



Desert Research at Gobabeb

Peter Tarr

THE Desert Ecological Research Unit of Namibia (DERUN) is situated at Gobabeb on the banks of the Kuiseb River in the Namib-Naukluft Park. Founded in 1959 by the South African entomologist Dr Charles Koch, DERUN is one of the best known desert research institutions in the world. It attracts an impressive selection of international arid-land scientists, who find the spectacular scenery at Gobabeb a highly conducive environment in which to pursue their academic activities. Shifting sand dunes, vast gravel plains and the vegetated Kuiseb River, which represent the three major habitats of the desert, are a short walk from the station and provide the perfect outdoor laboratory.

Over the last three decades, local and visiting researchers have marvelled at the array of adaptations displayed by specialised desert organisms and the Institute has accumulated a wealth of knowledge about the world's, oldest desert. Research topics have included studies on the age of the Namib, dune dynamics, water-organism relationships, and more

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academic endeavours such as waxy blooms on beetles and the absurd techniques which animals and plants have developed to cope with life in this hyper-arid environment.

In recent years DERUN has branched into the field of Environmental Education. Its Enviroteach programme translates bookshelves of scientific literature into teacher resource materials and worksheets which enrich the minds of young Namibians throughout the country.

DERUN is a non-governmental organisation of international repute, operating in a unique complex administered by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism. This joint endeavour of enquiry and information exchange is one of Namibia's great assets.

Although Gobabeb is not open to the general public, special "open days" provide people with an opportunity to visit the station and learn from the scientists who work there. DERUN is headed by Dr Mary Seely who has lived at Gobabeb for nearly thirty years.

