

TRAINING UPDATES

Gobabeb runs a number of training programmes, aimed at all educational levels from Primary learners to graduate and postgraduate students. Here we provide updates on some of these.

YES, we can!

Science in the Sand Sea: the fourth Youth Environmental Summit ... at Sossusvlei

Robert Logan

Gobabeb hosted its fourth Youth Environmental Summit (YES) from 4–11 May 2014, focused on the recently inscribed Namib Sand Sea World Heritage Site. With generous support from the Finnish Embassy's Fund for Local Cooperation, the programme brought together 31 secondary school learners and six teachers from seven schools in Omusati, Khomas, Hardap, and ||Karas Regions to participate in a week of intensive field research at Sossusvlei under the guidance of Gobabeb researchers. Thanks to substantial support from various partners, this was the first YES to be hosted off-site from Gobabeb.

The YES programme was initiated in 2012 with funding from the Embassy of Finland's Fund for Local Cooperation, with whom Gobabeb has been working closely since 2006. Held during the May and August school holidays, it is designed to inspire young learners to become interested in scientific and environmental careers and studies, while teaching basic principles of the scientific method. Each YES has a specific content theme; previous YESs have focused on "understanding the EIA process" (Aug 2012), "biodiversity and climate change" (May 2013), and "desertification and land degradation" (Aug 2013). Learners work in small groups with Gobabeb staff throughout the week to answer scientific questions related to the theme. At the end of the week, the learners present their findings in a creative seminar that involves songs, role-plays, and formal displays to Gobabeb staff, invited guests, and the general public.

In recognition of the June 2013 inscription of the Namib Sand Sea as Namibia's second UNESCO World Heritage Site (WHS), the theme for this YES was Namib Sand Sea: Our heritage, our pride; Gobabeb is the designated monitoring centre for this WHS. Over the course of the week, learners and teachers worked in three teams, each studying a specific aspect of biodiversity or human impact in the WHS. Over the eight-day programme, participants spent a cumulative 3300+ hours collecting, analysing, and presenting data from the field.



The YES also involved six teachers and one environmental educator from the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, who interacted with learners during the week. Here, Mr. Derick Simasiku from Khomas High School in Windhoek helps learners Fenny Akwaake and Rejoice Haindongo prepare for their final presentation.

The learners' final seminar presentation on 10 May at Sesriem Camp was attended by the Ambassador of Finland, Her Excellency Ms Anne Saloranta, and representatives from the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET); Ministry of Education; Ministry of Youth, National Service, Sport, and Culture (MYNSSC); National Committee for World Heritage; Namibia Wildlife Resorts (NWR); NamibRand Nature Reserve; and the Environmental Investment Fund of Namibia.

This YES was implemented as a true partnership between Gobabeb and key stakeholder organisations. An expert from the MYNSSC and the National Committee for World Heritage served as resource person, giving substantial background on World Heritage Sites, in general, and the Outstanding Universal Value of the recent UNESCO inscription, in particular. The MET was a valued partner during the YES, facilitating access to the Namib- Naukluft Park, providing transportation for the participants and the assistance of an environmental educator from the Department of Environmental Affairs. Namibia Wildlife Resorts provided tremendous support through accommodation, transport, and access to many of their facilities at Sesriem Camp during the week, without which, the YES could not have occurred at Sossusvlei

The studies:

The **Biodiversity Team** studied the diverse and endemic plants and animals living in the various ecosystems of the sand sea near Sossusvlei. Learners conducted surveys of vegetation and animals living in the dunes, on the plains between the dunes, and in the Tsauchab River, identifying over 40 species of plants and animals. They measured various abiotic factors that influence life in the desert, and observed adaptations for surviving in an arid environment.

Team Waste studied the generation and handling of solid waste and rubbish in the Sossusvlei/Sesriem areas and impacts on the park's wildlife. They quantified the amount of rubbish generated at the site during an average week, conducted surveys with tourists about their waste generation, and monitored how wildlife behavior is changed by poor waste management.

The **Surface Scar Team** examined the ecological and aesthetic impact of off-road driving and hiking in and around the dunes. They measured vegetation in different areas and found that reckless and unmonitored trampling and driving can leave long-lasting scars on the landscape that decrease its beauty while damaging plant communities.

Participating schools:

- Angra Penquera Senior Secondary School (Lüderitz)
- Dr. Lemmer Secondary School (Rehoboth)
- J.A. Nel Secondary School (Keetmanshoop)
- Karasburg High School (Karasburg)
- Negumbo Senior Secondary School (Onaanda)
- Khomas High School (Windhoek)
- Hochland High School (Windhoek)



The Ambassador of Finland with learners, teachers and Gobabeb staff relaxing on a dune for a sundowner on the final day. The YES was funded with substantial support from the Finnish Embassy's Fund for Local Cooperation.