

THE BARKING GECKO

March 2021

Vol. 22, No. 1



FAMILY HIDEOUT THE TRANSFORMATION IN PICTURES

GREETINGS FROM THE CEO

WORD FROM THE WARDEN

**GREETINGS FROM THE
LUSH, GREEN SOUTH**

NEWS @ NaDEET

INDEX

EDITORIAL	4
WORD FROM THE WARDEN	5
GREETINGS FROM THE CEO	6
GREETINGS FROM THE	
LUSH, GREEN SOUTH	7
FAMILY HIDEOUT -	
THE TRANSFORMATION IN PICTURES	8
NEWS @ NADEET	10
THE FINAL WORD	12

*"Heaven is under our feet
as well as over our heads."
- Henry David Thoreau,*



Stephan Getzin



Aerial view of fairy circles in the northern part of NamibRand, with phorbs growing on the outside of the circles.



EDITOR'S INPUT

Since 2012, the year in which we last had average rainfall figures, we have gone through each potential rainy season with bated breath! We have hoped for rainfall, wished for the smell of scorched earth getting wet and looked at the drying veld and the struggling animals with heavy hearts and disappointment.

The 2nd January 2021 brought us rain! We all know the cost and the toll the drought has taken on the wildlife, on the plains and how it has changed the landscape, but what we have discounted over the last few years and what has been a secondary concern, is the toll it has taken on the humans too. Many of us have had to deal with conflicting feelings about our inability to control this and the helplessness we have felt.

Those first few drops of rain, the ones that set off the smell of fresh rain on the hard, dry ground were like a balm for aching souls. Our kids raced around the garden, while we sat back and watched, still slightly skeptical of whether this would be

the real deal! We received a message from our colleagues at Aandster, saying they had had 80mm of rain already. I suggested to Murray that we pack up and move there, I was so excited.

It has been an amazing miracle watching the desert green, a reminder of the incredible power of nature. We have also witnessed the immense power of water and its ability to cause damage – several roads on the reserve washed away and a large section of the C27 south bound has been pretty much destroyed. Damage can mostly be repaired, and the graders have been in the area regularly!

In honor of all the greening, the transformation and the rain we have already had, this edition of the Barking Gecko is an image heavy one.

Lee Tindall

A WORD FROM THE WARDEN

Rain, glorious rain! January was a fantastically wet and rainy month which got many people speculating about whether this would be a record-setting rainy season. Some people even began talking about a 1-in-100-year event and many wondered how the current season compared to the most recent record setting event in 2011. Enthusiasm, like the grass, quickly dried up in February when there was only very limited follow-up rain and it began to look like we wouldn't be setting any records after all. This shouldn't detract from the fact that the Reserve is looking really great and the rain that has fallen so far is welcome indeed. The grazing from the January rains alone should be enough to last for a least another year, if not two. So, how then does the rainfall in 2021 compare to the rainfall in 2011? The table below shows a brief summary of the average amount of rain across the entire Reserve.

If one considers that the long term annual average rainfall on NamibRand is 100mm, it can be seen just how incredible the rainfall in 2011 really was. Unfortunately, we are still a long way from that, and while there is still a while to go before the end of the rainy season, the forecast does not look overly promising.

One of the reasons that people got excited at the start of the year was due to the large number of videos, circulating on various platforms, of huge volumes of water coming down out of the mountains and full rivers causing flooding across the country. What is important to remember is that the country, and certainly this area has experienced a very long protracted drought for the last 7-8 years and the ground in

most places was devoid of any vegetation. Studies have shown that this can lead to decreased infiltration of water into the soil and therefore increased runoff. This might be one reason why there was such a lot of water running into pans and through usually dry river beds. In 2011, the vegetation was in much better condition as there were very good rains in 2008, and average rains in both 2009 and 2010. The rain also started off slower, giving the vegetation a chance to grow a little before the really big rains came in February.

While more rain is always welcome and we certainly hope to receive more, from the animals' perspective things will be just fine the way they are. We should all just enjoy it for what it is.

	January	February	March	April	May	Total
2008	12	73	68	29	0	182
2011	58	109	79	23	63	332
2021	90	11				101

GREETINGS FROM THE CEO

2021 has started off with a bang! Most of the Reserve has already received more than its average annual rainfall. The landscape is green and looks amazing, grasses have regrown and the trees are happy. The silver bushman's grass gently waves in the wind, welcoming the herds of wildlife back to NamibRand.

While the welcome rains have brought much needed relieve to nature and animals, the financial situation for the Reserve has become very challenging.

As long standing supporters of the NamibRand Nature Reserve, we need your help.

As you might know, the Reserve collects a daily Park Fee from each guest, which helps to pay for conservation and biodiversity management costs of this unique nature reserve. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have been far reaching. One of the unfortunate effects has been the near collapse of the tourism industry in Namibia. As a result, the Reserve, which is an Association not for Gain, has suffered a significant loss of income. As the pandemic continues, the Reserve has had to rely on its own financial reserves and the support of generous donors to cover costs.

Last year we were fortunate to have received help from one of our directors, Mr John Bernstein, who donated a significant sum of money to NamibRand to help us stretch the available funds. Although we have adopted



extreme cost-cutting measures, such as reducing staff salaries and significantly reducing conservation activities we have now depleted our financial reserves. Tourism operators who traditionally support and help sustain the Reserve are not in a position to assist financially. Most lodges and tourism operators on NamibRand simply do not have any international guests and income raised from local visitors is very limited. Vaccines against the virus raise hope that the tourism industry will eventually recover, however, it will still be a long time until global economic impacts improve enough for visitors to travel and tourism to resume to its pre-pandemic levels.

It is against this backdrop that we would like to appeal to you to consider making a donation toward the NamibRand Nature Reserve. Please help us to continue to conserve this

beautiful landscape, its unique wildlife and support the great conservation success we have achieved. A financial donation from you, no matter how big or how small, will help us to continue to do our work and ensure the continued existence of the NamibRand Nature Reserve.

Please get in touch with us to help make a donation or contact the Reserve directly via www.namibrand.org.

We hope you enjoy the stunning images of the green Namib in this edition and look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards,



Nils Odendaal
Chief Executive Officer



GREETINGS FROM THE LUSH, GREEN SOUTH

After a quiet 2020, the year 2021 started off with more than we could hope for. On the 2nd of January the clouds started building for the umpteenth time. It was very hot and very humid.

Rain started falling over Dina/Excelsior and came closer to Aandster. Very quickly we had 13mm of rain and then some more showers came from the Sonop side. The rain turned into showers, this was at about 16:00, and after dark, about 20:00, it was still raining. Then the rain slowed. This was the time to check the rain gauges, and boy did we get a surprise. The gauge stood at 80mm.

With very happy hearts we went to bed and found the gauge the next morning standing at 93mm in total for the day. Needless to say, we had to go check the rest of the farm, only to find out that there were no dry places.

To date we've had 157mm of rain at Aandster. Every morning since then the veld is changing into a different world. 30 days after the rain the grass is full of seeds. Seeing all the wild animals still lying and resting at 10:00 in the morning after grazing, makes one's heart happy. What an experience this is.

All I can say is that if you can't see this for yourself, the photos don't convey the whole truth. It is a privilege to experience it first hand. With a year starting like this, it inspires one to start the year with hope and determination for what lies ahead.

Martin Verwey

NAMIBRAND
FAMILY HIDEOUT

THE TRANSFORMATION IN PICTURES



Water on the road at Family Hideout



The view from the Family Hideout veranda before the rain, December 2020



The transformation after the rain



The view from the Family Hideout veranda after the rains, Feb 2021

FACING DOWN PANDEMIC, NADEET PLANS FOR ITS FUTURE

Guest writer: Nancy Brumback

The COVID-19 pandemic has shut down the hands-on environmental programme for children, but NaDEET has pivoted to improving the desert experience when the students return, putting the final touches on an ambitious programme to train teachers, and celebrating a national policy for environmental education in Namibia.

"We were advised early by overseas supporters that the pandemic would be very serious, so we were able to take steps to cope," said Viktoria Keding, Director and co-founder of the Namib Desert Environmental Education Trust (NaDEET), based in Swakopmund. When the programme for school children in the Namib Desert shut down in March 2019, some staff went on half-pay for three months and some staff were laid off, "until we could see where donations would stand" to offset the loss of tuition payments.

"As with all of us, Viktoria and Andreas Keding and the staff at NADEET have had to adjust to the reality of COVID-19," said Richard Bittenbender, Friends of NaDEET USA. "They have adjusted their approach to fostering sustainable living while stabilizing NaDEET's financial situation in the face of a complete shutdown of traditional programmes. Their imaginative and focused reaction to this crisis highlights the skills, dedication and energy they and their staff bring to their mission."

NaDEET now hopes to resume its student programmes at NaDEET Centre on the NamibRand

Nature Reserve in February. The desert programmes normally take 30-40 students in grades 6-12 for five days each week.

In the meantime, the emphasis at the Centre has shifted from children to trees and gardens.

"Instead of people, we are focusing on trees, with funding from a donor to keep us alive and healthy," Keding said. "We have a goal of planting 1,000 trees in the desert," and the students will be part of that effort when they return. Currently, about 700 native camelthorn acacia trees have been raised by the Centre staff.

Andreas Keding, technical director and co-founder, figured out how to soak the camelthorn seeds and clip the husks (with a nail clipper) to mimic nature's system of passing the seeds through an animal's digestive tract to encourage them to sprout. He also developed "cocoons" to protect the seedlings—biodegradable paper containers similar to a tube cake pan to support the seedlings and provide water, surrounded by a fence, to be removed later, to protect the seedlings from animals.

The second major project at the Centre is the construction of gardens in frame structures covered by white shade cloth so that "we can try to grow some of our own food—lettuce, tomatoes, carrots, cabbages and more," again with the help of students in the future, Viktoria Keding said.





The first garden house is now serving as the tree nursery, but will be converted and two others, each about 54 square meters, will be added. Water comes from the deep wells that supply the Centre, and the structure sides are of metal mesh “to keep out the insects, mice, lizards, polecats and oryx.”

NaDEET Centre’s kitchen staff is using the downtime to develop an app to modernize the supply programme. Recipes are being standardized and new ones developed with detailed ingredient quantities. Suppliers are entered into the app, and the result should make ordering more efficient.

In Swakopmund, the Urban Sustainability Centre, just opened in October 2019, is already being expanded, and an extensive programme for training teachers is in the works. The Urban Centre demonstrates everyday solutions to environmental problems through exhibits such as the Eco-House. When pandemic conditions permit, it will again be open to groups and individual visitors. An adjacent space has been converted to the Eco-Café, “a cafeteria for programme participants where we practice what we teach, in the food we serve and how it is prepared,” Keding said.

Both the Desert and Urban Centres play a key role in NaDEET’s Education for Sustainable Development effort that aims to train 240 teachers in Namibia over the next three years

in cooperation with Namibia’s Ministry of Education. NaDEET must raise 10% of the funding to supplement the 90% generously supplied by Bread for the World.

“We are looking for as many multiplier participants as possible. By training the trainers, we will reach many more people faster with the message of sustainability,” said Keding.

The teacher programme will begin accepting applications in January. NaDEET plans to offer 12 trainings each year with 20 teachers in each class. Six will be at the Urban Centre and six at NaDEET Centre. The five-day programme will present sustainability goals, environment ethics, and how to effectively teach these ideas. The programme also will provide resources and two years of on-going support when the teachers are back at school.

Keding has seen a long-term goal achieved despite these difficult times. Namibia has adopted a national policy for environmental education, signed by the Minister of Education and the Minister of the Environment. The policy mandates appointment of a high-level task force for Education for Sustainable Development, plus development of an implementation plan and budget. NaDEET was instrumental in drafting and promoting this policy and has helped secure funding from UNESCO for implementation.



While donor funding has kept NaDEET operating at its current reduced level in the absence of the funds from the school programmes, Keding noted that increased donations are needed to assure that programs will be available to all when in-person sessions can resume. “Since the beginning, we have had an open-door policy, that everyone can come, regardless of ability to pay.”

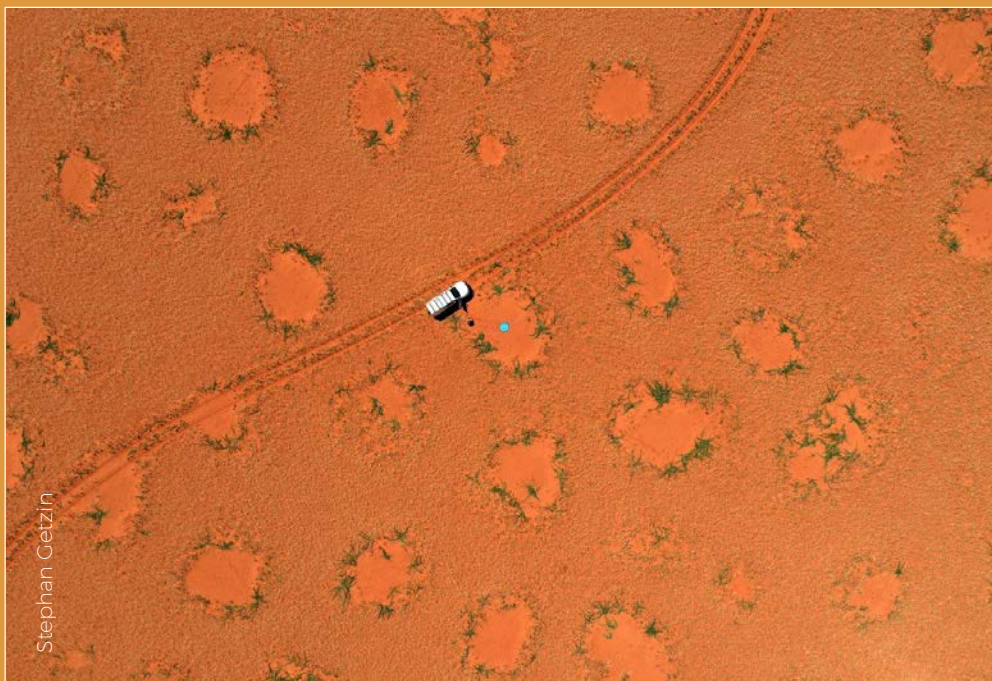
Donations are needed to offset the loss of tuition from participating schools, loss of donations from people who visit NaDEET, and loss of contributions from the NamibRand Nature Reserve park fees.

“Many of our donors are people who have visited NaDEET, and they cannot come right now,” she said.

Keding remains confident, however, in the work of NaDEET. “We have stayed true to our core during this pandemic. We continue to practice what we teach, and we will present that message even stronger when we can fully resume our work.”



Viktoria Keding and Honourable Minister Pohamba Shifeta



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

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

KINDLY NOTE:

Photographs are under copyright and may not be reused without the permission of the photographer.

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



If you wish to subscribe to the Barking Gecko, please contact the editor at the above address. Note that previous issues of this newsletter are available on the NamibRand website.