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MAGIC WORLDS

GREETINGS FROM THE NORTH

SCORPION DIVERSITY

SNIPPETS OF HISTORY

HIT THE BEAT

SEARCHING FOR THE DARKEST SKY

NEWS @ NaDEET

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*"Heaven is under our feet
as well as over our heads."
- Henry David Thoreau,*

SCORPION DIVERSITY

Dr Lorenzo Prendini

Namibia has one of the world's most diverse scorpion faunas, ranking second after Mexico. This is due to the diversity of Namibia's arid landscapes and habitats, including dunes, gravel plains and rocky inselbergs. Much of the scorpion fauna is endemic, but there are still many undescribed species. In addition, much remains to be understood about the distribution and ecology of species.

Dr Lorenzo Prendini (American Museum of Natural History, New York) and Dr Tharina Bird (Ditsong National Museum of Natural History, Pretoria) are surveying the arachnid fauna of Namibia, focusing on scorpions, spiders and solifuges (also known as sun spiders, *haarskeerders* or *jagspinnnekoppe*). Their work

is supported by a research permit from the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism (MEFT).

During the first of two field expeditions to Namibia, Drs Prendini and Bird visited NamibRand for one night as part of a three-week itinerary across Namibia. Although the weather was unusually cold, a night search of the dunes and interdune valleys with ultraviolet lamps confirmed the presence of four scorpion species.

Two of these species belong to the medically important family *Buthidae*, the thick-tail scorpions. *Parabuthus granulatus* is a large, dark brown scorpion widespread across the arid half of Southern Africa and is the most venomous species in the region. *Parabuthus*

stridulus is a small reddish-yellow scorpion that is endemic to the Namib and also has a painful sting.

The other two scorpions found are relatively harmless, belonging to the thin-tailed family *Scorpionidae*. Both belong to the burrowing scorpion genus *Opisthophthalmus*. *Opisthophthalmus adustus* is a large reddish scorpion with black markings that constructs deep burrows on the plains and interdune valleys, while *Opisthophthalmus holmi* is a small yellow scorpion that burrows in the dunes. Both species are endemic to the Namib.

More trips will be conducted in the future, and hopefully, more scorpions will be found.



Parabuthus granulatus



Parabuthus granulatus



Parabuthus stridulus