

# NamibRand nature reserve becomes Africa's first international Dark Sky reserve

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Namibia's NamibRand Nature Reserve, one of Africa's largest private nature reserves, has expanded its conservation role to include preserving the star-filled nighttime skies that shine above its dunes and mountains. These efforts in night sky conservation have earned the reserve high honors as the International Dark-Sky Association has just announced that NamibRand Nature Reserve is the world's newest International Dark Sky Reserve.

The International Dark-Sky Association's night sky conservation efforts include working with groups to form International Dark Sky Reserves (IDSR) and other dark sky places. International Dark-Sky Association's Executive Director Bob Parks explains, "The night sky over the NamibRand Nature Reserve is exceptional, as are the efforts the reserve has taken in modifying its lighting for the sake of its wildlife and visitors."

Dr. George Tucker, a retired professor of physics from the USA, who identified the NamibRand as a potential Dark Sky Reserve and led the certification effort, says "Viewing the pristine night sky over the NamibRand is an unforgettable experience. Being recognized as a Gold Tier International Dark Sky Reserve will serve to promote and protect this valuable resource. Achieving this status is a significant accomplishment not just for the NamibRand, but also for Namibia and all of Africa." Gold Tier is the term used to describe reserves with nighttime environments that have little to no impact from light pollution and artificial light. NamibRand's nearest neighboring communities are

small and lie some 60 miles distant, so the reserve's sky is one of the darkest yet measured.

In the core of the new reserve is the Namib Desert Environmental Education Trust (NaDEET) Centre, which runs environmental education programs that teach about the Earth and sky. Astronomy programs do more than explain about the physical universe – they focus on the importance of the night sky in the cultural heritage of Namibians. Overnight guests, usually groups of schoolchildren, even have the opportunity to sleep in “open air” units where they can view the night sky from the comfort of their beds. The NaDEET Centre's programs are open to all Namibians and visitors from around the world. For the Namibians who cannot reach the Centre in person NaDEET offers extensive outreach programs in the schools and communities of their region.

Viktorija Keding, NaDEET's Director, explains: “Prior to the NaDEET astronomy activity, even the most basic knowledge about the night sky and the threats posed by light pollution were completely unknown to most Namibian children.

This recognition therefore makes our participants aware of just how unique it is to have a dark night sky.”

Nils Odendaal, the Chief Executive Officer of the NamibRand Nature Reserve describes the importance of receiving the IDSR designation, “The conservation of the night sky and the mitigation of light pollution is an area of conservation in Namibia that, to date has unfortunately not enjoyed much attention. We hope to use our influence as a leader of tourism and conservation, not only in our area, but also on a national level to change this and raise the awareness of this important environmental concern.

He continues, “The NamibRand IDSR is the first in Africa – as well as the first in any developing country in the world. We hope that this IDA designation will generate international support, publicity and targeted research both for the NamibRand and for Namibia as a whole, further reinforcing the country’s leadership role in environmental issues.”

**More information:** [www.darksky.org/IDSPlaces](http://www.darksky.org/IDSPlaces)

Provided by International Dark-Sky Association

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