



Namib-Naukluft Park

Wildlife wonders

Big mammals include gemsbok, springbok, greater kudu, warthog, and giraffe. Hartmann's mountain zebra are the largest of Southern Africa's three races of zebra and occur only in western Namibia and southern Angola. The Naukluft massif was proclaimed as a park in 1968 specifically to protect them. On cold mornings they congregate on east-facing slopes to sun themselves. They are most active at dawn and dusk, spending the heat of the day in shade. They must drink daily and dig for water if necessary. Game viewing is at its best in the northern section of the park after summer rains result in lush grass. Large herds of animals congregate at this time. Game is less often encountered in the southern portion of the park and the mountains.

They're back and black! Today Namibia has more black rhinos than any other country in the world. Early European explorers reported encountering elephant, lion and black rhino in these surroundings. The lion and elephant

are gone but nearly 30 years after the species became locally extinct, nine black rhino were successfully re-introduced by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) as a 2007 centenary gift to the park. Black rhino are capable of digesting euphorbia twigs that contain a milky sap toxic to most animals (including man). Burnt twigs produce smoke that can cause blindness.

What are horses doing here? The Namib-Naukluft Park is also home to Namibia's only population of wild horses, probably descendants of animals used, then released, by the German colonial forces in the late 1800s and early 20th century. Their only permanent source of water is at the windmill at Garub. Drive carefully at night on the tarred road from Aus to Lüderitz. After drought, death on the road is the main cause of desert-horse mortality.

The NNP large predator niche is filled by brown and spotted hyaena, occasional cheetah, secretive leopard, black-



backed jackal, caracal, bat-eared fox, and African wild cat. Mongoose and suricate (meerkats) are more likely to be seen. The larger predators are mainly nocturnal.

Baboons thrive in the cliffs and valleys of the Naukluft massif but battle with drought and hostile conditions in the dry riverbeds on the Namib plains. Baboons here sometimes go for months without drinking (116 days is the current record). Their body temperatures may fluctuate by 5–6 degrees in a day and can reach 42°C. This lifestyle would prove fatal to human beings.

This is definitely reptile country. As night falls, listen for the chirrups of barking geckos using their burrows as amplifiers. Check dunes for the side-winding tracks of the endemic Peringuey's adder. Web-footed geckos use their long tongues to wipe fog-borne moisture from their noses and heads. Shovel-snouted sand lizards perform an entertaining dance, lifting their feet to avoid over-exposure to baking sand. Watch for chameleons staking out their territories beneath bushes.

Scurrying above, burrowing below – life in the dunes

Millions of years of wind have polished the dune-sand particles into minute spheres that rub against each other but don't congeal. Effectively the sand behaves like a fluid. Many creatures simply dive in to escape surface extremes of temperature or predators. There is enough air between the sand particles to enable the 'swimmers' to breathe. Many of the planet's deserts are relatively lifeless but due to the Namib's great age (45 million years), its

inhabitants have had a long time to adapt! Condensation from sea fog sustains plant and insect life, noteworthy being the many species of tenebrionid ('tok tokkie') beetles that feed on plant detritus and stand on their heads to collect fog water that then dribbles into their mouths. An unusual subterranean predator is Grant's golden mole. Termites make up to 95% of its diet, though it also hunts other insects and occasionally eats small reptiles.

Insects and arachnids are numerous and include tree scorpions, pseudoscorpions and the mouse-sized soilfluges that race around campfires at high speed snatching up insects attracted by the light. Avoid camping directly under trees as these are favoured areas for mites that suck the blood of animals seeking shade.

Frogs are understandable in the Naukluft mountain pools but also occur in unexpected places. Capable of lying dormant for years, they emerge from their burrows when occasional rain floods pans, most notably Sossusvlei.

Dune plants include the !nara melon, which, while bitter, is extremely nutritious and an important food source for both wildlife and the resident Topnaar community, who roast its seeds. Succulents and aloes thrive on the inselbergs.

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Environmental Care Code

Please adhere to the following:

- **Stay on existing roads and tracks. The lichen and gravel plains are extremely fragile and tyre tracks can last for hundreds of years.**
- **Note that the collection of animals, plants and minerals is prohibited in all Namibian parks.**
- **Take precautions to avoid disturbing nesting raptors if mountain climbing. Lappet-faced vultures are particularly prone to panic.**
- **Adhere to the rules and regulations listed on your park permit.**

Enjoy the wonders of this vast, fascinating park.

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