

NAMIBIAN ENVIRONMENT & WILDLIFE SOCIETY (NEWS)

DIRECTOR'S ANNUAL REPORT, AGM 2008

GENERAL

The Namibian Environment & Wildlife Society has undergone a significant transformation since the last AGM in March 2007. It has been a very exciting and fruitful transformation which I get very enthusiastic about and could go on about all evening. But I will try restrain myself and just give you the most important highlights.

The adopting of the new name of NEWS at the last AGM was the first very prominent change. This was followed by the formulation of Strategic Objectives for the next five years. I'd like to briefly outline those objectives, as I have built my report around the steps taken towards achieving them.

Strategic Objectives 2007 – 2012

Large membership base

Country wide-network including Individual, Educational and Corporate Members and Partner Organisations

Sound Administration

Sound administrative structure including staff, offices, an active Committee, a secure financial basis and effective administration and management of all aspects of the Society

Meaningful Activities

Research and environmental education are the focus of NEWS activities, which include collecting and disseminating information, monitoring and reporting on issues and developments, providing an accessible forum for environmental dialogue, initiating and supporting a variety of environmental programmes and conservation projects, advancing community participation in all aspects of conservation, and collaborating with Partners and liaising with relevant stakeholders to improve policies, laws and decision-making. All of these activities aim to eradicate environmental apathy and create better environmental awareness and understanding, which is the basis of successful conservation and truly sustainable development.

MEMBERSHIP

Not so many years ago, the NEWS membership base was slowly but continually declining. Through improved administration and public relations we have managed to turn that trend around and are now experiencing a steady growth in all sectors of our membership.

We have had an especially positive response from the business community and now have a total of 35 Corporate Members, with 25 Steenbok, three Springbok, three Oryx, two Sable and two Roan Category Members. Strangely, there are no Kudu Category Corporate Members. The kudu is one of my favourite animals, and I can't quite find the reasons for the empty space on our list. But we are only starting with our Corporate Membership drive for this year, and I hope to be able to find some kudus out there.

We have had a very positive response and a lot of encouragement from our Partner Organisations, and have signed MOUs with seven organisations. There are another three MOUs currently being finalised and the only reason that the figure is not much higher is because we have not had the time to sit down with more organisations to discuss collaboration.

We have also seen a steady growth in our individual membership base and have managed to get quite a number of people who had given up on the Wildlife Society back on board.

The reason our Educational Membership Category has not experienced a lot of growth is again because we have not contacted a lot of schools. Our capacities are still limited and I'll elaborate a little on that under my next point: Administration.

ADMINISTRATION

The name change from Wildlife Society to NEWS obviously needed to be accompanied by a new logo design (although we kept the Roan as our emblem), as well as revised leaflets and letterheads, and improvements to our website (still efficiently managed by Philip Ford free of charge, for which we are very grateful). We also decided to create a dedicated internet domain with accompanying e-mail addresses for our organisation, something that is quite important in our modern electronic world.

We have had to make minor revisions to our constitution to incorporate the various changes. The revised constitution has been circulated to you and will be discussed later.

Another very important step was the bold decision to change the administrative structure of NEWS by creating the position of Director in addition to the already existing Secretary/Office Co-ordinator (at that stage still without an office to co-ordinate). This gives us a completely new outlook, as we are now able to spend much more dedicated time aimed at realising our mission and objectives.

We have had a change in Office Co-ordinator at the start of this year. I'd like to thank Barbara Ludwig, who resigned to take up other career opportunities, for her great contribution in streamlining our administration. And I would like to welcome Birgit Noczil as our new Office Co-ordinator. Starting at NEWS during this time of re-structuring is not easy, but Birgit is motivated and confident that she will be able to handle our sometimes hectic office in the limited time available to her. Both the Office Co-ordinator and Director positions are still very much part time at this stage, and that obviously limits our capacities in some areas. As the new structure and our financial basis are consolidated, we would like to expand both positions.

The NEWS Committee remains active and monitors and guides the work of the staff through regular committee meetings.

Manuela Schmid as Talks Co-ordinator, Carole Roberts as Roan News Editor and Werner Sell as Treasurer have had to work the hardest, and the other Members, with Dave Joubert as Chairperson, Benson Muramba as Educational Membership Liaison as well as Joe Walter and John Mfunu have all made important contributions. Elinor Dürr was our Regional Representative for the Central Coast and attended numerous meetings and reported on issues. Our Vice-Chairperson, Peter Cunningham, compiled the regular NEWS-letter last year, but unfortunately left the country at the end of the year to take up work on an international project. I would like to thank him and all of the Committee for their work and support throughout the year.

In September we began renting offices in the NNF-owned complex in Frans Indongo Street. The NNF has been very supportive and I would especially like to thank Chris Brown and Sally Wood for their assistance and encouragement. Our next-door neighbour SAIEA has also been very supportive, and I'd like to thank Gudrun Denker and Peter Tarr for all their help and advice whenever I barged into their office. The NNF-SAIEA-NEWS complex has turned into a wonderful little environmental hub, and I believe the collaboration will continue to grow. Perhaps we can even create a direct thoroughfare to the DRFN, whose property borders our complex.

At the beginning of this year we decided to invest in new computer equipment, as our single old machine was no longer able to handle our greatly increased needs. To get a new desktop, laptop, printer and telephone system compatible is no easy task. This process unfortunately took an annoyingly long time, which was less due to the faults of any suppliers or technicians than it was

due to the seemingly inherent quirks of technology. Modus Computer Consulting supplied and installed most of the equipment and did so in a very professional manner.

We also received loans and donations of tables and chairs from two very supportive members, previous Chairperson Heide Beinhauer and Pastor Rust, and now have a fully furnished and productive office.

ACTIVITIES

NEWS Programmes

WE have designed four programmes in order to structure and focus our activities.

spread-the-NEWS

Is our general awareness creation programme and encompasses many of our mainstay activities such as Public Talks (of which we presented 12 on a variety of topics since the last AGM; thank you to the Scientific Society for renting their rooms to us), our NEWS-letters (which went out very regularly last year, and will do so again now that our computer system is fully functional) and Roan News, of which we can proudly present our first issue for 2008, the special edition on Uranium Mining (thank you to John Meinert Printing for the excellent and speedy production).

We plan to publish two more issues of Roan News this year, one around July and one around November.

NEWS-4-the-future

Is our youth programme aimed at creating a sound understanding of environmental issues and the basis for sustainable living for future generations. Activities last year included an essay contest run together with our Partner Organisation NaDEET in the South of Namibia. The contest had the topic 'environmental apathy' and resulted in forty pupils from Hoeksteen Primary School from Rosh Pinah visiting NaDEET to learn about sustainable living.

An expanded project similar to the essay contest and again in partnership with NaDEET, as well as one of our Corporate Members, is now being planned.

NEWS-4-leaders

Is our programme for decision-makers at all levels. There are many environmental issues needing urgent action and wise decisions today, which cannot wait for a more informed youth. Through this programme, we aim to facilitate informed and positive decision-making and the sustainable utilisation of resources in order to ensure a healthy environment. Due to our limited capacities, our activities were restricted to formulating the programme outline and creating links to Partner Organisations, but we do have several interesting projects lined up for this year, starting with a NEWS-NACOMA workshop later this month.

NEWS-4-research

Is our research-support programme through which we aim to continue to support a variety of research, as we have done in the past.

Issues

In the past, the Wildlife Society got very involved in a variety of environmental issues. As part of our strategic planning during the last few years, we have decided to limit our watchdog function, partly because we do not have the capacity to take direct action on all environmental issues in Namibia, and also because barking is not as effective as positive dialogue.

We now focus on monitoring issues through the collection and distribution of information in order to facilitate positive action. Where possible, we work in close collaboration with Partner Organisations

and relevant stakeholders to address issues. The important thing is that we do not intend to be controversial or to slow down or hamper development, but rather seek positive dialogue and constructive co-operation with all environmental stakeholders.

We have been monitoring a variety of issues, most of which have been reported on in our NEWS-letter. The main issues have been in the areas of mining, urban and infrastructure development, energy and water use and the protection and utilisation of indigenous fauna and flora.

Events

NEWS-NamibRand Outing to NaDEET

We organised our annual NEWS-NamibRand Outing to NaDEET in May 2007, this time together with one of our Partners, the Bird Club. It was a very enjoyable and fruitful outing, with the maximum number of 20 participants taking part. This year we have teamed up with another Partner, the Namibia Scientific Society, and the outing was booked out within six days. Such collaboration with Partners is very constructive, and we will continue to create new ties and strengthen existing ones. A big thank you goes to Viktoria and Andreas Keding of NaDEET, as well as to Marc and Elinor Dürr for hosting and guiding us so well each year.

Corporate Membership Function

We held our first Corporate Membership Function in July 2007 to give our Corporate Members an overview of our new structure, objectives and activities, and to thank them for their very valuable support. We will hold a similar function in July this year.

Public Relations

We have become much more visible in the media through regular radio interviews and newspaper articles. We have held numerous meetings, attended workshops and functions and corresponded on a great variety of issues and topics with Members, Partners and the public.

THE WAY FORWARD

There is a range of other activities planned for this year, although our focus must continue to be on consolidating the new structure. Two years ago we were still 'searching for the future' as the Wildlife Society of Namibia. Today we know how we would like our future to look, but we need strong public support to realise that vision.

A lot of work still needs to be done to strengthen our financial security and above all to increase our membership network before we can safely say that we have made it. But it is an exciting time and I am confident that if we continue to receive the positive response and support we have received from individuals, the business community and partner organisations, we will get there.

Thank you.

Helge Denker