

THE BARKING GECKO

NEWSLETTER OF THE NAMIBRAND NATURE RESERVE



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A tribute to Albi
GREETINGS FROM THE CEO

WORD FROM THE WARDEN

RAINFALL SUMMARY

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“The poetry of the earth is never dead.”
- Anonymous



Paul van Schalkwyk

HE TORE DOWN BOUNDARIES

A tribute to Albi Brückner

TEXT GINGER MAUNEY FOR *TRAVEL NEWS NAMIBIA* AUTUMN 2017



Along the dirt roads that wind their way through the Namib Desert, there are subtle signs of change. These signs read “No Fences.” They indicate areas where fences have been taken down to allow for the free movement of wildlife and the integration of land back to its natural whole.

The significance of these signs is so self-evident that we are forced to pause and recognize that it hasn't always been this way. There were obstacles, barriers to movement, limits to cohesion that had to be forcibly overcome.

These signs, their message and their effectiveness, are as understated and important as the man behind them, the late J.A. (Albi) Brückner.

An astute businessman and a keen conservationist, who served on the Board of the Desert Research Foundation of Namibia (DRFN) and the Chairman of the Namibia Nature Foundation (NNF), Albi's connection to the Namib Desert has become part of desert folklore.

In 1984 he purchased the Farm Gorassis for the price of a Volkswagen Beetle. The land was overgrazed, sheep farming throughout the south

was in a decline and wildlife had been shot out, so where others saw the chance to sell and get out, Albi saw the opportunity to stake a claim not only to the land, but also to the future.

He purchased another farm and then another, and by the mid-1990s, he had established his vision for a private nature reserve where fences would be removed, water points restored and wildlife would return to the land that it is so well adapted to inhabit. Local and international investors were inspired to purchase and connect more farms into the mosaic that formed NamibRand Nature Reserve.

For Albi, life was always about tearing down boundaries. This desire may have been ingrained in him when he was a child, growing up in war-torn Prussia where he learned to be both firm and open-minded.

In his teens Albi returned to Namibia, the country of his birth. Prior to Namibia's independence he was among a group of Namibian businessmen who met with Sam Nujoma, then the leader of the opposition resistance party, SWAPO. Afterwards, some members of the business community rejected Albi and his efforts to understand Nujoma, but for him the meeting was another way of tearing down fences.

When he was 60 years old, Albi's commitment to the environment culminated in this boldest move yet, the purchase of 100,000 hectares of land adjoining NamibRand.

“This put him under enormous financial pressure,” says Stephan Brückner, Albi's youngest son and the driving force behind Wolwedans, a series of high value, low impact tourism lodges on NamibRand. “But it was never about the money. It was always about the land, about leaving a legacy for future generations.”

The colours of the desert and the sheer sense of space always captivated Albi. Whenever he got the chance, he left Windhoek to explore NamibRand, visiting every corner of the property and often returning to the Farm Gorassis where it all began. Albi's impact on conservation in Namibia was both immediate, through DRFN and NNF, and sustained due to the land he helped to conserve and the people from nearby and around the world that he inspired.

“I believe that my father wanted to inspire people to do more, to give more, whether it was to conservation or socially. He believed in growing old with a purpose,” Stephan says.

For more than 30 years that purpose was NamibRand. By combining farms to re-establish

the integrity of an eco-system and using sustainable tourism to pay for the long-term preservation of the land, NamibRand became an international model for private sector conservation of large landscapes and for its contribution of the unique and fragile Pro-Namib ecosystem.

“My father's biggest hope for the future was that NamibRand would continue as is, that through our tourism model the land would be sustainable and that greed would not interfere. NamibRand has a sound constitution and structure, so he left knowing that it is in good hands for generations to come,” says Stephan Brückner.

NamibRand was Albi's inspiration and his solace. When his wife of 55 years passed away, he found peace in the desert, and now they lie side by side in a fairy circle, the perfect place for one who gave so much to conserve the space, the integrity and the mystery of the desert. **TNN**



EDITOR'S NOTE

Lee Tindall

It is hard to believe that we are in the early stages of the 2nd quarter of 2017. It's always a stark and harsh reminder of the fact that time waits for no one.

With the devastating and sudden passing of Albi Brückner, we were all reminded of this. I echo the words of Ginger Mauney in her tribute to Albi and our CEO's words as well. *Travel News Namibia* and Ginger Mauney kindly allowed us to publish their tribute to Albi in this edition of *The Barking Gecko*. We feel his loss deeply and greatly. His absence pushes us to further his dreams harder than ever, to honour his legacy to the furthest and to live a meaningful and rich life that benefits those around us and generations to come.

We have experienced some wonderful rains, which have smoothed the jagged edges and soothed the ache of the drought temporarily. By no means are we out of the drought, but it has brought relief in very limited patches. Keerweder is one such place – beautiful beyond measure. Beyond the beauty, the reprieve it has brought the wildlife has been immense. We are seeing lots of little zebra foals on a regular basis. A herd of plains zebra has taken up residence just on the Keerweder plains. It's a delight! There are some heavily pregnant mares at this stage and the anticipation of foals is exciting. I am reminded every day, how privileged we are to live here and more so, how wonderful this is for our children to experience. They have a deeper and more profound understanding of nature and its wonders than many adults will ever be given the opportunity to have.

"The greatest legacy one can pass on to one's children is not money or other material things accumulated in one's life, but rather a legacy of character and faith"
- Billy Graham



Water on Keerweder Pan.

With that said, we continue doing our best daily to preserve, to protect and to carve out a space for conservation and all it encompasses. We will continue doing so for those who walk this desert after us, for those who have carried the weight of this legacy before us and for those with whom we walk side by side in this journey. **LT**



MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

Nils Odendaal

The loss of our mentor, chair and custodian, Albi Brückner, who unexpectedly passed away on the 8th of December 2016, hit us all hard and we profoundly miss him. I personally cherished the days he would pop into the office in Windhoek to tend to NamibRand business or just visit for a chat and to catch up. Albi's friendly and gentle manner and his wisdom will be truly missed by all of us. We are honoured to be allowed to re-publish a tribute to Albi as written by Ginger Mauney and published by *Travel News Namibia*. Look for this article in this edition of *The Barking Gecko*.

We are excited to announce that Dr Malan Lindeque, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, has agreed to take on the role of chairperson for the NamibRand Nature Reserve Association. Permission from the Government of Namibia has been obtained and Dr Lindeque will chair our next board meeting on the 15th of April 2017. Dr Lindeque is highly respected and has contributed significantly to conservation in Namibia. We look forward to the vast experience he brings and his invaluable advice as non-executive chair to the Association.

The intense heat and fearsome winds that the Reserve experienced at the end of last year were broken when some parts of NamibRand received their first rains on the 1st of January 2017. Keerweder in particular has received very good rainfall over the past few months and it seems like most of the Reserve's animals have moved into this area to take advantage of the luscious green grazing that has transformed the landscape. The rain received has been very patchy and most of the Reserve is still dry and barren, but at least the wildlife now have a reprieve as there are some areas covered with good grazing. The ability of the animals to migrate in response to the rainfall and grazing is testament to the success of

our conservation policy of a fence free Namib. See the rainfall report in this newsletter for more details.

Congratulations to Viktoria Keding, NaDEET founder and director, for winning first place in the Trophee de Femmes 2017 awarded by the Fondation Yves Rocher - Institut de France. Viktoria was recognised with the prestigious award for her work with NaDEET promoting sustainable living, environmental conservation and awareness in Namibia. See www.yves-rocher-fondation.org/en/ for more information.

Congratulations are also in order to Stephan Brückner, NamibRand Safaris founder and managing director, for being recognised by Andrew Harper as the Environmentalist of the Year for 2017. Stephan was recognised by this famous travel writer for his contribution towards the formation of the NamibRand Nature Reserve and for instilling sustainability practices at Wolwedans. See www.andrewharper.com/articles/view/people-of-note-special-recognition-awards-2017/?utm_content=buffer5705c&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer#environmentalist.W

2017 looks to be an extremely busy year for research on NamibRand with multiple research visits already confirmed for the season. Scientists from the Max Plank Institute, University of Boulder Colorado, University of Pretoria, University of South Africa and the University of Cape Town are all visiting NamibRand to research the mysteries of fairy circles. Perhaps this renewed interest has been sparked by the new theory put forth by a group of scientists from Princeton University who visited us last year. See www.princeton.edu/main/news/archive/S48/48/36C19/?section=topstories.

We hope for more widespread rain across the Reserve and wish you all a Happy Easter!

Yours faithfully,

Nils Odendaal
Chief Executive Officer

WORD FROM THE WARDEN

MURRAY TINDALL

The Namib saw a brief break from the drought, which started in January with heavy storms and large rainfalls. Unfortunately, this was very patchy and not widespread, meaning that while some places had above average rainfall, others had barely any. The deep south is in dire need of some good rain, which may not happen. It looks like we are nearing the end of the rainy season for 2017. It is always incredible to see what the rains bring, apart from water, in terms of insects and wildlife. Keerweeder waterhole and the plains area has been frequented by a herd of hartebeest, once so skittish if you coughed they ran away – now so relaxed they almost think they own the place. A large herd of plains zebra has made the area around the homestead and the plains its home, where the mares are dropping foals on a regular basis. We have been inundated by insects at Keerweeder and the other homesteads. Some wonderful little insects have been found and some have been kept for scientific purposes and identification.

2017 promises to be a busy year. There has already been much research taking place, with a few options to collaborate on research and combine efforts for maximum results.

This is exciting and holds many possibilities for the Reserve and the Greater Sossusvlei-Namib Landscape (GSNL).

The GSNL Wildlife Research project has been going well and recent meetings with Morgan Hauptfleisch have been promising regarding the longevity and usefulness of this project. Sadly some of the springbook collars have expired – we assume this is a battery life issue and are in the process of trying to retrieve the ones we can. Jabus du Toit, from Wereldsend kindly contacted us, when he found the carcass of a research springbok with its collar still on. It has been retrieved and the search for the others is ongoing.

It is with gratitude that I think back to Albi and his passion. Gratitude for allowing us, the next generation, to take on an immense dream and gratitude for the faith he put in his dream and the people around him to follow it through. We hope we do him, his legacy and his dream proud by flying the flag for conservation proudly.

Wishing you all the best for the next quarter of 2017 – may it be successful and enjoyable.



Wolwedans Base after the rain.

RAINFALL SUMMARY

NRNR Rainfall 2016/2017 Season											
Property	Rain gauge	GPS coordinates		SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	Total
Kwessiegat	Kwessiegat house	24.91377°	15.90143°					22	7	1,2	30,2
	Cobra dam	24.91377°	15.87753°						6	1	7
Toskaan	Moringa	24.8379°	15.99758°					26	24	39	89
	Kokerboom	24.84943°	16.07159°			4		7	55	?	66
	Toskaan borehole	24.87461°	16.09083°			5		9	46	29	89
	Porcupine	24.88359°	16.06791°			1		7	30,8	19	57,8
Draaihoek	Draaihoek house	24.8986°	16.07737°			3		11	50	21	85
	Bushmankoppies	24.90874°	15.98122°			1		25,5	4,2	9	39,7
Keerweder	Keerweder house	24.94914°	16.03913°			1,6		37	24	41	103,6
	Boscia	24.953°	16.10804°			1		22	26	39	88
Jagkop	Jagkop	24.97864°	15.97149°			2		10	14,8	44	70,8
Verweg	Zebradam	25.01212°	16.02693°			1		28	23	42	94
	Verweg house	25.00862°	16.06276°			1		17	15,5	52	85,5
Toekoms	Toekoms house	25.03595°	16.095°			1		34,5	30	13	78,5
	Kuduwater	25.07502°	16.08407°			1		7	21	30	59
Wolwedans	Kraal junction	25.02576°	15.91114°					0	3	55	58
	Karl's valley	25.07849°	15.91893°					5,3	?		5,3
	Wolwedans village	25.11484°	15.99556°					25,4	5,4	17,2	48
Die Duine	Schafsberg	25.21122°	15.99343°			4		4	2	20	30
	DDR	25.22043°	16.03584°			3		5	1	12	21
	NaDEET centre	25.22722°	16.06136°			3,2	?	?	?		3,2
	Die Duine house	25.24086°	16.06278°			3,2		6,8	7,8	25,2	43
Stellarine	Horseshoe water	25.26343°	16.02571°			7		1	8	29	45
Gorrasis	Gorrasis house	25.30079°	15.9356°					14	29	3,5	46,5
	Straussenwasser	25.35341°	15.88405°					3		3	6
Aandster	Swartkoppie	25.34685°	15.98157°			5		2	10	11	28
	Vista	25.34043°	16.02183°			6		13	20	22	61
	Twee Pompe	25.32871°	16.05988°			6		12	32	11	61
	Aandster house	25.36114°	16.09999°			8,1		8	11	6	33,1
	Kalkpomp	25.38854°	16.10031°			6		0	9	7	22
	Prosopis	25.40473°	16.02814°			5		16	4	29	54
	Grootpomp	25.40349°	15.97097°			5		7	1	4	17
	Satanskop duine	25.40724°	15.93873°			4,5		6	1,5	35	47
	Satanskop	25.40724°	15.93873°			4,5		10,5			15
Springbokvlakte	Satanskop south	25.46505°	15.95004°					4			4
	Springbokvlakte house	25.47004°	16.01011°					19		10	29
	Two pumps	25.43776°	16.02675°					13		10	23
	Four Tanks	25.5072°	15.99884°					24		3	27
	Park border	25.51285°	15.94079°					6		18	24
Saffier	Aandster water	25.41009°	16.08331°					7		4	11
	Excelsior Turnoff	25.44071°	16.10993°					6		5	11
	Saffier House	25.4707°	16.09834°					29		23	52
	Sonop water	25.50487°	16.11610°					6		19	25
Dina	Dina north reservoir	25.30799°	16.07247°			4		15		6	25
	Dina middle	25.33149°	16.13532°			3		21,5	14	8	46,5
	Dina house	25.33168°	16.18961°			2		24	33	20	79
	Dina south reservoir	25.37956°	16.13707°			3		6	10	2	21
Average											43,9



Jacques Junius

Southern Rock Agama at Boulders

TALES FROM THE SOUTH

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS Peter Woolfe

Greetings to all from the deep south. We hope everyone had a great festive season and all are hitting the ground running as the season approaches.

It was with great sadness that we said goodbye to Albi Brückner. However, he remains all around us... and what he created. He was a truly great man and I am proud to have known him and to be able to contribute something toward his dream.

Dear oh dear! It looks like another disastrous rainy season, in the south anyway. Many places have received no rain at all and other areas well below average. Areas that did get a bit of rain could not fully benefit due to the rapid rate of seepage after such a long dry period. I attended the Maltahöhe Farmers meeting the other day and a number of farmers have had little or no rain and are now in a desperate

situation. One can only hope for a freak late weather system. We had a nice surprise when the Duwisib river came down in flood as a result of a cloud burst behind Duwisib Castle that delivered 140 mm in a short period of time. The water even reached the dunes on the western side of Dina.

Good news is that the Dina fence bordering on the Reserve has now been completely removed and what a difference it has made. At long last the fence on either side of the entrance road to Die Duine has been properly fortified and we hope this will solve the problem of animals entering the goral and getting stuck in the fence.

Regarding fauna we have had two good leopard sightings this year. One around the corner from the Gorasis house and another below the Horseshoe camp. A warthog was also spotted on the dry gravel plains of Saffir and three of the giraffe were seen browsing along the river system approaching the Springbokvlakte house. The number of springbok lambs has also spiked in recent weeks.

Thanks to the support of NamibRand, I was afforded the wonderful opportunity to attend a course on Permaculture. Five days of intense information together with very useful practical exercises made it a truly worthwhile experience. Thank you. I have pages and pages of notes that I will have to collate and put in some sort of order, so anyone who is interested please let me know so I can share this information with you.

We wish you all a great second quarter and look forward to seeing everyone at one time or another.

Cheers! The team in the south



Peter Woolfe

Duwisib River in flood



Peter Woolfe

Leopard at Horseshoe



Peter Woolfe

Hot composting

NEWS FROM NaDEET

VIKTORIA KEDING

DIRECTOR WINS ENVIRONMENTAL PRIZE

NaDEET's Director, Viktoria Keding, was honoured with the Trophée de Femmes Environmental Woman of the Year 2017 – Germany prize. The ceremony took place at Schloss Solitude in Stuttgart, Germany on 15 February 2017.

The Yves Rocher Fondation honours women in the field of nature and conservation who have demonstrated above and beyond their dedication to protecting the environment in seven different countries. Viktoria's 1st place win was handed over to her by the well-known women's magazine, "Für Sie" Vice-Editor, Susanne Walsleben.

Viktoria was awarded for the achievements of NaDEET Centre because of its creative approach to Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) through its philosophy "We practice what we teach". This approach engages participants with practical sustainable living skills through daily activities such as using solar cookers, energy efficient stoves, recycled fire bricks and water saving bucket showers. The prize money of 10,000 Euros will be used for NaDEET environmental education programmes.



Girls and Boys alike describe family-style solar cooking as one of their favourite activity.

NaDEET CENTRE

This year NaDEET Centre opened in late January to host German *Weltwärts* volunteers for their in-service conference. Since then the Centre has welcomed returning schools including St Paul's College, Origo Primary School and Maarti Athisaari Primary School. NaDEET is proud to host so many learners from such different socio-economic backgrounds and to give them an opportunity to spend a week on the magical NamibRand Nature Reserve.

One St Paul's College learner from Windhoek remarked: - "I liked the programme very much because it brought me out of my comfort zone and taught me a lot about different types of animals." This is just what NaDEET aims to do- get participants out of their comfort zones to experience life from a different, more sustainable perspective.

UNESCO KEY PARTNER IN THE UNESCO GLOBAL ACTION PROGRAMME

In 2014 NaDEET was selected to be a key partner in the UNESCO Global Action Programme. This action recently held its mid-term review conference in Ottawa, Canada and was attended by Viktoria Keding. This forum provides the opportunity for global networking and sharing of ideas. Viktoria presented the experience of teachers at NaDEET Centre during a debate platform with environmental educators from South Africa.



St Paul's College learners at departure after a week-long environmental education programme at NaDEET Centre.



During the daily Measuring our Environmental Footprint activity learners record water use.



Learning about the solar system and identifying star constellations are part of the astronomy lesson. This evening activity also introduces participants to NamibRand Nature Reserve being an International Dark Sky Reserve and teaches about light pollution before climbing up the dune to admire the magnificent night sky.

FAMILY HIDEOUT NEWS

Die Duine Staff Accommodation Extension and New Staff

Our two campsites Orion and Venus are proving so popular that our one staff member, Titus, has been run off his feet, trying to handle the house plus both campsites, increased numbers of guests, management of additional water supply, refuse and activities. So another helper has become necessary, and with that, a place to stay. Not available at Die Duine, where Tok Tokkie and NaDEET staff are also housed, but this is the obvious place if our staff is to have any sense of community. So no choice but to build.

What to build? Here we had lots of help from architect friends and family (thank you!) and soon a suitable design was found and documented.

Building in the remote Namib is a logistical nightmare for those of us who do not need to expand our infrastructure too often. Building materials were eventually sourced and transported down to Die Duine from Mariental, Windhoek and Maltahoehe. After much searching, a building team was found. Oom Martin Mouton from Schlip arrived with his team –his wife Joey, his son Joberto and friend Ricardo. A fine job was done in a few weeks, despite having to sleep in tents in harsh and windy conditions. It was still possible for the youngsters to have their music blare while they worked and to relax after a hard day's work by watching a movie on their laptop!

So welcome to Christina Boois, of Maltahöhe, whose husband Hendrik works at Boulders. Christina will be helping Titus out with cleaning, washing and general caretaking at the Family Hideout, as well as the campsites. Titus will concentrate more on meet and greet services, driving and guiding for the guests and general maintenance. We hope you will both be comfortable in your new quarters and with your new responsibilities.





Adult red velvet mite eating an insect.

Many thanks to those who contributed to this issue of *The Barking Gecko* by providing articles/information: Nils Odendaal, Murray Tindall, Viktoria Keding, Peter Woolfe, Jacques Junius for the amazing images and Ginger Mauney and *Travel News Namibia* for the permission to use her tribute to Albi article. *The Barking Gecko* is your newsletter and, as always, we invite you to continue to send us your contributions of artwork and photographs.

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Editor:

Lee Tindall (Research Warden)
Reserve Office
PO Box 131
Maltahöhe, Namibia
Phone: +264-63-683 026
Email: research@namibrand.org

Head Office:

76 -68 Frans Indongo Street
PO Box 40707 Windhoek, Namibia
Phone: +264-61-224 882
Email: info@namibrand.org
Website: www.namibrand.org



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