

PENINSULA DARTING PART 1

This year's darting season started at the beginning of May, when our field assistant Yennifer Hernandez and our volunteer vet Dr. Kirk Suedmeyer arrived in Luderitz. Our aim was to fit two GPS collars to brown hyenas at Wolf and Atlas Bay, two to Peninsula hyenas and two to Tsaukaib hyenas. Well, Kirk could not wait to go out to dart hyenas. Therefore we decided to drive around the Luderitz Peninsula to look for hyena activity, which we found very quickly: the hyenas had been busy digging out a dog carcass that had been buried quite close to the main gravel road. This was definitely a good site to try to dart hyenas, as they had already found the 'bait' and the site was also easily accessible from the road. Shortly after sunset, we set up the site and waited for the hyenas to come. Despite quite a bit of vehicle traffic in the area, the first hyena arrived at the bait just 30 minutes later. However, it was quite shy and unfortunately ran off. But: we were luckier the second time: Kirk managed to dart, but instead of hitting the hyena, he actually darted the dog carcass...well, these things can happen and we counted this as a practice shot...While we were



standing around the vehicle, re-loading the dart, Yen suddenly saw a movement at the bait – the hyena had returned. But now we were in a difficult situation. The car was parked too far away from the bait and Kirk needed to get closer to the hyena to be able to dart it. I had the feeling that the hyena really wanted to feed on the bait and that not much would disturb it, so we decided that Kirk should walk slowly towards the bait until he was close enough to get a good shot. The time seemed to stand still – the hyena kept Kirk in its eyes and vice versa...Kirk finally settled next to a rock close enough to the bait, but the hyena had moved a bit further away by then. We needed a lot of patience, but the hyena decided, after having walked around Kirk to catch his scent and after having decided that the scent was not too bad, to approach the bait again and to start feeding. Kirk took his chance and darted the hyena perfectly. She dropped only 30 metres from the dart site, so that we found her quickly.

The hyena was a young female, which we called Alaika. She was in an excellent condition, approximately four to five years old. We fitted her with a GPS collar. This collar records 24 positions each day and we already managed to do the first data download. She roams around the Luderitz Peninsula, but also visits the seal colonies at Wolf and Atlas Bay on a regular basis – this was very surprising, but I will report more about the surprising movements of Peninsula hyenas on page 2.

Alaika, Yen and Kirk



NUMBER OF ROADKILLS INCREASE

It is really hard to believe how many brown hyenas are hit and killed by vehicles on the tar road between Luderitz and Aus. At the beginning of May, a 9-month old cub was killed on the road near Haalenberg and at the beginning of June, a five to seven year old male was killed near Rotkop. Both accidents happened on a straight stretch of road and they should have been visible to the drivers. Speeding is the main problem and not paying attention to the animals that may cross the road. There are no fences along the road, so animals can move freely. If you drive this road, please drive cautiously!



SCHOOL FIELD TRIPS

The first school field trip was with the Luderitz Montessori school to the Wolf Bay seal colony. We observed the seals and the kids learned about brown hyena spoor, latrines and paste marks and a lot more...

We also went on a field trip with the Windhoek International School. The students renovated the observation hut at Van Reenen Bay and joined me on a nice walk to hyena city on their second day. The students adopted brown hyena Alaika, once they were back in Windhoek. Thank you very much!

URGENT EQUIPMENT NEEDS

We still need to raise funds to purchase more camera traps and to pay for the darting expenses this year. We are also looking for handheld halogene spotlights for our darting trips. We also need to buy a licence to update our home range calculation programme. Furthermore, we are urgently looking for funding to gain access to reference libraries. If you are interested in helping us by donating money or providing the needed equipment, please contact me via e-mail. Thank you very much in advance.

WHERE IS OONA?

Gino and I managed to squeeze in a search flight for Oona into our tight schedules at the beginning of May. Gino met me at the Luderitz airport and Kirk and Yen were on standby, as we wanted to locate Oona to dart her to replace the malfunctioning collar. To our surprise, we could not find her at all. We searched and searched for hours, but received not even a hint of a signal. I hope that she was just hidden well in a cave, but I rather think that the battery of the collar expired, so that no VHF signal is sent any more. Gino and I will do another search flight during his next visit and if we can't locate her then, I will try to attract her to bait in the Koichab River bed, where she usually rests, and hopefully will have the chance to dart her then.

WOLF BAY DARTING

I hadn't worked in the Wolf Bay area for many years and most collared animals had been hit and killed by vehicles on the road. Tony, the old Wolf Bay female, died at the beginning of this year and I have not seen the remaining collared female, Jewel, for a long time (her collar battery expired in 2007), so that I assume that she died, too. I was very excited to start working with the new Wolf and Atlas Bay Clan generation again and could not wait to dart and collar the first hyena. We set up our field camp just north of the Wolf Bay seal colony. The usual work started: dragging the bait, finding a good darting spot and staking the bait in. We decided to use Greenhouse gully to the north of the Wolf Bay seal colony as our dart site. We had success with darting hyenas there in the past and it is just a beautiful area to work, too. Kirk placed himself next to a bush and waited, staring at the bait. Yen and I waited inside the Wolf Bay observation hut, our ears tuned to the handheld radio, waiting for Kirk to say the magic words: "Ingrid, I darted a hyena.". Similar to the situation at the Luderitz Peninsula, the first hyena appeared in Greenhouse gully shortly after sunset. Altogether in three nights, we had nine hyena sightings before we eventually darted the first one. But, first about the hyena sightings: during the second night Kirk saw a collared hyena!!! Alaika. Well, this was really weird, as the Peninsula hyenas usually only forage at the Wolf Bay seal colony during the seal pupping season between November and January each year. What was Alaika doing at Wolf Bay in May? Possibly just a weird coincidence, but when we captured the first 'Wolf Bay' animal the next night, I really started wondering: the animal we captured was Tosca, our breeding female from the Luderitz Peninsula Clan. What has happened to the Wolf Bay hyenas? Where are they? Did the Peninsula Clan take over the Wolf Bay territory? All these questions, but I was sure that I would find out more once I had downloaded data from the collars and once I had also captured some 'real' Wolf Bay hyenas. To make sure that we don't capture any more Peninsula hyenas, we moved our darting site to the southern end of Atlas Bay. Luck was on our side: we captured and collared another female brown hyena and she was not known to be a Peninsula animal. Therefore I thought that we finally found the right area to dart 'real' Wolf Bay hyenas, but the next darting nights in the Atlas Bay area proved me wrong: shortly after sunset we received Tosca's and Alaika's VHF signals and both hyenas walked past our car to go foraging at the seal colony. Alaika even went to the bait to feed – as if she knew that we won't dart her again...

The first data downloads of Tosca and Obelixa (the 'real' Wolf Bay hyena) show that both animals belong to different clans. Tosca does not visit the Luderitz Peninsula very often and spends most of her time around the seal colonies. Obelixa lives along the coast between Elizabeth Bay and Atlas Bay, but for some reason does not visit the seal colony at Atlas Bay.

Tosca was pregnant when we captured her and she should give birth any time now. Her next download is due in the middle of July and I'm sure that we will be able to find her den then.



Taking measurements of Tosca

Thanks to Ingebert and Willem Swiegers for organising the bait for the darting trips. Many thanks to Norbert Klosta, who provided space in his cool-room to store the bait and who adopted Obelixa.

PENINSULA DARTING PART 2: MINERVA IS BACK...



Minerva close to her den

had given birth just before we captured her. I will start with the monitoring of the den site next week, as she has moved to the large communal den in the meantime, which can be nicely observed from a distance without disturbing the animals. I will keep you informed about her 'family' life.

Although we already had accidentally collared two Peninsula hyenas with GPS collars (we only had one GPS collar available for Peninsula hyenas), we still needed to fit a GSM collar to a member of this clan. We can only use GSM collars around the town of Luderitz, as the animals have to come into cell phone range occasionally to allow data transfer. Therefore, we went back to the dog carcass, but also took some more bait, just in case that the hyenas were not interested in the rotting dog any more. Again, we did not have to wait for long: shortly after sunset, Kirk mentioned the magic words again and we found the darted hyena shortly afterwards about 100 metres away from the dart site. As soon as I approached the sedated hyena, I knew that I had seen this animal before: it was Minerva. But: what was Minerva doing at the Luderitz Peninsula? What is going on with all the hyenas, why do they live in the wrong areas...? Sure, I was happy to be able to collar a well known, breeding female, but I was becoming increasingly worried about all the hyenas' movements.

Minerva appeared to be a bit thin, but otherwise in a good condition. She is between 10 and 12 years old and just raised a litter of cubs at the beginning of last year.

Over the past few weeks we were able to download over 100 positions of Minerva's whereabouts. As always, she forages mainly at the Luderitz rubbish dump and actually does not visit the Luderitz Peninsula too often, so it was really a coincidence that we captured her there. She also swam to Flamingo Island again, possibly to eat some gulls' eggs – I just hope the collar survives these 'wet' moments...

Minerva's movements became quite restricted recently and therefore Yen and I visited the area, where she seemed to spend a lot of time. We found her at a beautiful, small den and the footprints that we found at the entrance were very, very small. I think that she

TSAUKAIB DARTING: ATTEMPT NO 1

Well, one thing is definitely missing in this newsletter: where are the 'rain-stories'? The insider joke amongst my friends in Luderitz is that whenever I go into the field to dart hyenas, it is going to rain...and: it did! But first about the Tsaukaib darting attempt in more detail. We had already caught and collared three brown hyenas and



Tsaukaib Mountains

felt confident that it would be 'easy' in the Tsaukaib Mountains, too. But as usual things become increasingly difficult. The first two nights, Kirk only caught glimpses of hyenas, but none of them approached the bait. The third night finally seemed to be successful: Kirk darted a hyena shortly after sunset, but: the dart did not go off. And that was it for the darting attempt at the Tsaukaib Mountains – we did not manage to fit any collars. The hyenas outsmarted us again: it started raining heavily during the fourth darting night and we had to break-up our watch at 8:30 pm. It stopped raining at 3 am in the morning, but I was so tired and really hesitated to move out to continue with the night-watches. I heard Kirk stirring in the tent next to mine and thought, if he gets up than we will obviously continue trying. However, Kirk must have had the same thought than me and we were both too lazy and more importantly too tired to move and continue working. Well, we had to pay hard for this decision: when we went to the dart site the next morning, the hyenas had eaten nearly all of the bait and dragged a large piece of our bait down the riverbed. The hyenas had a party in our absence! Actually one of the hyenas was still feeding on the bait when Yen was the first one to check the bait at 7 am in the morning. From the footprints we were convinced that there were at least three brown hyenas involved, which gave us hope for the fifth night, but nothing happened. The hyenas were around, but stayed away from the bait. So we are faced with a new challenge in this study area. We will try to dart hyenas there in July or August again and will report more in the next newsletter.

FUNDRAISING AND DONATIONS

Adventure Camping Hire in Windhoek donated the well needed tent for our field projects. We already used the tent during the darting trips and it withstood the harsh, coastal weather conditions well.

Norbert Klosta sponsored N\$ 2500 and adopted brown hyena Obelixa. The **Windhoek International School** sponsored brown hyena Alaika with N\$ 1500.

Gwen Stirling donated £ 100 towards the purchase of new camera traps.

Grillenberger's Bottle Store collected N\$ 326.87 in its slot tin.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOU SUPPORT!

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