

Nature *walk*

in the Namib- Naukluft Park



the starting point of the trail. Besides attractive scenery, these different landscape features provide a variety of habitats for the abundant wildlife residing in this part of the Namib.

After the rainy season you might be lucky to see large herds of springbok, gemsbok, ostrich and sometimes zebra. However, at all times of the year, you must pay attention to smaller forms of life, such as the birds, lizards, geckoes, insects and plants which are always there, no less intriguing than the larger game, but often overlooked by the casual observer. Walking gives you a chance to observe many of these animals and plants closely.

Numerous facets of desert ecology can be witnessed first-hand. Just imagine the different forms of plant-animal interactions, such as plant pollinators and plant feeders, you will be amongst. You might notice the sweet scent of some flowers which attract insects, or the strong-smelling leaves of many desert plants which serve to deter grazing and browsing animals. Spines and prickles designed for the same purpose will probably not arouse your joyous excitement if you come into contact with them while walking!

Observe unique forms of mimicry or camouflage designed

Those who love the desert and like to revel in its harshness and beauty should consider experiencing this terrain on foot. It is certainly one of the most sensitive ways to observe the arid environment and its uniquely adapted fauna and flora.

Hiking today receives more attention than ever before. There are a number of trails and nature walks in Namibian parks, one of these being located in the far north eastern corner of the Namib-

Naukluft Park at Tinkas. Although set up by the Ministry of Wildlife, Conservation and Tourism a few years ago, the Tinkas Nature Walk has not yet been hiked by many people.

The Tinkas flats are part of the Namib Plains, but form a transitional area to the foothills of the Great Western Escarpment. At first glance they appear rather barren and flat, but once you start walking you realise there are hills, channels and river valleys that have to be traversed to get back to



to deter or distract possible animal predators. The “stonehopper”, a type of wingless grasshopper, for example, can only be detected when it moves. The lucky tourist might also be able to catch a glimpse of the desert food chain, observing lizards catching insects, and the lizard in turn being caught by a solifuge, a spider-like creature that is active during the day. Most of the insects and many geckoes and lizards are active in daylight, showing interesting adaptations in their behaviour and metabolism, designed to bypass the hottest time of the day – for example, climbing up onto plants to cool off in the air above the soil surface. An equal number are only active at night thus avoiding the heat of the day entirely – such as the barking gecko. This noisy fellow starts his

unmistakable calling shortly after sunset. It can be compared to rapidly clicking stones and is certainly one of the most characteristic sounds of the Namib.

The Tinkas hike takes you through a tributary of the Onanis River, which houses a series of permanent springs. The water and vegetation of this area are the main attractions for wildlife, especially birds. Apart from common desert inhabitants, such as the Namaqua

sandgrouse, Pale-winged starlings and Rock kestrels, one can spot Black-winged stilts, Double-banded plovers, Redheaded finches and Namaqua doves at the waterholes. Larger game, such as ostriches, gemsbok and springbok, will also visit the waterholes, usually in the early and late hours of the day. While walking along, the shrieking chatter of lovebirds and the cooing of Laughing doves and Rock pigeons will



Top: The hiking trail leads past interesting rock formations, such as these basalt columns.

Right: Springbok can often be seen on the plains.

Left: Permanent springs result in large stands of sedges and attract a variety of wildlife.



The careful observer will notice the abundance of cryptic wildlife, such as this remarkably well-camouflaged toad grasshopper, commonly referred to as “stonehopper”.

accompany you, as will the friendly Mountain chat, which never misses a chance to investigate who is sharing its territory.

Under most special circumstances, such as we experienced after a heavy thunderstorm in this area, even pelicans cross the desert – probably on their way to the Etosha Pan – and were observed resting in Acacia trees. This is an

unusual sight but not a mirage, as we first thought.

Whatever you see and encounter on this four / five hour walk will reward you for all the exercise. You will undoubtedly appreciate a cool beer and comparing nature notes back at one of the area’s three scenic camp sites. If you listen carefully to the sounds of the desert night, geckos will be barking and owls calling, zebras galloping past and jackals and

hyenas howling.

The Namib-Naukluft Park is one of the few truly unspoiled wildernesses on earth, and it should be treated with respect. Vehicle tracks in the desert can last for centuries, thus visitors should refrain from disfiguring the natural landscapes by driving their 4x4s “cross country”. Besides aesthetic reasons, one should remember that most seemingly lifeless desert shrubs took hundreds of years to reach their current size and some rain will revive them in a short period of time. Broken bottles and litter might be dangerous to animals and spoil the scenery for everybody. Too much noise will scare the wildlife away. Those who love the desert will be thanked by future generations for observing and appreciating its beauty without destroying it.



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