

OBELIXA AND HER CUBS

Obelixa was due for a data download at the beginning of April. I received her signal as usual in the Elizabeth Bay ghost town. It was very strong at the old plant where she was denning and I drove to the southern side, where my camera trap is also located to attempt a download. The signal strength was very good and I set-up the downloading equipment next to my vehicle. I was concentrating on the set-up and when I finally raised my head while holding the remote trigger transmitter and antenna, I was surprised by Obelixa and one of her cubs who were watching me from a distance of not more than 20 metres. Both of them seemed to be very intrigued by the strange set-up in front of their den entrance. However, they were not concerned about me and strolled back into the plant to continue playing. The cub was very interested in my car though and decided after some time to come closer and investigate. Obelixa did not seem to be too concerned to start off with, but joined her cub a bit later to make sure that everything was all right. I had just finished the download, when Obelixa left her cub to look for a resting site to spend the rest of the day. She returned twice to the den though before leaving into the direction of the ghost town again. I felt that she was at unease with my presence close to her unattended cub and I quickly checked the camera trap for more images and left the site. It was such a nice and unexpected experience and it was good to see one of the cubs, healthy and full of life.



CAMERA TRAP DAMAGE

As previously reported, I had set-up two camera traps at the Wolf Bay seal colony to monitor Tosca of the Peninsula Clan. I used our new Reconyx camera trap, our best quality camera trap up to date and a new generation Scoutguard camera trap. We got fantastic images, but on our last camera trap check at the end of May, we found the Reconyx camera trap bitten in bits and pieces. The hyenas had dug the camera trap cage out, managed to bend the protective housing to be able to get the camera trap out.



Reconyx camera trap after hyena attack (photo: Inga Jaenecke)

We could not even save the SD card, but the other camera trap took images of the culprits – as usual, our sub adult hyenas can't leave my equipment alone. Alaika's last cubs were on a rampage and seemed to have lots of fun, as judged from the images that the other camera trap took.



ROADKILL

Sadly I have to report another brown hyena roadkill. The young, male brown hyena was hit and killed at the Welcome to Luderitz sign at the end of May by a minibus driver at 4:00 in the morning. I collected the animal early the next morning. By that time the minibus driver was on his way back to Windhoek. He stopped and demanded N\$ 500 from me, as I was removing HIS kill. I was too shocked to even write down the registration number of the vehicle to report this to the Ministry of Environment and Tourism. Garth Lucas from Talking Pictures, who was filming a scene with me this morning, luckily convinced the driver that he would have to go to the police to report the kill and that he would have to pay a fine – this at least made him leave immediately.

OBELIXA'S COLLAR REPLACEMENT

I had realised last year that Obelixa's collar was not working properly any more. The VHF transmission was often broken, so that I needed to replace the collar to make sure that I would be able to find her to download data. I took this opportunity to call on my 'old' capture team, Dr. Hartmut Winterbach from Swakopmund and Dr. Jessica Kemper from the Penguin Conservation Project in Luderitz. We were all very excited to work together again – the last time had been in 2004. We also had Garth from Talking Pictures and his camera man Grant with us. They have been working with me on a documentary about brown hyenas and the project's work for many years.

After seeing Obelixa with her cub at the old E-Bay plant just a couple of weeks earlier, I felt confident that we would be able to capture her easily. We set-up our bait at the ruins of the old casino and used the structure as a natural hide for our team and the film crew. Luck was on our side. Just after sunset, both of Obelixa's cubs came to the bait. We were sure that Obelixa would follow quickly, but there was no sign of her. This was weird, but watching the cubs was just amazing. Once they had left, there was another hyena, which we presumed was a subadult or large cub, maybe of Obelixa's previous litter. Suddenly, Obelixa appeared at the bait while the 'large cub' was feeding there, too and it turned out that the large 'cub' was actually an adult, too. Amazing how difficult it is to judge size in the dark. We did not have the chance to dart Obelixa, but we were sure that she would come back the next night, as she now knew that the bait was there.



Hartmut Winterbach and Ingrid Wiesel with Obelixa



Grant, Hartmut, Ingrid and Garth setting-up the bait (photos: Jessica Kemper)

Obelixa did not disappoint us. We were able to dart her the following night. It was not the easiest to find her. We saw her disappearing to the south after she had been darted, but she outsmarted us and we finally found her just 300 metres east of the bait. We managed to fit a new GPS telemetry collar, took some blood and did some measurements to compare with previous data. She is still in an excellent condition and I'm so happy that we will be able to follow her for another three years due to the new collar.

BROWN HYENA RESEARCH PROJECT RESEARCH TEAM



From left to right: Diane, Sarah, Eric, Jack and Inga

My office has never been this busy – hardly any space for me any more...

Inga Jaenecke came back after doing her internship with the hyena project last year to start data collection for her Bachelor's degree in April. She is comparing sign survey data and GPS telemetry data to use for habitat and core area analysis.

Eric Murray and Jack Merrifield joined the team to work on their Master's thesis' looking at the foraging and hunting behaviour of black-backed jackals at the Van Reenen Bay seal colony. Jackals are the hyenas' greatest competitors along the coastal Namib Desert and definitely influence their foraging behaviours. Eric and Jack have been living at the Van Reenen Bay research station since March – no beauty salon nearby, judging by their beards...

Sarah Edwards arrived at the beginning of June to start with a 3 year PhD study on human-wildlife-conflict along the Sperrgebiet and Namib Naukluft Park boundaries. This project is co-funded by the Nedbank Go Green Fund and the Royal Holloway University of London.

And finally, we welcome Diane Metzger, who is going to help me with data entry for a long time to come. She will mainly prepare the camera trap and GPS telemetry data sets for analysis.

CAMERA TRAP IMAGES



Quite amazing footage this time: Lots of very good brown hyena identification images, cub close-ups, but also many new species. An unidentified bat, a striped polecat, our friend the caracal in the Tsaukaib mountains and quite a lot of porcupines as well as our famous Tsaukaib hare.

FUNDRAISING AND DONATIONS

Nedbank Go Green Fund had provided the initial funding for the human-wildlife-conflict study, contributing N\$ 151 100. **Dr. Paul Bright**, Sarah Edwards other PhD supervisor, from the **Royal Holloway University of London** raised an additional £ 10 000 and 37 Wildview camera traps.

The **Predator Conservation Trust** in the UK donated £ 1000 towards our annual aerial telemetry expenses. This donation helped us to cover more than half of our costs.

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

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