

Khomas Environmental Education Programme (KEEP)

Update September 2016



It has been nine months since we started implementing the Khomas Environmental Education Programme (KEEP) and, if we may say so ourselves, it is pretty amazing what we have achieved so far. Before heading into the mad rush up to Christmas we used the Namibian school holidays in August to take stock of what the programme has achieved to date.

In order to get KEEP up and running, we have spent a lot of time at schools introducing and promoting the programme as well as building relationships with educators in Windhoek, Namibia's capital, and throughout the Khomas Region. These efforts are now paying off. The interest in KEEP has been huge and continues to grow with the programme running at full capacity since the second quarter of the year. A total of 1,639 students have participated in the programme so far, representing 12 schools from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds.

These first nine months of KEEP implementation have clearly shown that there is a gap and need for a targeted environmental education programme. KEEP is now filling this gap and the interest from schools keeps growing. Feedback from educators and students alike is almost exclusively positive, so that is great to know.

In 'down-times' such as school holidays when there are no groups to take, we are still in the bush trying to plan and find new and exciting things to show the kids. This is also the time to update the programme, keeping it in-line with the national curriculum, or to chase up schools and organise future bookings – they are already coming in for 2017!

The KEEP Workbook is now in its second edition with an updated supporter list (this list is also available on the GCF Website). This specially designed fun workbook is not only a vital part of the field day but is also a valuable teaching resource linked to the national curriculum. As a result, the learning can continue both at home and in the class room and both students and educators enjoy using the workbook after the field day. Purposefully developed in black & white this book is a colouring in heaven for everyone! To ensure that your logo is included in the third edition (2017), please contact us now and pledge a donation. Namibia's children need your support.

In addition to providing environmental education to primary school students, another important objective of KEEP is the training of young Namibian conservationists and educators. GCF therefore offers internship opportunities for Namibian graduates or final year students. Our latest addition, Ms Naemi Antonius, is a recent graduate of Nature Conservation from the Namibian University of Science and Technology. With a special interest in the flora of Namibia, Naemi enjoys sharing her knowledge with our young enviro-kids teaching them about alien plant species and the importance of trees like the majestic camelthorn. Can you tell the difference between an *Acacia erioloba* and *Acacia karroo*? After a day with KEEP, these kids can!

With KEEP no work day is like the other – you never know what you will find in the bush. Some groups are treated to close encounters with giraffe other groups get extra lessons in adaptation from a stick insect, but there is always lots of tracking and animal detective fun!

Highlights during the last few months have been rare brown hyena spoor and new leopard tracks in the area. But by far the most exciting discovery has been a 3.8m, 34kg female Southern Rock Python. Previously rescued and released in Daan Viljoen Game Reserve by Francois Theart, founder of Snakes of Namibia, this beautiful girl was very obliging and did her part in educating the youngsters about the importance of all living things and busting some myths about snakes.

Kids love anything even remotely “gross” so it does not take much to get them busting open animal scat (poo). Amazing what can be found in these – they are real treasure chests of cool bits! We recently found termite heads, a variety of bones, a bird beak and claws in various scats. Brown hyenas definitely have a varied diet!

The KEEP kids have also been seeing first-hand the effects of the long Namibian drought. Porcupine and baboons have been ring barking trees heavily over the past few months. This is a clear sign of a dry environment. Animals ring bark trees by stripping of the protective outer bark and exposing the soft bark underneath. This is where the tree stores its water. By scraping off this bark with their teeth the animals get much needed water and nutrition. Seeing this and sitting next to the dried up dam brings home the message that Namibia is in the grips of a very serious water crisis and that, like the animals we see out here, we too need to adapt to our environment by saving water whenever we can!

While safe, reliable and affordable transport remains the biggest challenge for many schools in taking part, KEEP has been working hard with the schools and private transport companies to minimise this challenge. Bottom line, we will need to find additional funding to offer increased transport support to many of the Khomas schools or this issue will continue to be the biggest obstacle for under-resources schools to participate in KEEP. In an ideal world KEEP would purchase a bus, but all the associated costs with hiring a full-time driver, insurance risk and fuel need to be assessed in more detail – not cheap!

According to the follow-up visits with the schools and students after the field day, litter management and access to clean and safe drinking water seem to be the most pressing environmental issues for many of the students. With this in mind, the lack of other environmental activities in both Government and Private schools such as environmental clubs or exposure to other environmental management programmes through outings is staggering.

Every day the KEEP kids not only arrive with excitement and energy but show a willingness to get involved and learn. They also come up with such great ideas on water saving and environmental conservation. With enough support and encouragement, the future of the Namibian environment is looking positive. GCF/KEEP would like to thank the students and teachers that have taken part so far and of course all the donors that have help support us in making this happen!

KEEP aims to reach a target of 2,000 children by the end of 2016 – its first year of implementation. This is an amazing goal and we are well on track to achieve this. But we cannot do it alone. We can only do this because of the amazing support of our donors. As already mentioned above, if you would like to join the list of donors below, please contact us directly.

Have you booked your school in for 2017? Would you like to help support our programme? Then give us a call! We would love to hear from you.

We would like to thank the Ministry of Environment and Tourism for allowing us to take students to Daan Viljoen Game Reserve and all our donors for supporting KEEP:



