



### Title: Reptiles in Goegap

Reports from field assistants

Mouse portrait: M631

Insect portrait: Toktokkie

New: Gecko portraits

### EDITORIAL

#### EDITORS

Dr. Carsten Schradin, Brigitte Schradin.

#### ADDRESS

Goegap Nature Reserve, Succulent Karoo Research Station, Private Bag X1, Springbok 8240, South Africa.  
[info@stripedmouse.com](mailto:info@stripedmouse.com)

#### HOMEPAGE

<http://www.stripedmouse.com>.

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# WELCOME TO THE ELEVENTH ISSUE OF THE FSM-TIMES!



End of February I came back to Goegap to collect some data and samples during the dry season. I found the research station

in a very good condition and every mouse at the field site under observation. Ivana had really done an excellent job, with the help of the hard working field assistants. I could start working the next day, as Ivana knew the location and composition of each and every mouse group. The field assistants trapped the breeding males for me, such that I could do some experiments on male aggression. As expected, there was not much, as outside the breeding season there is no reproductive

competition. So after 1 to 2 hours the males were back in the field.

I had a very successful stay in Goegap and a great time. The field work was always finished by 10 AM, as everything was so well organised, and I could spend the rest of the day working on data analysis, writing of papers, proposals and reports. In these three weeks I got much more done than usually. I was sorry to leave Goegap end of March, but also very happy to get back to my family. In June I will be back, this time with my wife and son, and I am very much looking forward to it.

Kind regards,

*Carsten Schradin*

## THE DIFFERENT PLACES AND LOCATIONS

### South Africa

As the name says, it is the most southern country in Africa. South Africa lies at the Cape of Good Hope. The population of South Africa (40 million) consists of black South Africans (e.g. the Zulu), which represent 75% of the population. 12% are white, 8% coloured, and some are Indian, Malaysian or descendents of the San (bushman). South Africa is the only industrialized country in Africa with a very good infrastructure.

### Succulent Karoo

It describes a special vegetation type. It receives low rainfall in winter and is characterized by dwarf succulent shrubs and an amazing wildflower display in spring. It is a desert to semi-desert environment. Succulent Karoo is found in Namaqualand and southern Namibia. In the FSM-TIMES, the words succulent Karoo and Namaqualand are often used as synonyms.

### Namaqualand

It is situated in the northwest of South Africa, between Cape Town and Namibia. Famous for its wildflower display in spring, Namaqualand was one of the world's most important copper mining areas at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Nowadays the diamond mines are more important. Because of its dry desert like climate, agriculture is mainly absent and population density low. Namaqualand is part of the Northern Cape Province.

## Springbok

It is the capital of Namaqualand. Although Springbok has only around 20 000 inhabitants, it has shops for nearly everything, including two well stocked supermarkets. At weekends Springbok is very busy, when all Namaqualanders come here to do their shopping.

## Goegap Nature Reserve

Pronounced as "Guchap", this nature reserve lays only 20kms outside of Springbok. In spring it is visited by thousands of tourists that are attracted by its wildflower display. During other times of the year it is very quite and mountain zebra, gemsbok, springbok, aardwolf, mice and mice researchers live in peace.

## Field Site

This is the place in nature where the scientist collects his data. So our field site is where we observe the mice

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# NAMAQUALAND-WEATHER

By Edward Yuen

The last three months	January	February	March
Minimum temperatures			
night	7.1	8.7	7.3
day	29.5	31.7	20.7
Maximum temperatures			
night	25.3	17.5	19.7
day	45.7	42.1	43.4
Rainfall in mm	0.6	2.3	2.4
Days with rain	2	2	2

## THE PEOPLE IN GOEGAP

By Ivana Schoepf

The year started well in Goegap. After spending a rather unusual New Year at the Orange River we were glad to be back at the research station. In mid January Ramona's parents, Robert and Lydia Potzinger came all the way from Germany to visit her. They spent nearly 10 days in the reserve, and even though they stayed at the guest house they spent a considerable amount of time here at the research station with us. Both Robert and Lydia were very interested in our work with the mice and we spent many evening conversing with them. They were also very keen in getting to know the reserve and they spent a lot of time hiking and driving around the area. Robert and Lydia are really nice people and we had a great time with them. Those ten days here quickly passed and soon it was time for them and Ramona to head back home. Mirjam also left shortly before for Switzerland, so Ed and I found ourselves alone again. It was somewhat strange (and pleasant) to be alone at the research station for a while. This time around however we had only a couple of days for ourselves as we were soon joined by Jane Remfert, a student from Wisconsin in the USA. Jane worked with rodents before, something that certainly greatly helped her when it came to handle the mice here in the field. However she soon discovered that the mice were far from being as tame and as easy to deal with as her lab rats (after all the rats are bred to be that way, while the mice here are

certainly not!). In less than a week another field assistant came to join us: Maia Olsen from Greenland. Maia proved right from the start to be a very energetic and enthusiastic person. Both Maia and Jane were very keen to learn not just about the mice but also about all the creature great and small in Goegap, and they spend a lot of their weekends exploring the reserve in search of the most elusive creatures. However they soon discovered that to see some of the more shy animals of Goegap they did not need to go that far. In fact as the dry season progressed, we were visited by jackals, wild cats and spotted eagle owls; all attracted by the many mice and bush Karoo rats that were still running around aplenty at the research station. And while Ed was gone (he left for Hong Kong to attend his brother wedding for a couple of weeks – congratulations!) we even had the opportunity to get acquainted with a meerkat, which was left for a couple of days in our care. Soon after the meerkat had left, Carsten also paid us a visit. He arrived at the end of February, and spent a few weeks with us. Though he planned to spend up to a month here, he managed to finish all his work much earlier than he predicted. He then decided, thought he really loved it here, that he would go back to Switzerland a week earlier. This was quite understandable as little Apollo was turning one year old (happy birthday!!!) Even if it was for a short time we all greatly enjoyed

having him here and of course all the

the lekker braais we had together!



The group in March 2007: Carsten Schradin, Edward Yuen, Ivana Schoepf, Maia Olsen und Jane Remfert.

## FROM SEMI-DESERT TO CONCRETE JUNGLE

By Edward Yuen

In February, I had to go back to Hong Kong (HK) to attend my brother's wedding, I was excited to go back to see all my friends and family as I haven't been back for 4 years. However, it also meant that I had to part with the mice in Goegap for two long weeks, which I soon realized, turned out to be much more difficult than I thought.

After 3 days of traveling, I finally arrived in HK, and just like any other city HK is filled with skyscrapers and

many people! Compare to Goegap or Springbok it is quite a contrast. However, that was not the only difference, for instance while I was there, I realized how clear the air in Goegap was. During my stay in HK, I had been able to see my friends and family and had a great time there, but I could not help thinking what was going on in Goegap and how my group 23 was doing. I was often on the phone with Ivana (the research station manager and my girlfriend for

7 years) asking her about the work progress and news in Goegap, and of course how group 23 was doing. I just wished that I could be back sooner. There are just so many wonderful things in Goegap that I missed, the mice of course and all the living things there (except the flies and mosquitoes), the sounds of baboons and jackals, the view from

the veranda of the research station, the amazing night sky, and the "love at first bite" skilpaadjies (liver with fat in the form of tortoises = skilpaadjies in Afrikaans). I mean, HK is a great city for many things and I will be happy to go back soon again. However, for the last six months, Goegap has become my home and I am glad to be back!

## STINKING MONSTER IN GOEGAP

By Jane Remfert

One day a meerkat was brought to the Goegap nature reserve office. It was a very adorable meerkat and it was also extremely tame, indicating that it must have been raised as a pet. It was decided that the meerkat should come to the field station since he would be able to spend most of his time outside and would be able to be more like a meerkat and less like a pet. So, the meerkat--affectionately called 'monster'--came to live with us. He liked to follow us around while we were out in the field. If we walked down a path he would follow close at our heels. I was especially happy about the meerkat because I knew they liked to hunt and eat scorpions. I knew this because the second day I was at the field station I read a field guide about scorpions. I read the field guide about scorpions on the second day I was here because the first night I was here there was a giant scorpion in the kitchen. So, from day two I have been wishing for a meerkat and now I couldn't believe my luck. Unfortunately it quickly became apparent that our meerkat was no hunter. He liked to scratch

### How to become a field assistant?

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.

People interested in working as a field assistant for 2-3 months write an email to [info@stripedmouse.com](mailto:info@stripedmouse.com). Please write a short motivation and attach a CV. You will then obtain more information.



small holes in the dirt but showed little interest in actually hunting, not to mention little aptitude for such an activity. Alright, so he wasn't a hunter but he sure was cute. If we were sitting at the table he liked to crawl up our trouser legs and hug our calves. He liked to hug arms as well. The meerkat had such an affinity for attention and human company that it quickly became clear he would never lose any of his pet-like qualities. However, he seemed happy spending time outside exploring and we enjoyed the company. Of course there are always problems with having wild animals as pets....After a few days we realized that our 'monster' should really be renamed 'little stinker'. The little guy liked to mark his territory, a lot. He seemed to think it was necessary to scent the table legs and our shoes many, many times. But 'little stinker' was still awfully cute and he didn't smell bad when he was outside. One Saturday I was taking a nap when I was abruptly awoken as a meerkat jumped on to my bed. Up until that point I didn't think he could jump that high. I thought it was funny and laughed at 'little stinker' as he ran across my bed but I quickly put him on the floor because I did not want to encourage this behavior. Since I was then awake, I went outside to finish some of my field work. It was a hot, sunny day and as I was working I caught a whiff of 'little stinker's scent. Hmm...strange since I am outside....I noticed that the scent was especially strong when the wind blew my hair in my face. It then occurred to me that in the brief time 'little stinker' had been on my bed he had managed to scent my hair.

Ugh....I thought with the wind and the sun surely the smell will soon go away.....three hours later the scent of the beast had given me a headache and I was starting to get nauseated. The simple solution, of course, would be to go in and wash my hair.....and the plot thickens....so the night before all the field assistants had gathered around the lap top computer to watch IT. We were part way through when one of the field assistants came back from the bathroom saying that there was blood and fur coming from the sink faucet (especially freaky after watching a slightly similar scene in IT). It seems as though a mouse had gotten in to the water pipes and died. Lovely. Now I had the scent of meerkat in my hair and had the option of smelling like meerkat or washing my hair with water of questionable contents. I finally ended up washing my hair in the kitchen sink (different water tank and pipes) and life was good again. A few days later the meerkat was taken to a nature reserve further north where they have a rehabilitation program. We miss the company and entertainment but we know that he is much better off where he is. As all this happened on the weekend we had to wait until Monday to have someone look at the pipes. It turns out there were two dead mice in the pipes. We have since drained both water tanks, refilled them and added chlorine to be sure the water is sanitized. Life at the research station can be relaxing and seemingly simple but there are occasional moments of amusement and drama.



Sinker (left) marking Jane's (right) hair.

## GETTING TO KNOW THE MICE

By Maia Olsen

When I first came to Goegap, my prior experience with mice amounted to looking at mice in an arena at school and seeing a few dead mice. I had no idea what to expect from the striped mice other than what I had learned from the homepage and the articles I read. Had I come upon a real living mouse in Copenhagen, I would have been very excited.

It was overwhelming to take my first walk around the research station and see all the mice that seemed to be everywhere. Every time I turned a corner, the mice would be there, scattering all the ways of the wind. I was very excited, as I am sure the rest of the staff could tell from my enthusiastic shrieks.

It didn't take Ivana and Ed very long to drag me out into the field site to see the actual mice that I was supposed to work with. Now, the mice are very cute and very relaxed about us tramping around in their territories, but they certainly do not

appreciate being handled by us! Ed showed me the basics of holding a mouse and I stared at the little thing, fascinated with how close I finally was to wild living mice. Then I was ready to try myself! Unfortunately, it is not as easy as Ed made it seem. It is very hard to find that certain balance between holding them tight enough so that they cannot bite you and not so tight so as to make their eyes pop out of their little heads. A technique obviously exists, since Goegap is not flooded with exploded mice, but every person has to learn his or her own way. This entails getting bitten a few times, unfortunately. But finally, after 5 weeks I might add, I seem to be getting the hang of it! Note please: even the best mouse grabber can still get bitten from time to time. Now, seeing a mouse, or even grabbing them, is part of daily life and has gotten a touch of routine, but the mice never cease to amaze!

They have so many different personalities among them, and it is always a pleasure to get to know them. Take, for instance, the group I have been observing for some time now. Group 20 consists of 8 mice at the moment, and they all have different personalities. The alpha male is a raisin loving giant of approximately 70 g, who you can find almost everywhere in the field site--if bait is near by. And he will go far to get his bait. He sometimes comes up to me, during my observations, and once he actually succeeded in climbing my leg. He celebrated by biting my finger to see if I was a raisin. He is not happy about being held either, but will tolerate it, if given a raisin.

The older of the females is a cunning one. She has learned to open the metal traps after she has gotten the bait inside, and she will not enter a plastic trap. She often sits by herself and chews on grass as I observe her.

The female that has a blond backside is a real fighter. She is not very big, but will chase away any mouse she does not know in a second. She even tried to jump on a bush karoo rat once (three times bigger than her!), but, lucky for her, it

was already on its way home. Everybody in the group likes this female, and she always has somebody to sit next to during group huddling.

Also included in the group is a small female with a red head. She is a fragile little one who is always ready to jump to safety, should she hear something out of the ordinary.

The smallest of the group is male 2927. He never seems to get any bigger or any brighter for that matter. He grooms himself a lot, especially his hind legs. Sometimes he holds out one of his hind legs, as if he is pretending to play the guitar. Only problem is, he rarely seems to be able to keep his balance when doing this. Once he fell over, scaring everybody of the group, himself included.

Even though you learn the basic characteristics of striped mice, there is always a difference between the individuals. Some will bite you before you have a chance to get your hand around them and some will not bite you even though your hand is right in front of their nose. Either way, the variety within the striped mice and getting to know them individually will never cease to amaze me.

## 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

### Homepage Statistics

Due to the striped mouse occurring on TV (see below) our homepage was visited more often than normally. In fact, January was the first month ever that more than 3000 people visited our homepage. They also spent more time on it than normally. This indicates that it was really new visitors to stripedmouse.com that did not know our homepage so far.

However, statistics proved that the term entered into Google that most often lead to our homepage, was the same as the months before. And this was not striped mouse or mouse, but puff adder! So it was time to offer more information about reptiles in general (the title in this issue) and about puff adders in particular. This is now available at our homepage: <http://www.stripedmouse.com>.

	January	February	March	Total last quarter
Visits of stripedmouse.com	3177	3458	3819	10454
Downloads FSM-TIMES, SGM-Spiegel	450	250	401	1101

## TITLE: A STORY OF DESERT-DRAGONS AND ENCHANTED PRINCES OF SAND: REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS IN GOEGAP

By Tobias Feldt

As a faithful reader of this newsletter you certainly know that the striped mouse is the indisputable star in our field site and the central figure of our scientific desire. However, the Goegap Nature Reserve offers much more than "just mice". Besides mammals, birds and insects there

are also representatives of two already quite old taxonomic groups living here, not only just inside the reserve but sometimes also, very close to us, inside our research station: altogether 65 species of reptiles and amphibians are recorded or possibly occurring in

Goegap. Some of them are hardly endangered but others can become very dangerous by themselves. It is not surprising that there are so many different reptiles – altogether 61 species – occurring in this area because like no other animal group they are implicated to extremely dry and hostile habitats like the Succulent Karoo. Unfortunately, in this article it is not possible to describe them all so let us then concentrate on some characteristic representatives.<sup>1</sup>

### Snakes (*Serpentes*)

In Goegap, snakes are certainly the type of reptiles which are attracting the most attention, at least if you are lucky enough to see them. For this reason there have already been a few FSM-Times-reports dealing with specific members of this group which shows the considerable interest people having in them, as well in a positive and negative way. And so questions like "Are there many snakes around here?" and "Has something ever happened?" are commonly asked by field assistants arriving at the research station for the first time. In fact, the reserve is home to some of the most poisonous African snakes which are well known for causing serious accidents all over the southern continent. But fortunately, incidents like these are hardly reported from Goegap and most visitors' won't even see a snake from a distance because they avoid humans whenever they can. Unfortunately, it is not the same with our mice which are a favoured prey for these reptiles and it is absolutely

<sup>1</sup> according to the species list of the Goegap Nature Reserve

possible that, by doing radio tracking, you are following a snake, and not a mouse, but with a mouse inside.



A puff adder eats a striped mouse

The **puff adder** (*Bitis lachesis*) is one of the most dangerous snakes occurring in Goegap. Although its venom is weaker than that of the cobras and mambas it accounts for 60 % of serious snake bites in southern Africa due to its wide area of circulation and frequency. Besides, this thick and heavily built adder, which can grow between 1 and 1.5 m on average, is a comparatively sluggish snake. It does not crawl away in cases of trouble but relies on its perfect camouflage and usually issues a warning by giving a deep, hollow hiss which gave the snake its name. Anyway, people often step onto, or close to, puff adders and then get bitten. At dusk you can sometimes watch these as well diurnal as nocturnal reptiles lying on streets and roads to receive the last warm energy of the day.



The puff adder is very poisonous and one should not touch her !!!



The puff adder in her natural habitat

Considerably more poisonous than the puff adder is the **Cape cobra** (*Naja nivea*) whose venom is as toxic as the black mamba's. Without immediate treatment its bite can

cause human death within an hour. Fortunately, encounters with this relatively small (1.5 m on average) and slender cobra are quite rare despite its wide area of circulation.

And who is moving around attentively and thinking of some precautionary measures like wearing

long trousers and sturdy shoes should absolutely not be worried about working in our field site.



The Cape cobra is the most poisonous snake in Namaqualand.

The **black spitting cobra** (*Naja nigricollis*) is well known for the ability to eject its venom over a distance of about two meters making direct hits. There are only three other snakes in southern Africa doing so and some of them are even able to spit about four (!) meters. Growing

up to 2 m this dark coloured cobra has an impressive appearance especially if – encountered and defending – it gets into a reared position while exposing its hood. In such a situation it is a blessing if you are wearing glasses.



If you get the strange idea that you want to catch a spitting cobra, you better wear a mask to protect your eyes.



*The spitting cobra.*

Because of its dark colour and similar length, the **mole snake** (*Pseudaspis cana*) is often confused with black spitting cobras. But in contrast to them, this snake is harmless although large adults may inflict a painful bite while defending

themselves. The mole snake spends most of its time underground searching for food. Here it pushes its way through soft sand using its pointed snout in search of rodents and – of course – moles.



*The mole snake looks similar to the spitting cobra but is not poisonous*

Lizards (Lacertilia)

While the snakes are shy and can hardly be spotted, the lizards appear much more conspicuous on the field site. Up to 34 species of skinks, lizards, agamas, chameleons and geckos may occur in Goegap and some of them are part of our daily life like the striped mice, bush Karoo rats and elephant shrews.

So are in particular the geckos which are famous for their ability to “stick” to seemingly smooth surfaces thanks to their unique toe-tips. These are covered with groups of scales with tiny hairs and by this amplify the attractive forces between the surface and the animal. From the beginning of spring numerous **Bibron’s**

**geckos** (*Pachydactylus bibronii*) come close to our research station for foraging. When it is getting dark these normally nocturnal animals start sitting on walls, doors, windows and even underneath ceilings waiting for insects – especially moths – which are attracted by the inside lights. When the temperature rises more and more of them are showing up slowly “taking over” the research station. Through small chinks or short-time opened doors and windows they easily get inside the house so that in a sudden you have to share your room with a new roommate which from now on will enrich your sleep with its social interactive chirping sounds.



*Gecko in the hand, on the window, on the wall.*

The **Namaqua sand lizards** (*Pedioplanis namaquensis*) are not as confiding as the geckos but unlike them they are omnipresent in the field site during daytime. Contrary to their name these slender and amazingly fast lizards which grow only up to 500 mm from the snout to the beginning of the long tail also occur in the Western Cape and parts of Namibia and Botswana. Sometimes it seems as if they are absolutely unable to stand still and in fact they are always ready for a little

race against these strange big bipeds sometimes coming along the sandy paths. Like many lizards this species also has a colourful tail which it can shed when being attacked by a predator and which will grow again later on. Another remarkable characteristic you can usually watch them waving one of their forelegs, either to cool them down on the hot desert-sand or as a kind social interaction with their conspecifics.



*Namaqua sand lizard*

There are also a few skinks living in Goegap at which the comparatively large **western three-striped skink** (*Mabuya Occidentalis*) certainly is one of the most conspicuous. Unlike most of the other skink species this bronze-coloured reptile with the three distinctive white stripes on the

back still develops full legs and so looks more like a "real" lizard. Although it is normally feeding on insects it also seems to like the bait we are using to trap the mice. And so it sometimes happens that you don't find a mouse or another rodent

inside the trap but one of these scaled fellows, what a nice change!



But certainly the large **southern rock agama** (*Agama atra*) is the most beautiful reptile occurring in Goegap. Especially the breeding males – appearing in shiny blue with a bright stripe on the back – are very conspicuous and even attract attention in the colourful period of the wildflower display in spring. But also the females with their orange-yellow

body and greenish-blue head are an optical pleasure. Thereby, both sexes are able to change their colour to improve their camouflage. This agama also shows a very interesting territorial behaviour: they maintain comparatively large territories inside which males and females form well-defined hierarchies so that there is always a dominant male and female.

The dominant male usually perches on the highest point of his territory, push-up-like nodding his brightly coloured head as a signal for lesser males but also females. Looking at their size it is finally remarkable that the subspecies *Agama atra knobelli* which occurs in northern parts of Namaqualand and southern Namibia and grows up to 140 mm without the tail becomes noticeably larger in

both sexes than its relatives which you can find throughout most parts of South Africa. Obviously, living inside a semi-desert like the Succulent Karoo is not as bad as it seems. By the way, there is a big disadvantage for agamas but also chameleons and monitors compared to other types of lizards because unlike them a tail which was once shed will never grow again.



Male rock agama

Tortoises (*Testudinata*)

The last group of reptiles you can find in Goegap are the tortoises. There are five species living here at which the **Cape terrapin** (*Pelomedusa subrufa*) is not yet recorded but may possibly occur in the nature reserve. Certainly the most well known is the **leopard tortoise** (*Geochelone pardalis*) but you should also not forget about the

**speckled padloper** (*Homopus signatus*): measuring just 80 to 100 mm, this is the world's smallest tortoise and endemic to the Namaqualand and northern parts of the Western Cape. However, it is not easy at all to spot a tortoise inside the nature reserve but sometimes you can see them on the road between Goegap and Springbok ... hopefully still alive.



The smallest tortoise of the world lives in Namaqualand

**Amphibians**

Not as common as reptiles are their herpetological relatives, the amphibians. This is not very surprising as their evolution is bounded to the few permanent or at least periodic waterholes and springs you can find in Goegap. For this reason there are only four species recorded or possibly occurring in this area, all of them belonging to the order *Anura*:

- **platanna** (*Xenopus laevis*),
- **Karoo toad** (*Bufo gariiepensis*),
- **Cape river frog** (*Afrana fuscilgula*),
- **Namaqua-caco** (*Cacosternum namaquense*).

But even these few specialists which have become adapted to this hostile habitat during their evolution will hardly be seen in our field site which is way to dry for them to survive. But whoever is hiking through other parts of the reserve looking out for small pools or rills may have a good chance to spot a frog or a toad, either full-grown or still as a tadpole. By the way, so far it has never been reported if a "nice handled" desert-

frog will transform into a prince or just into a small heap of sand.



Tadpoles in a waterhole

As you see, Goegap has not just much going for mice but also for reptiles and amphibians and thus is worth a trip from a herpetological point of view, too.

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## NEWS AND INFORMATION ABOUT PLANTS AND ANIMALS

### MOUSE PORTRAIT: MALE 631

By Carsten Schradin

<b>Mother:</b> ?	<b>Father:</b> ?
<b>Date of birth:</b> 2004	<b>Date of death:</b> December 2005
<b>Age:</b> >1 year	<b>Cause of death:</b> unknown, disappeared
<b>Partners:</b> F894, 946, 988	<b>Immigrant!</b>
<b>Children:</b> 8 sons, 9 daughters	<b>Grand-children:</b> 56
<b>F: Female, M: Male</b>	

M631 was a typical breeding male: Big (that is fat) and impressive. Just the way one would picture a guy with a harem. But he was also friendly and nice, no macho but a softie! This is typical for the breeding males of striped mice. And this is what makes them so different when compared to house mouse males. Both species have a very similar social system: communal groups with several breeding females but only one breeding male, adult offspring that can stay at home. In both species the breeding males are the largest and strongest group members. But while the house mouse male is rather solitary, having few if any amicable relationships with other group members, the striped mouse male is the nicest member of the group. He greets all other group members at the nest and he shares the nest with them. The grumpy house mouse male typically sleeps

alone, away from the communal nest.

I trapped M631 the first time end of January 2005 at group 4. He weight 43g, so he must have been born the breeding season of 2004. Probably he emigrated from a non studied group living further up the dry riverbed. He was observed for some time at group 4, even though this group had already a very large breeding male, M527. So M631 did not stay there for long, but traveled around until he finally settled at group 5. Group 5 had three breeding females but no breeding male, so he made a good choice. He spent the entire breeding season 2005 with this group and had many children. End of December 2005 we found his transmitters only 5 meters away from his nest. He was never seen again and probably had been eaten by a jackal.

### INSECT PORTRAIT: STRIPED TOKTOKKIE (*PSAMMODES STRIATUS*)

By Stella Miranda Treffler

There is one beetle you will meet often in Goegap: The Striped Toktokkie (family *Tenebrionidae*), a stout, globular, black insect with a



body length of 24mm. It is a very slow moving beetle, which you sometimes meet even motionless. Its pronotum is smooth, but has some puncturing at sides. The elytra is also smooth with longitudinal reddish lines. You can know the males by a yellow felt patch under abdomen. They use this part of their body to knock on the desert floor. The knocking noise is attracting females. The yellow larvae are found under rocks. This ground-living animal is widespread, especially in arid and desert areas like the semi-desert Karoo.

### GECKOPORTRAIT: INTRODUCTION

Von Ramona Pöttinger

Geckos are the most diverse family of reptiles in southern Africa, with 89 species (68 of which are endemic) in 15 genera (six of which are endemic) occurring in the sub-region. In Goegap, five species are already recorded and six more are possibly occurring here.

This family of unusual lizards has an amazing array of feet and eyes. The toe-tips of many species have groups of scales with minute hairs. These unique scales are called scansors and allow them to stick to seemingly smooth surfaces. The different species and genera are easily identified by their feet. Their eyes are usually large, with complicated pupils that dilate widely at night and close to pin-pricks

during the day. Most lack movable eyelids; these have become fused and transparent. To keep this clean, they lick it with their long, fat tongue. Although a few geckos are diurnal, most are nocturnal. They can withstand much lower temperatures than most other lizards, and live in a large variety of different habitats; they are most common in deserts. Many have adapted well to urbanization and live in homes and factories. All are oviparous and usually lay two eggs. They store calcium for the eggshells in neck glands (endolymphatic sacs). Many live in colonies and have developed sounds which allow them to communicate in the dark.

The five species that are already recorded in Goegap are the Bibron's Thick-toed Gecko, the Marico Thick-toed Gecko, the Rough-scaled Gecko, the Common Barking Gecko and the Giant Ground Gecko.

The six possibly occurring species are the African flat Gecko, the Western Cape Gecko, the Western Spotted Thick-toed Gecko, the Weber's Thick-toed Gecko, the Namaqua Day Gecko and the Striped Dwarf Leaf-toed Gecko.

From the next issues of the FSM-TIMES on one species after another will be described.

## CONFERENCES, PRESENTATIONS AND PUBLICATIONS

### PUBLICATIONS

By Carsten Schradin

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of January the visitors to the website of the University of Zurich were greeted by a striped mouse. The main story of *unipublic* was about our research program. The article is still available online, though only in German: <http://www.unipublic.unizh.ch/magazin/umw/elt/2007/2422.html>.

Only a few weeks later we were again at the front of the University

webpage, this time with a report about the book on animal fathers. This book was also reviewed by the *Tagesanzeiger*, Switzerland's most read daily newspaper. The book was also the topic of a small broadcast on Swiss radio DRS2.

### STRIPED MOUSE SOON ON TV

By Carsten Schradin

A small documentary about our work on the striped mouse was shown on Swiss TV 1 on the 4<sup>th</sup> of January on the program MTW. You can still watch this documentary on the internet, when visiting our homepage [www.stripedmouse.com](http://www.stripedmouse.com) (go to videos). Here you can even watch an English version of the broadcast, that

was shown worldwide on Deutsche Welle TV. Furthermore, the documentary was also shown on several channels in Germany, including 3Sat. Altogether, a few million people watched this documentary about our work on the striped mouse.

## FUNDING OF RESEARCH: CALL FOR DONATIONS

### CALL FOR DONATIONS 2007

By Carsten Schradin

We would very much appreciate any donation you can make 2007 to support our projects. In 2007, we will establish a second field site on a farm next to Goegap. At this field site we will do experiments such as extending the breeding season. Ivana Schoepf, the research station

manager until June this year, will start here own studies there in August, hopefully leading to a PhD. As doubling the field sites means doubling the costs, all donations are more than welcome. Account details are given below.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are very grateful to the following people who donated and whose assistance contributed to the continuation of our research project.

**Marc Tschudin**, Zurich, Switzerland. Donation of 500 Swiss Franks (305 Euro).

**Wolfgang and Marlie Ortmann**, Germany. Donation of 90 Euro.

**Vontobel-Stiftung** Switzerland: The foundation of the Vontobel Bank in Zurich, Switzerland, supports the research project "Endocrine mechanisms of social flexibility in a mammal" from Dr. C. Schradin with a research grant of CHF 27 600 (ca. Rand 165 000, Euro 17 250). In this project, hormones will be measured from striped mice in Goegap that follow different social strategies. We will also compare hormone levels between the breeding season and the dry season. Furthermore, new assays for the hormones prolactin and estrogen will be established.

## 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.

### Account details

South Africa  
Standard Bank  
Branch: Braamfontein  
Account name: Wits University  
Foundation  
Account No.: 002900076  
Branch code: 004805  
Swift code: SB ZAZ AJJ 00480502  
Please state L.2112 as reference.

Germany  
Carsten Schradin, KSK Esslingen,  
BLZ 611 500 20, Konto Nr. 7434686

Switzerland (deposits in Switzerland)  
Postkonto 80-643-0  
Finanzabteilung der Universität  
Zürich, 8001 Zürich  
Reference: Kreditnummer 37202508,  
Projekt Striemengrasmaus  
(it is very important that you state the  
Kreditnummer)

Switzerland (deposits from abroad)  
Zürcher Kantonalbank, Hauptsitz,  
CH-8010 Zürich  
Account No: 1100-0109-594 (BC 700)  
Finanzabteilung der Universität  
Zürich, 8001 Zürich  
Swift-Code: ZKBKCHZZ80A  
IBAN: CH51 0070 0110 0001 0959 4  
Reference: Kreditnummer 37202508,  
Projekt Striemengrasmaus  
(it is very important that you state the  
Kreditnummer).

## THE MOUSE'S TAIL

### WILDCAT AT RESEARCH STATION

In February an African wildcat started to use the verandah of the research station as its daily resting point. The population of wild mice around the research station declined drastically. Still, the verandah was not supposed to be a wildcat shelter and the cat was chased away. We anyway needed the verandah for an

experiment with mice from our captive colony. But even though we tried to close the verandah as good as possible, the wildcat regarded our captive mice as her food storage and invaded the verandah at night. Though no physical harm was done to the mice, they had to be moved elsewhere.

### JACKALS

The good rains the last 2 years did not only lead to an increase of the rodent population, but also their predators. On a night drive we saw 5

jackals at different places, and at night one hears them howling very close to the research station.

### MOUNTAIN ZEBRAS EVERYWHERE

In former years the students had to be happy when they saw the mountain zebras ones during their 3-6 months stay. But now during the dry season one can see them nearly

daily next to the road to the gate. On some days there might be even two groups, only 1km apart from one another in the Goegap plains.

### COMING UP IN THE NEXT FSM-TIMES

The main story in the next FSM-TIMES will be about *Ecology and Management of the Succulent Karoo*.

### SGM-SPIEGEL

The FSM-TIMES is also published in German, as the SGM-SPIEGEL. If you want to receive the German version, write an email to: [info@stripedmouse.com](mailto:info@stripedmouse.com), please write „SGM-SPIEGEL Abo“ in the subject of your email