

THE BARKING GECKO

August 2018

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**A STRANGER IN THE DESERT
– THE MAKING OF A SYMPHONY**

GREETINGS FROM THE CEO

WORD FROM THE WARDEN

WINTER GAMES & FOOTBALL CUP

TALES FROM THE SOUTH

NEWS FROM NaDEET

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





EDITOR'S INPUT

Another BG and another year more than halfway through! So far it has been an exciting one, and the coming months will be busy and also look really exciting and productive.

The 27th of July brought a lunar eclipse! What an absolutely phenomenal event to witness from our veranda, in the desert. It was freezing here, but it was magical nonetheless. Murray and I were trying to show the kids the whole process and explain the science behind it. Unfortunately some of the science may have been lost on them, especially as one had fallen asleep by the time the eclipse started. Connor loved it; he was invested in the process and very interested. We ended the evening, a little earlier for him, with a feeling of magic and connectedness.

The eclipse was a beautiful reminder of the interconnectedness of the environment and the world. Most of us are affected by the full moon in one way or another. It can affect our moods, others don't sleep and some people are calmer than usual during the full moon phase.

Full moon affects the tides, it affects the wind and it affects wildlife. It is a dangerous time for game – animals are on edge and wearier as predation is known to increase at full moon.

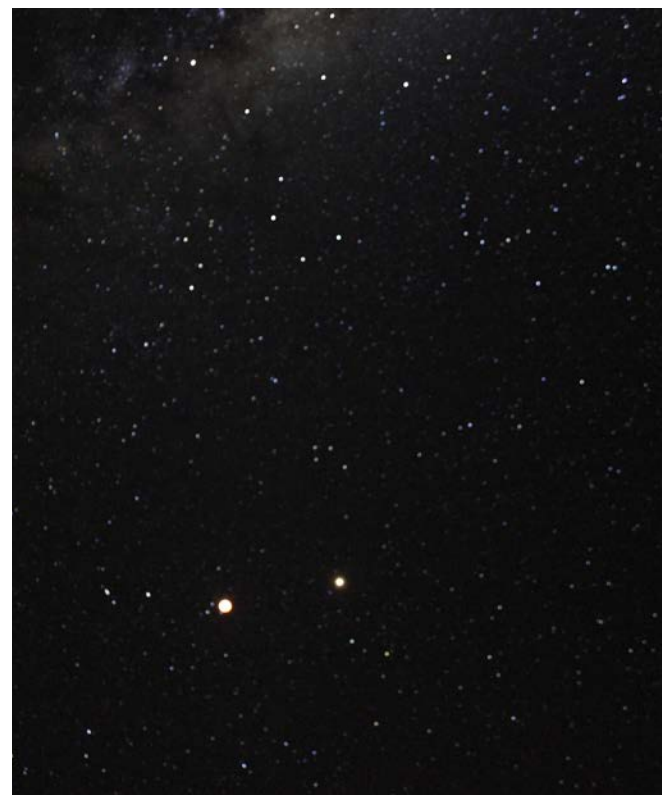
There are many legends about the sky and the universe, the way planets move, the effects they have on the environment.

With that said, the sky and the planets seem to have behaved oddly all year. I feel that this is reflected in the weather, uncommon winter rains, two weeks of endless wind and generally unseasonal winds. See more on the weather in the Barking Gecko! Wolwedans has submitted a couple of articles and one of my favourites is a brief commentary on the Cube project, a musical project in the desert.

Happy reading!

Regards from the desert

Lee Tindall



A WORD FROM THE WARDEN

At the end of May 2018 we conducted our annual game count throughout the reserve. As was to be expected following the poor rains, the numbers showed a dramatic decline from the previous year (see table below).

At a glance the numbers may seem concerning. It is worth noting, however, that in 2017 there were areas in the reserve which had very good rainfall and therefore attracted large numbers of animals from surrounding areas, most notably Namib-Naukluft National Park. This year the pattern was reversed: there were patches of good rainfall in the national park close to the western boundary of the reserve and animals moved back there in search of grazing. This was also seen with the aid of satellite tracking collars placed on a number of Springbok as part of the Greater Sossusvlei-Namib Landscape Wildlife Monitoring Project. Three Springbok were collared on NamibRand in December 2017, and shortly before the game count all three moved off into the national park only a few hundred metres from our western boundary!

The migration of animals also had an effect on predator populations. Spotted hyenas, which were

previously photographed on a regular basis by camera traps along the foot of the Nubib Mountains, seem to have disappeared! It is likely that they, too, moved west following the prey species, and will return in due course as other animals are also on their way back east.

If the game count were to be conducted today the numbers would certainly be very different. A late rainfall event towards the end of May of over 30 mm across the reserve and subsequent moisture from dew as well as some light winter rains have encouraged grass growth in recent months and large numbers of animals have started to make their way back east onto the reserve. The late rain has undoubtedly saved many animals from starvation and there should be enough grass to last until the next rainy season.

We keep fingers crossed that the next rainy season is a better one!

Murray Tindall
Control Warden

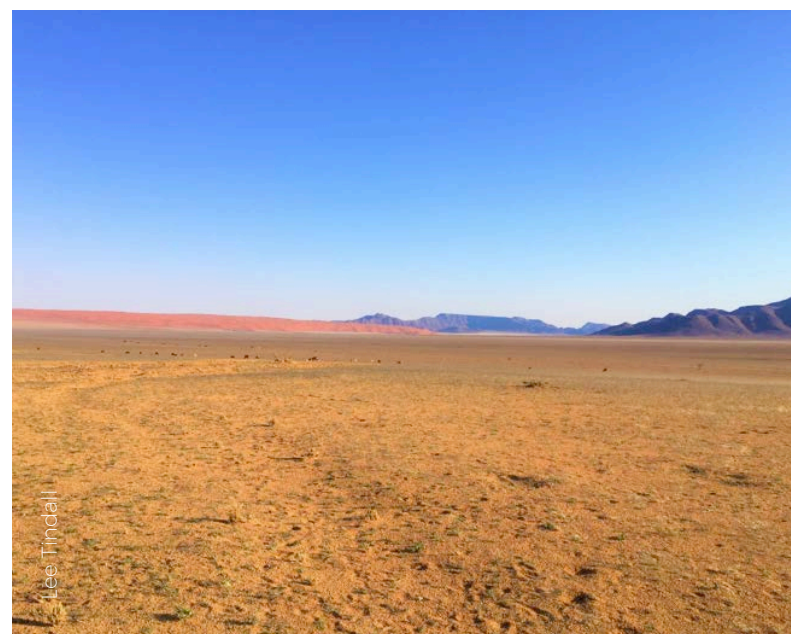
Total estimated numbers of game (Zone 1-10; May 2017 & 2018)				
Species	2017		2018	
	Number counted	Estimate	Number counted	Estimate
Gemsbok	2 847	10 625	995	3 707
Springbok	651	3 243	266	1 722
Kudu	1	4	0	0
Steenbok	0	0	0	0
Ostrich	76	226	54	131
B. Zebra	347	717	172	358
Hartebeest	62	174	25	67
Total	4 035	15 445	1 512	5 985
Giraffe*		9		10

*Total known numbers

GREETINGS FROM THE CEO

Late rains, in the form of isolated showers, at Easter as well as in mid-May and again in July resulted in green patches of vegetation which have saved our wildlife. As reported last time, good progress is being made in our continued effort to dismantle fences in order to open up the landscape and enable animals in search of grazing to migrate to these sparse patches of vegetation. The fence between NamibRand, Kumbis and Sonob in the south is now completely gone and others in the area, most notably Solitaire, have removed large quantities of fencing.

Our NamibRand Annual General Meeting (AGM) took place on the 25th of May and, as usual, was well attended by members of the association and by interested stakeholders. Ally Karaerua, MD of Natural Selection Safaris Namibia, represented the new owners of the farm Kwessiegat and confirmed his company's commitment and intended membership in NamibRand. This will happen as soon as the title deed for Kwessiegat has been registered in their name.



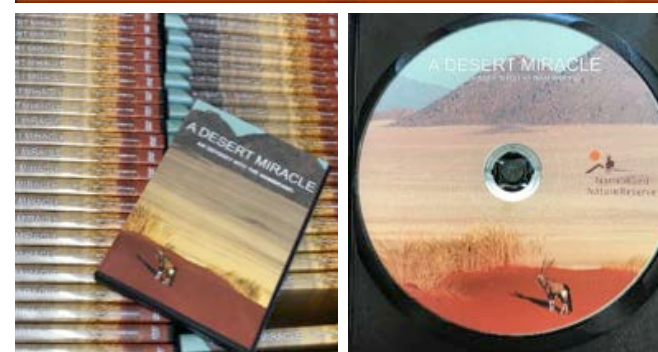
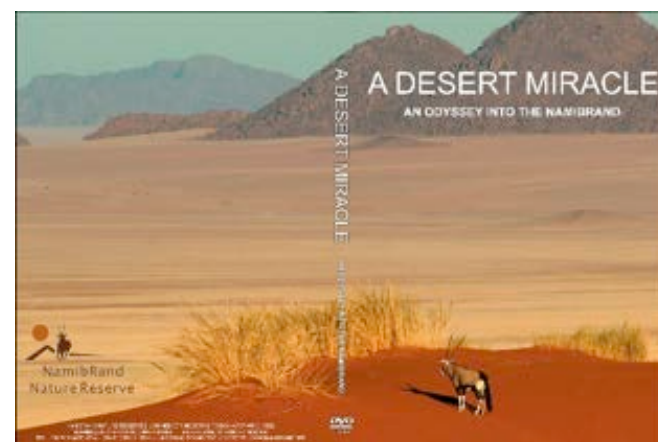
NamibRand stakeholders have started to revise their vision for the reserve for the future. Among the most notable outcomes to date are:

- A need to update the overall strategic vision of NamibRand to not only promote conservation, but to also embrace social and economic development in the region.
- To improve NamibRand's national importance and perception, especially with regard to social and economic standing.
- To upgrade and assist Namib Desert Environmental Education Trust (NaDEET) to be the reserve's official educational partner.

With this in mind, the directors of the NamibRand Nature Reserve Association have already approved a financial contribution to NaDEET in the current financial year.

We hope to complete the visioning process this year and will keep you updated!

Our annual game count took place on the day of the AGM. Overall wildlife populations are lower than in previous years and distribution indicates that most animals are in the western parts of NamibRand and beyond our boundaries in neighbouring Namib-Naukluft National Park. This makes sense as reports show that most of the rain fell there. For more about the game count see the 'Word from the Warden'.



Our documentary film – A Desert Miracle – is now available for N\$75 at our Windhoek office and at the curio shops of lodges in the reserve.

I was privileged to have been invited to the Great Plains Symposium held in Kearney, Nebraska, from 18-20 April 2018, and speak about the NamibRand Nature Reserve and the Greater Sossusvlei Landscape Association in front of an audience of 350 people. I love the fact that we can present our conservation success stories to an audience from a First World nation! Thank you to the University of Nebraska's Center for Great Plains Studies for hosting me and for facilitating a great conference! See www.unl.edu/plains/2018-ecotourism-symposium for more details.

It is encouraging to see that interest and participation by members of the Greater Sossusvlei-Namib Landscape Association (GSNL) are growing. We held a very successful game count throughout the landscape and our AGM at Solitaire Guest Farm on the 30th of June. Thank you to the owners, Carey Peterson and Pasquale Scaturro, for hosting us. Read more about the GSNL later in this newsletter.

You are invited! Our wardens, Murray and Lee Tindall, will give a talk on the Greater Sossusvlei-Namib Landscape Association for the Namibia Environment and Wildlife Society in Windhoek on the 11th of September.

We would like to thank all of you for your interest and commitment to NamibRand! Without your hard work and generous contributions (financial and in kind) NamibRand would not be the success that it is today!

Yours,

Nils Odendaal
Chief Executive Officer

NEWS TALK

LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION IN THE NAMIB

Thursday 11 Sep @ 19:30

Lee & Murray Tindall

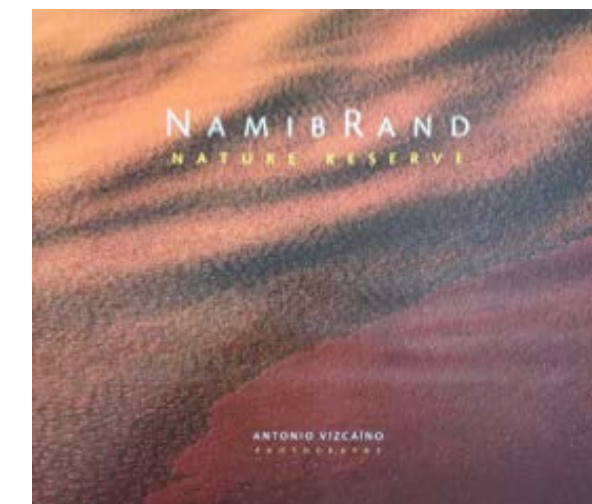
NAMIBIA SCIENTIFIC SOCIETY entrance Love Street

FREE ENTRY. Donations welcome

Landowners and custodians of the area have joined forces and formed the Greater Sossusvlei-Namib Landscape Association (GSNL).

The vision of the Association is to collaboratively manage the area for enhanced landscape and biodiversity conservation, and socio-economic development for the sustained benefit of the people within the landscape and the region.

Namibian Environment & Wildlife Society (NEWS) | www.news-namibia.org | 112 Robert Mugabe Ave, WDH



Get a copy of an amazing coffee table book on NamibRand Nature Reserve with spectacular photos by Antonio Vizcaino! Contact the Namibia Book Market at www.namibiabooks.com/contact



TALES FROM THE SOUTH

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS Peter Woolfe



Greetings to all from the south of Namib Rand Reserve! Regrettably, I must begin with the very sad news of Jakobus Kooper's unexpected passing. We all had the pleasure of working with him for several years and he will be missed.

The highlight of the period under review has to be the totally unexpected late rains. Beyond that, good progress has been made in other areas such as scrap and fence removal, the Aandstêr airstrip and the A frame. We even had a wedding!

On the 18th of May good rains were experienced across the south, ranging from 30 to 40 mm. Then again we were further blessed with widespread rain on the 15th of July, mostly ranging

from 6 to 10 mm and a whopping 29 mm at the Aandstêr homestead. Wonderful to see some green in the Namib after so long.

Scrap removal in the south also continued with Kumbis and several loads from Aandstêr. It is hard to guestimate but it appears another couple of loads will do the trick.

The boundary fence between Saffier and Springbokvlakte / Sonop West and Kumbis was dismantled. Approximately 11 km in all. As always, the difference it makes to the landscape is enormous!

Anyone approaching Aandstêr from any direction will also notice the absence of the bright yellow eyesore that welcomed you previously. The A-frame was given a paint job and the combination of dark grey and dune red has decreased the visibility of the house dramatically.

The Aandstêr airstrip has been upgraded with the construction of a paved turning apron together with two parking slabs. This was done to reduce damage to the planes' propellers from sand and gravel.

A new Solahart solar geyser was installed at Johannes' house on Springbokvlakte, for which he is very grateful.

We also celebrated the marriage of Elizabeth and Ruben, who tied the knot in Mariental on the 10th of May. Congratulations go to the happy couple and our best wishes for many years of happiness.

That's it from the south until Christmas. Another year almost gone!



NEWS FROM NaDEET

A YEAR AT NaDEET CENTRE

Weltwärts volunteer Franzi shares her experience of working as an educator for a year at the NaDEET Centre.

I started my volunteer year at NaDEET in August 2017 and loved every minute of it. It was an incredibly interesting and educational year.

I realized how much I love teaching and how much I learnt through it. Before I came to NaDEET I did not know all that much about environmental education or the desert itself. Having completed the volunteer year I would love to start teaching environmental education in Germany, as I realize how important and interesting this field is. It is very unique how NaDEET Centre teaches sustainability and how it works as a model for sustainability. Because our motto is "we practice what we teach", staff members also use bucket showers and long-drop toilets and cook with the sun's energy. Before I came to NaDEET I never imagined that we can cook every meal on solar cookers and how many creative ideas exist to protect the environment. At the same time I learnt a lot about the desert and I am still fascinated by how this eco-system works and how much life you can find in the desert.

The team had a big part in why I had so much fun at NaDEET. There are 5-7 staff members and the next village is some 150 km away. This means that we get to know each other well and are something like a small family. During our free time we do a lot of things together as a team, e.g. staff outings around the reserve or cooking together.

I am very happy to have spent a year here. Back in Germany I am eager to pass on the knowledge I gained.

Franzi Hünnemeyer-Weber



Franzi teaching a group of learners at the Centre.



We say good bye to Klara, another *Weltwärts* volunteer who worked on the development of the Swakopmund Centre.

URBAN SUSTAINABILITY CENTRE TAKING SHAPE IN SWAKOPMUND

Work on NaDEET's Urban Sustainability Centre in Swakopmund is in full swing, with a launch date before the end of the year in mind. The additional help of new staff members has increased our work rate and allowed staff to focus on developing individual sections of the Centre. The topics to be taught through the different sections are biodiversity, energy, waste, water and transport. This development promises to bring exciting features that will provide a hands-on learning experience for our visitors and increase our reach nationwide. We intend to launch the sustainable living house by the end of the year.

VIKTORIA RECEIVES BOWDOIN AWARD

NaDEET's director, Viktoria Keding, was awarded the Bowdoin Common Good Award in June 2018 at an event that took place in Maine, USA.

The award is dedicated to alumni of Bowdoin College who have "demonstrated an extraordinary, profound, and sustained commitment to the common good, in the interest and for the benefit of society, with conspicuous disregard for personal gains in wealth or status". Viktoria's efforts and contributions through NaDEET for Namibia's conservation and environmental education earned her the award. She attended the award ceremony with her family and friends at her alma mater, Bowdoin College in Maine, USA, where the award ceremony was held along with a reunion of her class of '98.



Viktoria Keding at the award ceremony.

NEWS FROM THE GREATER SOSSUSVLEI-NAMIB LANDSCAPE



The GSNL has had a busy few months! We had several meetings, the AGM and a lot of work has been done on the wildlife monitoring project.

Several springbok have been collared, as well as gemsbok and zebra, in an attempt to monitor their movement patterns and how these are influenced by the fences in the area. One of the challenges this project has come to face and realize is that springbok seem to be easy prey. Three of the collared specimens have been taken by cheetah or leopard. This is deeply frustrating, as the data we have from such an animal is then no longer useful; and we have to redeploy three collars. One of the springboks that were collared in May lasted three weeks before being eaten. Fortunately for the project, we are able to locate the collars and retrieve them for redeployment, so all is not lost. A redeployment exercise is being planned.

The monitoring project provides data not only to us, but also to a master's student, who is using it for analysis. Steffi Urban has used this project to inspire another project. The second project relates to how the fences pose risks to wildlife in the area and cause death. As part of this she has called on people in the landscape to help: Citizen Science at its best. Epicollect5 is an app that allows people to get involved from the comfort of their car, with the help of a smartphone. The app can be downloaded from the Apple or Play store for free, and the next simple step is finding the project "GSNL Wildlife Roads and Fences". Once you've joined, you can start collecting data. For more information and assistance please get in touch with us directly.

The GSNL's AGM was a held at the end of June and was a huge success. As Nils has already mentioned, a lot of that was due to the hosts: Solitaire Guest Farm. We had a number of specialised speakers at the AGM, addressing issues relevant to the landscape and its members. Dr John Kinahan gave an inspiring and knowledgeable talk on National Heritage Sites and their value, Lydia Slobodian's presentation was about how to become self-sustainable financially and how to start this process while master's student Steffi Urban, elaborated on her project and the results achieved so far with a power point presentation. These were all fantastic and welcomed by attendees. They also raised good talking points for dinner conversations and were food for thought long after the event.

We are looking forward to carrying on with wildlife monitoring, as well as the next GSNL meeting and get-together.

Lee Tindall



They say that when *opportunity* knocks on the door, it's *hard work* that answers. At Wolwedans a unique opportunity came knocking almost a year ago in the form of a cultural intervention all the way from Germany. At its inception in 2017 the CUBE project, as it has come to be known, was a daring feat that seemed impossible and exhilarating at the same time.

After months of planning, the CUBE finally arrived at Wolwedans. What it would become was anybody's guess, but in a bilateral team effort that spanned across two continents and brought together the creativity and dedication of over 50 people working together for something amazing – the CUBE Desert Symphony project was born.

In the heart of NamibRand Nature Reserve, at the foot of Chateau House on the Chateau Plains, a glass cube was erected. Inside the cube, a grand piano, which had been assembled at Wolwedans. For 40 days the Stranger devoted himself entirely to the composition of a desert symphony each morning.

The Stranger is a critically acclaimed pianist. He visited Wolwedans a year ago. In fact, he visited four times during the course of that year to plan his mammoth task with his team. His dream was to find a place on planet earth that would provide him with a true sense of isolation, where he could create his art.

He looked far and wide and when he eventually came to Wolwedans, he knew he had found that place. The Stranger has been performing his music for many decades and his project will continue over the next 10 years in various key locations around the world. NamibRand was the location of origin and the start of this incredible musical journey.

Wolwedans is also proud that one of its team members was selected to join the Stranger's team in Munich to create the cover images for the project and website.

After his return the Stranger stayed at the refurbished Chateau Namib, a tiny little house in the Chateau Plains at Wolwedans, from which he methodically emerged to visit his CUBE every day and add to his symphony. The project is now concluded and his creation is available via Soundcloud. These fractals of music have become a desert soundtrack and we are proud and quite relieved to have seen it culminate so beautifully.

Culture is key at Wolwedans. Becoming involved in this project was a moving experience and an opportunity that has tested the limits of our teams' ability to embrace and pull off the unknown. Experience this once-in-a-lifetime musical memory with us by visiting <https://stranger.org/>. Stream the symphony at <https://soundcloud.com/user-436563400>

WOLWEDANS WINTER GAMES & FOOTBALL CUP



Once a year, the vibe at Wolwedans becomes tangible as all departments of the organisation assemble in the NamibRand for the annual Winter Games and the Winter Cup. Team members from head office arrived on a crisp winter's day to meet their colleagues at the Wolwedans Village and engage in a day of teamwork, healthy competition and lots of sporty fun.

The games are in their 3rd year running and this year was perhaps the best by far. Teams were randomly selected, except for the Golden Oldies team, whose only selection criterion was seniority.



Shavonne Burger (Sales & Marketing – Windhoek) believes:

'the best part of the weekend was the team photo shoot at sunset, where our talented choir serenaded us. This was followed by a beautifully set up dinner under the camel thorn trees, complimented by the twinkling stars and night sky....It was indeed magical.'

Jason Nengola (Sustainability Coordinator; Organiser: Winter Games 2018):

'The Winter Games experience was electrifying, full of positive energy and laughter. All the staff loved the experience and more importantly the opportunity to make new friends and work as teams.'

The teams engaged in various sports including tug-of-war, volleyball, E-biking and relay. In the later afternoon quizzes and games like *Heads Up* were introduced to test product knowledge and compare notes on operational changes and new information between the various departments. The city folk didn't disappoint, with two of them being members of the overall winning team.

Earlier the perhaps most important event was staged: The Winter Cup. This is a soccer tournament hosted by Wolwedans for teams from neighbouring lodges. Participants included Le Mirage, Solitaire and NamibRand Nature Reserve teams. Wolwedans raced into the lead and won the final match 1-0 against Le Mirage to bring the trophy home.

Team members described the atmosphere as eclectic and an awesome way to stay fit and healthy while pursuing a passion for the beautiful game. At Wolwedans, our teams have a combined 1st team that is formed by the various departments, i.e. Food & Beverage, Scullery, Guiding, Lodge Hands, Management, Trainees and Maintenance.

The teams were treated to a braai at the end of the Winter Games and the atmosphere remained one of friendship and high energy as the teams connected, shared stories and laughter and created secret strategies for the following years' bigger and better event.

WOLWEDANS DOMINATES THE ECO AWARDS 2018



At Wolwedans the adoption of the 4 Cs (Community, Commerce, Conservation & Culture) has aligned the organisation with current eco-tourism ideals and sustainability practices. Assessment leader Jason Nengola describes the process as a review of the standards and measures already in place and as an acknowledgement of a combined team effort to uphold and practice the values and operating procedures instilled over time in many staff members and supporters of the brand and its practices.

The assessment converts achievements in the categories of management, conservation, energy, water, waste, pollution, sewerage, building and landscaping, staff and health, guiding, social responsibility and NTB compliance into measurable results. The five flowers awarded to all the Wolwedans camps and lodges represent above-average (over 90%) achievements in the various categories and top marks overall. They highlight the Wolwedans Collection's adherence to eco-tourism and its commitment to high quality, low impact tourism.

At the annual award ceremony of the acclaimed Eco Awards Namibia, held in June 2018, Wolwedans scored top marks (five flowers) for all of the assessed sites: Wolwedans Dunes Lodge, Wolwedans Dune Camp, Private Camp and Boulders Safari Camp in the south of the NamibRand Nature Reserve. The awards were presented to the Sustainability Coordinator at Wolwedans, Jason Nengola, at a glittering gala event in Swakopmund, hosted by the Hospitality Association of Namibia (HAN).

In a surprise twist, the Wolwedans Collection also won a newly introduced award, the Green Five Flower Achievement Award, which is given to a company that achieves exceptionally high scores in all environmental categories.



Hazel Milne, Program Coordinator for the Eco Awards Namibia, congratulated Wolwedans and said, 'The first Green Five Flower Achievement is a new category, introduced this year by Eco Awards, to give special recognition to any establishment which in addition to the 90%+ Five Flower Award also scores an average of over 90% in the four environmental sections – Conservation, Energy, Water and Waste. Well done, Wolwedans Team – you did it!!'

Wolwedans MD Stephan Brückner would like to thank the team and assessment leader Jason Nengola for their dedication, attention to detail and transparency in preparing for the 2018 assessment, which yielded such incredible results.

The final score for each of the Wolwedans Collection's four sites, i.e. Dunes Lodge, Dune Camp, Private Camp and Boulders Safari Camp was 99%.



Thanks to all those who contributed and made this an exciting edition and to Venture Media for the publication and help in making it look fabulous!

The Barking Gecko is your newsletter and, as always, we invite you to keep on sending us your contributions of news and views, short reports, sightings, artwork and photographs.

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