

Gondwana
TRACKS **PARK REPORT**

NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2012



Mountain Zebra at Jakkalsdam

Highlights

MET Minister's final field visit

Geluk House dismantled

Raptor Road Counts initiated

Staff children visit Augurabis

Leopard with cubs at Jagpos

Introduction

This is the final report of a bi-monthly nature; henceforth the GCP Park Report will be produced quarterly as was decided at the recent NDL workshop, so the next one will cover the period from January to March 2013, and will be available at the beginning of April. Other parks such as GKP (Anib) and GNP (Namib) will commence doing the same, as from the start of 2013.

Temperatures remained high, approaching 40°C, particularly in December, and artificial waters barely coped on some days, needing regular topping up with a water-trailer in the case of two localities, Dassiepoort and Middelpos.

Park staff put in some good hard work in the demolition by hand of various redundant structures including the infamous local eyesore known as Geluk house, and we must thank Brandberg Construction not only for the newly-surfaced main road, but also for lending us their bulldozer to complete the Geluk project.

The overnight trips to Canyon Outpost for three groups of 37 staff children from the 3 lodges and 9 staff members, run by Warden Sue and Park staff, proved highly motivational and will remain on the calendar.

Needless to say, the lovely photograph of the leopard mother with her two cubs at Jagpos, which appeared in the *Namibian* and the *Economist* newspapers, sparked a lot of comments and interest throughout the land.

Both the Ministry of Environment and Tourism as well as the private conservation sector, including Gondwana, will sorely miss the enthusiasm, genuine support and interest demonstrated by the outgoing Hon. Minister of MET, Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, but we wish her well as the new Minister of Foreign Affairs. Her recent visit to our area in the South on 16th November was the Hon. Minister's last field visit in her former capacity, and it was good to hear her speak so positively about Gondwana in public, both at Ai/Ais and at Klein Karas. We appreciate the invitation to join her on this occasion.

Management and Development

A brief summary of tasks undertaken during these two months is as follows:

Grenspos waterhole was re-activated beginning of November in order to relieve the other plains waterholes (Dassiepoort, Middelpos, Geluk, Springbokvlakte and Zebra) of some of the tremendous drinking pressure being experienced. Both Dassiepoort and Middelpos reservoirs were covered with 95% shadecloth to limit evaporation.



Filling Middelpos waterhole from a water trailer



Fitting shade cloth over Dassiepoort reservoir

Regular trips with the small water trailer were done to replenish Dassiepoort and Middelpos waterholes, particularly in December, due to high temperatures and heavy drinking pressure.

Another two redundant sheep drinking troughs (Klipspringer and Dassiepoort/Klein Karios) and two old and rusted reservoirs (Skorpion and Geluk) were dismantled.

Geluk house was demolished by hand, and then buried on site with the help of a roads contractor (Brandberg Construction) bulldozer, together with all the accumulated scrap wire from dismantled fencelines that had been stored there.



Demolition of Geluk house



Pulling wire into the hole made by the bulldozer



Bulldozer filling the hole with house rubble and soil

Broken/chewed/exposed pipelines were repaired at Holoog, Porcupine, Quaggagat, Kanebis, Grenspos and Stamprivier. Palms reservoir at Holoog was emptied, cleaned, patched and refilled. A new “forskop” (force head) was fitted to Geluk windpump.

The non-functional spotlights and “hide” (wall) near the main road at the Roadhouse, were dismantled: it was an impractical design for concealment, somewhat of an eyesore, and never used anyway. The little waterhole remains.

The Augurabis nature trail was cleared of two fallen trees, and some stonework was repaired that Mountain Zebra had affected.

A circular 90km Raptor Roadcount route was established in November between Holoog and the Lodge, that will be repeated quarterly.

Both Wardens and Senior Rangers attended the local NAMPLACE AGM at the Village during the third week of November.

Both Wardens attended the NDL workshop 6-8 December, at which feedback and a revue of the 2012 GCP Annual Work Plan was presented, the 2013 Work Plan was submitted for approval, and the next 5-year Management and Development Plan for Gondwana Namib Park was reviewed.

A Red Hartebeest that had escaped onto Klein Karas community land in December, was returned to the Park with the help of community members.

Usual routine weekly and monthly tasks including raingauge reading/servicing, down-loading of camera traps, waters maintenance and boundary fence repair proceeded as normal. Year-end admin completed during this period included finalising the AA/HR report, the Training Summary, the Bi-Monthly report, the Event Book summaries, Disciplinary Action Summary, Summary of all orders and expenditure, the 2012/2013 Budget requisition, a presentation for the NAMPLACE AGM on the GCP Management and Development Plan, 2012 Annual Work Plan progress report, and 2013 Work Plan.

Law Enforcement

A “vanghok” for leopard was found in the third week of December just inside the Park side of the Kanebis – Frankfurt boundary fence, set with the remains of a sheep that had been caught on the neighbour’s side. Technically, the trap was on the farm, since the fenceline is erected around a large hill, skirting a section of Kanebis so that it is physically part of GCP. Nevertheless we confronted the neighbour with the fact that he could at least have informed us. The exchange was very amicable and we returned the trap, which we had deactivated and removed, to him a few days later, after he apologised and accepted that maybe he shouldn’t set traps on our side of the fence. In any case, he is actually one of our better and more supportive neighbours, so no harm done, and all’s well that ends well.

Monitoring and Research

Climate

Negligible rain fell in November, although Tafelkop was at the centre of an isolated short heavy shower. During December there were a few more isolated showers all over the Park. These were very localized, falling within a small area each time. The cumulative mean rainfall for this year to date (July-December) is 13.0mm, which is slightly lower than last year’s figure of 15.4mm for the same time period. Most of the rainfall in GCP usually occurs during the months of February and March and it is hoped that rain will arrive soon, as the extremely high temperatures we have experienced during the last two months, together with low rainfall and high evaporation rates have put great pressure on the waterholes.

A total of 33 rain-gauges are monitored in the Park. Selected rainfall data recorded from these gauges during this two-month period is given below:

Name of rain-gauge	November (mm)	December (mm)	Park zone
Augurabis (Cañon Outpost)	0.0	1.2	North
Holoog	0.5	7.5	North
Tafelkop	11.0	16.0	North
Cañon Roadhouse	0.0	0.2	North
Middelpos	0.0	10.0	North
Cañon Lodge	0.0	2.0	Central
Bushman	0.0	13.5	Central
Quaggagat	0.0	24.0	South
Altdorn	0.0	5.5	South

Temperatures during November and December have been extremely high with the average maximum temperature being more than two degrees higher than in 2011 and the average minimum temperature for December being approximately six degrees higher than in December 2011. During December, maximum daily temperatures approached forty degrees on several occasions.

The minimum and maximum temperatures recorded for November and December 2012 are indicated below, together with the means for both months (derived from data for 2003-2012).

	November 2003-2012 mean	November 2012	December 2003-2012 mean	December 2012
Maximum temperature (°C)	39.7	38.9	40.5	40.6
Average maximum temperature (°C)	32.6	34.5	34.3	35.2
Minimum temperature (°C)	9.2	7.4	12.0	10.8
Average minimum temperature (°C)	17.0	15.9	18.0	18.4

Table depicting maximum and minimum temperatures in November and December

Veld condition

While woody plants afford ample browse and many are in new leaf – in fact the *Acacia karroo* has burst into a second flowering period again! – the grasses have wilted and been eaten back considerably over this period of intense heat and little, meaningless precipitation. Nevertheless the quantity of grazing is still sufficient, if not the quality; animals are just having to walk further now to and from water, and small signs of condition loss are being noticed particularly in the case of plains animals. Much pressure is being placed on the artificial waterholes, and virtually no veld-water remains where there was still some to be found this time last year.

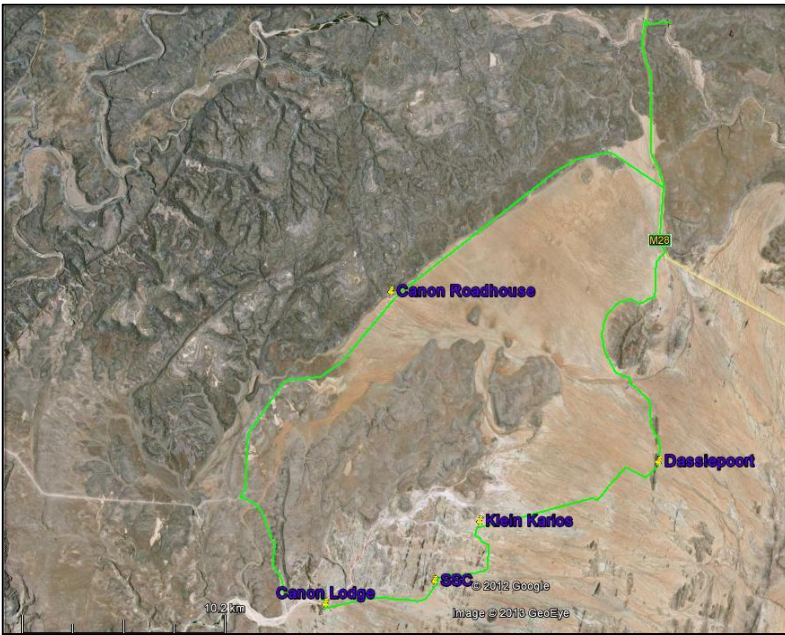
Indigenous plant nursery

Around 50 more Quiver tree *Aloe dichotoma*, *Hoodia gordonii* and Camelthorn *Acacia erioloba* seeds were sown in the nursery during November and December.

Wildlife and Vegetation Monitoring

Lots of plains animals have been seen concentrated around waterholes during this period. Many Red Hartebeest have calved: 47 calves were recorded in November and 12 in December. There are also many new Ostrich chicks that have been born recently.

Age and sex ratios for Springbok and Kudu were calculated based on 48hr camera trap analysis at four different waterholes. The analysis was based on 449 Springbok and 87 Kudu observations. The calculated ratios were 1:1.2 male:female for Springbok (1:1.9 in 2011) and 1:1.4 male:female for Kudu (1:1.5 in 2011). These ratios are as to be expected for natural ecosystems, where no commercial harvesting of game takes place. For animals greater than one year old, the ratio of adult to sub adults for Springbok was 3:1 and for Kudu was 2:1. This indicates a healthy recruitment rate into the adult population.

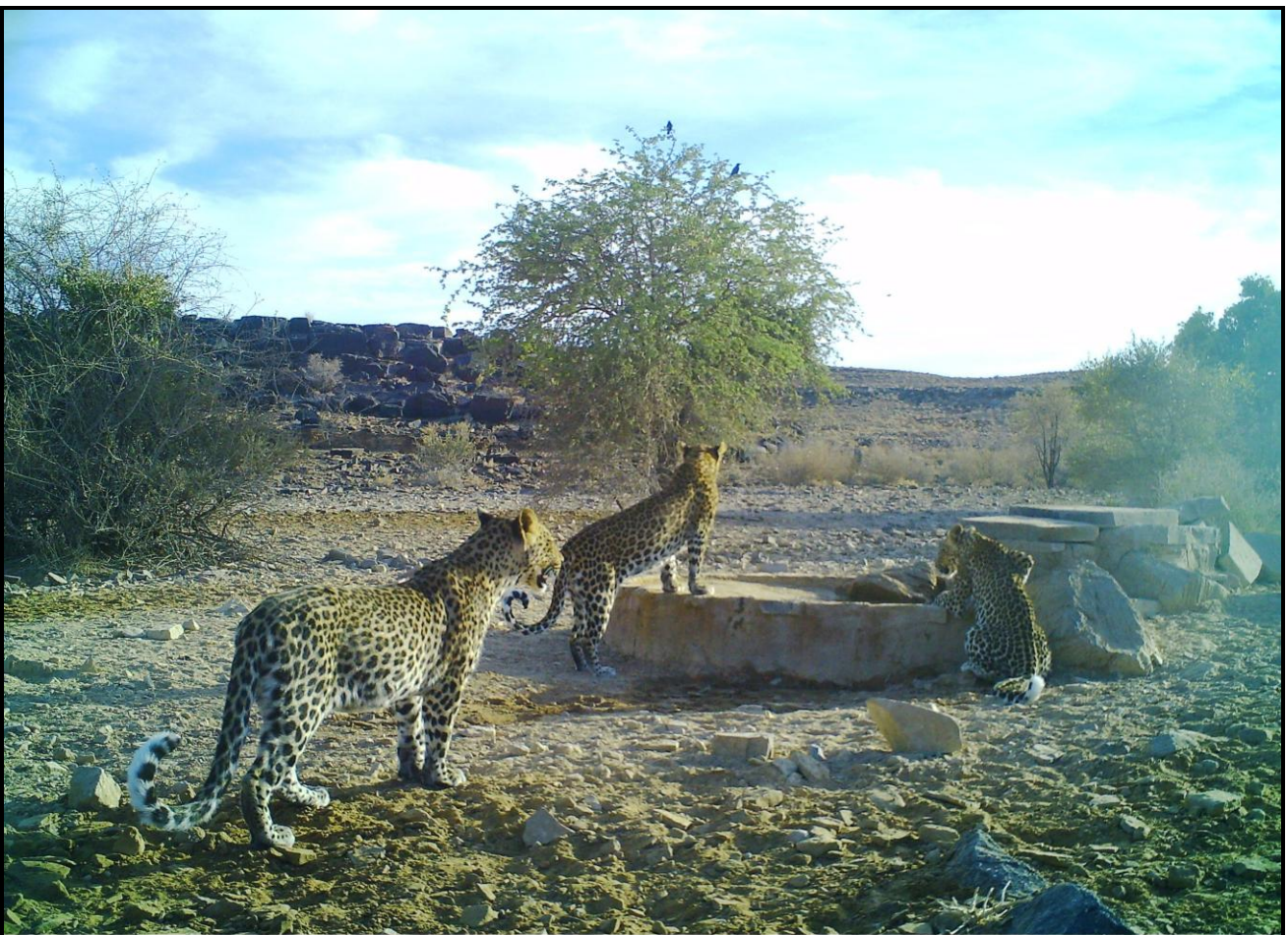


An exciting observation was the first record of a Lappet Faced Vulture nest in the Park. We have seen several Lappet Faced Vultures during the last year, but this is the first record of them nesting here and it is important, as it indicates that there is a healthy ecosystem present.

A circular 'Raptor Road Count' route has been set up, which will be driven four times a year, to enable us to more closely monitor the birds of prey in the area.

Circular Raptor Road Count route, starting from Park Headquarters

Leopard were photographed by three different camera traps. Nocturnal photographs of three leopard at Middelpos and one at Dasselpoort were taken during December and a lovely photograph of a mother and two cubs at Jagpos was captured during November.



Leopard at Jagpos

Several Grey Duiker have been seen along the !Gab river. There are at least four pairs around Park Headquarters; a pair have been photographed drinking at Stamprivier and three pairs were seen in the thick undergrowth near the river during the recent Staff Children's outing to Augurabis.

Two of the three Klipspringer study groups still contain four animals, whereas the other group now only contains three. Last year's lamb has now left the group to find its own territory.

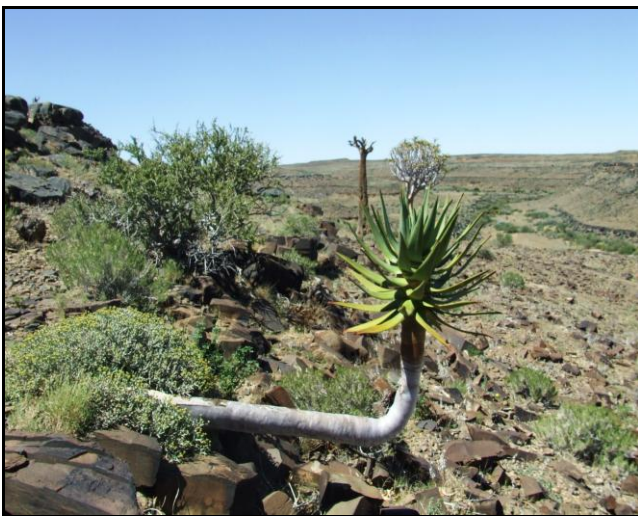
As part of his degree in Nature Conservation, Senior Ranger Ignatius 'Gammy' Sikongo was been carrying out a project on Quiver Tree population dynamics. Below is a summary of his findings:

The population dynamics of the Quiver Tree *Aloe dichotoma* in Gondwana Cañon Park

By Senior Ranger Ignatius N Sikongo

The Quiver Tree *Aloe dichotoma* is a majestic succulent and is the most recognisable tree in the Nama and Succulent Karoo. Confined to the Northern Cape and Namibia, this aloe is mainly found growing in the rocky habitat among the hills and has been declared a flagship species for the south of Namibia. Population structure is very important to understand, serving as a sentinel for the changes happening in the Quiver Tree population. The project was aimed at establishing population structure and recruitment status of Quiver Trees in Gondwana Cañon Park.

Six plots of Quiver Tree clusters (3 in the Sandy Plains and 3 in the Incised Rocky Hills) were selected for the study. Each plot was two hectares in size. All Quiver Trees were counted and measured. Within each 2ha plot, 1ha was surveyed to estimate the total numbers of seedlings in relation to adult trees. All plants labelled in 2006 were re-measured and seedlings which germinated after the last survey were also recorded.



Quiver Tree in Gondwana Cañon Park



Measuring the height of a young Quiver Tree

There was a significant difference between the two populations with the Sandy Plains more skewed to trees of greater than 4m in height and the Incised Rocky Hills dominated by plants below 2m. A total of 169 seedlings were marked during the 2006 survey. Of these, a mortality of 70% was recorded in 2009 and 94% in 2012. The Sandy plains appear to have fewer seedlings per adult trees as compared to the Incised Rocky Hills. All seedlings were found to be protected by nursing plants or in rock crevices. Seedlings in Incised Rocky Hills are generally in better condition than those in the Sandy Plains. Statistical tests indicate that population structure differs significantly in each habitat.

There is a need to be concerned due to low recruitment and survival rate. The Sandy Plains' population is more likely to eventually go through the post reproductive stage while the Incised Rocky Hills population is becoming more established with well-defined young trees.

The use of historic photographs of quiver trees to help determine age and survival rate of mature old trees would be interesting. Lack of detail in written records from the 18th to the 19th centuries has limited our understanding of what the structure and recruitment of quiver trees looked like then. Historical photographs would provide us with much quantitative and qualitative information that could be used to compare with data obtained from recent studies.

Human Resources, Information and Training

Both Wardens and both Senior Rangers attended the local (Greater Fish River Canyon Landscape: GFRCL) NAMPLACE AGM held at the Village 3rd week of November.



Wardens Trygve and Sue were invited as NAMPLACE GFRCL members by the MET Minister Hon. Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, and represented GCP on 16th November, at Ai/Ais to inspect and advise on the sewage and dump problems; and then to Klein Karas community to witness the ceremony organized by NAMPLACE, at which a sponsored Solar Sewing Machine project was initiated, and at which we were able to advise on the community vegetable garden project. Besides the Hon. Minister's delegation, the function was attended by numerous community leaders from the South, NWR, and NAMPLACE. It was pleasing to hear the Gondwana name being mentioned with respect many times, as well as the GFRCL project whereby neighbours can help each other and the entire local natural environment via the NAMPLACE initiative.

Trygve and Sue with Hon. Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah



Trygve offering advice to the Klein Karas Community gardeners



Cushions made by the Solar Sewing Project

37 staff children from the Roadhouse, Village and Lodge together with 3 staff members from each lodge and 3 Park staff members took part in three overnight trips to Augurabis (Cañon Outpost) during December. Whilst on their 'Augurabis Adventure' the children carried out many activities including walking the new 6km hiking trail, animal spotting, swimming, Eco-Oryx card games and treasure hunts, football matches and water balloon games. The 'Roadhouse Rhinos' were the champion animal spotters, the 'Lodge Leopards' the most enthusiastic footballers and the 'Village Dassies' the most spectacular swimmers. A lot of fun was had by everyone and it is hoped that we can repeat something similar next year. Comments from the children included;

"Dit was n lekker toer en het baie diere gesien." (It was a great trip and lots of animals were seen.)

Temmy Jossop

"Ons het die toer geniet het baie diere gesien. " Dit was opwindend. Dankie daavir. (We enjoyed the trip and saw lots of animals. It was exciting .Thank you.)

Cindy Jossop

"Ons het getoer Augurabis too. Ek het die swem geniet en mooi diere gesien." (We went on a trip to Augurabis. I enjoyed swimming and saw lovely animals.)

Benidine Swartboo



'Roadhouse Rhinos' on the hiking trail



Eco-Oryx card game



'Lodge Leopards' study the map



'Village Dassies' visit the Giraffe bomas

We would like to thank all the staff from the Lodges and the Park Staff for coming with us or helping behind the scenes.



Philippe at Geluk

During December a new student intern, Philippe Ackermann from Germany (whose tour-guide father lives in Namibia) started a three month placement with us, in preparation for studying for a degree in Wildlife Management. He has already become part of the Park team and we look forward to working with him for another two months.

We welcome Johann and Anja as new managers at the Roadhouse, and thank them for the great support and cooperation so far.

Trygve and Sue Cooper

Park Wardens, Gondwana Cañon Park

2013/01/08