



## **“Water, water, every where, Nor any drop to drink”**

The lament of the Ancient Mariner<sup>1</sup> was on everybody’s lips. At least that was the case earlier this year in Walvis Bay. Whereas the mariner’s plight was his inability to drink seawater while he was suffering thirst – part of a curse inflicting him and his companions when he shot an albatross – what Walvis Bay suffered was caused by too much of a good thing. High floods in the Kuiseb had severed the town’s supply of fresh water. This crisis is fortunately over... for now.

As every Namib toktokkie knows, good water is an invaluable resource, albeit highly unpredictable. Desert denizens devise many ways to obtain it and protect its source, even at high costs. In Namibia we do know what it is like to be without water or at least to face the prospect of not knowing when the next supply of water will come again. Most of Namibia is desert, and the western part is extreme desert. 2011, as we all know, is an exception, in many places being the wettest year yet on record. Currently we are bathed in the plentiful supply of water and bask in the result of the unusually high productivity. However, this is the very time to be aware of the unique opportunities we have right now to defer the drought crisis some years down the line. In Namibia, drought is bound to come. That is why it is desert.

This year the Namib is dressed in hues of green seldom seen. Flowers dot the landscape, changing over the course of months. Anybody who has not yet ventured into the desert in recent months to see it in these rare patterns should not miss the opportunity to do so. It is still blooming in places. Most of the grass has faded to gold or silver sheens and this promises to bolster the desert’s natural larder for many years to come. Myriads of toktokkies, icons of this column, benefit from the boon of detritus. All desert life has received a good boost.

In this new weekly column, Toktokkie muses about the desert and its biodiversity, be it to increase awareness and questions concerning the Namib’s creatures, its ecological processes, the functions and services of nature, uses and abuses, and environmental management, all in relation to human development. Toktokkie is your fitting guide. Tenebrionid beetles (also called darkling beetles, colloquially toktokkies, because some species tap their bodies on the ground to communicate) come in many shapes, sizes and colours. Different Namib species fittingly illustrate various concepts of desert ecology. Children like to talk to these beetles as they go about their business. Children do not need a column to know what toktokkies are telling them, but some adults require interpretation. The icon shows the common Namib species *Zophosis moralesi*, aptly, Moral from a Darkling Beetle.

This week the Ancient Mariner<sup>1</sup> is the sage for the Moral of the Story: Careless destruction of nature leads to untold grief.

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<sup>1</sup> The Rime of the Ancient Mariner by Samuel Taylor Coleridge