of heaven,
And the narrowest hinge in my hand puts to scorn all
machinery,
And the cow crunching with depress'd head surpasses
any statue,
And a mouse is miracle enough to stagger sextillions
of infidels.

Walt Whitman

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