

# FSM-TIMES

FourStripedMouse

## Title: Tokoloshe Goblin from South Africa

Reports by students  
Mouse portrait: Female 924  
Gecko portrait  
Mantophasmatodea: Strange insect discovered in  
Goegap



### IMPRESSUM

### EDITORS

Dr. Carsten Schradin, Brigitte Schradin.

### ADDRESS

Goegap Nature Reserve, Succulent Karoo  
Research Station, Private Bag X1,  
Springbok 8240, South Africa.  
[info@stripedmouse.com](mailto:info@stripedmouse.com)

### HOMEPAGE

<http://www.stripedmouse.com>.

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## WELCOME TO THE FOURTEENTH ISSUE OF THE FSM-TIMES!



Dear Reader,

Another year has passed, and it was another exciting year in Goegap. Every year brings

something new and unexpected. This year this was clearly the extremely high predation pressure the striped mice were suffering from. After a not too bad dry season we expected to have around 30 mice per hectare at the start of the breeding season, but it was only 6 mice/ha. This shows how predation can affect the entire population structure and, more importantly, the social structure of a population.

These are interesting and important scientific results. But to get these results, it was important to have help of highly motivated field assistants which, as volunteers, paid their stay all by themselves, as a reward working often 12 hours a day in cold and heat. I would like to use these opportunity to thank all volunteers that helped the project during the last four years. Without their help, the striped mouse project could not exist.

But even when you have volunteers, long term field studies are still very expensive. We thank everybody that supported the striped mouse project in 2007. In this issue you will find the financial report for 2007 Please pay attention to our announcement at the end of the newsletter that we are looking for a sponsor for a field vehicle. At the moment the research station relies mainly on a 20 year old Ford Sierra that spends as much time in the garage as at the research station. We hope to find a way to provide a proper car to the research station in 2008.

In this issue of the FSM-Times you will find many stories and reports from the students that stayed there during the last three months. I hope you will find them very exciting and that you will keep supporting our project in 2008.

Kind regards,

*Carsten Schradin*

### THE DIFFERENT PLACES AND LOCATIONS

#### South Africa

As the name says, it is the most southern country in Africa. South Africa lies at the Cape of Good Hope. The population of South Africa (40 million) consists of black South Africans (e.g. the Zulu), which represent 75% of the population. 12% are white, 8% coloured, and some are Indian, Malaysian or descendents of the San (bushman). South Africa is the only industrialized country in Africa with a very good infrastructure.

### Succulent Karoo

It describes a special vegetation type. It receives low rainfall in winter and is characterized by dwarf succulent shrubs and an amazing wildflower display in spring. It is a desert to semi-desert environment. Succulent Karoo is found in Namaqualand and southern Namibia. In the FSM-TIMES, the words succulent Karoo and Namaqualand are often used as synonyms.

### Namaqualand

It is situated in the northwest of South Africa, between Cape Town and Namibia. Famous for its wildflower display in spring, Namaqualand was one of the world's most important copper mining areas at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Nowadays the diamond mines are more important. Because of its dry desert like climate, agriculture is mainly absent and population density low. Namaqualand is part of the Northern Cape Province.

### Springbok

It is the capital of Namaqualand. Although Springbok has only around 20 000 inhabitants, it has shops for nearly everything, including two well stocked supermarkets. At weekends Springbok is very busy, when all Namaqualanders come here to do their shopping.

### Goegap Nature Reserve

Pronounced as "Guchap", this nature reserve lays only 20kms outside of Springbok. In spring it is visited by thousands of tourists that are attracted by its wildflower display. During other times of the year it is very quite and mountain zebra, gemsbok, springbok, aardwolf, mice and mice researchers live in peace.

### Field Site

This is the place in nature where the scientist collects his data. So our field site is where we observe the mice

## NAMAQUALAND-WEATHER

By Ed Yuen

Throughout September the temperatures had been steadily climbing, hence we expected a long hot summer ahead of us. We could not be more wrong. At the beginning of October, there was a sudden change in weather and the temperatures plummeted. More than once we were greeted in the morning by a chilly wind that went straight through our bones. However, as the month progressed, the temperature started rising again. All changed, however on October 26 when a storm broke out in the middle of the afternoon. And what a storm it was!

The rain lasted for only a couple of hours, but so much had fallen in such a short time that even our dry river bed in the field site started running! After the rain had fallen, we had a short cooling period, helped by the occasional light showers, that carried on until the beginning of November. Soon enough, however, temperatures started soaring again. Heat and dryness characterized the following weeks of November. On the 20<sup>th</sup>, however, some light rain drizzles brought in a cool front that lasted for over a week. A similar pattern played out in December.

Periods of hot and dry weather were seemingly suddenly followed by short spells of rain and some cold fronts. Quite a change from the same period in the previous year when by the end of December the heat had become so intense that it

was literally impossible to be outside and the thought of rain seemed only a distant memory.

The last three months	October	November	December
Minimum temperatures			
night	0.1	8.3	6.9
day	12.4	18.9	21.8
Maximum temperatures			
night	19.9	19.6	18.8
day	35.7	38.2	36.8
Nights with frost	3	0	0
Rainfall in mm	20.0	7.1	0.3
Days with rain	1	7	3



*Goegap did not experience any snow at Christmas: 35°C was just too hot! But there was lots of rain, in fact so much, that the dry riverbed started flowing. So Ivana and Gaby took the chance to take a Christmas bath!*

## THE PEOPLE IN GOEGAP

By Maarten Bleeker

In September we had quite a team working on the mice: Ivana, Gaby, David, Dana, Carsten and myself. Carsten and family went back to Europe in October and without them the house got rather quiet. Everybody missed Apollo (most). He always had to show us where the gemsbok was painted on the wall and where it is best to spot geckos. David went home in the middle of September, after lots of working, hiking and taking photographs. He enjoyed his stay and will be back in January to start his MSc thesis. At the end of September we got a new recruit: Missanga van de Sand. Missanga is from Konstanz, Germany, and came to help us for a period of two months. She enjoyed here time here and was of great help. The same goes for Dana. After a longer period of five months she went home end of November. Dana was taking care of the new pet mice and adored not only them, but also the mice in the field.

At the end of October a small group of researchers from Stellenbosch stayed at the farm for 5 days. Sonja, Frans, Conrad and Johann are interested in the link between genetics and the geographic distribution of several rodent species in South Africa in relation to which parasites these rodents have. They invited us for a Potjie kos with potbrood (bread from the braai) and rice, everyone had a great time.

During the last period it was quite busy, not only work but also in the house. The kitchen was crowded, it was hard to find a quiet spot in the house and there were even cues in the toilet. Nevertheless, the help was more than welcome! Besides Carsten' never ending lists of work, Gaby also kept us busy. In September we started with the usual home ranges and plant surveys. After this Gaby put a lot of feeders in the field and home ranges had to be done twice more, once with and once without the feeder. After this the workload on the main field site got less and the work on the farm increased (Ivana works on the farm where more experimental work is permitted). Together with Dana and Gaby not only home ranges of adults were determined but also home ranges of juveniles. Right now Ivana, Ed and Gaby are finishing the home ranges of the last females for Gaby's study. Then there might be some time for some holiday.

In the middle of December I will go for a two weeks holiday to explore more of South Africa together with my mom, her boyfriend and my sister. Ivana, Ed and Gaby are thinking about going on holiday together at the start of January. In January two new field assistants will come to help us with the home ranges and plant surveys in February. The house will be full again and lots of work can be done!

## THE THINGS YOU CAN LEARN IN 5 MONTHS

By Dana Weldon

I have now been in this fabulous semi-desert for 5 months and experienced the cold periods were I would plead with the skies to stop the wind so I could actually locate my last mouse that I had just spent half an hour looking for to pleading for any sort of wind to take the edge of the oppressive heat. And then from hoping those rain clouds wont burst (which would result in me having to work on Sunday) to rushing out the car to jump in a cold shower. And then the reverse again,

I really am hard to please aren't I. Namaqualand is definitely a land of contrasts and shifting weather that reminds me daily of my fine homeland Scotland. There's nothing quite like rain storm appearing from nowhere to take the edge off home sickness. But what exactly have I learned in my time here, learning of course being the purpose of my trip and not attempting to escape my sister's endless wedding plans and, sure to be, embarrassing hen night.

### Well firstly of mice

- Being bitten by mice is unavoidable no matter how cute you say they are.
- Boy mice will always make more of a fuss than girl mice when getting ear tagged, a theory that I believe holds for humans in general.
- Mice do actually laugh at how ridiculous you look while radio tracking them in circles as they run ahead of you.
- Mice do actually hold conversations about us and how silly we are that we catch them and we feed them instead of eating them. And yes it is perfectly sane to believe that mice can talk like people; have you never seen the 'Rescuers down under'? (great movie).
- You are not insane just because you talk to the mice.
- Hair dye, ear tags and radio collars DO NOT make the mice look silly they are actually really cool looking.

### Secondly of animals other than rodents (yes believe it or not we do have them)

- Predators are never courteous enough to leave transmitters in a convenient location after eating our poor little mice, jackal buzzards being the worst offenders.
- Gemsbok although not wary of big cars will run away from you when you are on foot, very strange.
- Lizards never pose for photo opportunities no matter how cute you say they are as well. This actually holds for most animals.
- Glowing eyes in the night will always make you freeze on the spot no matter how many times you've ran across that mouse eating wild cat.
- Birds will always be noisy when running across a metal roof, it's a fact of life people, don't bother trying to change it.

- Nothing and I mean nothing will make beetles realize that running side ways away from humans provides less chance of getting stepped on than running directly in front of said person, really nothing.
- Geckos will always prefer your shower to their natural environment.
- Flies are without a doubt the most annoying insects in the whole world and have a strange obsession with noses and ears.

Thirdly of Springbok (the town not the jumpy little animal or world cup winning rugby team)

- Inferno (sports cafe) will never have more than 4 people at any one time in it, even on game days. And every song you love will be automatically switched off by the owner especially if you say loudly that you like the song.
- If applying for a visa extension do so the day you arrive in Springbok as the one month prior rule is cutting it a bit close; one would also advice checking the status of your application weekly just to ensure it has been sent off.
- The local Spar will always be out of that one essential thing you want to buy, for example braai sauce marinated spare ribs or low fat milk or in date bread.
- The local Spar is probably the best place to do ones weekly shopping (despite the above).
- The phrase 'it will be ready next week' actually means it will be ready next month.
- The only fix for fast food junkies is KFC until you of course get back to Cape Town, so enjoy.
- Street lights and zebra crossing mean nothing and roads can be crossed at any point just as long as you remember which way to look first. i.e. if you're from the UK then as normal and if you're from Europe then it's the other way; at this juncture I cant remember which way is which but you'll pick it up as you go along.
- Shopping lovers (like myself) will always find something fabulous to buy from one (or all) of the four (affordable) clothing stores that are in town. N.B there are also some really nice although pricier designer places in town.
- The horse riding is an absolute must even if you have never ridden before, and just as an extra incentive they have a rescued Suricate that loves being petted.

Fourthly of the station itself.

- It is actually possible to have a full shower in 5 minutes.
- Although most of the above mentioned shower is spent fighting the taps that run either freezing cold or scorching hot.
- No matter how warm you feel at night in bed always leave extra tops, socks and blankets handy because guaranteed at four in the morning you

will wake up freezing and struggle to find those frost bite preventing socks that were earlier thrown across the room.

- Sleeping bags work better when zipped up, you would think this would be written on the label but no, so now you know.
- No matter how hard you sweep the carpeted floors they will never be dust free. It's another one of those facts of life things.
- Despite only having one radio station with a very limited collection of songs you will learn to appreciate it.
- Lost tourists provide the greatest of entertainment even if only asking for directions, they are after all some form of contact with the outside world.
- The research station is most definitely haunted but what does one expect with two cemeteries.
- There is also a Tokolosh living in the attic. A Tokolosh is a mythical poltergeist creature that causes mischief just incase you're wondering. I know it sounds like a great excuse to get out of taking the blame for spilling that milk but it's true, honest!
- A DVD is worth watching even if it's the twelfth time you've seen it in the last five months.
- Bikes are actually easy to learn to ride even if you are already 21 and living in a desert.

And then of course there was all that trapping, painting mice, radio tracking, looking after pet mice, journal club, cleaning, learning to

cook for myself, office organization, data analysis and all that other science stuff too.



## WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

By Missanga Flôr van de Sand

In the beginning when I was still struggling against all the instruments and data I thought everything was going to be endless. Now that I have only one more week to work here and that I feel quite familiar with the receiver, antenna and the GPS, I realize that my time here passed by very quickly.

One of the first things I've learned here is that every time you take a camera you certainly won't see anything interesting or it is too far away. My last and only night drive for example was completely uneventful. But one Sunday morning when we went out for a horse riding trip and were not supposed to take the camera we saw the rock dassies, jackal buzzard, a goshawk and at the horsefarm they had a duck and a domesticated meerkat.

For my first camera film I was walking and waiting with lots of patience, taking great pains over all the pictures I took. When I wanted to develop this film I got an empty one back. In the photo-shop they made a mistake and everything on it was lost. So I almost lost my motivation to go on looking for good motives and by that time the flower season was already gone. But now I still got a huge amount of undeveloped films which I would like to develop in Germany and I hope there are some good pictures among them. Even though none of them will be able to show what a great variety of, not only plants and animals I met, but

*How to become a field assistant?  
Only people with a biological background can become field assistants. These are students of biology, veterinary medicine or related areas. The work of field assistants includes: radio-tracking, trapping and marking of small mammals, behavioural observations, work at the research station, including maintenance, and much more. People interested in working as a field assistant for 2-3 months write an email to [info@stripedmouse.com](mailto:info@stripedmouse.com). Please write a short motivation and attach a CV. You will then obtain more information.*



also what an amount of impressions and experiences I made here.

Not all, but most impressions were positive and they all taught me something for the future. I got to know many of the resident species and of course I learned a lot about the striped mice, their behavior and group dynamics.

Besides learning the skills I needed for the field-work, such as radio-tracking, trapping, marking and

handling the mice I learned how to braai to my taste. My first braai attempts were reduced to a chicken leg – raw at the inside and black at the outside –, but this improved step by step and reached now a very tasteful form of small Calzone-Pizzas filled with mozzarella, basil, tomatoes and olive oil. By now I could open a braai-restaurant, if I am not going to be successful in my biological career...

I even learned that a broken car does not necessarily need a mechanic to drive on. For my first trial to get the old FORD running I walked the 3.5 km to the farm (where another field site is located) and because it was a really hot day I thought this fact might be helpful to starting the motor. Of course it didn't work out, but as I've had already walked that far I crawled under the bonnet and found a loose wire and its corresponding plug.

Overjoyed I drove the car back and...

got stuck in the deep sandy road... (another thing I've learned). So I nevertheless had to walk back to call the others for help.

Few days later the same problem occurred. The car did not utter a sound after turning the key, but this time the suspicious wire was still connected in the correct way. Not knowing what to do we started to shake all the wires we could find under the bonnet. It took us a while

to find out that this time the problem was located under the steering wheel. Considering the road it is nearly a wonder that the car is still running. During the two months I am here the car more and more took on a life of its own. During driving it opens its trunk without any reason just as you can open one door only when the car is in the right mood. And so another lesson I learned was that you can get used to almost everything.

One of those experiences is that, if you want to know the next week's weather, throwing a dice (or Maarten hanging his laundry) is more reliable than the weather forecast.

Fate also told me that if you can't get something you need from a shop and they tell you: "come back next week" doesn't mean they'll have it next week.

Too bad, that I did not really become acquainted with the people from here in Springbok. I only know that you see most of them at the very end or beginning of the month queued up in front of the banks, the post office, the supermarket and elsewhere.

At least I found out a lot about the history of South Africa and its peoples reading the autobiography about Nelson Mandela.

So I am really enriched with a huge amount of new experiences and after I'll have finished my work here I'll try to make some more experiences traveling.

## WHAT TO DO ON A SUNDAY WHEN YOU ARE FAR AWAY FROM CIVILIZATION IN THE GOEGAP NATURE RESERVE

*By Gaby Schmohl*

For more than 4 months I've been here in Goegap and thus many Sundays went by. Sometimes I experienced nothing except computer work, but on other days I experienced a lot on my hiking trips. After a long hard working week determined by the mice I enjoy it to decide myself what time to get up and what to do. Mostly I'm not really successful because of my stupid inner clock that wakes me every day at around 5 a.m.. After turning around and making a lot of noise in my bed trying to fall asleep again I get up even on a Sunday at 6 a.m.. Some people, especially the ones that prefer to sleep all morning, just think I'm crazy, maybe I am, but I don't understand why I should stay in bed on a wonderful day and not enjoy the nature. A big advantage to get up that early is that there is nobody else in the kitchen and it is so quiet. I just love these rare silent moments having a great breakfast while reading a book.

At the beginning of my stay I went hiking almost every Sunday. All these hiking trips are determined by impressive animal encounters and funny moments. Hiking together with David means walking with a high pace so that I felt like a Klipspringer which quickly jumps over rocks. The same time I shared my mind with David, I missed the next stone. Luckily I could avoid breaking a leg or a foot. Since then I've got the

nickname Klipspringer. Once I went hiking alone along the single official hiking trail in the Reserve and to my surprise (!) I met another hiker. I couldn't believe my eyes. Of course I was really surprised to see somebody, but he only wore flip flops! I've never seen that before and I go hiking a lot in my country. What would Maxi (manager of the Reserve) say...because the first time you meet her after your arrival, she stresses wearing high shoes and long pants at all times due to the dangerous snakes and scorpions. Well, at this moment – especially it was a hot day - I felt a bit "overdressed" with my hiking shoes and long trousers compared to the flip flops and shorts. I'll never forget my first hiking trip together with David. Fascinated by 4 Klipspringer we couldn't stop taking pictures, when David turned around and spotted an owl just a few meters away starring at him. That was so amazing and we were just lucky. We almost missed this highlight. Looking in the wrong direction at the wrong time.... Being alone in the nature I take more time and can wait one hour ore more just to get – hopefully - a nice picture of a malachite sunbird at the end. In such moments I feel like a professional photographer, even though I am far away of being one.

Rather rarely so far – exactly twice – I preferred it to cycle to Springbok for

playing squash. The bike is not like the ones professional athletes ride, it has no suspension at all. Now you can maybe imagine how your ass is feeling after a twice one hour-ride to town on a sandy, bumpy road. You have to treat the bike like your boyfriend otherwise you have to carry it home. That's what happened to me the second time on the way back and I was only half way. I already had some problems with gears on the way to Springbok, but I could avoid falling down due to a blocked wheel. After the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> time I couldn't fix the problem again and I had to push the bike back to the Station. Although it doesn't help you solving the problem, of course I cursed which is nothing else than just natural. Listen to all the stupid comment of tourists sitting in their cars and leaning out of the window telling you "but you should cycle a bike" is not helpful to keep up your motivation. At least I knew that at the end of my 90 minutes walk some

lovely chicken wings on the grill were waiting for me.

Worth mentioning is a 4 hour hiking trip in the rain. That was the time we were declared as totally crazy. Talking about "we" means Missanga, Maarten and me, while Dana and Ivana stayed behind in the Station. We misjudged the weather situation as it happened to the meteorologist of Springbok every day. At the beginning it was quite nice and warm and we saw some new animals I haven't seen a millipede before. Totally wet and freezing we just wanted to take a hot shower which was what we actually did after our return.

Finally I would like to mention that Goegap Nature Reserve is much more than only flowers over flowers during springtime. To get an impression of the amazing animals one needs to be lucky, a lot of time and patience. That's the perfect condition for an interesting Sunday.

## SECOND IMPRESSIONS

*By Maarten Bleeker*

Goegap is a nice place to be and the mice like it too. I have been here since May and at first I thought everyday would be the same, but it is not. I love waking up in the early morning when the birds are singing and the gemsboks are grazing next to our house. Days are getting longer and the people more tired. Weeks pass by which seems like only a couple of days.

Everyday I see new species running, flying or crawling around. Once in a while we see the jackal buzzard, ostrich, steenbok or a snake. This time of year is the breeding season and there are many juveniles, pups, nests and chicks. Also the mice are breeding although I have a feeling this will end soon. The weather is getting warmer (hot for me) and rain is very scarce. The waterholes are

favorite visiting spots of e.g. gemsbok and birds.

Mice are everywhere and many groups consist of 1 or 2 breeding females and around 3 to 8 juveniles or young adults and all the males seem to roam. This is quite a different situation compared to last year where the population density was high and groups had over 20 individuals. Probably last year was a good year for the mice and also for their predators. We do not see the jackal that often anymore, but we see the African wild cat frequently. Also we saw 2 young jackal buzzards flying around close to the office.

I am working on the main field site and Ivana on the farm. I have the impression that both sites are comparable in population density and group composition, although there seems to be a higher predation rate at the farm. On the farm work is focused on determining home ranges of juveniles whereas the

focus of the main field site is on tagging juveniles and determine group composition. This coming week I will trap along the dry riverbed to see if any mice emigrated. Because Melanie is almost finished with her field work, I will start trapping when it is still dark and have to wake up very early. In the afternoon I also trap until it is dark, so I will get elephant shrews. On the one hand I am not looking forward to waking up so early and finish late. On the other hand I hope to trap gerbils and other nocturnal species. Maybe I will see some bigger mammals running around in the dark. After trapping the emigration I will have a 2 week holiday. My mom, her boyfriend and my sister are coming to South Africa and we will travel around Cape Town, Oudtshoorn, Wilderness, Cederberg and end up in Goegap. I am really looking forward for this and can not let them go home without showing them our striped mice.

## FARM LIVE

*By Ivana Schoepf*

After a „short“ break of six weeks in Europe, I came back to Goegap in mid August. The flower season was already well on the way, and once again the display in the reserve was breathtaking. Though everything looked familiar on the surface, things were certainly going to be different for me this time around. First I was no longer the research station manager, this position had already been filled by Maarten, but I had

come back to Goegap to start my own project. Though I was still going to be working with mice, I was no longer going to be based in the main field site, but some 3 km away on the farm Klein Goegap. This was going to be quite a change for me, as after a year spent working in the main field site, I was well acquainted with all the mice groups and each of their members. Now I know this is going to sound a bit odd, but I truly came to

love the little critters, so much so that I had even named some of them! In a way I was sad to leave all the mice from the main field site behind, as I felt I had come to know each one of them personally, but instead of looking at things this way, I took this as an opportunity to start a new chapter in my life, a very important one if I may say so,



A nesting site on the farm

... and after all at the farm I was also going to make new acquaintances! Life at the farm soon proved to be challenging, but also very, very interesting. Though, through some preliminary trapping, done by Ed and myself back in May/June, we had established that a viable mouse population existed at the farm, we did not know anything about group location or composition. The first major task for me as I arrived in August was to determine how many groups were there and where they were. This job was going to require some extensive trapping and radio-tracking! After some hard work, and with the help of a field assistant, David, I was able by the beginning of September to establish the sleeping site and the composition of at least 10 groups on our farm field site. I was very proud! But more work was

yet to be done. First of all, we needed to determine each of our 10 groups' home ranges. This was done over a very hot two weeks in September. Temperatures had suddenly soared, so spending the whole day out in the field proved rather difficult. Things were not as bad as they sound though, as thanks to Carsten, we had a place where we could retreat to, at least during the hottest hour of the day: a tent. But not just an ordinary tent, but one of those huge, military style tents, which was, not only our saving grace from the heat of the sun, but also functioned as a storage room as well as our cooking base – many coffees were made in its shades! It was then that I witnessed the first tiny juveniles running around the nests. By the end of the home ranges in September, the mice breeding season was truly in full swing. David left soon after, but thankfully help was on its way in the form of Ed. Ed, obviously could not get enough of the mice, and had decided to come back to Goegap to assist me at the farm. Soon enough his help proved indispensable. As the breeding season progressed, we had more and more mice (from the tiny to the huge) to handle, and it was then that Ed's expertise proved to be a real asset. It was around this time that we also realized that for the purpose of my study, we needed to expand our field site considerably. So, while I was trapping further afield to look for new groups, Ed and Dana, the new field assistant (actually new only at the farm, as she had been working in the main field site since July!) were keeping count of our already-established adults and their new ever-growing



offspring (or popcorns, as they had been jokingly nicknamed by Jane and Maia before, for their ability to seemingly pop up in the thousand out of nowhere!). At the same time we were also busy radio-tracking our first juveniles. The little ones were, in



Trapping on the farm

fact, fitted with collars very similar to the once the adults usually get, only smaller and lighter (how cute!). Radio-tracking both adults and juveniles four times a day proved to be quite a handful, but in the beginning of November the workload decreased for all when Gaby came to give us a hand. She had come to the farm to do some experiments as part of her master project. Her help

was surely needed, as in the meantime, our field site had double in size (from 10 to 20 hectares!) and we now had more than 30 groups to follow! So, while Gaby and Ed were busy determining the home-ranges in the "extended" area, we continued radio-tracking the other mice. By the end of November/ beginning of December both Dana and Gaby left the farm: Dana has returned to Scotland, while Gaby has gone back to work in the main field site. In these days only Ed and I are now left at the farm. We are still busy following the adults and the juveniles, but radio-tracking for times a day is now restricted to those mice in the "extended area" – mice in the "original" field site are now radio-track only once a day for control tracking. Life at the farm continues. Many months (and years - or at least I hope so: this mainly depends on whether we will be able to get *any funding!!!*) of hard work lie ahead of us, but as we approached the end of the mice breeding season and of our calendar year, I cannot help but look back with awe at how much has been achieved since my arrival in mid August. I am truly amazed!

**Goegap Nature Reserve**

**Accommodation: Guesthouse, bush hut, camp site.**

**4x4 routes, tourist route for all cars, two hiking trails.**

**Tel: +27 27 718 99 06**  
**Fax: +27 277181286**

**HOMEPAGE: STRIPEDMOUSE.COM**

*By Carsten Schradin*

	October	November	December	Total last quarter
Visits of stripedmouse.com	1970	2100	2680	<b>6750</b>
Downloads FSM-TIMES, SGM-Spiegel	902	794	882	<b>2578</b>

**TITLE: TOKOLOSHE: FROM FACT TO MYTH TO OUR ATTIC**

*By Dana Weldon*

Physical evolution such as ape to man, horse cart to car, splitting the atom to nuclear bomb, is apparent to most people for better or worse. But what about non physical evolutions such as the changes to myths and legends, local tradition and old wives tales. Many of our modern beliefs have spanned from such evolutions or expansions of the original tales. Black cats as an example where only originally unlucky if they crossed then re-crossed your path causing people to chase said cat away after the first crossing (which itself was lucky) and through time this evolved into the belief that black cats crossing your path once was unlucky. This ancient game of Chinese whispers also applies to a particular African legend regarding a rather mischief creature referred to as the Tokolosh (pronounces as : Tokalosh). Before my arrival here in

Goegap I had never heard of the Tokolosh (despite it being my second time in South Africa) and being a person who has a personal interest in the paranormal that surprised me. But even after my search for the true identity of the Tokolosh and its origins I am still no closer to understanding what one is or where it started.



According to a telling of the Tokolosh based on traditional beliefs by Nick Greaves (from his book 'When bat was bird and other animal tales from Africa') the Tokolosh is a physical creature of small stature with a mischievous personality. Similar to hobbits but with large brow ridges, coverings of body hair and small bodily features. They appear almost like small cave men, possibly a left over from the mid stage evolution of ape to modern man (such as its North American counter-part the sasquatch or 'big foot'). One would be forgiven for thinking that these mythical creatures were chimpanzees or gorillas that had been mistakenly identified as Tokolosh by local people who were not aware of their true nature. This is not uncommon in any region of the world; Alexander the Great misidentified monkeys as pygmy warriors in India and had his soldiers engage in battle against them, also in merry old England when the first captive crocodile escaped its cage to wander the streets of London it was described as a dragon that breathed fire by startled on lookers. However the Tokolosh has an unusual ability that would make the misidentification theory unlikely. The Tokolosh can turn itself invisible but only to adults (children appear to be impervious to this ability) and it is unlikely that adults are less likely to see apes as they would be the community members who spend more time out with the community in the apes' territories hunting than their children. Nick Greaves does suggest that this is a clever way for children to blame their mischievous ways on this mythical creature; the only counter to

this is that adults must then themselves also believe in the Tokolosh fully. One must also consider that this particular fact about children is not uncommon; there is a global belief that children have a deeper connection with the metaphysical or spiritual world than adults. Possibly due to their willingness to except the world at face value or maybe there is some as of yet undiscovered difference in brain chemistry but what ever the reason it has been documented many times. Most people have probably experienced this when around small children were they are either fixated in hysterics on a blank spot of the wall, talk about long dead relatives in detail or even the phenomenon of imaginary friends which after all must come from somewhere.



Tokolosh although mischievous are not evil by nature but they can be manipulated to be so; it was believed that a witchdoctor would persuade

these creatures to carry out malicious deeds in return for rewards such as much coveted milk. These playful childhood friends would even become conspirators to murder. The victims of such attacks usually had some grudge held against them by the witchdoctor or other community members who had sought their revenge by requesting the aid of a witchdoctor. Although not clear it could be possible that the threat of a malevolent Tokolosh would keep community harmony, preventing people from hoarding goods or being hateful to others. Much like an extreme form of a child's 'time out' or the old adage 'if you don't behave you'll go to bed without supper'. It may seem extreme but if threats of the 'boogey man' scare children into good behavior why would it not work on adults as well? I was unable to find a reason as to why not during my research but I did find much evidence of them being feared. One local told me that people used to be so afraid of the Tokolosh that they would raise their beds up on bricks so that the (rather short) Tokolosh could not reach them as they slept. Even today without the need for paranormal policing the fear of this creature still exists, perhaps due to its fame in local newspapers where many strange phenomena are blamed on the Tokolosh. But the modern version of the Tokolosh has appeared to evolve into two separate entities with some different appearances and natures. The split between these two entities has formed an adult child divide. The adult version takes on a more malicious poltergeist appearance whereas the child's version holds

more to the traditional pygmy cave man appearance but it too has become more wicked in nature. The poltergeist Tokolosh can be visible to adults but merely as a dark short figure, similar to a solid shadow. This version is very malicious and has lost its childlike mischievous nature. A poltergeist Tokolosh is actively placed onto a person in the form of a physical curse, if you will, by someone holding a grudge or who is envious of something you have; perhaps you are in a relationship with a person they desire or you received a promotion at work over them. This possession causes a run of very bad luck; now usually when one has everyday bad luck negative things appear to happen with great frequency like your alarm clock not going off, the bus being 20 minutes late or the cooker packing in on the day you promised to host a dinner party for your boss. But a Tokolosh heralds a very different type of bad luck, with a Tokolosh your alarm doesn't go off because it has been slammed across the room and broken off the wall, your bus is late because it has four flat tyres and you can't host your bosses dinner party because your kitchen has spontaneously combusted into flames and your crockery is flying round in circles above your head. Such occurrences although inconvenient are curable; one solution is to leave an open bottle of alcohol on a table as the Tokolosh, being a fan of a good drink, will climb into the bottle and start drinking the contents, when you see the volume of liquid decrease all you have to do is close the bottle before the

Tokolosh is finished drinking. This must be done quickly for as soon as the alcohol is gone then so is the Tokolosh. The second solution is to consult with a witchdoctor who mostly likely put the curse upon you at the request of someone you know. The witchdoctor then has the ability to remove the curse or identify the responsible party, all for a 'small' fee of course. This version may have arisen following the influences of poltergeist stories from other cultures or possibly by the Tokolosh being relabeled as a poltergeist for the modern age despite being a different entity entirely.



The more traditional modern version of the Tokolosh mostly adopted by children introduces sharp teeth to the image of the small creature instantly giving it a more cruel feeling. This Tokolosh does not befriend children as the old ones did but instead chooses to steal possessions from people's homes under the cover of

darkness despite being able to turn invisible to both adults and children at its choosing. A particular favorite item to steal is still however milk, the old bribe of the witchdoctors, I was unable to discover why milk was such a delicacy to them but sometimes the small details that stick with myths have no apparent reasoning they just are, such as in the above stated black cat superstition that no where states why the cat must be black. These creatures are nocturnal and are said to also attack people who wear crucifixes or yellow which apparently enrages them. They are able to be scared off by salt which can either be mixed with milk to trick them into ingesting it or it can be thrown at them. Salt has been used traditionally as a purifying agent, it is commonly used in ancient Celtic religions to represent the earth and to create circles of protection so it being used to protect against the Tokolosh is not all that unusual and actually makes sense. These creatures may be a way for parents to teach their children about the dangers of the night without them fearing people in the day; it also works to implement curfews on playful children who need a very good reason to come in doors when the sun goes down. The Tokolosh although a thing to be feared can also ease a child's fears. If a child believes that having some salt will protect them from being attacked by a Tokolosh (or something else that is being masqueraded as a Tokolosh) when then they are safely locked up in doors then they may sleep easier. Its not an uncommon trick of parents, how many have told their children

that if they keep on a night light or hold a special teddy that all the monsters under the bed and in the cupboard will be too scared to come out and they will be safe all night. This type of protection is seen also in every day culture such as the Native American use of dream catchers to prevent bad dreams. But why should the two ideas be so different, well maybe they are not entirely, as I found very few sources for this article it may be that the child's view of a Tokolosh is simply that. A mixture of misunderstandings of tradition and shared stories among friends who attempt to out do one another by bragging about their misadventures with the Tokolosh. But despite my continued confusion to what exactly a Tokolosh is I am

now a firm believer in them particularly because one lives on the attic of our research station. You may wonder how I know such a thing and no not because the crockery flies around the room. It is because our little field toddler Apollo would when asked where the Tokolosh was would always point up to the ceiling. Our first lady Brigitte also reported Apollo laughing at some unseen entity and hearing strange noises and having doors slamming when she was home alone. This is enough evidence for myself to believe in such an entity, after all why chance not believing in such a powerful being that may be tempted with its mischievous nature to prove to you that it is real.

#### Tokoloshe from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia (shortened)

In Zulu mythology, Tíkoloshe', Tokoloshe or Hili (from the Xhosa word uthikoloshe) is a dwarf-like water sprite, said to be fond of women and sour milk. The Tokoloshe, according to the Zulu shaman Credo Mutwa, is widely known as a bear-like humanoid being. Some call it Tikoloshe. It looks like a very nasty looking teddy-bear in appearance, in that its head is like that of a teddy-bear, but it has got a thick, sharp, bony ridge on top of its head. Tokoloshes have a hole in their head. They are also immensely strong. The ridge goes from above its forehead to the back of its head, and with this ridge it can knock down an ox by butting it with its head. This creature causes the Black people in certain places to raise their beds on bricks, one brick laid on top of the other one, about 3 feet above the ground. And you find this all over South Africa. However, the Tokoloshe is stated to be "a cross between a zombie, poltergeist, and a gremlin" that "lives in South Africa." It goes on to say Tokoloshes are "created from dead bodies by shamans...if the shaman has been offending by someone." According to the book, the creatures are "only the size of small children... [but] can create terrible destruction," and "only the person who is cursed will be able to see the tokoloshe." In addition, the book says the tokoloshe may also choose to wander, causing mischief, particularly to schoolchildren. Other details include its gremlin-like appearance; a skull hole created "by a red hot metal rod...heat plays a vital role in Zulu magic;" and gouged out eyes.



Some Zulu people are still superstitious when it comes to things like the supposedly fictional tokoloshe - a hairy creature created by a wizard to harm his enemies (also been known to rape women and bite off sleeping people's toes). Usually, the Tokoloshe is presented as an aggressive and mischievous bear-like being, somewhat similar in appearance to the Ewok creatures from Star Wars, that sometimes attacks, abducts, or in other ways does harm to children while they are asleep at night. On the west coast of Africa the Tokoloshe, or Teikolosha as it is known there, is a worm like creature which has a head of a dog like creature a sharp tongue made of gold. It is said that the Teikolosha will burrow through the sand and eat the crops of villages that have a resident that has done wrong. Once all the crops have been consumed the Teikolosha will lay eggs in place of where the crops were but what will grow will be more crops but these crops will be poisonous and bleed when cut. Anyone who attempts to fight the Teikolosha will be banished to the African underworld and it is thought that their children will age rapidly and crumble to dust. The Tokoloshe is sometimes called upon by people to cause trouble for others, and a witch doctor (inyanga, Sangoma) may be called to banish him.

## NEWS AND INFORMATION ABOUT PLANTS AND ANIMALS

### MANTOPHASMATODEA: STRANGE INSECT DISCOVERED IN GOEGAP

By Carsten Schradin

End of September I was reorganizing the Wendy House with the striped mouse colony. When I carried some of the plastic cages inside, a small but rather fat insect fall out of one. I picked it up and called Apollo to have a look at the mantis. But as I had a look at it I got the feeling that this is maybe not a mantis but something very special I had been looking for for many years but never found.

I got the insect field guide from the shelf to make sure that my suspicion was right and quickly I knew it was: This was no mantis, but

an insect of the order Mantophasmatodea! This entire order was only discovered 5 years ago in 2002! While new insect species are described every day and even new vertebrate species are described quite often, it was a sensation in 2002 that an entire new order was discovered! Systematics go from species to genera to family to order, thus an entire new order is very high in the systematics hierarchy.

The new order had been described from a specimen collected at the Brandberg mountain in Namibia. In

the meantime, approximately 10 species of Mantophasmatodea have been described from South Africa and Namibia. Being a hobby entomologist as a student, I always dreamed of finding one of these unique guys in Goegap, but until this very special day I was not successful. I took several pictures and finally preserved the specimen in alcohol. I then contacted an entomologist colleagues at the University of Cape Town who is a specialist in the field. However, it was not a new species, but already had the name Namaquaphasma ookiepensis. However, we were close, as this species was named after the town Okiep, which is only 27km from Goegap and the place where Brigitte and I married.

For more information on this order visit:

<http://www.museums.org.za/bio/insect/mantophasmatodea>



The Mantophasmatodea discovered at the Research Station in Goegap.

### MOUSE PORTRAIT: FEMALE 924

By Carsten Schradin

<b>Mother:</b> from group 3, but mother unknown	<b>Father:</b> unknown
<b>Date of birth:</b> February 2005	<b>Date of death:</b> Nov. 2006
<b>Age:</b> 20 months	<b>Cause of death:</b> unknown,
<b>Partners:</b> M1045	Founder of group 15
<b>Children:</b> 12 sons, 12daughters	<b>Grand-children:</b> approx. 11

**F: Female = Weibchen, M: Male = Männchen**

I started to pay special attention to F924 when we trapped her only in the middle of the dry riverbed at the grass field, but never at any of the

group nests. That was strange, why did she not go into the traps at the nest of group 3, where she was born? The easiest explanation was

soon conformed when we put a radio-collar on her: F924 was sleeping in the riverbed, not in the nest of any of our groups: She had founded her own group, group 15. Her nest was in a large *Deverra* shrub in the riverbed. It often happens that a female founds a new group, but normally this occurs at the edge of the field site in sub-optimal habitat. But F924 founded her group in the best possible area, at the riverbed where the population density was highest. And she did so very successfully: 12 sons and 12 daughters is a very good reproductive success, F924 lived for nearly two years, and her group 15 still exists and is well established.

F924 was one of these females that immediately came running when she heard that we put up traps. F924 was not afraid of traps and she had no reason to be afraid: When the trap closed, she ate all the bait, and then used her little hands to grip the trap lid, open it and run out, and into the next trap. In this way she finished and emptied all traps without being trapped. For us this meant it was not good enough to set traps and check them after 45min. Instead, somebody had to wait and take F924 immediately out of the trap after she entered it and put her into a small cage, such that the traps stayed

open for the other mice. Later, more mice started to open traps. We even made a study to learn how this behavior had spread over the field site, expecting that some mice might have learned from others. However, we found a random pattern, it simply seemed that with all this trapping and this many mice, some of them learned the trick by themselves.



F924 was not afraid of traps!

#### WONDER FEMALE 5504

By Gaby Schmohl

Most mice know how to behave when they got trapped, but not this special wonder female. Since the end of October she has been a part of the study population on the farm.

At the beginning we had absolutely no problem to handle her and putting a collar on to get an impression of her home range. Because her collar didn't work properly we had to

change it. Making sure it is her, we read the number loudly before putting her into the ether and then changed the collar "successfully". But, next morning due to any reasons nobody has an explanation for it, she hasn't got any collar around her neck. Well, I didn't feel anything touching her belly, so it must be on another mouse. Now, the misery started. Firstly she seems to be not really trap happy. Secondly, don't be too happy if you get her and would like to put her back into the trap to transport her to Ivana to take the collar off and put a new one on. Why? I could manage to put her back, but – of course – the trap didn't close as soon as she was in it. So I

had to help with my hand that was a big mistake. I got bitten and you know it already, the mouse escaped. Actually this happened twice before I handed her over to Ivana, maybe she's luckier I thought, but she wasn't at all. She managed to handle her and put her into the ether bottle. While she was writing down all the details of her (weight and sexual status), she jumped out of the bottle instead of falling asleep. What can we learn? Close the lid properly or hold it if the mouse has the ear tag 5504. Well, at the end all her struggling, squeaking, biting and jumping out of bottle didn't help, she got a new collar.

#### SUPERMALE 5047

By Ivana Schoepf

Supermale (M5047) has the power of speed. When you radio-track him there is not knowing where he could be, as he can travel over 250m between each round (during home ranges time, we do one round of radio-tracking every 1-2 h, and 250 m is a very long distance for a mouse to move.) ! Whether he is

using his powers for rescuing other mice (especially ladies in distress!) is yet unclear. But to all the predators out there: there is a new breed of mice in the field now: Supermale and Wonder Female. He is fast and she is strong. Try and catch them and they will show you. You have been warned!





Supermale with the source of his strength

Habitat: Desert and semi-desert on flat, stable, sandy with sparse various soil substrates, preferring vegetation.

## CONFERENCES, PRESENTATIONS AND PUBLICATIONS

### POPULAR SCIENCE PUBLICATIONS

In the Christmas issue of the magazine *Schweizer Familie* (Swiss Family) a short article about the popular science book *Biologie des Vaters* from Carsten Schradin was published. The article was about animal fathers.

### GECKOPORTRAIT: COMMON BARKING GECKO (*PTENOPU GARRULOUS*)

By Ramona Pöttinger

There are two subspecies but only *P. g. maculatus* occurs in Namaqualand. Its whole range is from Namibia through Namaqualand to the Great and Little Karoo. You can here him quite often around the research station, but you hardly ever see him.



Identification: *P. g. maculatus* has fewer than 160 scale rows at midbody, and the color varies with

the substrate. But it is usually grayish-yellow with black crossbars and five pairs of pale spots on the flanks. It has 5-10 dark bars on the tail.

Biology and breeding: It is active for a short period around sunset. The calls can vary from 1 to 13 clicks but usually consists of five. In rocky areas, they often live in a sand hummock trapped at the base of a bush. After dark they emerge and walk slowly in search of prey, which includes ants, termites or small beetles. If disturbed, they freeze and are effectively camouflaged. Their burrows are complex, with many blind passages, which end sometimes just beneath the surface. These serve as escape routes.

## FUNDING OF RESEARCH:

REPORT 2006

By Carsten Schradin

In 2007, we got altogether donations of 661 Euro, which was much more than 2006 (173 Euro) but less than 2005 (898 Euro). As in the years before, none of the eraders of the FSM-TIMES made a donation, while seven readers of the German SGM-Spiegel donated. The donation box at the office in Goegap also made a significant contribution this year. Some money was obtained by selling striped mice to private pet holders.

Money was spend on the software Contribute from Adobe to manage the homepage stripedmouse.com Furthermore, a digital camera was

bought for the research station. A few mosquito nets were bought that can be used over the head during field work Most money was spent for iButtons, data loggers that can store temperature data. These data loggers will be used by David Lehmann for his MsC thesis, which he will start in January. With the iButtons he can determine temperature in nests of striped mice and their surrounding, studying in how far sharing a nest influences ambient temperature in striped mice.

Category	Income in Euro
Amount carried over from 2006	234
Donations SGM-Spiegel	468
Donation box Goegap	193
Sell striped mice	47
<b>Sum</b>	<b>942</b>
	<b>Expenses in Euro</b>
Software for homepage	132
Digital camera for research station	221
Mosquito nets	20
Poster for exhibition Goegap	23
iButtons for MsC thesis David Lehmann	294
<b>Sum</b>	<b>690</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>252</b>

## SUBSCRIBERS DONATION

We appeal to all subscribers of the FSM-TIMES to donate 80 Rand (10 Euro, 15 dollars) a year for research on the socio-ecology of small mammals in Goegap. Donations of more than 80 Rand are welcome and donors of 400 Rand (50 Euro, 75 dollars) will be mentioned in the next FSM-TIMES.

Donations will be used for the following purposes:

1. Scientific research on small mammals in Goegap, especially smaller research projects such as Diploma and PhD theses, which have difficulties in raising funds elsewhere.
2. Improving the infrastructure of the research station.

In the last issue of the FSM-TIMES of every year we will publish how much we received in donations and how the money was used.

Account details

South Africa  
Standard Bank  
Branch: Braamfontein  
Account name: Wits University  
Foundation  
Account No.: 002900076  
Branch code: 004805  
Swift code: SB ZAZ AJJ 00480502  
Please state L.2112 as reference.

Germany  
Carsten Schradin, KSK Esslingen,  
BLZ 611 500 20, Konto Nr. 7434686

Switzerland (deposits in Switzerland)  
Postkonto 80-643-0  
Finanzabteilung der Universität  
Zürich, 8001 Zürich  
Reference: Kreditnummer 37202508,  
Projekt Striemengrasmaus  
(it is very important that you state the  
Kreditnummer)

Switzerland (deposits from abroad)  
Zürcher Kantonalbank, Hauptsitz,  
CH-8010 Zürich  
Account No: 1100-0109-594 (BC 700)  
Finanzabteilung der Universität  
Zürich, 8001 Zürich  
Swift-Code: ZKBKCHZZ80A  
IBAN: CH51 0070 0110 0001 0959 4  
Reference: Kreditnummer 37202508,  
Projekt Striemengrasmaus  
(it is very important that you state the  
Kreditnummer).

## Sponsor Needed for Research Station Car!

We are looking for an organization, foundation or private person that would be willing to support the Succulent Karoo Research Station by sponsoring a car. The research station needs a car that is both robust and provides a lot of space for students and scientific equipment. Two possible vehicles that would be suitable and are available for a very good price are:

- Toyota Avanza 1.5 SX, which has high clearance and offers plenty of space. Costs R 126 000 (approx. 13 000 Euro).

<http://www.toyota.co.za/models/viewrange.aspx?id=avanza>



- Mahindra Bolero 2.5TD double cab 4x4, a very robust vehicle with full 4x4 drive. Costs R 181 500 (approx. 18 000 Euro).

<http://www.mahindra.co.za/productGallery.cfm?type=1&model=106228&series=1>



## THE MOUSE'S TAIL

### ANNOYING FLIES EVERYWHERE

Getting up at 5 in the morning and having breakfast is one of my favourite parts of the day – if there weren't that many flies. Fighting with them for food is okay, but in the very early morning they already have sex. They don't really care doing it on your food, on your cup or even on your head. I'm sure that's the reason why for each fly killed at least 10 more appear. So far I'm quite unsuccessful getting rid of them with the help of Carsten's "fly swatter". This is now my favourite weapon and

everybody knows when I'm back from the field due to the "zack" noise trying to kill a fly. Outside life as a fieldworker is even harder without the help of my weapon. Especially during observation you are supposed to sit motionless otherwise you scare away the mice back into their nest. I think that's the flies' revenge for all the killing in the station that they don't give up flying into your nose, ears or mouth and you can't do anything.

### SNAKES

In Goegap everyday is different. Around our house a big mouse family has settled. The mice are in the middle of the food chain and eat a lot, but also get eaten. This particular mouse family attracted a harmless mole snake which was around the house for several weeks. Furthermore, there are many dangerous snakes in the field and we have come across puff adder, cape cobra, coral snake and many horned adder. Missanga found two (mating?) puff adders in a hole and they stayed there for three days.

Most animals are afraid of the relative huge human beings running around in the field, although they can strike when cornered or feeling threatened. Still I think we are the most dangerous and would like to explain it by an anecdote: `Walking in my steady pace in the field, I (=Maarten) take a turn at a bush, and almost get a heart attack because there was a big puff adder 30 cm from my right foot.` The snake did no harm but I really thought that my heart skipped a beat! Let's see what we will find tomorrow...

## **GOLDEN MOUSE PRIZE-WINNERS**

**2007: GOEGAP NATURE RESERVE**

**2006: DR. GUSTL ANZENBERGER**

**2005: JENS SCHRADIN**