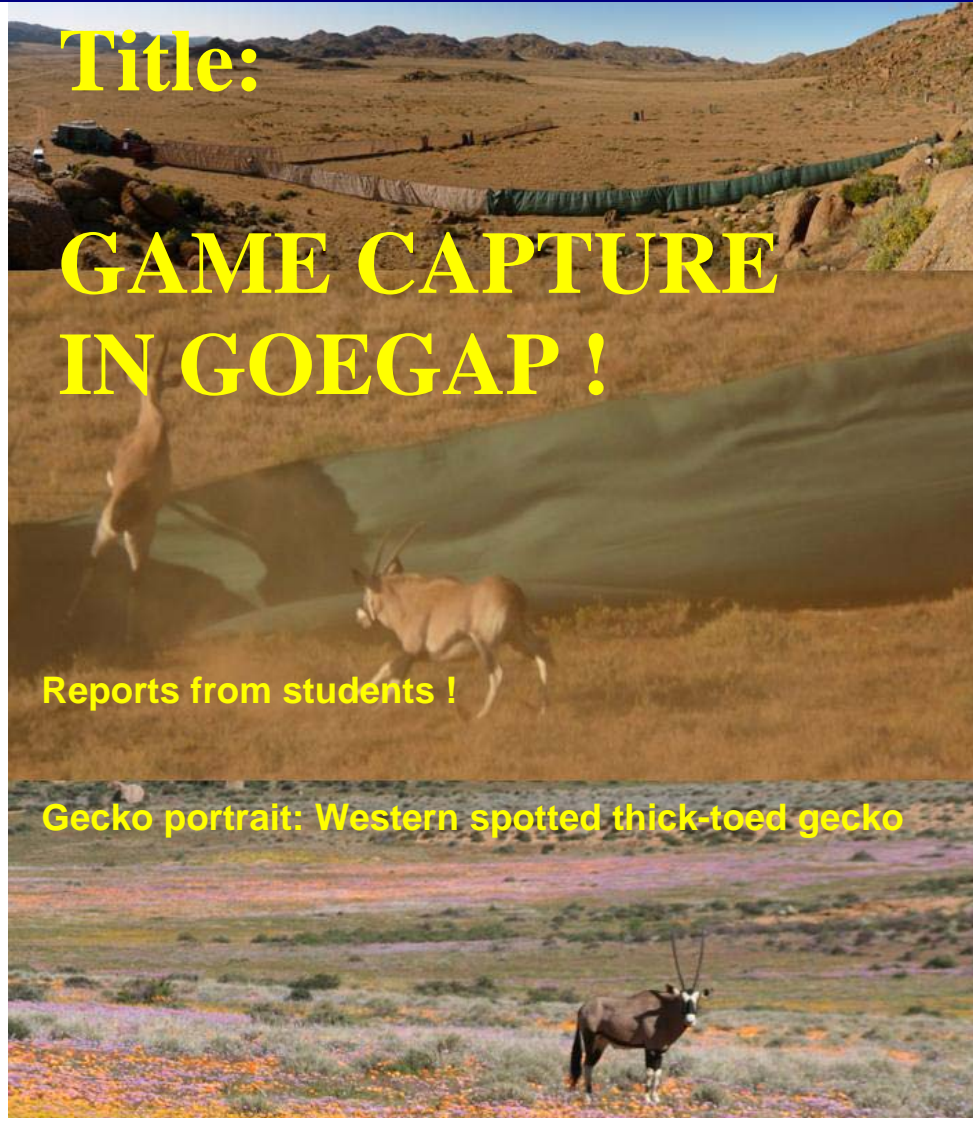


Title:

GAME CAPTURE IN GOEGAP !

Reports from students !

Gecko portrait: Western spotted thick-toed gecko



EDITORIAL

EDITOR

EDITORIAL

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WELCOME TO THE EIGHTEENTH ISSUE OF THE FSM-TIMES!



2008 was a very busy and successful year for the striped mouse project. We received a grant from the Swiss Science Foundation that enables Ivana to conduct her PhD and the project to continue for at least another 3 years. From a long-term perspective, it is most important that with Ivana's project the experimental field site on the farm Klein Goegap is well established. I am sure that many more and very important projects will be conducted there in the future. The research station also developed well, with two more Wendy houses, more solar power, a wind generator, and a very new and nice research station car. One MsC student submitted her very good thesis this year and three more collected their data for their thesis to be submitted next year. Many volunteers from all over the world

gained valuable experiences in Goegap and helped us to realize all the projects. Ed demonstrated that he is very good research station manager and he started a new and very important project on personality traits in striped mice, which is likely to produce very interesting results. We presented our work in many talks at universities and conferences, the media reported about us and we also had some very good publications in scientific journals, especially about the interactions between hormones, environment and social behaviour. We can just hope that 2009 will become as successful as last year. The striped mouse team also wishes you all the best for 2009, and lots of fun when reading through our new issue of the FSM-Times.

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 descendants 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 20th 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

The last three months	October	November	December
Minimum temperatures			
night	6.2	9.7	10.6
day	18.0	21.5	22.0
Maximum temperatures			
night	14.1	15.1	24.8
day	35.6	31.6	42.9
Nights with frost	0	0	0
Rainfall in mm	2.5	0.5	0.3
Days with rain	2	1	3

THE PEOPLE IN GOEGAP

By Ed Yuen

After a very busy third quarter, the research station became quiet once again. Both Romy and Alessandra had finished their short stay in Goegap in August, and while Romy had gone back to Zurich to continue her study in Biology, Alessandra will begin her studies at the medical school in Lausanne next year. At the end of September Vivian also left the farm team and went on a 2 weeks tour of South Africa before heading back home to Germany. Then, at the end of October, after 4 months in Goegap, it was time for Keenan to leave us. But before leaving South Africa, he was one of a few brave enough to have a dip with a great white. And then, in the beginning of November, Carsten, Brigitte and Apollo had finished their stay and went back to Switzerland for a very cold, possibly snowy, Christmas. In the middle of November, Ivana and I went on our holiday in the

Mpumalanga province and just a few days later, the two Diploma students, Nils and Sarah, also left the research station for their three weeks holiday around the Garden Route and the Wild Coast in South Africa. So, for the first time in 2 years no one was occupying the research station for more than a week. Then, after a very nice holiday, Ivana and I returned to Goegap in the beginning of December and just shortly after our return, the new field assistant Eve Davidian also arrived. Eve has quite a lot of experience working with rodents before in France. In addition, just two years ago, she also took part in a research project on foraging behaviour of the Cape porcupine in Nieuwoudville, South Africa. With such experience, surely, she will be a great contributor to our striped mouse project.

ANOTHER SEASON

By Ed Yuen

I have been involved in the striped mice project for a bit more than two years by now, but this is the first year that I was here for the entire breeding season. I still remember back in May, many groups had gone extinct and I had to put transmitters on new individuals in hope of finding new groups that we could use as focal groups. Since then, I have had to learn every individual in every group, and with the “personality” studies that we started this year, I really got to know them “personally”, like which one was the shy one or the brave one, or the curious one, or which was the friendly one, who was the bully and most importantly who was the one that liked to bite me every time! But things began to change once the breeding season commenced; many females became pregnant, some groups split, males began to gain weight, while some left their natal group to become breeders of other groups, some became roamers, and some just simply disappeared. And then, the next thing you know, hundred of juveniles began to emerge from the bushes all over the field site.

But thanks to the effort of everyone involved in the project, this turned out to be a very productive breeding season for us. We managed very well in terms of monitoring and following the focal groups, the group members and most juveniles were first trapped at a very young age, which meant a more accurate growth curve could be obtained for this year; blood samples were collected from

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

carsten.schradin@zoo.uzh.ch.

Please write a short motivation and attach a CV. You will then obtain more information.



almost every individual at least once a month in order to determine the seasonal changes in hormones and the endocrine changes between different reproductive tactics in males and females; methods for “personality” test were established and data for “personality” of males and females with different reproductive tactics were collected; individuals were followed to determine activities budgets; a study on population genetic was conducted by Nils, while Sarah

tried to trap every single juvenile of every litter from every group in order

to determine paternities of different social backgrounds. On the farm side, things have been quite busy too. Ivana and her two field assistants, Vivian and Keenan, successfully completed a second removal experiment, with many hours worth of radio-tracking data being collected. Many more blood samples and behavioural data were also collected by the farm team and they will be used by Ivana for her PhD thesis.

As the non-breeding (dry) season begins, there are yet more studies that need to be done and more data to be collected. For examples, “personality” data will be collected from philopatric mice in order to find

out whether “personality” influences their dispersal, survival and which reproductive tactics to choose; then, from behavioral observations we will try to identify whether individual recognition exists in striped mice; more follow observations will be done and blood samples will be collected every month for the seasonal changes in hormones. The mice might have finished their breeding season but our work here will continue; and just like the mice will have to try their very best to make it through the long harsh dry season; we will work our hardest in the time to come to make our contribution to the scientific community.

MY 10 LIFE LESSONS OF GOEGAP

By Keenan Robert Morrison I

I, Keenan Robert Morrison I, have officially spent four epic months at the research station here in Goegap Nature Reserve. As a self-declared veteran member of the striped mouse research team, I feel that it is my pleasure and duty to impart my wisdom on to any and all who read the splendor that is the FSM times. Here you will find 10 lessons that I and my fellow researchers have learned the hard way, some of which will save your life.

1. Look into a bush before sticking your hand in. As my good friend Viviane discovered while searching for a radio collar, many things can be found inside a bush. One of those many things can in fact be a Many Horned

Adder, a particularly fun but poisonous snake. Luckily Viviane wasn't bitten while she blindly felt around in the bush, but needless to say, she learned to use her eyes first.

2. Use a flashlight at night. Typically, the moonlight is strong enough that radio tracking sleep sites at night can be done without the use of a flashlight. However, on more than one occasion, I was deceived by the moonlight and found myself lying in the dirt and halfway down an Aardvark hole.
3. Buckle up on your way to The Farm. Let's just say that the road on the way to The Farm can get a little bumpy. So bumpy in fact, that if you aren't buckled up,

there's a 84.6% chance that you'll hit your head on the roof of the Mahindra.

4. Lift up rocks carefully. Ed "Jiggles" Yuen once discovered in his attempts to collect large rocks that scorpions like to hide under them. Ed taught me all about lesson number four, and I like to think that it's indirectly kept me alive.



5. Goegap is pronounced who-hahp. Trust me; though it looks like Go-Gap, it's not, and the sooner you learn that, the sooner you'll sound like a true resident of Namaqualand.
6. Don't enter into a push-up battle with a rock agama. It doesn't matter how great you are at push-ups, breeding rock agama males are ten times better. Push-ups are a way of life for them, it's how they intimidate their competitors and attract the ladies, so they're pretty much the local experts.



7. Don't eat curry from a can. I don't care how tasty it looks and how convenient it is to cook, it's not worth it. Trust me, your body and the people here at the research station will be much happier if you don't eat it.
8. If Ed asks you to clean the traps, be afraid, be very afraid. I won't go into too much detail because I'm still scarred from the experience, but suffice it to say that cleaning the mouse traps is the opposite of a good time.
9. Don't believe any of Brigitte and Carsten's stories. If it involves ghosts, 5-meter snakes, or lion's jumping on cars, it might be true, but odds are they're trying to trick you.
10. Be grateful for every moment. Time flies here. My four months here has felt more like four weeks. If you ever swing by the research station, make sure to savor every moment, because before you know it, it'll all be over.

By Eve Davidian

Waking up from a little nap, I looked at the screen in front of me and realized that the small symbol representing our plane was flying over South Africa. I looked through the window and, as I was contemplating never-ending lands of reddish sand, I felt it, the feeling I had three years earlier as I was coming to South Africa for the very first time; the power of South Africa. This feeling you can have when facing something tough and wild but also very fragile. For the second time, I was given the opportunity to fulfil my dreams by studying animals in a magical place.

I was quite surprised when I arrived in Goegap. I expected to end up in a flat, dry and bushy land as it is in Nieuwoudtville, on the Bokkeveld Plateau. Ok, Goegap is dry and bushy right now but it isn't flat at all! The reserve is full of granitic koppies of different size and shape which offer us amazing sunsets when the light paints them in pink.

The morning following my arrival, I followed Ed for a trapping initiation or a biting initiation should I say. The most frustrating is that I didn't really get bitten because of my bad handling technique but more because I wanted to gently release the mouse in a "here you go little fellow"- way and got a nasty thanks in return. I guess I wasn't that gentle after all.

Ten days have passed and now I am assisting Ivy at the farm site. Each day is exiting as I continuously learn new things with the mice and I am

always lucky to see a new animal or plant during the trip to the study site or my daily walk around the station. Nevertheless, I must say I don't really look forward to see a cobra, even though I know that my time will come. It's not that I don't like snakes but when they are deadly poisonous and moreover aggressive*, I feel a little repelled. I recently met my first South African snake. It was about 20:30 and becoming quite dark. I was radio-tracking my last mouse when, suddenly, I heard a hissing and something moving fast in the bush next to me. I jumped, letting out a little noise, and saw a thin, black snake of about one meter long sliding away. Well, it appeared that it was only a mole snake, which resembles the spitting cobra but isn't poisonous. I must admit that I was a little shocked and when I looked at myself, I realized I was frozen with one leg in the air.

It might be really amazing to come to Goegap during the flowering season, when everything is covered by colorful flowers. I don't regret being here in summer though. Most plants are now producing their seeds and I am impressed by the diversity of the seed cloves I can see here.

I haven't been in Goegap for a very long time but I am already sure that my little adventure here will be unforgettable.

* Remark: Cobras are not aggressive, but defensive. If you take a step away, they will go away, too!

By Ivana Schoepf

One can only truly appreciate the worth of others only once they are gone. For me this was the case in November this year. This past breeding season I was again busy collecting data for my project. My work schedule requires me to collect different types of data often during the same period of the day (i.e. in the morning, for example, I need to collect blood, perform behavioral tests and collect radio-tracking data), but until the end of October this year I have always been fortunate enough to have the help of field assistant that allowed me to collect all the different types of data. However in November all this changed and for the first time I was left on my own on the farm as my next 'helper' was due to arrive only in the beginning of December. Luckily at that point most of the data collection for the blood

and the behavioral phenotype had been done – the remaining tests and blood samples I was able to collect thanks to Ed as he kindly came for a few days to the farm and help me with this. However, I still had a week worth of radio-tracking points to collect and for this I was on my own. Hence, I rolled up my sleeves and I went out four times a day and radio-tracked 40 or so mice. It was certainly a challenge, which I am very proud to say I overcame. But if this taught me anything is that now more than ever I appreciate the valuable help that our field assistants give us. Without them our work would be indeed much more difficult. So this short story is dedicated to all the field assistants, past, present and future and to the contribution that they gave to the project. This one's for you. Thank you.

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

By Carsten Schradin

	October	November	December	Total last quarter
Visits of stripedmouse.com	3633	3589	3427	10 649
Downloads FSM-TIMES, SGM-Spiegel	347	426	274	1 047

TITLE: GAME CAPTURE IN GOEGAP!

By Sarah Weick and Nils Solmsen

Goegap Nature Reserve is famous for being one of 25 global biodiversity hotspots with many endemic plant species, while its fauna is less known. Visitors come here to take pictures of the amazing wild flower bloom in spring. But ones the tourist season is over, big herds of animals come down the highlands, following the rainfall. The vegetation there serves zebra, springbok, ostrich and gemsbok during the following dry months as food and water sources.

As beautiful it might be to observe them, as hazardous it can be for the ecological equilibrium in the reserve because they mainly feed on

perennials, i.e. long living plant species. These plants are very important soil stabilizers. Due to the absence of predators and to the fence limiting the size of the habitat of the animals, wildlife management is a big challenge.

Maxi, the reserve manager of Goegap Nature Reserve, arranged a deal with the Richtersvelt, Namaqua, Tankwa Karoo and Augrabies National Parks to remove 200 Gemsbok, 70 Springbok and 40 Ostrich. There was too much game on Goegap, and the risk existed that they would permanently damage the flora, soil and ecosystem.



The boma set up in Goegap to catch the gemsbok, which were chased by a helicopter.

A professional crew from the South African National Parks (SAN-parks) had a few days in August 2008 to put this into effect. They arrive with a helicopter, 4x4 vehicles, a huge truck and quickly got everything ready for the "show"...

While everybody was hiding, the helicopter was tracking the first herd of gemsbok; in a "cowboy style" the pilot pushed about 25 animals to the catching zone. But against any expectations, the panicking 140kg colossus jumped over the 2m fences!



The gemsbok, weighting between 100 and 200 kg, were fit enough to jump over the 2m high fences and escape from the boma!

Only 11 gemsboks could be captured in this way. They were finally pushed into the waiting truck. To avoid them accidentally injuring or killing each other during the transport, their very sharp horns (average length of 1m) were covered with plastic tubes.

Since it was clear by now that they could escape from the trapping fences, the tactic had to be changed. The rangers loaded their guns and darted additional 7 individuals from the air. Once an animal was hit the 4x4s followed the dizzy but still quite defendable gemsbok.



Pushing a 200 kg gemsbok to the ground is no easy task!

Now the challenge began: only the bravest men take a gemsbok by its dangerous horns to push it down! With 6 men on its heavy body, the fight was finally lost by the gemsbok. Neither any ostrich nor springbok were caught, nor was the planned number of gemsboks achieved. It is not yet clear whether there will be

another removal. Instead the great dream of Maxi is to release some cheetahs in Goegap which could help to keep the populations of antelopes in check. As the nature reserve will be expanded by another 8000 hectares in the future, this dream might come true one day.

BOX: The Impact of Predators on the Populaton Densities of their Prey

By Carsten Schradin

Over the last decades, predator-prey relationships achieved a lot of attention both by scientists and environmentalists. How are the often large populations of prey regulated, why do populations not grow larger and larger? Spectatcular film material from the Serengeti and other wildlife areas of large predators chasing, killing and eating their prey give the impression that it might be the mighty lion that regulates the population density of its prey. But evidence for this is rather weak, and the opposite might be true!

For the large carnivores of the African savannas, little evidence exists that they regulate their prey, as Prof. Bothma and C. Walker explain in their book about lions, leopards, cheetas, hyaenas, and the wild dog. In the early years of conservationism, lions and spotted hyaenas were even shot in the Kruger National Park to stop a major decline in blue wilderbeests and zebra populations. However, this culling was stopped when it became clear that changes in rainfall and vegetation pattern were the cause of this decline in ungulate numbers, not the large predators. It is now generally assumed that predators cannot regulate their prey numbers in natural areas, except under special conditions, e.g. when their population density is very low due to other factors (drought) or when the area is very small (islands).

In contrast, the prey itself plays a very important role in regulating the predator. Population densities and home range sizes of lions vary largely over their range, as a response to prey densities. Home ranges of lions in the Central Kalahari are much larger than those of areas with plenty of prey, such as Kruger or Moremi in Botswana.

Literature:

Bothma, J. d.u P. & Walker, C. 1999. Larger Carnivores of the African Savannas. Van Schaik Publishers, Pretoria.

NEWS AND INFORMATION ABOUT PLANTS AND ANIMALS

BUSH KAROO RATS: THE COLLECTORS!

By Ivana Schoepf

Bush Karoo Rats really are amazing creatures! They spend most of their day working, collecting branches to build their lodges and even very young ones help out their parents with the work load. They often make the best of what is available to them and collect different materials to help improve their nest: seeds, branches, leaves ...pens, pencils, receiver covers ... All sort of things that are left unattended in the field can be

easily found in their lodges. So next time that somebody has lost something instead of looking around everywhere in the field perhaps one should start the search directly at a Bush Karoo Rat nest! And who knows, maybe Ed might even be able to find his missing glasses in one of their lodges! (SIDE NOTE: Ed lost his glasses in the beginning of this year while swimming in the river).

WHEN THE CAT IS AWAY ...

By Ivana Schoepf

In the middle of November Ed and I left Goegap for a two week holiday to the Kruger National Park. We were very excited about all the wildlife we were going to see. But little we knew that we were going to experience a more real sense of being in the wilderness in Goegap - and I am not referring to the amount of tourists! When we left for the holidays Sarah and Nils were still at the research station, but by the time we came back they had already left for their holiday along the coast of South Africa. At that point the research

station had been without people for over a week. Even the mice from the captive colony had gone, as in our absence the people at the office had kindly agreed to take care of them. Even though there were no (captive) mice and no people, the research station was far from being empty. In fact, while nobody was looking, all sorts of creatures great and small had sized their opportunity and had moved in the area around the research station. And so, upon our return, we were 'greeted' by: a pair of Namaqua doves (plus eggs) that

had made their nest outside the toilet; a pair of Rock Pigeons that had taken up the beams on the veranda; a family of Bush Karoo Rats that had started construction on their lodge inside the traps; a family

of mice that had taken over the tree stump in the garden and a Dassie rat that had made itself comfortable on the veranda. So, I guess, the saying that goes: "when the cat is away the mice party" really is true!

GECKOPORTRAIT: WESTERN SPOTTED THICK-TOED GECKO (*PACHYDACTYLUS SERVAL PURCELLI*)

By Ramona Pötzing

There are three races but only *P. s. purcelli* may occur in Goegap. It is found in the karroid areas of South Africa, entering the W. Little Karoo in the south and stretching northwards into south-east Namibia.

Identification: The back of this gecko is covered with granular scales and lacks enlarged tubercles. The tail is cylindrical, segmented and slightly longer than the body. The colour is

variable and reaches from pale olive to greyish-brown with dark brown blotches. The belly is white and the tubercles on the tail are golden.

Biology and breeding: These geckos are found in isolated populations, where they are usually very common. They live in small cracks and under flakes. Females lay two small eggs in rock cracks.

CONFERENCES, PRESENTATIONS AND PUBLICATIONS

There is no news for this section for the last three months. But in the next issue you will read about our newest

publication, David's MsC thesis, and more.

FUNDING OF RESEARCH: CALL FOR DONATIONS

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.

You can easily donate money online if you have a PayPal account.



Otherwise, please transfer money to one of our bank account.

Account details

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IBAN: CH51 0070 0110 0001 0959 4
Reference: Kreditnummer 37202508,
Projekt Striemengrasmaus
(it is very important that you state the Kreditnummer).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are extremely grateful to Dr. Urs Thalman (Zurich, Switzerland) who donated CHF 5 000 (Euro 3 300). This money will most likely be used to buy solar geysers for the research station, such that we get hot water from the sun and save on our gas expenses.

ANNUAL REPORT

By Carsten Schradin

In 2007, we got altogether donations of 3 419 Euro, which is the highest yearly amount we got so far! As in the years before, none of the readers of the FSM-TIMES made a donation, while six readers of the German SGM-Spiegel donated. The donation box at the office in Goegap also

made a significant contribution this year. Money was spent for the MSc project of David Lehmann, to buy a new video-camera such that he could videotape the activity of mice in their nest, and other important equipment. Especially the video-camera will also be available for future projects.

Category	Income in Euro
Amount carried over from 2006	252
Donations SGM-Spiegel	3323
Donation box Goegap	96
Sum	3671
	Expenses in Euro
Expenses for MSc thesis David Lehmann	350
Sum	350
Total	3374

New way to donate money !

Since November last year you can donate money easily online via PayPal! Just log onto our web site www.stripedmouse.com and click onto the PayPal button. We are very grateful for any contribution!



THE MOUSE'S TAIL

THE NEW RESEARCH STATION ASSISTANT: THE DASSIE RAT

Dassie Rats are small rodents that we normally associate with rocks. The best way to see one of these critters is to go and sit on one of the many rocky hills around the reserve.

But not these days. These days, you would be more likely to see a Dassie Rat on the veranda of our research station!

BUSH KAROO RAT'S STORAGE ROOM

Bush Karoo Rats never cease to surprise us! The Bush Karoo Rats living around the house have found a new way to store their food: they put it in our traps! After Nils finished his trapping along the river bed, he returned the traps to their resting place in front of the house, so seeing all this empty rooms the Bush Karoo Rat that lives in the garden thought to himself: "What a waste of space! Perhaps it would be appropriate if I

were to take over all these empty rooms and do something useful with them! Maybe even use them as storage". So, bit by bit, he started to place branches inside the traps. Several days have now gone by and many of the traps are full of mesembryanthemum branches: the food is so neatly packed that it resembles the shelves of a supermarket!

GECKO'S LIGHT

It is not unusual during our braai nights to see geckos hunting for moths and other small insects. The insects are attracted by the light and geckos often wait patiently by the side of the light to snatch a meal. But no longer: last time we had a braai one of the gecko, tired of waiting by

the sidelines, decided to take his hunt a step further and went and placed himself directly on the light bulb in the middle of all the action. For the gecko was a real feast, while we had a new nice decoration for our light!

SGM-SPIEGEL

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GOLDEN MOUSE AWARD-WINNERS

2008: KLEIN GOEGAP

2007: GOEGAP NATURE RESERVE

2006: DR. GUSTL ANZENBERGER

2005: JENS SCHRADIN