
Gondwana
TRACKS **PARK REPORT**

SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER 2012



!Gab river, Augurabis

Highlights

Park Staff visit Hobas

GCP welcomes Windhoek School groups

Several redundant reservoirs dismantled

Introduction

The heat of summer has suddenly arrived with a vengeance, and there appears little prospect of rain yet for the Park; at least all trees are in new leaf and offer some shady respite. As expected, the maintenance of waters is taking some priority while game concentrates increasingly to slake their thirst, particularly on the dry plains.

A proud achievement for the Rangers and General Workers was the dismantling of eleven (11) old, rusted and redundant reservoirs in the northern and central areas. With less than 10 of these rusted hulks remaining in the Park, we should have this particular project wrapped up sometime soon, leaving only the removal of rubble from the bases to be disposed of (the actual corrugated sheeting of the walls we take to a central scrap depot at Geluk for disposal by a scrap-metal dealer).

Cañon Outpost (Augurabis) facilities were put to good use for a week by learners from Combretum School in Windhoek, during a Field Study trip. The locality proved ideal for this type of activity.

We again have cause to thank Windhoek International School (WIS) for another very productive week of hard voluntary work at Gondwana Cañon Park. Besides a great cleanup project, we now have a really interesting and scenic 5.7km nature trail laid out in the Augurabis area, which will surely be of immense value to school groups, shareholders, staff etc.

Sadly, Conservation in Namibia lost three well-known personalities that passed away during this period: recently-retired Director of MET (Parks and Wildlife) Ben Beytell, Piet Burger from the MET Regional Office in Otjiwarongo, and the legendary Jan Oelofse, game farmer, lodge owner and past Head of Game Capture in the former Natal Parks Board, where he pioneered many of the capture techniques of yesteryear that are still practiced today. A number of Gondwana figures were acquainted with all three.

Management and Development

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

Steenbok waterhole was extensively repaired, 200 droppers in the fence-curtain across the !Gab River where it enters the Park were replaced, the fence around the Wardens' house was heightened to stop Kudu damage, and Holoog lawns were top-dressed with old sheep manure.

The quad-bike and the main generator received minor services, and both 4x4 vehicles were given major services.



Reservoir dismantling

Porcupine damage to Holoog pipelines, and Baboon damage to Quagga waterhole pipelines, was repaired. 30 Quiver trees and 10 Camelthorns from our nursery at Park HQ were delivered to the Village.

A further 11 redundant, old, rusted and generally out-of-service reservoirs were dismantled (Kanebis x 1, Augarabis/Soutrivier/Jaghuis x 5, Geluk x 2, Roadhouse x 1, Middelpoos x 1, Klein Karios x 1), and both Klipdam and Palms reservoirs at Holoog were cleaned and refilled. An old disused one-room shack between Ostrich and Middelpoos was also dismantled.

The !Gab River crossings to Park HQ were strengthened with gravel. Middelpoos and Dassiepoort pipelines (reservoir to trough) were unblocked.

A 5,7km nature trail was laid out around Augurabis area with the assistance of Grade 11 students and teachers from Windhoek International School, during the second week of October.

Scrap metal from cleanup operations at Augurabis and Holoog was transported to Geluk scrap stockpile.



WIS students on the Augurabis nature trail

Monthly rain-gauge servicing was undertaken as usual, together with routine down-loading of camera-traps, maintenance of waters and minor repairs to all boundary fences.

Warden Trygve and MD Manni attended a NAM-PLACE committee meeting at Konkiep Nature Reserve on Friday, 7th September.

Law Enforcement

On 24th September, a group of Oryx boxed themselves up in the sharp southern corner of the border fence of Einaug next to the main district road, at our northern Park entrance, and our staff managed to chase them out of the corner deeper back into the farm to better safety. In the process however, one female galloped straight into a metal fencepost and killed herself with a blow to the head. We could not raise the owner (neighbour Hennie Blaauw) on the telephone, so we dragged the carcass away from the road deeper into his farm and hid it behind some bushes so that nobody would see and steal it. We managed to talk to him by 'phone late that night when the NAMPOL Stock-theft Unit visited to investigate (obviously some passing tourists probably thought someone was trying to harass the Oryx when they saw them being chased out of the corner and a carcass lying on the ground!). The neighbour donated the carcass to the police for their effort, and we showed them in the dark where it was lying, and helped them load it onto the NAMPOL bakkie – with their broad smiles, one wonders how much actually ended up being given to prisoners, or old-age homes, or a school etc. which is the normal legal procedure. Anyway, Mr Blaauw thanked us too for our effort, and for keeping an eye on things.

Monitoring and Research

Climate

Negligible rain fell in September, and none in October. 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	September (mm)	October (mm)	Park zone
Augurabis (Cañon Outpost)	3.0	0.0	North
Holoog	0.0	0.0	North
Cañon Roadhouse	0.0	0.0	North
Cañon Lodge	1.0	0.0	Central
Klein Karios	2.3	0.0	Central
Kudugat	2.0	0.0	South
Altdorn	0.0	0.0	South
Fourie se gat	2.5	0.0	South

September was cooler than average and the beginning of October also had some cool days as cold fronts passed over the Park from the south. The latter half of October however became very hot. The minimum and maximum temperatures recorded for September and October 2012 are indicated below, together with the means for both months (derived from data for 2003-2012).

	September 2003-2012 mean	September 2012	October 2003-2012 mean	October 2012
Maximum temperature (°C)	35.0	34.7	36.6	36.6
Average maximum temperature (°C)	25.8	26.0	29.5	29.6
Minimum temperature (°C)	4.8	3.6	6.7	5.9
Average minimum temperature (°C)	10.7	8.2	14.1	12.3

Table depicting maximum and minimum temperatures in September and October

Veld condition

.While woody plants are in full new leaf, grasses have become very drab and brown under the onslaught of recent high temperatures with no precipitation. Even the Sweet-thorn *Acacia karroo* had a noticeably shorter flowering period than usual - maybe due to such an abnormally short interval this year between the belated end of cold wintery weather and the sudden start of intense summer heat?

Indigenous plant nursery

The advent of spring and the warmer weather enabled renewed planting of indigenous seeds to take place in the nursery. Seeds from Quiver trees *Aloe dichotom*), *Hoodia gordonii*, Camelthorn *Acacia erioloba*, Buffalo thorn *Ziziphus mucronata*, Wild Ebony *Euclea pseudobenus* and the Nama Resin-tree *Ozoroa namaensis* were sown during September and October.

30 of the larger Quiver trees and 10 young Camelthorns were taken to the Village for planting in the Lodge gardens.

Wildlife Monitoring

Game pressure at waterholes increased dramatically in the latter half of October and with the return of the hot weather many Snake observations have been recorded in the event book.



Recorded mortalities included 3 kudu (old age and fence death), 1 Ostrich (fence), 1 Oryx (road kill), and 1 Cape Hare (road kill).

Five camera trap sightings involving two Leopards (at Jakkalsdam and Stamprivier) were recorded during September.

The Giraffe translocation to GCP intended for October was postponed until April/May next year, when conditions will be more favourable weather- and vegetation-wise.

Trygve with a young Puff Adder caught in the outbuildings at Holoog

Following his visit in August, Professor Morris Gosling was able to spend another few days monitoring Mountain Zebra at GCP in the second week of September. He is in constant contact with us, and we send him camera trap photos of the zebra on a regular basis; from the resultant identifications, he is always able to inform us of the history and age etc. of various individual animals, which makes the mountain zebra project so much more interesting and relevant to us.



A young Caracal (Rooikat) was released at Augurabis on Sunday 28th October. It had been sent to the Park after being caught in the Stampriet area.

All three Klipspringer groups that are being studied at Holoog now contain four animals. Each group consists of an adult male and female, last year's offspring and a lamb from this year. There is no sign as yet of last year's offspring leaving their group and finding their own territories.

Dorothea examining a Klipspringer midden

Student intern Dorothea Nakatana has been carrying out a project looking at scent marking behavior in two of the territories at Holoog. Her observations have shown that Klipspringer appear to scent mark preferentially on *Catophractes alexandri* and *Haematoxylum dinteri* and she has hypothesized that this may be due to these two plants being a favoured food source for the Klipspringer. She also found out that most of the scent markings were found within a vertical height of 55-60cm from the ground. This is approximately the height of the pre-orbital gland in an adult Klipspringer. We are hoping to extend this study to all the Klipspringer study groups in the future.

Human Resources, Information and Training

Ten plastic rain gauges were donated by Gondwana to the local MET official at Hobas.



Senior Ranger Eddy Shipulwa thanking Ranger Max Witbooi for his hospitality

A team-builder and information outing was held for our staff and students, whereby all 14 of us from Park HQ went to Hobas and the Fish River Canyon viewpoints on Sunday, 16th September, courtesy of Ministry of Environment and Tourism. For most, it was the first time they had ever been into this famous area of the National Park. A huge thank-you goes to Simon Andreas at the Roadhouse for organizing sandwiches for everyone afterwards, and we are very grateful for the permission, cooperation and friendliness from Chief Control Warden Harry Tjihukununa, Warden Mentos Paolo Vinte, and Ranger Max Witbooi in particular.



Park Staff and Student Interns at Fish River Canyon lookout near Hobas



Park staff at the start of the Fish River Canyon hiking trail



Gammy giving his presentation to Combretum School learners

Grade 8 learners from Combretum School in Windhoek, lead by Sue Brown, took part in a field Studies week at Augurabis. Warden Sue Cooper gave them a presentation on the Park, and Senior Rangers Gammy and Eddy and our intern student Dorothea talked to them about their work and studies. The learners were also shown some rock engravings and a camera trap was set up which recorded Kudu and Mountain Zebra visiting Augurabis during the evenings.

Grade 11 students and teachers from Windhoek International School performed another week's volunteering work at GCP – this time at Cañon Outpost (Augurabis) in October – collecting litter and old trash, shifting firewood and planks, and creating a 5,7km nature trail under the guidance of Wardens Trygve and Sue.



Park staff and students creating the nature trail and removing firewood at Augurabis



Andrew at Fish River Canyon

Our UK intern Andrew Weston, returned home in late September following a few weeks of good hard work which was much appreciated and our Namibian intern Dorothea Nakatana finished her internship with us at the end of October. We would like to thank them for all their hard work and the willingness with which they approached every task that they undertook. Here are Andrew and Dorothea’s thoughts about their time at GCP.

“I have had an absolutely brilliant time helping out in the park. I’ve really enjoyed getting stuck in and being involved in everything that goes on here. I’d just like to say a massive thank you to all the park staff, especially the guys at Holoog for welcoming me and being so friendly for the whole time I’ve been here. Hopefully I’ll be back for another visit.”

Andrew

“This has been a wonderful stay with the staff of Gondwana Cañon Park (GCP). I have had many good experiences with the guys from Gondwana. Let me mention the technical part. I had no technical experience during my first in-service training and I have had lots here. I also gained experience in game management and tracking, which I had never done before. I have gained experience in record keeping which will help me in the future and I have gained experience from all the staff in identifying plants and animals. All of the experiences I have gained from your company will help me throughout my career and I will recommend GCP as one of the best stations for students to be attached to. You have good hospitality for students and you have been so kind to me. I will use all the experience that I have gained from the staff to be a good person in the conservation world.”

Dorothea



Dorothea, Eddy and Gammy at Augurabis

Roadhouse managers Otto and Brigitte von Kaschke transferred to Namushasha last week of September. We will always remain grateful for their immense support and guidance towards us field staff at GCP.

Trygve and Sue Cooper

Park Wardens, Gondwana Cañon Park

2012/10/04