

# Toktok Talkie

by Joh Henschel



## Landscapes of Biodiversity

We don't have to go far to witness something really amazing. Right here at the Namibian coast we find ourselves in a wonderland of nature, among the most special areas in the world. To support Namibia's custodianship of the Namib, the UN Development Programme granted funding to the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) for an assessment of biodiversity vulnerability and land-use. The focus is on our very doorstep: the Central Namib Desert.

As every Namib toktokkie knows, nature exists in the context of landscapes and their characteristics. Think of the Namib dunes, gravel plains, Inselbergs (free-standing mountains surrounded by plains or sand), riverbeds, washes, isolated waterholes and numerous other features. Think of what conditions are like in these desert landscapes and how these conditions differ across space. Think how they are located in relation to one another and how they are interconnected and affected by what is around them. Now think of how these features, processes, conditions and interconnections affect what lives there. Suddenly the creatures which populate this part of the world spring into focus in a very different way, as we cannot separate them from their landscape. The Namib's special species such as Welwitschia, Black Rhino, Lappet-Faced Vultures, Husab Sand Lizards, Teloschistes Lichen, Wheel Spider, Fog-Basking Beetle, and of course our friend Moralesi, not to mention many other less charismatic species, exist in the context of their populations, communities of species, and landscapes. One cannot make effective management plans or decisions concerning Namib biodiversity without this context.

With such complexity, how can we predict, let alone manage, consequences of sudden drastic changes, such as the current growth of mining and industry in the Namib? MET launched NACOMA (Namibian Coast Conservation and Management Project), which conducted a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). This provided decision makers with information and tools that will help them make environmentally sound planning choices. The uranium rush prompted the Ministry of Mines and Energy to conduct another comprehensive SEA in 2010. This was still missing some key information layers about biological diversity in order to protect our natural heritage without foregoing economic benefits for people. To fill this gap, the MET project, Strengthening the Protected Area Network (SPAN), commissioned Fauna & Flora International (FFI) and partners from Namibia and abroad to identify areas of importance for biodiversity and people in the Namib. They are doing this by classifying and mapping landscapes, the organisms in the landscapes, and those features of the landscape that influence where the organisms occur. This allows them to find out how vulnerable the biodiversity and landscapes are to impacts particularly of uranium exploration and mining. The project brings together scientists, ministries, industries, communities and municipalities who participate in the further development of Decision Making Tools.

"Watch this space" for further information on the Landscape Level Assessment of Key Biodiversity Vulnerability and Land-use within the Uranium Province in the Central Namib. Whatever you do, appreciate the Namib's special landscapes and the remarkable biodiversity they contain.

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