As most of you have already heard by now, a ‘new’ member to the Brown Hyena Research Project team was born on 15 February. His name is Max and he weighted 3.3 kg at birth and his standard length (C) was 49 cm. So you also finally all know now why it has been a bit quiet on the news section of our web page and regarding office hours, as Steve and I first had to get to know Max and find out about his ‘schedule’. But: we are back in the field! Our first task was to find Tosca and Obelixa to do their data downloads. The last time that we had downloaded data was in January, when Gino and Thomas tracked them by plane.

Oh, I nearly forgot; we actually have a second ‘new’ member to the hyena project: Gino and Kathie’s daughter Kay, who was born just a few weeks after Max. I guess she will join us for the aerial downloads soon…Well, back to the field trip. Having no experience in packing in order to be prepared for having a baby on board, I possibly packed half of my household for the first field trip. It is actually a wonder that I did not forget any necessary downloading equipment, but I had fantastic help from Sarah, our student volunteer from Hamburg University. She had arrived a few days earlier and it was going to be her first field trip, too. The last member of the team was Ruttu, who was going to help with Max. We drove to E-Bay first to find Obelixa, but did not receive her signal there. Then at Bain’s Bay we received a very strong signal from the road. What great luck, at least we did not have to go hiking with Max and could work close to the vehicle. We set up a temporary camp to protect the new team member from the sun and wind (luckily it was a nice day though) and to be able to perform all motherly duties while downloading the data. The data download was easy, very good signal strength and since the wind was not blowing, we could mount the antenna on a tripod and relax. Max seemed to enjoy all the attention and the fresh air, too. Once the download was finished we continued on our route to find Tosca. She was not in the vicinity of her dens south of Atlas Bay and I decided to drive to Wolf Bay to show Sarah and Ruttu the seal colony. It was also getting close to lunchtime and I had planned to be back home then before it became too much for Max. However, my researcher brain went against my motherly instinct: we arrived at Wolf Bay and received Tosca’s signal from the hills north of the Atlas Bay seal colony. Instead of driving back home, I took the chance and drove towards the signal. It was not as strong as Obelixa’s signal had been, but good enough to trigger and try a download. By that time the wind had picked up and it was getting colder. In my mind, another hour would not make too much of a difference, but Max had other ideas. The download felt as if it was taking forever…still, we got a really good download done and quickly went back to town. I only managed to transfer the data to the computer the next morning, but both data sets were very good. For the first time it actually looked as if Obelixa might be denning at a den near Bain’s Bay that we had mapped many years ago while working with Raleigh International volunteers. I was definitely keen on setting up a camera trap there to monitor brown hyena movement to the den and to finally get to know other members of Obelixa’s clan. Tosca’s data did not show any denning pattern, which was not all too surprising. We already knew that her cubs had left Jungle Den and that they were seen together quite a few times by Namdeb personnel and also once together at Unerhoff Pan by Steve. However, Tosca spent quite a bit of time in the hills between the Atlas Bay and Wolf Bay seal colonies where the other dens are located that she had used to raise the previous litter. Was she about to give birth again? Well, we have to see and wait for the next data download or maybe not?

More of Tosca’s news further below…
Brown Hyena Research Project

CAMERA TRAPS AND TOSCA’S ‘NEW’ DEN

Sarah, Gary and I set up all of our camera traps at the end of May. The only new location we chose was close to the suspected den site of Obelixa. It was difficult to find a good spot, as the area is quite rocky and we have to mount the camera inside a protective cage that is buried into the ground, as the hyenas and jackals would otherwise destroy the camera. The cage does not always prevent damage though: when I checked the camera trap at the new location last week, its manual trigger was bitten off and the culprit that was photographed doing it turned out to be a cheeky jackal. He also managed to move the camera slightly so that all other photographs were skew and showed more cage than anything else. However, we got a hyena hair photograph, so hyenas are definitely in that area. The camera traps near Jungle Den surprisingly showed photographs of cubs—at least one small cub, so the den may still be in use by another breeding female.

I try to check the camera traps once every week. The batteries last for a long time, but in winter we often have fog along the coast and it is necessary to clean the lenses regularly. At the moment I’ve only got four hours to do all of them in one day, as I need to rush back to feed Max again. When I checked the camera traps last, I was really doing good in time. I had checked Obelixa’s, the one at the old airport hangar, the two traps near Jungle Den and was on my way to check the camera trap at Greenhouse Gully when I received Tosca’s signal from the hills between the two seal colonies. I was about 1 km away from a den that she had used last year when her cubs were less than three months old. The closer I got to the den, the stronger her signal became. I stopped about 500 metres away from the den and quickly got my binocs out, as I heard her moving and did not want to miss the opportunity to see her. To my surprise, I did not see her, but two cubs lying in front of the den and looking into the direction of the car. Unfortunately I had to move on, but took some photographs that I was able to check in more detail at home. These two cubs are already older and I think that they were actually the cubs from Tosca’s previous litter. However, it is possible that Tosca has got a new litter at that den and that the other two youngster will eventually start bringing food back to the den for the new cubs.

I hope that I can learn more about what is happening at this den from Tosca’s next data download, which is due in the middle of June.

Another brown hyena nose

Thanks to Gary Cowan for helping to set up the camera traps and for keeping Max happy.

ANOTHER SAD ROAD-KILL

There have at least been five brown hyena road-kills at Haalenberg over the past four years. That was one of the reasons why we had one of the brown hyena road warning signs put there. This unfortunately does not help much. Another brown hyena was killed just a few metres in front of the road sign in May. Jessica and Sarah picked the hyena up. Max and me met them afterwards and we took all measurements as well as some tissue samples for genetics. The hyena was a 5-7 year old male in a fantastic condition. I still find it extremely difficult to understand how we can have so many road mortalities with so little traffic and so few hyenas in the area. I believe that the Haalenberg animals belong to a clan that lives in the Tsaukaib Mountains to the south of Haalenberg. We tried to dart hyenas there last year, but were unfortunately unsuccessful. If we manage to fit enough collars to coastal hyenas this year and still have time left, we will definitely try to collar those animals again. That may also give us a better understanding about why the move over the tar road and how frequently the actually do that.

A big thank you to Jessica and Sarah who drove out to collect the hyena before somebody else could have taken it. Also thanks to Gary, who drove out early in the morning after he heard about the road-kill, but did not find it as he got the wrong information about the accident site.
MY FIRST EXPERIENCES AT THE BROWN HYENA RESEARCH PROJECT

Hello, I am Sarah Holtfrerich from Hamburg, Germany. I finished my bachelor degree in biology last year in September and after that I wanted to earn field experiences. Because of that I asked my Bachelor-father Dr. Ralf Wanker if he could recommend a project where I could ask for an internship. He told me different possibilities but when he suggested the Brown Hyena Research Project I was very enthusiastic because it was always a dream of me to work with big carnivores. The other big plus was that the project is in Namibia. My grandmother was born in Swakopmund and so I went 'back to the roots'.

I was very excited before I came here and bombed Ingrid with lots of e-mails before.

I hate long distance flights and so I was quite nervous at the day of my departure. I had luck; in both flights I had two seats for my own. So my time in Namibia must become great and so it is!

Ingrid picked me up from the airport in Lüderitz and about fifteen Minutes later we arrived at her house. The first question from Ingrid in front of her house was: “are you afraid of dogs?” - I am not, so I got to know two very sweet and characteristic Dobermans, Sabi and Mac, and one very funny and sweet whatever-dog, Siggi.

The day after my arrival my work started in the office. The data I worked with where downloaded from one hyena, Minerva. While my work with the data I got a very good impression of Minerva’s life, when she goes to bed, when she wakes up, where she eats, when she had cups and even that hyenas seem to swim sometimes. So I got very curious about the hyenas in the field. The first day we drove in the Sperrgebiet everybody was quite excited, me because of my first day in the field, Ruttu because of her first day in the Sperrgebiet and Ingrid because of her first day with her Baby Max outside in the field. But everything went great, we could download the data from two very close hyenas, Obelixa and Toska, so on this way I got to know a very, very angry scorpion. I would have been angry too if someone would stole my roof over my head - BUT- it is quite not easy to find stones in the desert and I obviously I needed the stone (by the way, I am sorry little angry scorpion). After that experience I was glad to be back in the office again and measured her (it was more or less obviously a he) and took some genetic samples we buried him. To save the grave from other hyenas we put some stones on the grave.

The next time we drove there, was to install the camera traps and that was the day where I saw my first real-live brown hyena: Toska. Two days later we checked the SD-cards but there were no pictures taken. Next week we will go and check them again and I am sure we will have more luck then.

On the following Friday evening I went to the Barrels-bar with one of my very nice neighbours, Sylvie, just to have one or two drinks….6 drinks later we went home. On the next morning Ingrid called me: a road-kill. Shame, such a pretty and a big hyena it even looked as if it was still alive. We took her with us and after we measured her (it was more or less obviously a he) and took some genetic samples we buried him. To save the grave from other hyenas we put some stones on the grave. On this way I got to know a very, very angry scorpion. I would have been angry too if someone would stole my roof over my head - BUT- it is quite not easy to find stones in the desert and I obviously I needed the stone (by the way, I am sorry little angry scorpion). After that experience I was glad to be back in the office again and learn more about Minerva and her life.

All in all I had great first tree weeks with lots of new experiences and friends and I am excited and look forward what the next weeks will bring.

FUNDRAISING AND DONATIONS

Dr. Kirk Suedmeyer donated another camera trap to the project and the Kansas City Zoo is kindly sponsoring the shipment. Thank you very much for your contribution and support.

The Interessen-Verband der Auslandsjäger, a German hunting organisation has donated € 500 to the hyena project. We have purchased a camera trap from those funds and will use the remaining amount to pay for the bait that we need to buy for our darting season. Thank you very much for your donation.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

THE BROWN HYENA RESEARCH PROJECT WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE FOLLOWING PEOPLE AND COMPANIES FOR THEIR HELP AND SUPPORT:

| Namdeb Diamond Corporation   | MFMR Luderitz Safaris & Tours |
| Chevron Namibia              | Gino Noli                      |
| Predator Conservation Trust UK | Kathy Peard                    |
| OK Grocer                    | Jessica Kemper                 |
| Luderitz SPAR                | Jean-Paul Roux                 |
| ESRI                         | Trygve Cooper                  |
| MET                          | Volker & Daggie Jahnke         |
|                             | Ronel v.d. Merwe               |
| Steve Appleton               | George Shimaneni               |
| Walter Rusch                 | Kolette Grobler                |
| Beppo Family                 | Wilfried Erni                  |
| Jessie Salb                  | Erich Looser                   |
| Mildred Salb                 | Jürgen Syvertsen               |
| BP Swakopmund                | Morag Barrell                 |
| Erongo Agencies              | Luderitz Backpackers           |
| Mrs. Traut                   | Westair                        |
| Christine Lindner            | Eric Schultze                  |
| Helmut & Herta               |                               |
|                                |                               |

Chris Voets
Chris Bird
Louise Yates
Kansas City Zoo
Nicole & Adam Baden-Clay
Coastway Tour Service Station
Antje Burke
Kirk Suedmeyer
Coastway Tours
Helmut & Herta
Syvertsen
Brown Hyena Research Project

Contact Details

BROWN HYENA RESEARCH PROJECT

BROWN HYENA RESEARCH PROJECT WEBSITE:
 www.strandwolf.org.za

Dr. Ingrid Wiesel
P. O. Box 739
Lüderitz
Namibia
Tel.: ++264 (0)63 202114
Fax: ++264 (0)63 202114
e-mail: strandwolf@iway.na

DONATIONS:
Brown Hyena Research Project – Nedbank Namibia
Bismarck Street, Lüderitz, 9000, Namibia
Lüderitz Branch, Branch Code 461610
Cheque Account
Account number: 11010015024
Swift code: NEDSNANX
BIC: NEDSNANXXXX
IBAN: 46161011010015024