



THE BARKING GECKO

Newsletter of the NamibRand Nature Reserve



December 2009

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2009 Draws to a Close

As 2009 draws to a close, temperatures on the Reserve are rising along with the hope for rain. So much has happened over the past several months on the Reserve, it is challenging fit everything into this edition

of the Barking Gecko.

NamibRand opened its northern border with Wilderness Safaris Namibia to allow for the free movement of wildlife. Reserve staff hosted numerous visitors from National Geographic photographers and writers, ranchers from the Northern Great Plains Project in the US and international researchers to neighbouring farmers and fellow Namibian conservationists. NamibRand conducted its annual game count and developed a new sightings database to improve the monitoring of wildlife. Several Kgotlas took place, providing Reserve residents an opportunity to discuss local management issues. NaDEET won awards, achieved many goals with its publications and continued to host Namibian school children, inspiring them to live more sustainably and protect their environment.

NamibRand's cheetahs and vultures continue to thrive, contributing to national and international conservation aims. An international artist used NamibRand as the canvas for his latest experimental work. On a sadder note, Reserve staff and residents mourned the loss of their colleague Jacky Vlees. All these stories and more can be found in this edition – we hope you will enjoy it.

December is always a time for reflection and evaluation. The Reserve has experienced many changes over the past year, including major staff changes. These changes had extremely positive results. While our new and expanded team has accomplished much, without the on-going support of our landowners, concessionaires, partners, neighbours and friends we could not continue to achieve the Reserve's conservation aims. As the Reserve moves forward and sets its goals for 2010, these relationships are integral to maintaining the legacy of NamibRand and building its future. We look forward to all 2010 has to offer NamibRand. We wish all of you a wonderful holiday season and a very peaceful and prosperous New Year.

Danica Shaw

Fences Open for Wildlife

On Wednesday, 1-July 2009 members of the NamibRand Nature Reserve and Wilderness Safaris Namibia signed an historic agreement for the benefit of wildlife. The two organisations have agreed to open their common boundary fences to allow the natural movement of animals such as oryx and springbok across a larger conservation landscape. For animal populations to prosper in arid ecosystems such as the Namib, large open areas are necessary to facilitate seasonal movements in response to rainfall.

The agreement focuses on natural resource management and unrestricted wildlife movements. While there is no provision for commercial traversing rights, both organisations have agreed to work together in the interest of conservation. In the future, wildlife management and research within this area will be cooperatively undertaken.

The agreement was signed at a small gathering held at NICE



Photo: D. Shaw

Wilderness Safaris Namibia CEO, Bruce Simpson and Nils Odendaal, NamibRand Nature Reserve CEO shake hands on signing the agreement.

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Restaurant in Windhoek. At the event NamibRand Nature Reserve CEO, Nils Odendaal and Wilderness Safaris Namibia CEO, Bruce Simpson reaffirmed their commitment to conservation in Namibia through such innovative management actions. NamibRand Custodian and Chairman, Mr. J.A. Brückner, expressed his approval of the move, stating that it furthers his dream to restore and extend the conservation of the Namib landscape.

The border fence will be opened in strategic areas along its entire length. This action will open the Kulala Nature Reserve (37,000ha), owned by Wilderness Safaris, to the NamibRand Nature Reserve (172,200ha). Similar initiatives with additional neighbors will support the Action for a Fence Free Namib Desert initiative which seeks to further open and secure a healthy and extensive desert ecosystem.

Ginger Mauney and Danica Shaw



2009 AGM and Game Count

NamibRand's annual game count took place early on the morning of 6 June 2009 and was well supported by teams from Sossusvlei Desert Lodge, Wolwedans (three teams), NaDEET, Tok Tokkie Trails, Aandstêr (including Albi Brückner and N/a'an ku sê) and Mr Klein's team (including Family Hideout and NRNR staff). A special welcome to Peter Woolfe and Franziska Malta, who led their team on the new Route 9 representing the Pro-Namib Conservancy through Excelsior and Dina.

As usual, this event was combined with the Reserve's annual general meeting, which was held later the same afternoon at Sossusvlei Desert Lodge. The AGM was well attended by all stakeholders. Attendees enjoyed a bit of social interaction after the meeting over sundowner drinks and snacks.

All data collected by participants of this game count have been collated. In view of the fact that we now have information for five years, we would like to look at the trends over the longer term. As annual rainfall is one of the main drivers of this

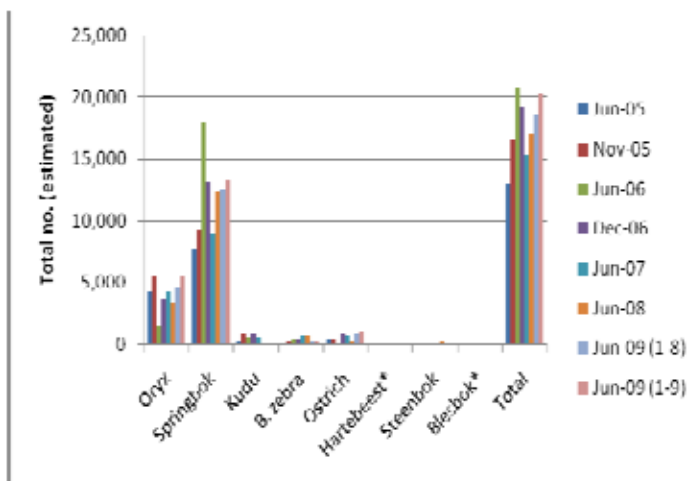


Figure 1. Total game counts for all plains species, June 2005 – June 2009

integrated system, it should provide interesting correlations with game numbers and distribution. In the mean time provisional feedback is given below, in terms of the three core objectives of these counts, and a follow up will be provided once the rainfall data have been incorporated.

Data collected by participants of the June 2009 game count were collated and analyzed, bearing our three core objectives in mind:

Objective 1: Population estimates

The total number of oryx on the Reserve (Route 1-8) in June 2009 is estimated at 4,700, and springbok at 12,551. When the Pro-Namib Conservancy is included (Route 1-9), the total for oryx increases to 5,414 and for springbok to 13,400.

The overall population estimate (Route 1-8) has increased by 9% from June 2008 to June 2009. The addition of the Pro-Namib Conservancy area (16,450 ha; Route 9) in June 2009 resulted in a total increase of 19%.

Natural fluctuations in wildlife populations are primarily rainfall driven, often evidenced in seasonal migrations. Over the total count period, high mean rainfall (200 - 250 mm) was experienced in 2006, 2008 and 2009, accompanied by an overall increase in numbers of 25% in June 2006, 11% in June 2008 and 9% in June 2009 (Route 1-8). In contrast, low mean rainfall (< 75 mm) in 2005 and 2007 brought about a decrease of 20% in numbers.

Looking at the dominant species, estimated numbers of oryx increased gradually from a low of 1,447 in 2006 and remained fairly stable at around 4,000, reaching 4,700 (Route 1-8) in June 2009. This is an increase of 1,440 (44%) since 2008. With the inclusion of Route 9, the total is now 5,414. Springbok numbers (in June) have remained at around 12,500 for the past two years (a trend linked to the good rains), showing an overall increase since the start of the counts (7,733 in June 2005). The maximum of 17,900 in June 2006 has not been reached again. With the inclusion of Route 9, the total is now 13,400.

The total biomass of the Reserve has increased slowly but steadily from 9.0 kg/ha in June 2005 to 10.9 (Route 1-8) and 11.1 kg/ha (Route 1-9) in June 2009. This trend can, in part, be related to good rainfall in 2006, 2008 and 2009. At the same time, the area available to the game has increased with the gradual opening of fences with neighbouring properties, and especially with the inclusion of 16,450 ha through the

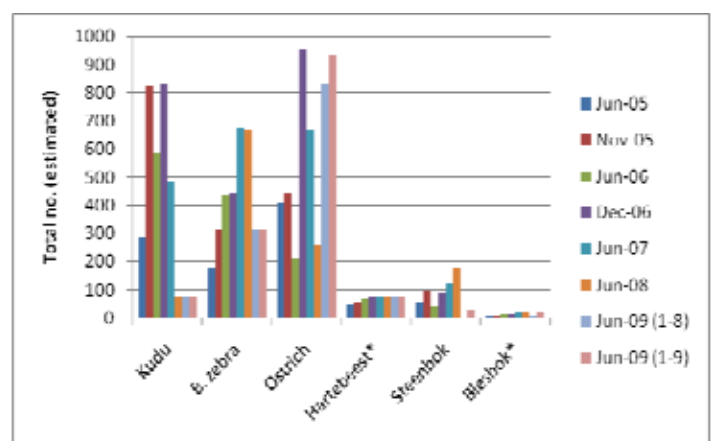


Figure 2. Total game counts for all plains species other than oryx and springbok, June 2005 – June 2009

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establishment of the Pro-Namib Conservancy (Route 9) in June 2009.

Objective 2: Wildlife distribution/density

The highest density of wildlife was in the north/east (especially Route 1; and Route 2 & 5) and the south (Route 8 & 9) of the Reserve, while the south-western (Route 7) and central vegetated dune belt (Routes 3, 4 & 6) had lower densities of game. Compared to June 2008, mainly the north-western parts of the Reserve showed an increase in wildlife (particularly Route 1 around Sossusvlei Desert Lodge, where the increase was over 300%), with a decrease in the central/western areas.

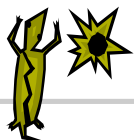
Objective 3: Population change over five years

Sightings of oryx continue to increase, reaching 232 animals/100 km for Route 1-8. With the addition of Route 9, these sightings increased to 269/100 km. Springbok sightings for Route 1-8 also increased to 529/100 km but, with the inclusion of Route 9, this figure drops to 514/100 km. The total number of sightings per route is now 715/100 km (Route 1-8) and, with the inclusion of the Conservancy (Route 1-9), 953/100 km. The total population appears to have reached a plateau and has been fairly stable for the past four years.

The effects of increased natural predation by re-introduced predators, including cheetahs, are probably minimal at this stage; however, the effects of increased predation on game numbers in the cheetahs' home range (mainly in count zones 2 and 6) should be monitored in the future.

NamibRand would like to thank all the participants for their willing and enthusiastic help with these very important game counts over the years!

Ann Scott



Sacred Nature

I see the spectacle of morning from the hill-top over against my house, from day-break to sun-rise, with emotions which an angel might share. The long slender bars of cloud float like fishes in the sea of crimson light. From the earth, as a shore, I look out into that silent sea. I seem to partake in rapid transformations: the active enchantment reaches my dust, and I dilate and conspire with the morning wind. How does Nature deify us with a few and cheap elements! Give me health and a day, and I will make the pomp of emperors ridiculous. The dawn is my Assyria; the sun-set and moon-rise my Paphos, and unimaginable realms of faerie; broad noon shall be my England of the senses and the understanding; the night shall be my Germany of mystic philosophy and dreams.

Ralph Waldo Emerson
Nature

A Day in the Life of Five Male Cheetahs on NamibRand

I recently set out for an entire day to collect behavioural information on the five male cheetahs introduced into the Reserve in December 2008. After their release, the males remained in a relatively small area, due to the presence of female cheetahs in the pens at Keerweder.



Photo: C. Painter

Now that two of these females have been released and the others were taken back to CCF, everyone wondered whether or not the five males would change their movements and behaviour accordingly. I must say, I wasn't quite prepared for what this day had in store for me...

I departed from Aandster early in the morning and arrived at Keerweder around 06:30 to receive news that the five males had just been seen by Reserve staff on the eastern side of their former holding pens; so it didn't take me long to find them. For the next 10 ½ hours I was fortunate enough to directly observe some of the most exciting behaviour that cheetahs have to offer.

In the first hour after my arrival the males roamed around the holding pens, marking every so often. From there, they strolled in a northeasterly direction towards their favourite riverbed between Keerweder and Boscia. Nothing much really happened until 10:20, as the cheetahs were mainly resting in the shade of various trees and shrubs. Only their marking behaviour was worth noting on my data sheet.

Suddenly, however, they got to their feet rather quickly and started moving east in a distinct 1-2-2 formation. Kia, as usual, was taking the lead, followed immediately by Mushara and Cadbury whilst Ra and Lindt were at the back. This formation had previously been observed during several of their hunts. The cheetahs had set their sights on a herd of 15 hartebeest further up the valley and approached them from downwind. Their stalking looked promising, until the coalition stormed ahead, in what appeared to me, an uncoordinated fashion. The hartebeest caught sight of the group and fled in all directions, leaving the five males to attempt to take down different animals individually. This



Photo: C. Painter

proved unsuccessful, and after a few short chases I observed the five cheetahs resting in the grass. They

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appeared to exchange astonished looks at their failure. One must be very careful with anthropomorphising wild animals, but at that moment they did seem somewhat bewildered.

After a few minutes of rest, the males reunited and moved further towards Boscia, until I lost sight of them. I drove around the valley and happened to stop in the perfect location. As soon as I got out of the car to check for the cheetahs' signals, I spotted them sitting up under a boscia tree, all focusing in the same direction. They had already selected their next potential prey; there was a herd of 200+ springbok which they stared at intently. The herd moved across the road I was parked on and remained unaware of the cheetahs' attention. One minute later, they had come within striking distance and consequently Kia and Mushara bolted off into the middle of the herd. The other three followed suit, but with much less effort. The next thing I saw was a cloud of dust, in which body parts of cheetah and springbok could be seen. Kia caught a sub-adult male springbok and Mushara came to his aid, killing it only 200 metres away from me.

Not long after, the other males arrived at the kill and joined in the feast. It was a rare privilege to observe the cheetahs make a kill and feeding, especially since all of this took place during the hottest hours of the day. At about 13:10, and after 1 ½ hours of gulping down chunks of meat and bouts of resting, the males had finished their meal. Only Kia stayed with the leftovers for a few more minutes, while the others were already busy grooming each other and licking the blood off their faces. Eventually, Kia dragged the remains of the springbok to where



Photo: C. Painter

the others were resting and was rewarded with his share of grooming.

I was then expecting the males to disappear in the grass for a

prolonged time to rest and digest. However, after only 30 minutes they stood up (still with some blood on their heads and distended stomachs) and slowly made a move to cover the last two kilometers to Boscia waterhole. Ra, the smallest of the five, fell behind a few hundred meters and the group stopped regularly to wait for him to catch up. At one point, Ra's brother Kia called for him and this resulted in Ra making a serious effort to rejoin the coalition. Upon his arrival Kia had hidden himself in the long grass to mock-charge his brother. The two engaged in a short play fight and then reunited with the others.

Along their way towards Boscia, the males took every opportunity to scent mark and scratch mature shepherd's trees, before going to rest under a camelthorn only 500 meters away from the waterhole. Two hours later, they got up again, but only to partake in more allo-grooming, during which I could hear them purr.

Shortly after 17:00, the males headed further up the road to a



Photo: C. Painter

big camelthorn tree. It was my first observation of any of the five actually climbing a tree and marking it with faeces. Mushara spent several minutes doing so,

whilst the others scent sprayed the base of the same tree.

As the light started to fade, the males moved on and finally drank from the waterhole at Boscia. At that point, I decided to leave them to themselves, having had an outstanding experience already, even though most of it could only be seen with binoculars. I strongly believe that keeping a fair distance to the group allowed them to display such authentic behaviour.

A single day of observations obviously gives too little data to draw any robust conclusions. Nonetheless, it is encouraging to record that the males are exploring the areas around Keerweder

more and more and do not stick around the females' pen continuously. During the 10 ½ hours of observations the coalition moved approximately 8.5 kilometers in search of food and water.



Photo: C. Painter

Florian Wiese



National Geographic visits NamibRand

Namibia will soon become the only country in the world with its entire coastline (1,570 km) under conservation status. By the end of 2009 it is expected that the Namib-Skeleton Coast National Park will be proclaimed. This mega park, incorporating the Sperrgebiet, Namib-Naukluft and Skeleton Coast National Parks as well as the West Coast Recreational Area and the area surrounding Walvis Bay, will become the 8th largest protected area in the world and the largest in Africa, covering 10.75 million ha.

National Geographic plans to publish an upcoming article focusing on this new national park. As part of this coverage, internationally renowned nature photographer, Frans Lanting and his wife, writer, videographer and producer, Chris Eckstrom, recently spent more than a week on NamibRand.

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Frans has been hailed as one of the great nature photographers of our time. He portrays wild creatures as ambassadors for the preservation of complete ecosystems and his many publications have increased worldwide



Photo: www.lanting.com

Chris Eckstrom and Frans Lanting

awareness of endangered ecological treasures throughout the world. His work has often been commissioned by *National Geographic*, where he also served as a Photographer-in-Residence and he is a trustee of WWF US.

Chris has had a prolific writing career, serving as a staff writer for *National Geographic* for 15 years, publishing in numerous conservation and travel magazines, collaborating with Frans on several projects and various other interesting and important endeavors.

The *National Geographic* article on the new park will feature Frans' photographs and text by Alexandra Fuller, whose book about her African childhood, *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight*, has won critical acclaim. Alexandra reported that NamibRand was the highlight of her trip in Namibia while covering this story.

Frans and Chris also have been assigned a feature article on travel in Namibia for *National Geographic Traveler* magazine. Frans' photographs and Chris' words will showcase what NamibRand and the rest of Namibia has to offer conservation orientated travelers.

We feel privileged to have had the opportunity to host and work closely with these individuals who have achieved so much for biodiversity and conservation efforts around the globe. Frans and Chris thoroughly enjoyed their time on NamibRand and felt a special connection to the waterhole at the Keerweder guesthouse, where they were able to capture some exceptional photos. Praise for NamibRand from such well-traveled and knowledgeable champions of biodiversity and conservation is a high honor indeed and serves to remind us all just how extraordinary NamibRand really is.

We look forward with great anticipation to the articles and photographs and will be sure to keep you updated on publication dates. To learn more about Frans and Chris' work, please visit www.lanting.com.

Danica Shaw

Call for Contributions

Please remember to send us your interesting tidbits, exciting stories, beautiful photos, comic relief or any other things which you would like to share.



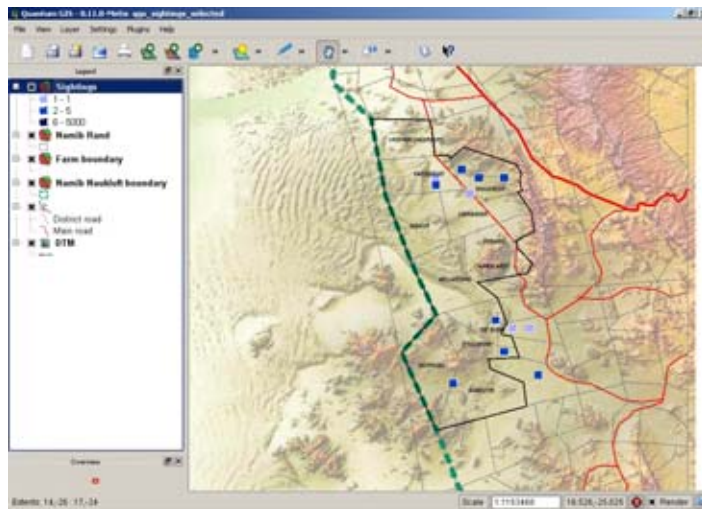
New Sightings Database for the Reserve

NamibRand has a new management tool. The NamibRand Sightings Database is a customised database which has been designed to store and manipulate information on wildlife sightings (including mammals, amphibians, birds, reptiles and some plants) across the Reserve. Data collection is through printed datasheets – observers record the species, location, number of animals, age and sex (if known), etc. Data entry is done either through an on-screen form, or by importing from formatted spreadsheets. Currently only incidental sightings are recorded in the database, but it will soon be developed to incorporate game count data as well. Incidental sightings are entered with GPS coordinates, where available, or with the 2x2 km grid square reference. The database includes a comprehensive list of species, which can easily be added to if necessary.



Information from the database can be output in spreadsheet format. One can choose to extract all sightings of a particular species, or restrict the output to a particular time period or only live observations, for example. The database can also generate maps of sightings; again, for selected species, time periods and/or sighting types. This facility makes use of a free GIS software package called Quantum GIS. Maps of sightings are based on the 2x2km grid used on the Reserve. Map outputs can either be displayed on the screen, or exported as .kml files which can then be displayed by anyone using Google Earth.

Some of the archived data have already been entered, and additional 'old' records will continue to be entered by Reserve management. Further development of the database will include



Sample map output – sightings of Bat eared fox

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the option to automatically generate much of the summary data and maps which comprise the annual game count reports.

The database will be managed by the Wardens, Mike and Ann Scott, who will be in charge of making sure that all sightings are entered into the system and will also provide feedback to NRNR staff. It is hoped that it will prove a useful tool for monitoring wildlife populations and movements within the Reserve. It has been developed by Tony Robertson and Alice Jarvis, environmental database and GIS consultants with a range of experience in database development and GIS applications. They have worked on a wide range of projects including the Atlas of Namibia, ConInfo and its associated databases, MET's incident book database and a range of web sites.

Tony Robertson and Alice Jarvis

Goodbye Friend



Jacky as we will always remember him.

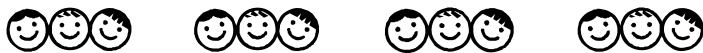
It is with great sadness that the Reserve reports the loss one of its valued employees on the 1st of June 2009.

Jacky Vlees worked for NamibRand from August 2005 and was known for

his hard work, enthusiasm and jovial spirit. He was well liked by his colleagues and was a strong supporter of the Reserve. Jacky, born on 12 June 1973 is the son of Lydia Kooper. Lydia is the wife of Jakobus Kooper, the strength of our interests at Aandstêr.

Jacky was laid to rest at the family cemetery on the farm Hammerstein on the 7th of June at a well attended funeral where family, friends and colleagues had a chance to bid their much loved friend farewell. He will be greatly missed.

Nils Odendaal



News @ NaDEET

NaDEET has been quite busy, hosting 13 school groups (over 400 people) and welcoming several new volunteers. Viktoria and Andreas Keding also welcomed a new daughter.



Welcome Baby Marlene!

Marlene was born on 12 August 2009 and is quickly becoming a favorite member of the NaDEET team. In fact, if you stop by in early December, you'll be sure to see our last school group for the year, experiencing how to live a

sustainable lifestyle. Despite all the activity, the tranquility on the Reserve ensures that the staff can work on their own exciting projects, whether it is adding an activity to the



Inspired by their time at NaDEET, teachers and learners from Frans Indongo PS, held an open house for alternative cooking in their Katatura community.

curriculum, writing the new *Bush Telegraph*, or completing a grant application. Here are a few brief updates on what's happening at NaDEET:

In early July, NaDEET's Director, Viktoria Keding, launched the publication of her new activity book, *It's Time to Change*, at the Craft Centre Café in Windhoek. It is now on sale at the Namibian Environment and Wildlife Society's NEWS-stand in the Craft Centre. The activity book is being distributed free of charge to every Namibian school by the Ministry of Education, thanks to the support of two Dutch foundations, Wilde Ganzen and deSTEEN. The Ministry's endorsement says that they "have carefully studied the book...and recommend it without reservation as a good reference and teaching tool for schools and colleges of education as well as anyone interested in environmental education." *It's Time To Change* is also available from several tourist operations on the Reserve.

The two 2009 *Bush Telegraphs* are doing their job in achieving the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals. "Sanitation for a Healthy Environment," released in June, challenges people's current perceptions of sanitation and offers several environmentally friendly options to address the worldwide sanitation crisis. "Women for a Sustainable Environment," released in October, makes clear the vital connection between gender equality and environmental sustainability. This issue highlights strong female role models both in Namibia and elsewhere, who are doing their part to protect the environment. This year the *Bush Telegraph* is being sponsored by the UNESCO Windhoek office, as part of promoting the 2005-2014 Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.

In late November NaDEET was honoured with third place in the Eco-Media Awards for its on-going environmental publications and work in promoting environmental literacy throughout Namibia.

Several new volunteers have helped NaDEET this year in numerous ways. After saying goodbye to Stephan Trappe in June, Samuel Pfenning, the new year-long German Development Service (DED) volunteer from the Weltwärts programme, arrived in July. Samuel is assisting at the Centre, and with several maintenance and development projects. Ben Burghart, another intern, has written grant proposals and manned the office during the arrival of little Marlene Keding. Two American art therapists, Cheryl Walpole and Christi

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Meyer, spent six weeks helping children express their thoughts about nature through art. Alanna Pardee, a Global Studies Master's Student has been involved with every school group, written a *Bush Telegraph* and assisted with administrative work.



Cambridge PS students using art to express their thoughts about nature, the environment, and sustainability.

Photo: NaDEET

With a generous private donation we have added wind energy to our electrical grid, in addition to our existing solar panels. Installed below the ten meter wind generator is a new weather station, one of several owned by the Reserve, which can be monitored live (during our office hours) at www.nadeet.org/weather. Many other materials, such as *Bush Telegraphs* and the new activity book, can be downloaded off the NaDEET website (www.nadeet.org).

Looking ahead to school holidays, NaDEET staff will move forward with some exciting ideas, in particular new construction projects and evaluating the Centre's programme. We have been asking the learners to complete an in-house survey, which we are currently analyzing. The results will give us clues on how to improve our programme. An arrival survey (given to learners when they first get to the Centre) will also show how Namibian children think of environment-related topics before we begin teaching.

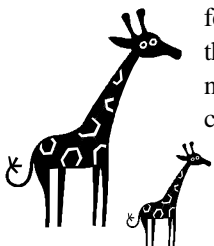
The NaDEET team looks forward to a challenging (and hot) summer, as we continue to build on our Three-Year Strategic Plan. We are pleased to have so many friendly people around us, including other staff from all around the Reserve, who are always ready to lend a hand and contribute to NaDEET's vision of a sustainable Namibia. With everyone's help we are truly making a difference.

The NaDEET Team

Giraffe Update

The young female giraffe re-introduced to the Reserve in April 2008, has died after giving birth to her first calf.

The female was sighted by Sossusvlei Desert Lodge staff on 2 November in the midst of calving, which was not reported immediately to Reserve staff. The following afternoon, 3 November, Wolwedans staff reported the new calf and the carcass of the already dead female. This was reported immediately, but it was too late in the day to investigate. The following morning, Reserve staff located the carcass of the female and a few meters away, the carcass of the calf which had been killed during the night by the Keerweder group of male cheetahs.



It is suspected that the female died from birth complications. While it is unfortunate

that the calf was then killed by the cheetahs, with the death of its mother, it had no real chance of survival.

While this was a setback in the development of NamibRand's giraffe herd, the

fact that a calf was born is further evidence that the group is happy and thriving in their environment. We hope that there will be more calves to follow in the future.

Other members of the herd have recently been sighted for the first time at the Keerweder waterhole. Previously they have only been seen at Sandgrouse waterhole and the large gravel pit near Keerweder.

Danica Shaw



Giraffe at Keerweder waterhole

Photo: A. Price

Strengthening Ties

WWF Great Plains project

From the 24-26th June Reserve management had the privilege of hosting a group of eight visitors from the World Wildlife Fund's Great Plains Project. This is the third year in a row that members of the Great Plains project have visited NamibRand. This time participants included ranchers who are in the process of diversifying their economies to include natural biodiversity production system based land uses such as conservation and tourism. The study tour comprised of participants from Nebraska and South Dakota and included the head of the WWF project, Mrs. Martha Kaufman.

NamibRand was of particular interest to the group as lessons could be learned from changing the land use from a livestock based economy to an exclusive conservation and tourism system. Of special interest to the group was the way in which the Reserve has managed to amalgamate itself into a cohesive, holistically managed and legally constituted nature reserve, where several different landowners have decided to work together for the greater good of the environment.

It is encouraging to see that NamibRand is held up a model for private land conservation and highly regarded by the international community.

Wilderness CEO group

On the 28th of October NamibRand hosted a group of high level CEO's and owners of various international travel agencies on the Reserve. This group organised by Wilderness Safaris Namibia which was hosted in partnership with NamibRand Safaris was shown around the Reserve, highlighting some of the accommodation facilities. A presentation, focusing on conservation in Namibia, the NamibRand Nature Reserve's history, objectives, achievements and future as well as our efforts toward a large landscape conservation initiative (Fence Free Namib), was particularly well received by the group. We received many positive comments from the CEO group and are

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Whirling sandgrouse at Keerweder

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confident that this public relations exercise will result in additional promotion of the Reserve in Europe and the USA.

Grand Circle Foundation

On 31 October and 1 November, Nils Odendaal hosted Mr. Jim Best, his wife and their friends on the Reserve. Mr. Best is a close personal friend of Mr. Alan Lewis, who is the president of the Grand Circle Foundation, donor and trustee of the Aandstêr Trust – which governs the farm Aandstêr. Mr. Best served for many years as the president of the Grand Circle Corporation, which is the commercial company which supports the Foundation.

Although on holiday in Namibia, Mr. Best was asked to check in on Aandstêr and to meet with management of the NamibRand Nature Reserve. We are pleased to report that we received very positive feedback from Mr. Best who commented that, “the Reserve is obviously well run and a great success.”

Maltahöhe Farmers’ Union

The Maltahöhe Farmers’ Union visited NamibRand on 21-23 May 2009. They were kindly accommodated at NaDEET, where Mike and Ann Scott joined them for the weekend. It was a wonderful opportunity to get to know some of the local farming community, and we enjoyed showing them around the Reserve and discussing our projects and activities with them, as well as cooking and playing cricket together.

One of the highlights was a simple yet effective way they taught us to capture a large yellow cobra that was trapped in one of the toilets: find a 2.5m length of 75mm wide PVC piping (with one end stopped up with a piece of cloth/



Maltahöhe Farmers’ Union at NaDEET

newspaper) and walk slowly and carefully towards the snake, moving the open end of the pipe towards it. The snake will (should) slide into the pipe, thinking it is a nice dark hole in which to escape. Then quickly close up the other end of the pipe in a similar fashion. Now the snake can be removed and set free - a good distance away! 'n Boer maak 'n plan ... (A farmer makes a plan ...) and it worked!

Gondwana Cañon Park

Rachel and Danie Brand, the wardens of Gondwana Cañon Park, paid us a visit on 26 June. It was very stimulating to discuss matters of mutual interest, and to compare the differences between NamibRand and their large Reserve set in the Nama Karoo desert environment.

As they are expert in giraffe matters, it was interesting to gain new insights into our population of nine giraffes at Draaihoek/

Toskaan. We were also fascinated to hear about their work using camera traps to sample and photograph predators, scavengers, and Hartmann’s mountain zebras at various waterholes at night, and about their experiences with reintroduced black rhino. We look forward to working together more closely in the future!

Nils Odendaal & Ann Scott

Art Exhibition on NamibRand

NamibRand’s inspiring landscape most recently became the canvas for an artistic exhibition of light. German artist Luzius Ziermann has created a 50 x 50 m symbol representing “light” from 2500 recycled vehicle mirrors in the sand on Wolwedans.

The symbol “Luzius” is a symbol for light created by the artist. The vertical line represents a ray of light and the lines of longitude, the horizontal line represents the earth and the lines of latitude, the incomplete oval represents the earth in its movement around the sun, while the two points represent the sun, moon and all other light sources in our universe. Light is crucial to Luzius, “through light, everything is created.”



Luzius, meaning “the one born to the light,” has had a very interesting artistic career. His most recent series of works, Weisung von oben (Direction from above), are dimensional paintings achieved through the manipulation of canvas and acrylic and pigment paint. They are very organic, on one level appearing as terrain maps or satellite images and on another, smaller and random patterns of nature. In the artist’s own words, “[The titles of] my paintings are designated by geographical latitudes and longitudes. But they might also represent a piece of skin, as seen under a microscope, a blood vessel, a hair, a fingerprint, the footprint of an elephant or the tracks of an ant, water in motion, a leaf, ... you name it. I painted them first, and only after finishing them, I browsed through an atlas in search of a place, a landscape, or a mountain range that might be described by the painting.”

As an extension of Weisung von Oben, Luzius has envisioned Weisung von oben – Signierte Landschaften (signed landscapes). The exhibit on NamibRand is the first of twelve sites worldwide, where the mirrors will be installed. The sites have been chosen for their beauty, silence, grandeur and sense of wildness and seclusion.

It took the artist and his assistant close to a week in the November sun to lay out the grid and place the mirrors.



“Light” on NamibRand

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The result is stunning – beautiful sparkling points of captured light, surrounded by NamibRand’s exceptional landscape. The contrast between the nature and the symbol is incongruous, but adds to the experience. Through this exhibit Luzius “gives the light the opportunity to sign its own work.”

The installation will remain on NamibRand through mid-January, so please have a look if you are on Wolwedans or visit www.luzius-ziemann.de.

As part of this project, an exhibition of Luzius’ work was held in November at the Goethe Institute/NaDS in Windhoek and Luzius has made a generous donation of computers and solar equipment to NaDEET.

Danica Shaw

Meetings Meetings Meetings

Three very positive Kgotlas (NamibRand’s own traditional form of Reserve management meeting) have been held this year. The meetings were all well attended and productive, with good communication and a spirit of cooperation. The first Kgotla was on 13 May 2009 at Keerweder and the second on 4 September 2009 at Aandstêr. The third meeting, on 4 December 2009 at Toekoms, was combined with a festive end-of-the-year celebration. A special thank you to Wolwedans for the generous catering, and to Albi for his participation!

Among the actions arising from the Kgotlas was a meeting on road management and maintenance (13 July 2009) and a meeting on fire management (10 September 2009). At each meeting a working group was formed to address identified issues.

Welcome to all the many new faces who have become part of the Reserve this year!

The next Kgotla is scheduled for 9 April 2010 at Sossusvlei Desert Lodge. We look forward to seeing you all there!

Ann Scott



December 4th Kgotla at Toekoms, (L to R) Mike Scott & Ann Scott (NRNR), Preston Issaks (NRNR Polytech student), Roelene Beumer & Nestor Nguumduka (SDL), Thomas Soutschka (TTT), Andreas Keding (NaDEET), Kerstin Klein (TTT), Lars Baum & Christine Theil (N/a’an ku sê), Vinte Mendez—back (Wolwedans), Eddie Weber (Wolwedans), Florian Wiese (N/a’an ku sê), Viktoria Keding (NaDEET), Andréé & Paul Vicry (NamibSky), Albi Brückner (NRNR), Machiel Levin (Wolwedans), Corris Kaapehi (NRNR) (Kneeling L to R) Richardo Tjiho (Family Hideout), Ralf & Nadine Zipfel (TTT).

My Life as a Ranger on NamibRand



My dream of working as a Ranger was cemented on a Wilderness trail in the Kruger National Park at the tender age of 12. I was technically still 11, but was big for my age and having played in an under 14 Rugby team, was a convincing 12 year old. The impressions created and the freedom felt during this experience made me want to live in similar places. By following this dream, I ended up on NamibRand Nature Reserve (NRNR) in December 2002. After building NaDEET Centre in 2003, I started to work for NRNR in March 2004.

Working for NamibRand was never boring and gave me an opportunity to gain vast amounts of experience including maintenance, land management, law enforcement and a lot of ‘small little things’ that one needs to learn to be able to work, live and stay in the Namib. Achim and Ursi Lenssen and Peter and Marilyn Bridgeford, as real old desert foxes, provided to me with trickle-down-knowledge, common sense and living practices required in the Namib, all the with greatest of patience. Thank you very much.

Since then it was also my privilege to have Nils Odendaal and Danica Shaw as friends and colleagues. As work and private life are pretty much one in an area like this, we shared many experiences together. I remember on one my first outings with Nils, we spotted an *ISV* (secret Ranger lingo for *Illegal Standing Vehicle*) with two *SLUHS* (*Suspiciously Lingering Unidentified Homo Sapiens*). I was about to screech to a halt and in a booming voice demand the reason for these *SLUHS* to *SL* (*Suspiciously Linger*), but thought it best to leave it to the Warden. Nils very determinately climbed out of our *RV* (*Ranger Vehicle*). He very calmly made it clear to the *SLIHS* (now *Suspiciously Lingering Identified Homo Sapiens*) that they were in the wrong and with much relief on their part they slinked off. Since then I have often appreciated Nils’ calm and relaxed approach to taking life, work and *SLUHS* in stride.

Now that I am back at NaDEET I reflect on my 4 years working for NamibRand as a special time that made me grow as a person.

Thank you to all who have made this possible!

Andreas Keding



View from the dunes towards Sossusvlei Desert Lodge.

Photo: R. Catehpole

Vulture Culture

Lappet-faced vultures (*Aegyptius tracheliotos*), which are classified as *Vulnerable* in Namibia, continue to make remarkable appearances on NamibRand. In recent months, the birds have regularly been sighted in the Southern parts of the reserve and have hopefully established a breeding population.

I recall that I used to spot the 'odd' Lappetfaced during the carnivore monitoring in 2008. However, this year the situation has changed dramatically. Corris Kaapehi, Ranger at Aandstêr, and I made the first 'mass' observation in April when we investigated an oryx killed by one of the study leopards. Upon our arrival at the crime scene, we counted a total of 52 vultures. The birds left the carcass before we could observe any wing tags or differentiate between males and females. But we were stunned at the mere number of vultures we had just seen.

Only few weeks later, and again in the company of Corris, I saw an adult pair of vultures working on an old nest near Straussenwasser. The nest was a confirmed breeding site in previous years and vultures have been spotted perching on it since its repair.

In July, I was lucky enough to record 47 vultures clustered around another oryx carcass near Prosopis. Of these I could positively identify 21 birds as adult females, 9 as adult males plus 13 subadults (the remainder were adults but could not be sexed). I watched them tear into the flesh and intestines of the oryx for over two hours before they scattered away when the light started to fade. The next afternoon, I returned to the site and counted a total of 40 birds with a similar age and sex ratios. There was not much left of the oryx.

My most recent group sighting of the often mis-termed 'ugly faces' dates back to late July when I observed 23 vultures feeding on what...? Yes, an oryx!

Several vultures with wing tags have been spotted in the aforementioned flocks and if you happen to see one, please report it to Reserve staff.

There now appears to be a stable population of approximately 50 birds in the South of the reserve and I managed to record the species 27 times over the last two months. Vultures form an integral part of the nutrient cycle and also in NamibRand's attempt to restore the indigenous pro-Namib ecosystem. Thus,

we can only hope that they will permanently settle on the Reserve.

Florian Wiese

*Editors note: The vultures at Straussenwasser did indeed breed! The chick was still too small for tagging, but was ringed by Peter Bridgeford & Marc Dürr on 7/11/09. Mike and Ann Scott have would like to reminded everyone to report any signs of vulture breeding activity from about May each year.



Photo: F. Wiese

Breeding vultures on their nest near Straussenwasser.

New Logo for NamibRand

The NamibRand Nature Reserve logo has been modernised and updated. The new logo maintains the key elements of the original logo which was first used in association with the NamibRand Game Reserve from the early 1980's. Thank you to Stephan Brückner for his expertise and design skills!

The oryx has now been "unfenced" more accurately symbolising the wide open spaces of NamibRand. This is particularly relevant now that internal fences have been removed and good progress has been made toward opening up our border fences with like-minded conservation orientated neighbours.

Nils Odendaal



NamibRand Contributes to New Bird Studies

Barn Owls

The Reserve is initiating a new project based on the regular collection of Barn Owl pellets and information is therefore being sought on their roosting/nesting sites, where pellets containing prey remains may accumulate. Barn Owls are found throughout Namibia and feed mainly on rodents. During the breeding season, one pair may catch up to five prey species per night each for six chicks, for three months – this amounts to about 2,700 rodents in one breeding season! In this way, they are an effective and important (but often under-rated) biological control agent for populations of rodents. These owls regurgitate the indigestible remains of their food (e.g. bones, hair) in the form of neat grey pellets about 45 x 20 mm in size, that can be used to determine what they feed on. Barn Owls are thus most effective sampling agents for informing us which prey species occur in the region. Apart from rodents, they also feed on small birds, bats, golden moles and elephant-shrews.

The project has been initiated in cooperation with Dr Margaret Avery of the Iziko South African Museum in Cape Town. We are hoping to promote the collection of samples from a variety of sites in Namibia over the longer term, as part of a cooperative project to enable useful and interesting comparisons. Margaret has kindly indicated that she would be happy to support a study of this nature. As an example of the potential scope, we collected about 6 700 pellets from two sites over 10 years at De Hoop Nature Reserve, as part of a similar study in the Western Cape!

If you are interested in collecting samples for this study, please contact Mike and Ann Scott (warden@namibrand.org) for further details.

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Ludwig's Bustards

A new study based on a growing concern for Ludwig's Bustard mortalities on power lines has sparked off a new interest in these large birds at NamibRand.

Jessica Shaw (of the Percy FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology, DST/NRF Centre of Excellence, University of Cape Town) is investigating collision mortality in these bustards, and how it might be mitigated. The birds are particularly susceptible to power line collisions, and are now listed as *Vulnerable* on the South African Red List because of this single source of mortality. Work by Dr Andrew Jenkins and the Eskom-Endangered Wildlife Trust Strategic Partnership estimate this mortality to be in the region of one Ludwig's Bustard per kilometre per year of high voltage transmission line across the Karoo, which is probably unsustainably high and is likely to be having population level impacts.

Jessica is planning to conduct a new census of the population (which extends from the Eastern Cape and Karoo in SA to northern Namibia) to see whether numbers have decreased as expected, continue to assess the magnitude of power line mortality through regular line surveys with the EWT, look at patterns of local and regional movement of bustards through radio and satellite tracking, and explore mitigation options.

With its lack of overhead lines, NamibRand appears to be a safe haven for Ludwig's Bustard (e.g. counts of 26 were obtained on at Kwessiegat on 18/3/09 and 27 at Keerweder Pan on 11/7/09). They often frequent flat, open areas such as the plains at Kwessiegat and the Keerweder Pan area. Although not yet on the Namibian Red List, the species appears to be facing similar problems with power line collisions in Namibia, particularly in the South. This problem is currently being investigated by the NamPower/Namibia Nature Foundation Strategic Partnership (www.nnf.org.na/nampowerproject.htm). Jessica has indicated that she would like to visit the Reserve when the time comes to capture some of these birds to fit satellite tracking devices. Any records of large concentrations of these bustards – or breeding activity – are therefore welcome for inclusion in the Reserve's database.

Verreaux's (Black) Eagles

Verreaux's (Black) Eagles are also in the spotlight! As part of a South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) run project looking at the state of the environment, Lucia Rodrigues (also of the Percy FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology, DST/NRF Centre of Excellence, University of Cape Town) has begun an ambitious project to monitor a large sample of Verreaux's Eagle nests, having started the work on the (single) pair on Table Mountain, Cape Town. This monitoring method may help to act as an early warning system for environmental changes, given that raptors have been proven to be excellent indicators of biodiversity.

Over 30 Verreaux's Eagle territories have been identified in the Western Cape and are being monitored with varied degrees of intensity. These include nests in the Table Mountain National Park, Hottentots Holland, Kogelberg, Overberg, West Coast, Swartland, Boland and Sandveld areas. Through Dr. Rob

Simmons, a request has been made for breeding sites of Verreaux's Eagles in Namibia to be monitored in a similar fashion. Any relevant records will be included in the NamibRand database and shared with this study.

Ann Scott



Photo: J. & D. Klein

Spot On

Mr. and Mrs. Klein reported an incredible sighting of a leopard on Draaihoek in late October. It was sighted around 9:00 in the morning along the road towards Moringa Valley. It seemed very calm and wasn't bothered by the vehicle, allowing ample time for photographs.



Desert Thoughts

When the questions are too big,
and the answers are not yet in time,
I look to the sky.

In starlight there are answers
to newer, older unframed questions.

Ancient light, our reassurance,
emitted with or without hope,
To be caught by a loving, skyward eye.

F. Lynne Bachleda

Cape Ground Squirrels:

A Possible Namibian Keystone Species?

Cape ground squirrels (*Xerus inauris*) are common throughout the arid areas of Namibia, but are excluded in the Northeastern part of the country where rainfall is higher and vegetation becomes denser. They dig and live in extensive burrow systems with a depth of 1-2 metres, and persist all year round. Grasses are removed in the immediate burrow area for nesting materials and increased visibility against predators. Their foraging activities involve moderate digging of soil substrate for seeds

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Xerus inauris—Cape ground squirrel

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and other food materials. Soil dug from burrows form mounds of heaped sand at the burrow entrances which serve to prevent flooding of the burrows.

In a study I conducted for my BTech thesis, I wanted to determine whether Cape ground squirrels are keystone species. The aim of the study was to look at the effect of Cape ground squirrels' foraging activities and burrow presences on the diversity, composition and abundance of small mammals and invertebrates at their burrow areas

or colonies. These estimates were compared to control areas without ground squirrel burrows. The study was conducted over two seasons (winter and summer) in the pro-Namib region of Namibia on the Namib Rand Nature Reserve.

Preliminary results on small mammals indicate significant differences between the vegetation cover at burrow areas between the two seasons, which was mainly bare during winter and dominated by annuals such as herbs in summer. Control areas without ground squirrel burrows, were mainly dominated by perennial plants such as grasses throughout the year. This suggests that the presence of burrows combined with their foraging activities could be influencing secondary succession in areas occupied by squirrels thus altering the ratio of annuals to perennials. In addition, the results also indicated significant differences in small mammal abundance and composition at burrow sites over the two seasons, with significantly more small mammals at these sites in summer. This suggests that squirrel burrow areas could be affecting the seasonal distribution of small mammal populations, hence there is no significant difference in winter. The deep and extensive burrows of squirrels may serve to provide shelter against extreme temperatures and predators, and flash floods that may affect small mammals' burrows, specifically during the rainy season. This result also ties in neatly with seasonal differences previously discussed for vegetation cover, namely that annual plants at squirrel burrows (which was said to possibly be brought about by the squirrels' digging and foraging activities) determine the seasonal whereabouts of small mammals.

Given such result, one can almost certainly say that ground squirrels are worth the consideration as keystone species. However, before labeling a species as keystone, the effects of its habitat modification should be relatively higher compared to the commonness or biomass of these species. Further research, like all good researchers would agree, is recommended to determine the degree of influence the ground squirrel exerts on their environment.

Corris Kaapehi

All about Selma

My name is Selma Kanandjembo and I am 21 years old. I was born in a village called Onayena near Ondangwa on the Northern part of the country. I completed my grade 12 in 2005 at Ekulo Senior Secondary School where I was a member of the environmental club. I participated in different activities to teach other learners not to litter, waste water and many more by writing up posts and through role play. By then I was already interested in learning more about natural resources management, but I was hoping to study nursing or any medical related course. I applied to do nursing at University of Namibia in 2006 but my fear of blood and needles stopped me from doing it. I decided to follow my other option which was studying natural resource management.

I enrolled at the Polytechnic of Namibia in 2007 on a course of Nature Conservation. It was amazing to learn everything about nature, from a living thing to a non-living thing; microscopic organism to something as big as an elephant. I did my first in-service training last year at Gondwana Cañon Park (located between Keetmanshop and Karasberg), where I began putting theory into practice from technical activities (e.g. servicing windmills, building waterholes and fixing water pipes) to game management (game count, game capture, care, etc.). It was such a great experience. During my first in-service training I did a research study on quiver tree recruitment in Gondwana on selected sites of the Park.

I have completed my 3rd year and my second in-service training at NamibRand Nature Reserve from June to October. I was proud to be part of the Reserve team. I learned new things and everyday I acquired new experience. I have learned a lot on the Reserve from daily activities and the most interesting of all is radio tracking the cheetahs. I enjoy climbing hills and koppies in search of the cheetahs, which is the focus of my final project. I will be graduating with a Diploma in Nature Conservation next year if I pass my in-service training, and will be looking forward to fulfilling my career in any Nature Conservation related work.

Selma Kanandjembo



Selma at work tracking the cheetahs

Thank You!

Many thanks to those of you who contributed to this issue of the Barking Gecko—Ann Scott, Florian Wiese, Nils Odendaal, NaDEET, Ginger Mauney, Tony Robertson, Alice Jarvis, Andreas Keding, Corris Kaapehi, Selma Kanandjembo, Christopher Painter, Martin Harvey, the Kleins, Robin Catchpole and Aaron Price and . Your input, stories and photographs are always appreciated!

Danica Shaw

“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”



Weather Report

No significant rain has been recorded between May to the beginning of December. The table below provides the maximum and minimum temperatures recorded each month as well as the average maximum and minimum.



** Please note December 2009 figures only include up to the 7th.*



Month	Max	Min	Ave Max	Ave Min
May 09	31.5	-1.2	27.0	7.1
Jun 09	27.9	-1.4	23.9	4.6
Jul 09	26.7	-0.8	23.2	8.3
Aug 09	33.3	-3.0	28.6	7.5
Sep 09	35.7	4.9	30.8	11.0
Oct 09	37.3	5.3	32.9	13.6
Nov 09	38.7	7.4	33.1	15.0
Dec 09	33.8	10.8	28.5	12.8



Photo: © Martin Harvey

As the sun sets on 2009—the NamibRand team wishes you and yours a wonderful holiday season and a very peaceful and prosperous 2010!

Newsletter of the

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