Only now do we realise how spoiled we have been for the past nine years. With Alaika and Obelixa, being the experienced breeding females of the Atlas Bay and E-Bay clans, we had one litter following another and reproduction was incredibly regular and successful. So what is happening now? We haven’t seen a litter of cubs born in both clans since 2017.

Alaika and Obelixa have stopped breeding due to their old age, but there is no reason why KC Sowande doesn’t. With the long-term data that we have been collecting in the area, I could go back in time and look at the clan structure over time and tenure of immigrant males that are usually fathering the cubs and stay with the clan for a few years before moving on. Alaika of the Atlas Bay clan gave birth for the first time in 2012. At that time, there was an immigrant male, called Clyde, whom we collared in 2013, but who died under mysterious circumstances (see March 2014 issue of our newsletter). Another immigrant male, Clyde Too, filled his gap quickly and we collared him in 2014. Clyde Too stayed with the clan until at least September 2017, when we did a data download. However, he had definitely left the clan by the beginning of 2018. Three years are a natural tenure time, so there was no reason to worry. However, Alaika was getting old and Nymeria, the only female offspring that stayed in the area, was hit and killed on the mining road in 2014, leaving a gap for a female to take over from Alaika. All other cubs that we captured were males and the last one, Luther dispersed in 2018. It therefore seems that with Nymeria’s death and the immigrant male Clyde Too’s leaving, there is no-one to left to ensure the survival of the clan. We had a similar situation many years ago, where most clan members of the Atlas Bay clan were killed on the tar road, so that the clan became extinct. The vacant territory was then only taken over years later by Tosca, Alaika’s mother. The situation with the E-Bay clan is a bit different. The current breeding female of the clan is KC Sowande, Obelixa’s daughter and sister to Balu. Her father was most probably Darwin, whom we collared in 2011, but who dispersed again the same year and settled and possibly joined another clan along the Orange River a year later. Wallace took over his role at E-Bay and we collared him in 2013. He is most probably the father to Lilinoe, Lloyd, Kai-Alex and Pelle. Wallace was last seen on a camera trap image in 2016, but we still have to analyse camera trap data from 2017 to determine the time of his emigration. Lilinoe also disappeared around the same time, which is unusual for a female. We also haven’t picked her up on any of our camera traps, so we think that she may have died. However, since the beginning of 2018, there has been no immigrant male sighted in the E-Bay clan area, which may explain why KC Sowande is still not breeding. We will analyse last year’s camera trap data this year and will hopefully have more detailed data then.

This summary highlights clearly, how unpredictable and complicated reproduction in a social species, such as the brown hyena, can be and that any disturbance or mortality, for example through road mortalities, can have long-term impacts on the survival of local populations.
Our preliminary Orange River Mouth study has come to an end. Now is the time to evaluate the data and for Sue to write up her MSc thesis before deciding on the way forward. We haven’t done any detailed analysis yet, but I would like to share some of our amazing captures with you here. As expected, the most frequently photographed carnivores were black-backed jackals and brown hyenas. However, we also spotted quite a few African wild cats and honey badgers, and some Cape foxes and small spotted genet. The biggest surprise though, were our leopard captures near Hohenfels. We haven’t identified the individuals yet, but the spot patterns on the images are clear enough to obtain ID’s.

New Publications


Sightings & Mortalities

Three brown hyena sightings have been reported since December. Thanks to Willa Kruger, Kim Pitcher and Helmuth Syvertsen. One of Helmuth’s tourist spotted Obelix in February, still ‘well’ and alive. However, we also have to report two roadkills, one near Swakopmund, reported by Samantha McCartney, and another one on the ‘new’ tarred Orange River road – this road has already proven to be detrimental to brown hyena movement to the river.

The worst mortalities that I have to report on though are from Garub. I will write more at a later stage, once I have more data at hand. Some of you may have followed the ‘discussions’ around the wild horses at Garub in the media. In an attempt to save the horses, the Ministry of Environment and Tourism tried to capture and relocate the few remaining members of our spotted hyena clan in December last year. This was unsuccessful and the Ministry then shot three clan members in February, one of them has been confirmed to be Nya. The identification of the other ones has not been released yet.

Support

Our grant application for the Orange River Study to the Namibian Environment and Wildlife Society was successful. We received N$ 7000 for fuel expenses and for lithium batteries for our camera traps. We have purchased lithium batteries for the project from VARTA Namibia, who supported us before, by offering batteries at cost price, which is a substantial help to our project. We were also invited to submit a grant proposal to the Disney Conservation Fund. Decisions will be made in August.
Camera Trap Images

We are processing our camera trap data and here are some images that made us smile:

- Paste marking acrobatics 😄
- Cheetah surprise at Van Reenen Bay seal colony.

- How to take the perfect selfie... 🐇
- Even hares like the smell of brown hyena paste marks 😃.