

HOTTENTOTBAY HYENAS DISAPPEARED

It was finally time again to try and fit the GPS collar to one of the Hottentotbay hyenas. Our target animal "Remus" was unfortunately hit by a vehicle on the road (see below) and we had to start from square one. However, our camera trap images and observations at the den near Anigab confirmed that there are at least four animals in the group and we asked Dr. Mark Jago to help us catch one of them. Mark and his wife Laura arrived at the beginning of October and we drove the two hours through the sand dunes to reach the den site area near the Anigab pan. I was more than confident that we would catch a hyena there, but on arrival, I could hardly detect any wildlife signs. Did the rains over Easter that flooded the pan force the hyenas out of the area? Did the game move away from the waterholes to grazing further inland? Not even jackals were present and no signs of the ever present Gemsbok. Well, we were at the site and there was no time to drive around to find better signs of hyena or other wildlife activity. We had to try: we place the bait approximately 200 metres away from the den and did our usual night-time watches: Nothing. No sighting of any animal, no noise, just blackness and total silence. Before night two, we drove to the coast in the hope of finding more activity, as brown hyenas usually forage along the beaches. Also there was no indication of hyena presence, but we found a jackal den, which seemed to be occupied. So, why not studying jackals... However, the hyena team is not known for giving up quickly, so we gave it another try close to the den. To top the already hopeless situation, we had one of the most horrible sandstorms that day, but it could not dampen our mood and we still enjoyed our sandy braai meat and sand-cocktail sundowners.



Anigab brown hyena at the den site last year – where are they now?

Another sleepless night and no sight of any animal, except for two gerbils that hopped around our vehicle at dawn. They probably knew better than we did that the hyenas took an extended holiday from their home...

We had to leave the next morning, trying to get out of the dunes before the sandstorm hit us again. On our way back I decided to take a different route, as I had the strange feeling that hyena activity would be found further south. And this is how it was. Arriving at boat bay we came across several fresh brown hyena tracks leading up north towards the Anigab pan. So this was the area where the hyenas were foraging at that time.

Since Mark and Laura had to leave, I decided to try to go to Boat Bay in January to set up the bait there in the hope of finally fitting the GPS collar. The Hottentotbay project seems to be as difficult as the Bogenfels one. Attempt number 7 (see below) was unsuccessful, but we won't give up!

Thanks to Mark and Laura Jago for their enjoyable company in the dunes and to Steve for guiding us safely through the dunes.

ROADKILLS



Remus was hit by a vehicle just 500 metres east from the Lüderitz town sign in the middle of September. He was still alive after being hit. We were informed immediately, not by the driver of the vehicle, but by concerned Namdeb employees that were on their way to work. By the time we arrived at the accident site, he was dead. Remus lived in the area around Hottentotbay and the Anigab Pan, some 80 km north of Lüderitz. He only visited the Lüderitz area occasionally, usually socializing with Minerva from the Agate Beach Clan. Remus was a beautiful male brown hyena in an excellent condition. He was about nine years old when he died. Despite the brown hyena road warning signs, people continue to speed and cause such horrible accidents.

BBC SUCCESS AT GABUSIB AND FAILURE AT BOGENFELS (ATTEMPT NUMBER 7)

The BBC seems to bring luck for our darting operations. Last year we went out with the "Animal Park" crew and caught two hyenas in one night. This time the "Vets in Africa" team joined us for a two day trip to Gabusib, which is approximately 80 km inland from Bogenfels and for an additional two days at Van Reenen Bay, 10 km north of Bogenfels. The aim was to fit as many GPS collars as possible, doubling our capture chances by having two vets on site, Mark Jago and Emma Rambert, and a very experienced game capture specialist, Shaun Rambert. To make things even more interesting, we worked on a guys vs girls success rate game plan: the guys task would be to dart hyenas at the bait at night and the girls task was to find, approach and dart hyenas during the day, playing hide and seek.

We arrived at Gabusib in the early afternoon, set up camp and looked for recent brown hyena activity around the mountain. There was a set of fresh tracks close to our camp and we decided for two nice sites to set up our bait. During the first night, the guys team spotted one hyena close to the bait, but not close enough to be able to dart it. The investigation of the area around the bait the next morning revealed, that actually quite a few hyenas seemed to have been interested in the food, but it became clear, that they did not trust the vehicle presence close by. Therefore Shaun decided to spend the next night alone on a little koppie close to the bait, only using his bedroll as some sort of hide and shelter. And: it worked! Shortly after starting his watch in the evening, Shaun darted a large, male, adult brown hyena. Judging by his tooth wear, the hyena was about 14 years old, but in an excellent condition. We fitted the collar, took all necessary samples and released him after approximately three hours. The next morning, I checked for his VHF signal and received a faint signal from a mountain range to the north-

east of Gabusib. Several other hyenas visited the bait that night, as we saw many different new tracks the next morning and also hardly found leftovers of our bait. Gabusib therefore seems to be a good darting site to return to, as we still have three additional collars to fit.

Our next stop was Van Reenen Bay. We set up our bait south of the seal colony, where we had caught Ray the last time. While we were busy setting everything up, one brown hyena peeked over one of the mountains and obviously did not like what it was seeing, as it never came to investigate later. The rest of the night was quiet and only the jackals enjoyed the welcome change on the menu again.

The next day, it was Emma and my turn. We went to the observation hut to wait for foraging brown hyenas. Suddenly a hyena appeared on the cliff to the northern side of the seal colony, grabbed a piece of carcass and walked away into northern direction. This was our chance. We followed the animal to a feeding site in the hummock dunes, but it did not stay long enough for us to approach closely. It started walking further north and disappeared behind a large hummock dune. Since we did not see it coming out from behind that dune again, we circled around it. Nothing behind that dune, but it looked as if there was a large resting site dug into the sand. We assumed that the hyena must have gone for his daily sleep in there. While approaching the bush, we spotted another hyena on its way to the seal colony. Since we assumed that the hyena in the resting site would stay there, we decided to give it a try with the other hyena first. But: this hyena went to exactly the same spot on the northern cliff to grab a carcass and to move off. Emma and I decided to get Mark and Shaun's help for darting the resting hyena in the bush.

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So all four of us approached the hummock dune together. To Emma and my surprise there was no hyena inside there. Also, although the resting site seemed large from a distance, it was hardly big enough to fit a jackal. How embarrassing: what we figured out that had happened is, that we missed the hyena moving away from the bush. It probably just went behind the next hill to continue feeding on its prey and returned to the seal colony just a bit later. So the second hyena we saw must have been the same one that we assumed to be resting inside the bush. So, it was hard to admit, but the guy's team was definitely more successful than us, but I'm sure, we had more fun!

There are still three GPS collars to be fitted on Bogenfels hyenas and as always we won't give up. The next attempt is planned for January and we will make use of our new darting technique from the bedroll – just hope that the jackals don't mistake us for interesting, new food...

Thanks to Emma, Shaun, Phoebe, Dale, Rachel, Paul, Tanya, Paul, Mark, Marcus, Cornelius, John, Sebastian and Fabienne and Yanick for making this trip so enjoyable.



GHb1m darted near Gabusib (photo by Fabienne Berens)

DOCTORATE



As reported earlier, I finally submitted my thesis in June this year. A few months later I received the invitation to defend my thesis at the Zoological Institute at the University of Hamburg. The big day was to be 27 October. I prepared my speech and rehearsed many times in front of a very patient Luderitz audience. But this was only the first part of getting through that day. I still had to study all the basic subjects, as the panel can asked questions up to 1 ½ hours. Fabienne helped me in Luderitz through hours of daily questioning and on the day of my departure to Germany I actually felt pretty well prepared. On the day of my disputation I felt surprisingly calm, but once I entered the room, the excitement hit me. Still, the presentation went extremely well, thanks to all the rehearsals in front of my friends in Luderitz and a last minute one with one of my best friends in Germany, Claudia. The panel asked questions for on hour and left for their discussions. Half an hour later, the panel had made their decision: I passed with an overall A and the party could start. My best friends Claudia and Birgitta, and my mother had organized the buffet and champagne to celebrate in style. What a day!

The pdf version of my doctorate will be available to download on our web-page next year. We will keep you informed.

Thanks to everybody who joined the celebrations and kept their fingers crossed during the defence. Thanks to all the Luderitzbuchters: Jessica, Jean-Paul, Rene, Fabienne, Sylvia, Kolette, Kathie, Gino and also Namdeb for printing my thesis and for the use of their conference room for rehearsals. Also thanks to the panel: Prof. Dr. Schliemann, Prof. Dr. Ganzhorn, Prof. Dr. Parzefall, Prof. Dr. Dzwilllo, Dr. Grimm, Dr. Tiemann, Dr. Ruhberg, Dr. Henning, Dr. Kaiser and Dr. Wanker

KOLMANSKOP HYENAS: FOLLOW-UP

Kolmanskop ghost town does not only seem to be a highlight for tourists visiting Luderitz, but also for the brown hyena population around town. Our camera trap captures hyenas at least every second night and many well-known and collared hyenas pass this site. Also Tosca, the lactating female of the Peninsula Clan, was finally captured on camera. Her GPS data had already shown, that she visits the territory boundary at Kolmanskop every seven to fourteen days, but we did not have a visual sighting of her for a long time. Therefore it was extremely nice to see that she is in an excellent condition. Another brown hyena had passed the camera trap just two hours before she checked the two latrines along the boundary and a third one followed early in the morning. It is not unusual to capture two to three hyenas during the same night, the maximum number of different individuals per night was four so far. We exchanged the film camera trap for a digital camera trap last week. So at least we don't have to wait impatiently for the development of the films any more and can see the results straight away.



NEWS

Our Environmental Information Centre is moving from the Luderitz Waterfront to Kolmanskop Ghost Town at the end of January. This also gives us the opportunity to give regular presentations at the Otanda Environmental Centre, which is situated there as well.

We have successfully downloaded data from Tosca's collar ten times and four times from Ray's collar, which gives us about 9000 and 3000 GPS fixes respectively. We tried to locate GHb1m from Gabusib for a download in the middle of December, but could not find him. We had similar problems with finding Alfie, our other inland hyena, initially, so we are not getting worried yet. We will try to locate him in January again. GHb1m's first download was actually due last week, but Gino is on his well deserved holiday and we will only be able to fly again once he is back.

Mahoney Newcombe from the UK adopted on of our brown hyenas at Sylvia Hill.

The Brown Hyena Research Project wishes all of you a very happy
New Year!



GEMMA AND HER HYENA PROJECT EXPERIENCES



I am very lucky to have taken part in several projects with the BHRP and I will never forget spending 2 weeks building a hyena skeleton from scratch, sleepless nights on the peninsula trying to dart Radford and the local clan and spending time with Flip, Robin, Sonja and of course Sonny chasing those elusive lions! Thanks for the memories (and the champagne) guys!

However, back to the seriousness of research, I am incredibly lucky to have worked at Van Reenen Bay and the impact assessment project there. Although my time there was brief, the pre- and post- mining study on the coast is one that I really enjoyed, and taking part made me feel I was contributing to the well-being and understanding of the wonderful brown hyenas.

In particular that wet, cold Easter weekend that, though long ago, still makes me shiver, for 2 reasons, firstly it actually was freezing cold and we were in danger of drowning in the desert, there had been so much rain! And secondly because it was my 1st close encounter with a brown hyena. Marvellous!

Collaring 'Ray' and helping Ingrid and Gino collate all the data and ensure a safe release was just awesome. And better still was following up on his progress. It was always so exciting to get back and plot his GPS positions on the map to see where he had been and what he had been up to. As it turns out Ray (so far) is not the most exciting hyena in the world – after going back to VRB with Ingrid several times to download the data, it seems that Ray likes the comforts of Van Reenen Bay and does not go on too many adventures. However, maybe that will change in the future. Meanwhile, Ray seems to be the perfect subject for the study, staying in the Van Reenen area and giving us lots of data. And he will of course always have a special place in my heart, as the first brown hyena to get up close and personal!

Thanks again to everyone that made my 5 months on the project great fun and a real learning curve! Good luck with everything in the future...

FUNDRAISING AND DONATIONS

Wilderness Safaris Wildlife Trust contributed with N\$ 10 000 to our aerial telemetry expenses for the year 2007. Since our study area included many inland sites now, aerial tracking becomes increasingly important to be able to do data downloads on a regular basis.

Westair provided hangar space and time at the Luderitz airport while we were out in the field trying to dart Hottentotbay hyenas.

Succulent Karoo Ecosystem Planning (SKEP) approved of the following projects:

- Brown Human wildlife conflict with spotted hyenas around the Sperrgebiet boundary
- Brown hyena awareness
-

The following grant proposals are still pending:

- Herbivore abundance and movement in the Sperrgebiet (SKEP)
- Brown hyena conservation along the Orange River (SKEP)
- Brown hyena conservation in the Sperrgebiet (Nedbank Go Green Fund)
- EnviroClub Sperrgebiet: The Luderitz youth is encouraged to run a "Biological Puppet Theatre" (Global Environment Fund)

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

Namdeb	Benguela Enterprises CC	Raleigh International	MET	Rene Rossler	Luderitz Backpackers
Caltex	Hottentot Bay Investment	Luderitz Bay Shipping	MFMR	Ronel v.d. Merwe	Mark Noffke
Siemens	Cc	&Forwarding	Luderitz Safaris & Tours	Steve Appleton	Mandy Noffke
Shell Solar	Wilderness Safaris	First National Bank	Riaan Laubscher	George Shimaneni	Pisces Environmental
Predator Conservation	Wildlife Trust	Luderitz Yacht Club	Andrew Cunningham	Gisela Wolters	Services
Trust	Namibia Nature	Luderitz SPAR	Alex MacKay	Kolette Grobler	Westair
OK Grocer	Foundation	Windhoek Optics	Gino Noli	Norbert Klosta	
Truckscan	Sidewinder Films	Wild Horse Trust	Kathy Peard	Wilfried Erni	
Critical Ecosystem	Forbidden Land	Upstart Technologies	Jessica Kemper	Erich Looser	
Partnership Fund	Coastway Tours	Seaflower	Jean-Paul Roux	Lino Scanavino	
Nebank Green Fund	4x4 Adventures	Coastal Electric &	Trygve Cooper	Jürgen Syvertsen	
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Fund	BHP Billiton	Nest Hotel	Johann du Toit	Beppo Family	
GraphPad Software, Inc.	Divpac	ESRI	Frikkie Kraamwinkel	Willem Swiegers	



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If you would prefer to do a bank transfer, the details are as follows:

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ADOPTION AND DONATION FORM

Post form to Brown Hyena Research Project, P. O. Box 739, Lüderitz, Namibia or

e-mail to strandwolf@iway.na

- Adopt/Sponsor a brown hyena for one year (N\$/ZAR 1500-00, Euro/US\$ 250-00, £ 150-00)
- Become a friend of the Brown Hyena Research Project - annual fee: N\$/ZAR 500-00, Euro/US\$ 50-00, £ 35-00 discount for members from Namibia (60%) and other African countries (30%)
- I would prefer to donate N\$/ZAR, Euro/US\$, £

I enclose a cheque for the amount of N\$/ZAR, Euro/US\$, £

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Thank you very much for your support!