



Newsletter

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Obelixa Surprises Us Again...

by Ingrid Wiesel

When I analysed Obelixa's GPS tracking data in December last year, it looked as if she gave birth in September 2015. However, in March this year, we discovered her at a new natal den with a 2-3 months old cub. Initially I thought that I had seen two cubs, one nursing and one disappearing quickly into the den, but on all subsequent visits, we could only see one small cub. I downloaded her GPS data, which indicated that she gave birth between the end of January and the middle of February 2016. Hence, I assumed that she had lost her September 2015 litter until we were sent these pictures by Brad Wood, who sighted Obelixa and her cubs at E-Bay ghost town. We initially thought that we had just missed the second cub, but on closer inspection of all the photographs it became clear that the cubs were of different age. Our old lady seems to have fallen pregnant just after giving birth to the older cub, as gestation period is on average 97 days.

What an amazing hyena she is! In her advanced age she doesn't move vast distances anymore though and only looks for food at beaches nearby, but she still seems to be able to bring enough food back to the den. However, she obviously has help from all the other clan members including her daughter KC Sowande.

Since we collared her for the first time in 2009, she has had at least seven litters, lost one and successfully reared at least five cubs to sub-adulthood.

Obelixa's collar battery is about to expire and we will have to drop it off soon. I hope that we will regularly capture her on camera traps to be able to see whether she manages to successfully rear these two cubs and to monitor her condition. Even if she is going to survive until next year, we are not going to capture her to fit a new collar, so in some ways, we already have to say good-bye to her soon.



Obelixa and her two cubs (photos courtesy of B. Wood)

Peninsula sightings

Our Peninsula camera traps pick up more uncollared animals and we receive more and more sighting reports from the public. It looks promising that the Lüderitz Peninsula becomes the important denning and foraging area that it once was again.

Aardwolf roadkill



Reported by Brad Wood
On C13 – 28 km south of Aus

Brown hyena roadkill



Reported by Julien Cloete
On Swartkops road 15 km from
Oranjemund

Nya and Zane's First Recorded Movements

by Ingrid Wiesel

The two spotted hyenas, Nya and Zane, that we fitted with GPS telemetry collars in April this year are doing well. Inga went together with Telané Greyling and Christine Wulff-Swiegers from the Namibia Wild Horses Foundation to familiarize herself with the area in order to learn the routes for future data downloads and camera trap checks.

Although both hyenas travelled from the darting site near the wild horse trough at Garub all the way north to the sand dunes bordering the Koichab riverbed, Inga found them resting in the Hasenberge close to the darting site. Both remote data downloads went well and we received over 600 data sets for each animal covering a period of one month.



We removed all camera traps for maintenance in April, but Inga has set them all up again, so that we hopefully will be able to post some images of our collared spotted hyenas on our Facebook page soon.

Van Reenen Bay Renovations

by Inga Jaenecke



Before and after....

We used the long weekend at the beginning of May to do the necessary restorations at our Van Reenen Bay observation hut; we that was the de Villiers family (Jurgens, Frederik, Stefan, Eugene, Jurgens, Lucy, Margaret and Louise) and myself.

After getting up early the Saturday morning and checking our camera traps along the way to Van Reenen Bay, we arrived there at lunch time. None of them had been to Van Reenen Bay before, so the research station didn't quite meet their expectations. Everyone thought

that we would stay in a tiny hut which just gives enough space to cook and sleep. So you can imagine how surprised everyone was when they saw the quite spacious research station with a kitchen, dining/living room and bedrooms in the middle of nowhere, looking over the Van Reenen Bay seal colony.



As everyone was keen on starting the restorations at the observation hut and to find out what else I withhold from them, we hit the road. At this point I have to say that I have only once driven from the research station to the observation hut which is several years ago. So we had to rediscover the old tracks, which were barely visible. Especially the tracks that go through a large hummock dune field were completely gone. As everyone, who has been in Luderitz before and experienced the wind, can imagine, it is impossible that tracks will be visible for more than a few days, especially if a road is not regularly used. So the advice I got beforehand was to stay in the dunes, to not drive on the gravel plains and to orientate towards the hills on the other side of the dune field. Nothing easier than that, and once the first tracks were made we were able to reuse them every day. When we got to the observation hut the wind was howling, but this couldn't stop us. And when I saw the amount of power tools and

the generator that was taken along, I was really happy the wind was blowing, as the seal colony starts just at the bottom of the cliff where the observation hut is situated. I think if it wasn't for the wind, the seals would have been slightly wondering where the noise came from. Once everything was set up, the restorations started. The boards protecting the windows at 3 sides of the hut were cut in the appropriate size, the hut itself was sanded to get the old colour off, broken parts were fixed and everything was painted in a nice greyish marine colour. It took us Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning to get the observation hut look as new and blinding in perfectly with its surrounding.

It is once again amazing how much fun hard work can be if you have the right tools with you, great company and an amazing view. I would like to thank Pescanova and Novaship Namibia again for sponsoring the needed material and equipment! Furthermore, a huge thank you to the de Villiers family, you did a great job and it was a lot of fun working with you! I hope there will be a chance to repeat this.

Citizen Science Project Updates

by Ingrid Wiesel

With this new column, we want to keep you up to date about sightings reports from the public and our citizen science collaboration partners.

The distribution of brown hyenas in Namibia is still very sketchy and although our data to model distribution and density becomes more scientifically sound each year, we still have a long way to go. Inga will search all available online databases during the next few months and will develop guidelines for our future camera trap owner collaboration partners in order to standardize data collection as much as possible. But in the meantime, please continue to report sightings to us directly. These include visual sightings, spoor sightings, road mortalities and camera trap images. Whenever possible, please include photographs as proof.

Between April and July 2016 five visual sightings (Jessica Kemper, Brad Wood, Pieter Sieberhagen, Hennie Anthonissen) and one spoor sighting (Susann Kinghorn) were reported by the public, three were forwarded by Namdeb's Environmental Section and four camera trap captures were reported by camera trap owners (Keith Newnham, Natasha Batault).



One of our camera trap owner collaboration partners, Keith Newnham, has recently set-up a camera trap north of Port Nolloth in South Africa. No recent records of brown hyenas exist from this area, so that it was excluded in the most recent IUCN distribution map. However, the habitat there is ideal for brown hyenas and we were certain that they occur in that area, but had no proof.

In the past four weeks, Keith's camera traps have captured brown hyena on three occasions – without such collaboration partners, we would never be able to delineate the true distribution due to lack of data and it highlights the importance of our newly established Citizen Science Project.

Camera Trap Images



HCO ScoutGuard 3.24.2016 20:00:58



HCO ScoutGuard 3.24.2016 7:13:15

Important paste mark at 'Overhang'. Hyenas spend a lot of time marking and investigating newly deposited scents.



HCO ScoutGuard 4.14.2016 18:10:50



HCO ScoutGuard 4.14.2016 20:09:02

The spring at E-Bay is visited mostly by ostrich, but brown hyenas frequently drink there, too.



Bushnell Camera Name 59°F 15°C 04-10-2016 04:59:21



Bushnell Camera Name 48°F 8°C 05-12-2016 02:25:03

Peninsula hyenas

FUNDRAISING

- **Predator Conservation Trust** in the UK donated £1000, so that we could purchase five camera traps and protective housings for our Citizen Science Project.
- **Pescanova/Novaship Namibia** donated all required materials for the renovations of the Van Reenen Bay observation hut and research station.



Contact Details

www.strandwolf.org

www.facebook.com/BrownHyenaResearchProject

P. O. Box 739

Lüderitz

Namibia

Dr. Ingrid Wiesel

ingrid.wiesel@strandwolf.org

Inga Jaenecke

Inga.jaenecke@strandwolf.org

Donations:

Brown Hyena Research Project – Nedbank Namibia

Bismarck Street, Lüderitz, 9000, Namibia

Lüderitz Branch, Branch Code 461610

Cheque Account

Account number: 11010015024

Swift code: NEDSNANX

BIC: NEDSNANXXXX

IBAN: 46161011010015024