

# FSM-TIMES

FourStripedMouse



## TITLE AFRICAN WILD CAT

Reports by students from Germany, the UK,  
Spain and Switzerland  
New paint for the research station  
Mole rat sighting

### IMPRESSUM

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#### HOMEPAGE

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## WILLKOMMEN BEI DER FÜNFUNDZWANZIGSTEN AUSGABE DER FSM-TIMES!



Liebe Leser,

der diesjährige Winter und Frühling waren wirklich eine

Enttäuschung: Viel zu warm, viel zu wenig Regen! In Europa würden sich die meisten zwar über ein solches Wetter freuen, aber für die Natur hier ist es nicht gut. Zum Glück hatten wir wenigstens im Herbst etwas Regen, und der Regen im Winter blieb nicht ganz aus. So gab es genug Nahrung für die Mäuse zum Überleben. Aber die Fortpflanzungssaison kommt nicht so richtig in Gange. Die Mäuse bekamen ihre Jungen später als sonst, viele Weibchen wurden gar nicht schwanger. Aber zum Glück sind die ersten Jungen inzwischen

geboren. Wir hoffen nun, dass es im Oktober noch guten Regen gibt, und die Fortpflanzungssaison nicht zu früh aufhört. Auf jeden Fall mal wieder ein besonders Jahr im Land der Mäuse!

Ansonsten hat sich einige an der Forschungsstation getan. Viele neue Studenten kamen in den letzten Monaten, und ein Postdoc. Ausserdem strichen wir die Station neu an, und der Forschungsraum wurde renoviert. Über all das lesen Sie in dieser Ausgabe, und ich wünsche viel Spass dabei!

*Carsten Schradin*

## WELCOME TO THE TWENTY-FIFTH ISSUE OF THE FSM-TIMES!



Dear Reader,

Most people like it when it is warm and not cold, sunny and not rainy. That's how the weather here was the last months, the South African winter and spring. Normally we should have rain and cold weather, but we did not. At

least we had had some little rain, and the mice were not starving. But the breeding season has been affected significantly: the mice started breeding later, and only a few females got pregnant at all. We hope now for some late rain in October and that the breeding season wont be terminated too soon.

Otherwise the research station saw ones more a lot of changes. Many new students arrived and one postdoc. Also, we gave the house a new paint, as the old one was already falling of the walls, and used a lot of crack filler to renovate the walls. Last but not least, we removed the old

dusty carpet in the research room and put some new tiles in. Read all about that and much more in our new issue of the FSM-Times!

*Carsten Schradin*

## NAMAQUALAND-WEATHER

*By Carsten Schradin*

THE LAST THREE MONTHS	July	August	September
MINIMUM TEMPERATURES			
NIGHT	2.2	3.5	1.3
DAY	10.3	12.0	18.1
MAXIMUM TEMPERATURES			
NIGHT	13.6	14.7	14.2
DAY	31.3	30.7	33.8
NIGHTS WITH FROST	1	0	0
RAINFALL IN MM	10.6	6.8	6
DAYS WITH RAIN	3	3	3

## THE PEOPLE IN GOEGAP

*By Ivana Schoepf*

The last three months at the research station have been quite busy. Not just in terms of work (e.g. painting!), but also in terms of the amount of people that the research station saw coming and going. From the latter point of view, especially, we can even say that this was probably the busiest we ever were. But let's start from the beginning. At the beginning of July, Julien Reynaud arrived at the research station. Julien is from France one of Carsten's PhD

students. He is in the first year of his doctorate, and he came to Goegap with the intention of conducting experiments in the field. Julien will stay with us for the whole breeding season, until the end of November. Not even ten days after Julien arrival, we were joined by Kalya Miramontes Sequeiros. Kalya is from Spain and she is a PostDoc, but she came to Goegap as a volunteer as she wanted to learn new field techniques and get more experience working

abroad. Kalya arrived just in time to watch the final of the World cup in which her country won!

Not even a week had gone by since Kalya's arrival and the population of the research station was back down to four people as Carsten and his family left with destination Zimbabwe for their month long holiday. But we were not four for very long. Just three days after Carsten's departure, we were joined by the very first people who signed up for our *Striped Mouse Research Expedition*: Suzanne Guldener and her daughter Noelle from Switzerland. Suzanne and Noelle only remained at the research station for two weeks, but during this time they were lucky enough to see both a porcupine and an aardvark!

A few days after Suzanne and Noelle arrival, a seventh person arrived at the research station: Nicola Sewell. Nicola is a graduate student from Northern Ireland and she will stay with us in Goegap as a field assistant until January 2011! Nicola didn't even have the time to settle in, that we were joined by one more person: Davina Hill. Davina is originally from England, but she moved to South Africa at the beginning of July to do a Postdoc at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. She has come to Goegap to do the data collection for her project, which focuses on female alternative reproductive tactics and she will stay at the research station for the next two field seasons.

More or less at the same time as Davina's arrival, an old face appeared at the research station: Alessandra Schneider. Alessandra is an old field assistant of our and this was her third time visiting us since she left Goegap

as a volunteer in 2008. Alessandra loves South Africa so much that she is planning to come and study medicine here. This means that we will get to see a lot more of her in the next few years. Like some of us, she is becoming a permanent part of the Succulent Karoo research station! Another week had passed and another face appeared: Eloísa Martins. Eloísa is from Switzerland and she came to Goegap with the intention of finding out whether behavioural ecology is something that she would like to pursue as a career. Eloísa staid with us as a field assistant for a period of six weeks. Eloísa is possibly the only person in the history of the research station that on the same night of her arrival saw the elusive aardvark! Lucky, lucky! The day after Eloísa arrival, Suzanne and Noelle left us.

But we were not eight for long. And so in the beginning of august just a few days after Suzanne and Noelle departure, another old field assistant came to visit us: Viviane Reijak. Viviane was here in Goegap as a field assistant at the same time as Alessandra, so we had a sort of old Goegap reunion. Viviane and her two friends, Nina and Stephan, were on their way to their holiday in Namibia when they decided to stopped with us for a few days.

Also in August, Carsten and his family returned from their holiday, but just missed Vivian and Alessandra, who had left a few days earlier. Thought Carsten did not get a chance to see Alessandra, he did get to see Vivian again as on her way back from Namibia she stopped once again in Goegap. The research station was really busy at this time, but there was

still space for one more person and on the 19<sup>th</sup> of August, another field assistant joined our team: Dany Krönert. Dany is a student from the University of Berlin in Germany and she is planning to remain with us until January next year.

Finally in September, we received the visit of Dr. Mike Scantelbury, who was on his way to the Kalahari Gemsbok Park to set up a new study and a group of German visitors (Herdtfelder) interested in our work with the mice.



The group in September 2010, from front to back, left to right: Carsten, Nicola, Davina, Apollo, Ed, Julien, Carl (boyfriend of Davina), Dany, Kalya and Brigi.

## NIGHT DRIVE

By L.C. Miramontes Sequeiros (Kalya)

All started in a lunch time, as a great idea of Ivana to took as for a night drive in this exceptional natural environment of South Africa. At that moment we were about six living in the research station, Susan and Noel, Julien, Ivana and Ed, and me, and of course all of the rest of wild animals cohabitant of the reserve. As this was my very first time in SA I was very excited with the idea of going out for a "nocturnal expedition" to see real wild animals that so far I only were able to watch them in the documentaries on TV of course, but never in their real natural state.

What to say about this experience... when talking about feelings it's always difficult to explain them but for sure you will get what I could feel when trying to distinguish a wild cat between the bushes, stones and ground around it in the dark, where you could only see the black stripes in a brown mop, even it was not possible for me to distinguish the rest of the body, that will be my live picture of a wild cat alive.

During the drive many more wild animals were there, so we could see those beautiful springbok which gave name to the nearest town to the Reserve, also one of the most representative antelope species of Africa the Oryx with the big horns, in such a place like Geogap you can see these typical species as the sheep and cows in my country, it is a big contrast. Also we were delighted with the Cape fox tail running into the mountain darkest side, and a pair of

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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.  
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birds standing on one leg on what should be their first dream.

But what was the real revelation of the drive appear almost at the end of the trip, as most of the good things, they make you wait for them; a black shape running away in the prairie of our lights there it was the porcupine. Trying to hide its head in the land and erecting its spines, without a doubt this was the most exciting encountering of the night, it gave us the chance of take a few pictures that in this occasion we can share with all of you, hoping you enjoy them as much as we did.

## SOCIAL DINNER, THE BARBECUE

By Julien Raynaud

Working in a research station usually does not let you so much time for sharing meal around a table enjoying the daily anecdotes of everybody. To cope with this concern, some research stations design a schedule in which each person has to cook at least one time within the schedule for everybody. Obviously, everybody eats together, but to satisfy all of them is not an easy way, and might be a source of problem! This is definitely true, when it is the time to share the food expenses. Of course, this leads to step back to a simple option, cooking for yourself. This is what we do at the Goegap research station. As the station become quite fast busy, we can't cook all together at the same time and thus sharing a dinner is difficult. That's mainly why, once a week we organize a barbecue and the better time to do it is usually during our day off, that is, on Sunday.

One person is in charge to start the fire. The more we are the more we need time to make it ready. Once ready, everybody can enjoy cooking together, waiting with a drink and so on. This type of dinner is definitely needed for the "welfare" of the station. The atmosphere of a field station can be good only if people enjoy being together, and unavoidably has opportunities to know each other. Regarding the barbecue, this is the perfect time to know better each other. However, the barbecue should not be the duty of only one person, that is, every people should participate to make it ready before to enjoy the cooking. Of course, as this event happens during the day off, people are free to participate or not. If you want to fully enjoy this event, better think to buy enough meat and drink!

## GOEGAP ANIMALS

By Nicola Sewell

On arrival at Goegap I was quite excited at the possibility of encountering first hand some of the animals I have only ever seen on television or in pictures. I have been at Goegap now for one month and am far from disappointed. Not only is the landscape stunning, but working in the field has given me the opportunity to see animals close up that are usually quite timid, and would

be hard for normal tourists to catch a glimpse of. In my second week here, during a nest observation, a small grey mongoose was hunting less than 5 meters from where I was sitting. Unfortunately for the mice I was observing, it was them he was hunting! A few days later, a group of baboons were fighting quite close to where I was trapping; the noise alone was impressive, they were very loud



and angry. Later that day, on return home from the field site, a porcupine crossed the road in front of the car. We were extremely lucky to see the porcupine so close, and he did not seem bothered that we were there, but simply shuffled across the road to the other side and wandered off into the bushes.

The list is endless; however one thing I was less excited about the thought of seeing up close were the snakes. Goegap has many different species of snake ranging from the harmless Egg-eater to the highly poisonous Black Spitting Cobra and the Puff Adder. Early one morning, while setting traps, I caught a glimpse of something out of the corner of my eye. When I turned around, I saw a Many Horned Adder slither into the bush beside the nest I was settings trap. I quickly set the rest of the traps and left as I did not want to be any closer to the snake than I already had; the snake however, had other plans. For three days the many horned adder stayed at the nest I was trapping at. On the third day I was checking the sleeping sites of the mice in this particular nest, and had a quick look around to see if the adder was still there. I couldn't see her so went ahead with my work. Suddenly I heard a loud, vicious, spitting noise coming from the bush I was standing directly beside! The adder was in the bush beside my leg and was not happy that I was there. I moved slowly out of the way, finished my work and left, however the experience had left me less than keen to return to the site again. Back

at the research station, there were books about snakes and other reptiles found in South Africa. After a quick read of these I felt better about my encounter with the adder. There have been very few cases recorded of a Many Horned Adder ever biting anyone, although their venom is found to be as toxic as that of the puff adder. This is not surprising as it is very energetically costly for a snake to produce venom and so biting is only really used as a last resort if the snake feels threatened. Most snakes hiss to alert people of their presence and the Many Horned Adder was simply letting me know that I was too close and it wasn't happy. The next day, the adder was gone. I'm not saying I was disappointed and I certainly won't be going to look for her, but the next time I come across the Many Horned Adder or any other of the snakes found here, I won't be as worried, and might even take the picture myself! (The picture of the many horned adder was taken by



Julien (he's crazy!)).

## FOLLOWS

Von Eloisa Martins

Follows sind vom Prinzip her nicht schwer: Eine Maus während drei Stunden verfolgen und das beobachtete Verhalten aufzeichnen. Das dachte ich zumindest. Nach einer Woche Aufenthalt in Goegap musste ich aber zugeben, dass die Wirklichkeit ganz anders aussieht. Schon beim Tragen aller Gegenstände kamen die ersten Probleme. Wie kann man zwei Stoppuhren, Radiotracking-Gerätschaften, ein Clipboard, ein Fernglas und ein GPS mitschleppen und gleichzeitig noch schreiben können? Nach einigen Versuchen fand ich dann eine Lösung : So viel wie möglich um den Hals tragen und den Rest mit der linken Hand stabilisieren, damit man mit der rechten den Stift halten konnte. Ausserdem darf man nie vergessen Ersatzbatterien mitzunehmen und diese ja auch geladen zu haben, sonst muss man die Arbeit abbrechen und diese an einem anderen Tag fortführen, was leider einmal und fast ein zweites Mal vorkam. Sobald man aber mit dem Verfolgen der Maus anfängt, kommt das grösste Problem auf einen zu: die Maus nie für längere Zeit aus den Augen verlieren. Bei meinem ersten Follow konnte ich nach zehn Minuten die Maus zum ersten Mal nicht mehr orten und sie für die folgenden zwanzig Minuten nicht mehr sehen. Als ich die Maus dann wiederfand, hatte ich mir fest vorgenommen, sie nicht wieder aus meinem Blickfeld entkommen zu

lassen, doch es passierte wieder. Anstatt den Reiseweg der Maus zu folgen, lief ich einige Male in einem grossen Kreis. Insgesamt waren es am Schluss über eineinhalb Stunden, in denen ich im Feld umherirrte und nach der Maus Ausschau hielt. Nach diesem Follow, welcher eher einer Suche entsprach, nahm ich mir vor eine bessere Technik im Radio-Tracking anzueignen, um die kleinen Nager nicht mehr entwischen zu lassen und siehe da, es klappte. Trotzdem musste ich immer noch auf einige Dinge achten, um das Verhalten der Tiere nicht zu beeinflussen. Ich durfte ihnen zu Beispiel nicht zu nahe kommen und keine allzu schnellen Bewegungen durchführen. Der zweite Versuch verlief schon wesentlich besser und ich konnte mich auch endlich an meiner Arbeit erfreuen. Ich habe gemerkt, wie viel man mit dieser Methode über die Striemengrasmäuse in Erfahrung bringen kann, selbst über ein einzelnes Individuum. Man sieht was und wie sie fressen, wann sie sich gerne von der Sonne wärmen lassen, was ungefähr ihr Revier ist und mit wem sie freundschaftliche oder feindliche Beziehungen pflegen. Obwohl ich meistens mit Muskelkater im linken Arm und mit schmerzenden Füssen herumlaufe, ist dies eine Erfahrung, die ich nie vergessen werde.

## DIE FALLENKONTROLLE

Von Noelle Guldner, 8 Jahre alt

Noelle war mit ihrer Mutter Susanne Guldner im August für 2 Wochen in Goegap, im Rahmen des Mouse Expedition Programms.



Am schönsten fand ich es immer in Goegap die Fallen zu leeren, das war meine Lieblingsbeschäftigung!

Meine Mutter hat mich am Morgen schlafen lassen, ich ging immer nur auf die zweite Fallentour mit. Und das ist dann so gegangen:

Ich sprang voraus und guckte schnell in jede Falle, ob Mäuse darin waren.



Obwohl eigentlich alles sehr ähnlich aussah, wusste ich den Weg schnell auswendig

und fand auch die gut versteckten Fallen fast jedes Mal als Erste. Meine Mutter und Kalya kamen immer ein bisschen später, weil sie so viel zu Schwatzen und zu Lachen hatten.

Ich tat die Fallen raus, die eine Maus darin hatten. Kalya holte dann aus

der Tasche eine Waage, auf die man die Falle mit der Maus raufstellte. Dann band meine Mutter eine Sandwichtüte um die Falle, holte aus und schleuderte die Maus in den Sandwichsack. Guten Appetit! Haha!! Dann nahm man die Maus sorgfältig heraus und ich las die persönliche Nummer aus dem Ohrtag ab und sagte die Zahlen auf Englisch Kalya, die sie sogleich auf eine Liste schrieb. Jetzt schauten wir ob es ein Männchen oder Weibchen war und kontrollierten ob die Scheide geöffnet ist und man „nipples“ sah und ob „Skrotum“ ja oder nein. Dann liessen wir die Maus wieder frei und sie sauste blitzschnell unter das nächste Gebüsch. Und dann zurück zu ihrer Familie.

Diese Ferien waren sooooooooo schön und mein grösster Wunsch wäre es, eine Mausfamilie mit nach Hause zu nehmen! Denn wenn ich gross bin, werde ich ein Tierheim eröffnen. Und dort dürfen die Stripedmouses auf keinen Fall fehlen!!!



Kalya und Susanne Guldner.

## WAR ES DIE MÜHE WERT?

Von Dany Krönert

*Zwei Tage in denselben Klamotten, ob es regnet, stürmt oder schneit.  
Zwei Tage in denselben Klamotten, in denen du auch schläfst.  
Zwei Tage in denselben Klamotten ohne eine Dusche.*

Der Trip von Deutschland über London und Kapstadt nach Springbok und letztendlich ins Goegap-Nature-Reserve war eine Tortur, man kann es nicht schön reden.

Von Berlin nach London, über Nacht von London nach Kapstadt, schon alleine das war wirklich grässlich; links und rechts Sitznachbarn, vor dir, hinter dir... Würstchen zum Frühstück, muss man da noch etwas sagen?!

In Kapstadt sechs Stunden auf den Intercape-Bus gewartet bei Regen und stürmischem Wind. Über Nacht mit dem wesentlich bequemeren Bus in Richtung Springbok, drei Stunden Verspätung aufgrund eines Unfalls. Nachts in einem Caravan-Park von Springbok übernachtet. Am nächsten Tag endlich an der Forschungsstation angekommen.

Man kann es so sagen: es war eine schreckliche Fahrt.

Und wofür das Ganze? Um sich in völliger Einsamkeit mit acht Leuten das Klo teilen zu müssen? Um in einer kargen Landschaft im Dreck vor einem Mäusenest zu hocken und zu hoffen, dass etwas passiert?

Ganz genau! Es reicht ein einziger Blick auf einen nur zwanzig Meter entfernten Spießbock auf dem einstündigen Marsch zum Nature-Reserve-Office, der einen für die Reisetortur entschädigt. Wenn dann noch Affen, Elefantenspitzmäuse, Springböcke, Buschkarooratten, die seltsamen Gesänge der Vögel und und und hinzu kommen, dann weiß man, ja genau dafür bin ich so weit gereist. Genau dafür würde ich wieder so weit reisen. Genau dafür verzichte ich auf eine Dusche, warmes Wasser. Genau dafür verzichte ich auf Handyempfang, auf Internet.

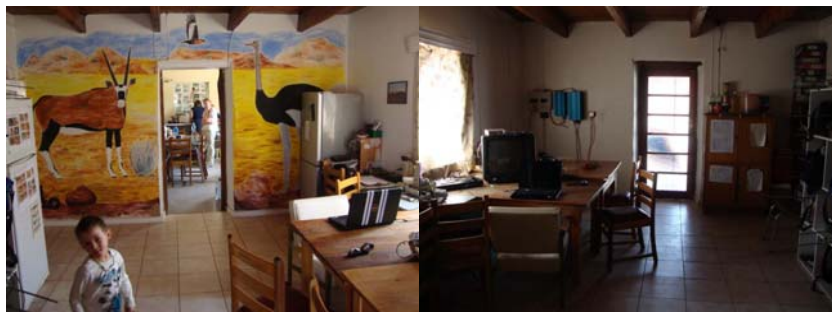
Es ist so unglaublich, wie atemberaubend, wie faszinierend, wie reichhaltig ein Gebiet sein kann, das zum größten Teil aus Steinen besteht. Es ist unglaublich, wie mir der Atem weg bleibt, wenn ich über die buschige Weite schaue und realisiere, dass ich auf der anderen Seite der Erde angekommen bin.

## RENOVATION DER FORSCHUNGSSTATION

Von Carsten Schradin

Unser Forschungszimmer hat mehrere Regale für die Bibliothek, zwei grosse Schreibtische für die

Computer und mehrerer kleine Abstellische, z.B. für die Zentrifuge, sowie die Inverter, welche uns Strom



liefern. Und bisher hatte es auch einen dunkelbraunen alten Teppichboden. Dieser schien vor allem dazu gut zu sein, den Staub und Dreck von den Schuhen aufzunehmen. Einmal die Woche wurde der Raum gefegt. Ergebnis war eine grosse Staubwolke, die sich auf den elektronischen Geräten niederliess. Wirklich sauber bekam man diesen Teppichboden nie! Also rissen wir ihn im Juli raus und ersetzten ihn durch schöne Fliesen. Dabei stellte sich heraus, wie uneben der Boden dieses alten Hauses ist, aber wir sind mit dem Ergebnis sehr zufrieden. Der Raum ist nun deutlich heller und viel einfacher zu fegen,

ohne Staubwolke! Zudem sieht man den Dreck besser. Es wird nun mehrmals die Woche gefegt, nicht nur einmal. Als nächstes war das Haus selber dran. 2002 hatten wir es streichen lassen, doch Wind und Sonne hatten den Wänden stark zugesetzt. Alle Studenten an der Station mussten anpacken. Wir entfernten die alte Farbe und benutzen mehrere Säcke Spaltenfüller, um die Wände auszubessern. Vier Eimer Farbe später sah das Haus schon viel besser aus. Ich hoffe, die neue Farbe wird die Wände vor Wind und Regen schützen.



Die Forschungsstation in der alten Farbe links, und im neuen Look rechts.

## 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

	July	August	September	Total last quarter
Visits of stripedmouse.com	1760	2025	2095	<b>5880</b>
Downloads FSM-TIMES, SGM-Spiegel	40	30	47	<b>117</b>

## TITLE: THE AFRICAN WILD CAT

By Ivana Schoepf

The African Wild Cat (*Felis silvestris lybica*) is a member of the cat family, which among others includes lions and lynxes. Like its larger cousins, the Wild Cat is a formidable predator, capable of taking down prey as large as guinea fowls, hares or even baby antelopes. Considering that this cat is only 85-100cm long and weights between 2.5 and 6.0 kg, it is an

impressive achievement as some of these preys are as large as the cat itself. However, these are rather large and unusual dietary items, and most often the menu of the Wild Cat includes birds, reptiles, amphibians, insects and, unfortunately for us, small mammals.





That small mammals, and especially small rodents, such as our beloved striped mouse, are favorites of the Wild Cat, it is something that we have come to know painfully well. Each year many of our little friends disappear thanks to the Wild Cat. At my field site on the farm Klein Goegap, the Wild Cat seems to have been particularly successful. In fact, most of the striped mice mortality of the past few months can be attributed to the cat. The Wild Cat at the farm has become rather acquainted to us and it is not unusual in the morning to

go out in the field and see it. One morning, not so long ago, for example, I was on my way to set some traps and I came across the Wild Cat. Unlike all the other encounters I had with him, this one was rather special, as he did not seem to be afraid and, instead of running away, he set down just few meters in front of me. In retrospective, I think now that he was trying to mock me, as a day later, two of the mice I was radio-tracked were dead thanks to him!



It is often very alluring for us to label the Wild Cat as “the enemy” as it eats our mice. However tempted as we are to chase him away from the field site, we have to understand that he also needs to feed. In any case, at the end of the day this is what happens when once chooses to work with animals, such as mice, which are virtually on everybody’s menu! Hence, instead of persecute him, we have to understand that this is all part of the natural cycle and we have to respect it.

Unfortunately thought, the respect of nature is soothing that in our modern society, is often given secondary import and, as it is the case with many other species, even the

supposedly widespread Wild Cat is now facing some troubles. In fact, even though the Wild Cat is apparently the most common of the African cats, ranging widely across Southern Africa (being absent only from the Namib Desert coastal belt), and is not yet considered endangered species, it is, like many wild African predators, under pressure from an encroaching human population. Besides the loss of suitable habitat and direct persecution by farmers, who blame the Wild Cat for taking small lambs (the validity of this claim has never been proven!); there are two main problems that the Wild Cat has to deal with: direct competition and interbreeding with domestic cats.





Domestic cats, like their wild counterparts, are significant predators of small vertebrates and in areas where there are many domestic cats; the Wild Cat is becoming rarer and rarer. In addition, the Wild Cat readily interbreeds with domestic cats and this can lead to a loss of genetic identity for this species. Consequently, pure African wild cats are now found only in remote and isolated areas; such as National Parks and Nature Reserves, away from human settlements where domestic cats occur. The problem is also that hybrids of domestic and Wild Cats are difficult to identify and often are mistaken for the real deal.



*Hybrid between a wild cat and a domestic cat*

The Wild Cat, in fact, can be easily mistaken for a domestic tabby; however, it can be distinguished by the hybrids and its domestic counterparts, by its reddish belly, its rich red-brown ears (compare the two pictures below) and its longer legs.



The confusion over mistaken identities coupled with the secretive nature of this species makes it difficult even for experts to establish the true extent of the Wild Cat population. Indeed much of what is known about the Wild Cat comes from a few observational studies made of captive and wild Cats and from comparisons made with domestic cats. The latter made under the assumption that the African Wild Cat is likely the ancestor of our modern day domestic cat. In fact, from Egyptian drawings and figures of cats found by the thousands in temples and tombs, it seems that Wild Cats were domesticated first in Egypt about 6000 years ago to keep rats and mice away from farmed crops and granaries. Certainly, the Egyptians were very keen on cats as they even worshipped a cat like goddess, Bast, who symbolized hunt, love and pleasure. The depiction by the Egyptians of the distinctively upright-seated posture of the wild cat, which is typical of this species, serves as an additional indication that the African Wild Cat, and not another species, is indeed the ancestor of the modern day domestic cat.

From the few studies available we know that Wild Cats are territorial and solitary, except when mating or when a female is nursing kittens. It seems that females, after a gestation period of 65 days, produce a litter of 2-5 kittens, which are born among dense vegetation or in rocks. Only one litter is generated each year, typically during the rainy season so to coincide with the peak activity period of their prey species. Kittens lay hidden in the den until they are about 3 months old, at which point they start to

accompany their mother on hunts. Kittens seem to reach independency at around 5 months old, however they are only fully-grown once they reach one year of age and begin breeding. Males tend to reach maturation and have chance of independent breeding only after 2-3 years.

Much like the domestic cat, the wild cat also buries its feces and it kills its preys by inflicting a lethal bite to the back of the neck or on the throat (this is dependent on the size of the species killed). The Wild Cat seems to be mostly active at night or in the early mornings and late evenings, and these are indeed most of the times when I saw a cat myself. Thought Wild Cats are agile climbers and sometimes creep up on birds nesting in trees or snatch them from the air, they seem to be doing the vast majority of their hunting on the ground. We can also vouch for this as most of the death that we attribute to the Wild Cat come from our findings of many radio-collars on the ground.

By living directly in a reserve where Wild Cats occur I can fully comprehend how difficult it is to study them. Though I have seen the Wild Cat quite often, I must admit that the majority of times I only detected its presence by finding its foot-prints, feces or remains of an unlucky mouse! Hence, it does not come as a surprise to me that even though the Wild Cat is one of the most common African predators; few large-scale study of this species have been undertaken. This unfortunately means that our knowledge of the behavior of this species is still very limited, something that seriously impedes our ability to take proper conservation measures for this beautiful species.

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## NEWS AND INFORMATION ABOUT PLANTS AND ANIMALS

### FIRST SIGHTING OF A MOLE RAT IN GOEGAP

*By Davina Hill*

Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> August was a cold, rainy day. I had been in Goegap Nature Reserve just over a week and had been hoping to spend my day-off exploring the mountains, taking in the magnificent landscape and searching for wildlife, most of which was new to me. Eventually the day came to a close and the weather didn't improve and so I resolved, as I walked back to the wendy house, to postpone my plans until the next week. It was at that point that I spotted a small furry mole-like creature lumbering slowly across the wet sand. Curious, I hurried over for a closer look. Its short, stumpy legs and poor eyesight made for clumsy, confused movements that earned me time to examine it. Its fur was silver and was soft and silky to the touch. A yellowed pair of chisel-like incisors protruding from its closed mouth contrasted against its cuddly, ungainly appearance and eradicated

any notion I might have had of handling the animal. Gradually it made its way to the fence that separated our garden area from the rest of the reserve and disappeared into the night. I had seen my first free-living mole-rat, the Common mole-rat, *Cryptomys hottentotus*, and as I later discovered, it was the first known sighting of a mole-rat within Goegap Nature Reserve.

Mole-rats have always fascinated me for their social behaviour. The Common mole-rat lives in groups consisting of a reproductive pair and up to twelve non-reproductive workers, who are usually their offspring. The workers dig the burrows in which the group forage and live by first biting into the soil with their incisors, pushing the soil under their bodies with their forefeet and then kicking the soil behind them with their hindfeet. As well as digging and defending the burrows, mole-rat

workers co-operate to find and store food for the colony and care for their younger siblings. Reproductive suppression of the workers is induced socially by the reproductives, who are usually the largest individuals of their gender. However, if a worker disperses from the group and encounters an individual of the opposite sex, reproductive suppression is lifted and the pair will become the reproductives of a new

colony. Dispersing individuals find mates from other colonies and thus avoid inbreeding. In arid areas, such as the Succulent Karoo habitat that we find at Goegap, dispersal is thought to be influenced by the amount and timing of rainfall. I wonder if the individual I encountered on that cool and cloudy night went on to find a mate and establish a new colony.

### AARDVARK

*By Ivana Schoepf*

Aardvarks are considered one of the most secretive of all the African mammals, and you would have to consider yourself very lucky to see one. The closest that most people ever come to an aardvark is normally when they come across one the animal's burrow or diggings. Well, in the past few weeks, this is exactly what happened to us in Goegap. All around the research station and in the field site we came across fresh footprints and new diggings almost on a daily bases – and this also includes a huge chasm, which appeared one morning in the middle of the road! Thought, after all that digging, the aardvark must have been running out of space to do new excavations as

one night he decided to come a lot closer to our research station than he ever did before. So close in fact, that not only he was inside the fenced area, but he even thought of checking out if our little Wendy House was something he could dig under! And so at some point in the middle of the night Ed and I were awoken by this unearthly sound of something, or someone, scratching against the walls of our bedroom. It sounded very much like somebody tearing through a chalkboard! At first we were startled, but then we realized it was none other than the aardvark! And, a few days later we finally caught him crossing the road just a few metres away from the research station!

## COMMON BUZZARD (*BUTEO BUTEO*)

By Erwan Chereil

45cm tall, 102-128cm wingspans

As indicated by its name, the common buzzard is common in Europe and South Africa, except in the Namaqualand. 2009 is the first year they have been observed in the reserve. As big as a jackal buzzard, they are different by the colour and we hope that they don't eat as many mice as jackal buzzard. It is a summer visitor not very easy to recognize because of the several forms existing, here we saw the only

most common form. They go to Europe for breeding, during northern



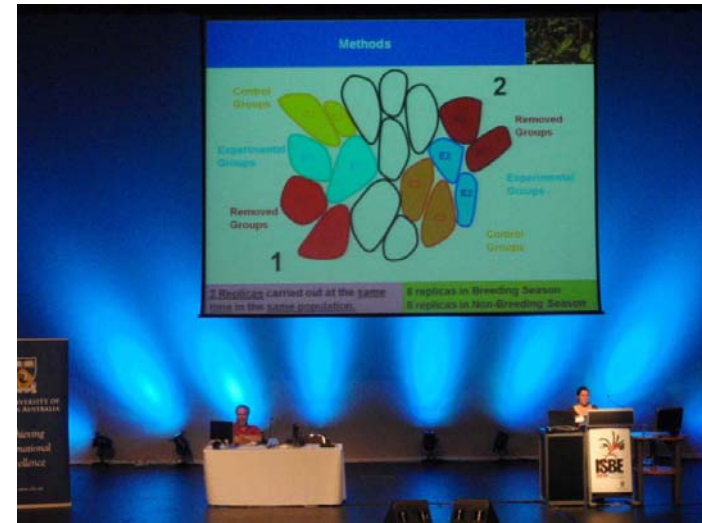
summer and then go to Africa for the rest of the year.

## CONFERENCES, PRESENTATIONS AND PUBLICATIONS

By Carsten Schradin

End of September Ivana went to Perth in Australia to attend the 13<sup>th</sup> International Behavioral Ecology Congress. She gave a well attended talk in the main lecture hall about "When to Live in Groups and when to Live Solitarily? A Field Experiment in the African Striped Mouse (*Rhabdomys pumilio*)".

End of September Carsten went to the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg to meet with Prof. Dr. Neville Pillay and his group. It was impressive to see how many students and interesting projects Neville supervises, from reptiles over primates up to the highly evolved striped mice.



Ivana giving her talk in Perth.



Carsten and Neville at Wits University.



## 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 accounts.

### Account details

South Africa  
Standard Bank  
Branch: Braamfontein  
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Swift code: SBZAZAJJ00480502  
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### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

WE ARE GRATEFUL FOR EVERY DONATION MADE TO SUPPORT OUR RESEARCH!

## THE MOUSE'S TAIL

### FLUE

Students are always afraid of tropical illnesses they might get when coming to Goegap. But this here is outside the tropics and a desert is a very healthy environment. So I tell them: Get a vaccination against the flue! I should have got one myself: First

Apollo got sick, then I, then Ed, then Ivana, and then Nicola. Halve of the research station (and halve of Springbok) got the flue this year, plus some secondary infections. Luckily, by now we are all well again!

### PROBLEMS WITH THE WORKMAN

The company Plumlec from Springbok installed our new solar system this year. We asked them whether its ok to put the solar panels next to the gate. They said yes, but after the panels were installed, they found out it was too far away from the batteries. They had to move the panels and charged us R1600 for their own mistake. They also installed

a solar regulator for R3100 that never worked and which they did not replace. After 7 months of problems I finally ordered a new one from Germany, for halve the price. Plumlec drives a better car than I do, they really know how to do business. But they have now one customer less.

### RESEARCH STATION DOG

Since the 7<sup>th</sup> of September, the research station has a new permanent inhabitant: Jogi, the Labrador. He is actually Eds dog, who got the puppy for his birthday. Jogi is well tempered and for sure will become a highly respected and very much loved member of the research station.



**GOLDEN MOUSE PRIZE-WINNERS**

**2010: VOLUNTEER FIELD ASSISTANTS**

**2009: DR. URS THALMANN**

**2008: KLEIN GOEGAP**

**2007: GOEGAP NATURE RESERVE**

**2006: DR. GUSTL ANZENBERGER**

**2005: JENS SCHRADIN**