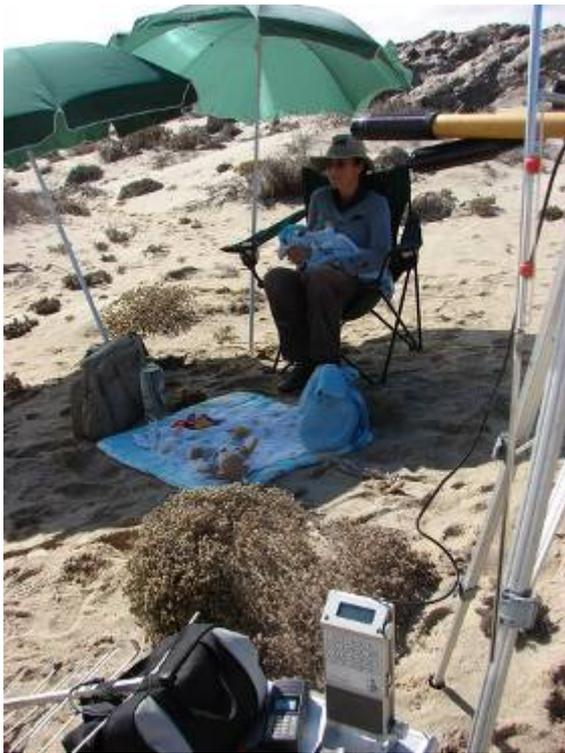


INTRODUCING MAX TO FIELDWORK

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 (☺) 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 Unverhofft 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 download or maybe not? More of Tosca's news further below...



Downloading equipment, Max' playground and Max and myself

ALAIKA IS BACK!

Alaika became somewhat of a ghost... after she lost her collar last year shortly after we fitted it, I was hoping to catch her image of one of our camera traps, especially on the ones set up close to Tosca's active dens. As you all know, most hyena images we get are nose, fur or ear shots, so that I did not get many photographs that could be used to identify the specific animal. The few photos that were of really good identification quality were of other, unknown hyenas or of Tosca, clearly identifiable through her collar. No Alaika. Well, I guess she was just outsmarting me again and walking around the camera trap as not to trigger a photograph. Obviously I'm hoping to fit her with a collar this year again, but since I had not seen her in the meantime she could have also left the area to join another clan. Last year I also had given up on the camera trap that I had set up south of the Wolf Bay seal colony at a nice feeding site called Greenhouse Gully. However, I got some funds to purchase more camera traps from Namdeb (these traps have to be used for the Bogenfels impact study) and from the Interessen-Verband der Auslandsjäger (a German hunting organisation). In preparation for the darting season I decided to try my luck at Greenhouse Gully again not expecting anything else than jackals on the photographs. However, the first images that I retrieved proved to be the most exciting ones for this year so far. Obviously most images were of jackals, but suddenly I had to laugh: a porcupine (see below)... there are so many porcupines in the area, but I have never seen one there at night, let alone captured one on camera before.

I thought this can't get any better until I saw the next photograph. A perfect image of a brown hyena carrying a seal pup away from the seal colony. I had the feeling that I knew that animal and after checking my identification catalogue I knew for sure that it was Alaika. What a fantastic surprise. Soooooo, I really hope to fit her with a collar in July/August and I'm sure Yen and Kirk, who are both joining me again for this year's darting season will see it the same way. After all, Alaika is 'Yen's' hyena. I'm so relieved to see her in such a good condition and also hope that now, where the 'spell' is broken, she will show her beautiful face on camera trap images more often.

Just a quick remark to our darting season that will take place in July and August. I will obviously have a bit of difficulties spending all the time in the field, as Max also needs my attention and I'm sure the hyenas are in good hands with our experienced Yen-Kirk team. However, we have two additional team members this year. Dr. Dawn Zimmerman, also a vet from the US, who is going to look at brown hyena disease and Corin Willers, the grandson of my MSc and doctorate supervisor Prof. Dr. Harald Schliemann. I'm sure we will have a fantastic and memorable time.



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



Porcupine at Greenhouse Gully

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.

Can you spot the two cubs?

ANOTHER SAD ROAD-KILL



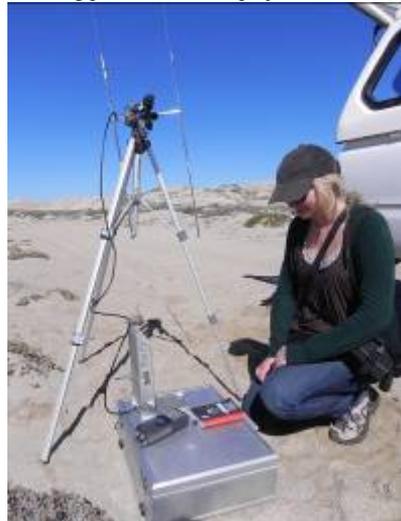
There have at least been five brown hyena road-kills at Haalenberg over the past four years. That was one of the reasons why we had one of the brown hyena road warning signs put there. This unfortunately does not help much. Another brown hyena was killed just a few metres in front of the road sign in 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 they move over the tar road and how frequently they 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, Siggie.

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

Ingrid and me were happy, Max loved his first day in the field (maybe he should become a scientist too), and Ruttu liked her first day in the Sperrgebiet.

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:

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