

SPOTTED HYENA DOWNLOADS

After our first successful data download, we more or less knew where to search for the spotted hyena “Oona” for the next download. However, many of the areas where she spends time are inaccessible, so one needs a lot of luck to actually find her. There is also only one road in the area and it is often many kilometres away from Oona’s preferred resting sites. Nevertheless, Jessica and I decided to try and find Oona in the Koichab pan in the middle of December. We planned for a nice day in the field without actually expecting to find her. We drove along the Koichab pipeline, seeing quite a lot of game along the way including close to 100 ostriches around a water leak at the pipeline. We just passed the Kirchberg Mountain and suddenly got a strong signal from Oona’s collar. The signal came from the dunes. We drove further along the road to get closer to the dunes, but the signal started to get weak, so we decided to walk towards the signal. It was actually pretty difficult to locate



Oona walking amongst the dunes

the signal in the dunes, as the sand swallowed the signal many times. We also didn’t know whether Oona was resting together with the other hyenas, so our approach was very slow and careful. Suddenly, a quick movement right next to us in a bush made our hearts stop: a Cape hare - running for its life. Well, this didn’t help us much to feel comfortable and we also knew from the signal’s strength that we must be within a few hundred metres of Oona. However, we still could not trigger the download, so we decided to go back to the car and drive along the power line to the other side and approach Oona from there. This time we were lucky. We only had to move about 500 metres and could trigger the download. So we sat on the dune, checking the bushes for catching a glimpse of Oona, but obviously, these animals are pretty well camouflaged. Suddenly, the download signal strength changed and I said to Jessica that I think that Oona is moving. Shortly afterwards, I saw a movement in the corner of my eye, looked through the binocs, but could not see anything, so I blamed the “sighting” on a bird. Seconds later, Oona appeared. She was about 200 metres away from us, but hadn’t seen and could not smell us. She walked slowly to another bush, digging a new resting site. It was absolutely amazing to see a spotted hyena amongst the dunes. By then the download also had finished and we sat still on the dune and watched her. Suddenly she looked into our direction, but did not seem to be bothered at all, as she continued digging the sand to expose the cooler sand layer underneath.

What a priveledge! I can’t describe how happy we were. We got close to another 1000 data points and it showed again, that Oona stays away from farmland, she only crossed to a farm to the south once. In February we decided to search for Oona again, this time taking the road from Aus, via the Hasenberge and Dikwillem to the Koichab. It was an amazing trip. The area got quite a lot of rain and many plants were flowering. We arrived around lunchtime in the Koichab pan, which was also transformed by the rains. We passed a huge lake, just south of the dunes and to our surprise, we received Oona’s signal again – very close to the area, where we had done the previous download. We could trigger the download the first time and again, sat on a dune, checking the bushes around us. This time Oona stayed in her resting site, but we could see from the downloaded data later, that she had only been about 150 m away from us. I don’t think that she is resting with the other hyenas during the day, but we will try to fit the second collar as soon as possible to get more information about their daytime and nighttime behaviour. As with the previous downloads, the data showed that she stays within the boundaries of the Sperrgebiet and Namib Naukluft National Parks and we hope that it stays this way. However, we have to talk to the bordering farmers soon to make them aware of the project and hope that they will collaborate. We also pinpointed some areas where Oona has possibly been feeding on gemsbok or wild horses and we gave the information to Telané, who studies the wild horses in this area and she is going to investigate the sites soon.

We also would like to fit brown hyenas in the same study area with GPS collars to find out how both hyena species interact. Therefore we are urgently looking for funding, so if anybody has an idea or would like to contribute to this study, please contact us.

Thanks to Jessica for joining the downloading trips. It feels a lot safer to walk with two people in unknown territory – I still have to get used to the spotted hyenas.



Water in the Koichab

CHRISTMAS WITH RAY

Although Ray is a pretty boring hyena when it comes to movement and activity, he is definitely one of my favourite ones. He actually turned out to be my best Christmas present. Over Christmas, we had a camera man, Alistair, working for Talking Pictures, staying at Van Reenen Bay to get brown hyena predation shots. I drove him into the study area and showed him the seal colony, but while we were on our way, I also received Ray’s signal. He was resting near a beach, south of the seal colony and I went there to do a download after dropping Alistair at the seal colony. I had problems triggering the download, so that I was pretty sure that Ray was resting in one of the caves near the beach. After completing the download I decided to look for him. I finally found him resting in an entrance to a tunnel in the cliffs to the north of the beach. He really looked comfortable and I just wished that I could join him there in the cool shade, but I had to stay on top of the cliff, exposed to the hot sun. I watched him for a long time and took the first video footage of him. He finally got up, as he heard some cars moving in the area, but he still had no idea that I was watching him. Ray moved through the tunnel and walked north into the hummock dunes. I waited until I lost him out of sight and drove back to the seal colony, but still saw him on the way, digging a resting site in a hummock dune.



Ray resting near the beach

WHO NEEDS A GYM?

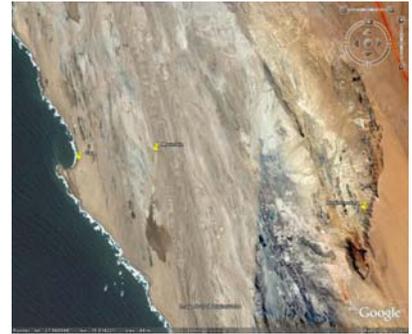
Caspar and Rodin definitely keep me fit. First of all, they are not as easy to find as Ray (at least these two hyenas move vast distances and have large home ranges) and the network of roads in their home range areas is pretty poor, so finding them with a vehicle is tricky. Therefore I couldn’t believe my luck, when I went to search for Rodin near Dreimasterbay and picked up Caspar’s signal (remember, he is actually an inland hyena, that only sometimes visits the coast) just north of my igloo at False Plumpadding. It was coming from eastern direction and I knew that there are no other roads than the one I was on, so I started walking. The dune field in the east was about 2.5 km away and I was convinced that Caspar must be resting in one of the mountains to my side of the dunes, as the signal usually does not carry for too many kilometres. To my surprise, I also suddenly started to get Rodin’s signal from approximately the same direction. Caspar’s was coming from the northeast and

Rodin's from the southeast. I followed Caspar's signal first to look for Rodin after I had done Caspar's download. Well, easier said than done. One hour later, I finally arrived at the last mountain range before the dunefield, but both signals were still coming from far away. I couldn't face walking for 2.5 km over the dunes and it was also past lunchtime and I only had another free hour before I had to drive back to town in order to get through the Sperrgebiet gate before it closes. Back at the car I checked my map for roads I might not know, but obviously, I know my area well and there are no more roads. I was so disappointed. What are the chances of getting a signal of both hyenas again! Not much I could do, so I planned another trip for the following week.

I drove straight to Dreimasterbay, not expecting anything, but: I received Rodin's signal – and he was still moving – very close to the place where I started walking the week before. His signal was strong and again coming from eastern direction. Suddenly I lost the signal. Therefore, I was convinced that, although he was still walking, he would settle down in a resting site soon. It was already 10 am and he usually isn't active much during the day. I was also convinced that he would be on my side of the dunes. Well, an hour later, I arrived at the same mountain where I had been the week before and received no signal whatsoever. Only one explanation: he was still walking and was only going to settle in a resting site far away from where I was. It was still early enough, so I decided to drive the remaining road. Once I was back at the car, I switched on the receiver and started driving north. About two hundred metres further on, I received a strong signal from Rodin's collar and I found him another 300 metres to the north, in a mountain right next to a beach. He really outsmarted me there. While I was trying to be clever and follow him to his resting site, he changed direction and moved to rest at the beach. At least I got lots of exercise and was till rewarded with a download.

I was obviously excited to see where Rodin had been the week before, when I stopped searching at the dunefield. I downloaded the data and couldn't believe it: he had been another 8 km to the southeast of the mountain. He must have been lying high up on a mountain, otherwise it would have been impossible for me to get his signal from this far away. I'm just happy that I didn't decide to walk through the dunefield to find him – not sure if I would have been too happy after such a hike. Well, at least this whole story taught a valuable lesson: don't follow hyenas when they are still moving, rather wait and see. Still, I had a good time and the area is really amazing to hike, although next time I would prefer a day without gail force winds.

I tried to find Caspar twice since, but haven't had any luck. Gino might come to fly for us in April again and I'm sure we will find Caspar then.



Rodin's resting site and my hiking trip

WHERE ARE THE BROWN HYENAS FROM SYLVIA HILL?

It's been quite some time since I've been at Sylvia Hill to monitor the brown hyenas in the area. However, in 2003 we established that we have at least three brown hyenas in this area including a male "Der Sabi" and a female "Liesl".

In 2004 Der Sabi was seen mating with Liesl and another male brown hyena was around, but we could not establish his ID. In May 2006, a visitor to the area reported a badly injured animal that turned out to be Der Sabi. One side of his face was swollen and basically sort of ripped off. His left side eye was gone and we all agrees that he might die of these injuries.

Other than this, hyena spoor was always seen in the area, especially around the seal colony. So I was really looking forward to my visit to Sylvia Hill in February. I went straight to the den site, which has always been active during my previous visits. Arriving at the den, I could already see that it hadn't been used for a long time. There was no hyena spoor in the area and I started to check all know latrine sites: most of the latrines were gone and the few that I could still find hadn't been used recently. There were also no paste marks in the area. Next task was to check the food sources. There were no fresh tracks going to the bird colonies and nothing to be seen around the seal colony. The hyenas disappeared! What happened. There is plenty of food, so why did they leave. Maybe they were affected by the distemper outbreak a few years ago, but all other hyena populations are fine, so I don't really think that this is a probable explanation. I can only imagine that the female died for some reason and that both males (we assume that the third hyena is a male, too) left the area. The area is so rich in food sources and there are two perfect den sites in

the cliffs. Jackal numbers, as competitors, are not larger than anywhere else, so I hope that other hyenas will move into this vacant territory soon.

Strangely, Sylvia Hill is not the only coastal site, where hyena numbers have dropped recently. At Van Reenen Bay, hyena numbers dropped, too. However, the seal production at the colony at Van Reenen Bay dropped drastically and I rather think that this is the cause for the low hyena abundance at the moment. In contrast, the seal colony at Sylvia Hill has been growing over the last four years and this year's pup production is higher than it was four years ago. At Sylvia Hill, we found one dead hyena on the cliff above the seal colony. Unfortunately the skull was gone (possibly tourists that removed it) and we can't determine the age of the dead animal.

We will continue monitoring the situation and have planned another trip to Van Reenen Bay for the beginning of next year.

Thanks to Volker Jahnke from Coastway Tours for sponsoring the trip to Sylvia Hill. Also thanks to Wittus, Kolette and Gunther for joining the trip and making it so enjoyable, despite the bad hyena news.



BOGENFELS ATTEMPT NO 11

I actually feel bad reporting about our Bogenfels darting trips – it just doesn't get better. Hartmut arrived at the beginning of February to spend four sleepless nights trying to dart hyenas. I had been monitoring the area with camera traps since the beginning of January without much success: lots of jackals, but no hyenas. However, we can't give up and waited for two nights at the southern end of Van Reenen Bay for hyenas. We had actually seen a hyena walking away from the seal colony carrying a dead seal pup and on the first evening at the bait just after sunset, Ray walked towards our car, ignoring the bait and walking towards the research station. That at least gave us hope...for some hours...then it was too quiet...and as usual: nothing happened. Sorry, not nothing. The jackals had a feast. The monitoring of the seal colony during the day revealed nothing and we decided to try our luck further away at Dreimasterbay. Lots of hyena tracks there and we were actually convinced that it would work there. Well, we did not see any hyenas, but saw some spoor the next morning, about 100 metres away from the bait. The hyena must have been spooked by the car and walked off into opposite direction. We spent the day at the Baker's Bay seal colony and saw two hyenas, one of them approaching the seal colony. But, a weird thing happened on this trip: three hyenas that saw the vehicle (they could not smell it and we were not moving) ran away immediately, including the one approaching the seal colony at Baker's Bay. This had never happened before. There is more traffic now in the area due to the mining at Bogenfels, so maybe they became wearier of cars. In future, we will try to dart the hyenas further inland, maybe in the Klinghardt mountains. We are working on improving our equipment too, building a hide amongst other things. Hopefully we will be able to try to fit the Bogenfels collars later this year – we are far away from giving up.



One jackal...



Two jackals...



Three jackals...

WILDLIFE IN THE SPERRGEBIET

I had some fantastic other sightings while I was driving to my study sites since December last year. I saw a troop of baboons twice, just about 15 km away from the coast. Then I came across a beautiful, but scary, Cape cobra at the Bogenfels turn-off – far too close to the coast to be comfortable. I also saw two families of bat-eared foxes near Grillental and the Black Mountain and unfortunately one road kill just after the Black Mountain. However, the absolute highlight was seeing a honey badger. I got reports of honey badgers in my study areas, but all sightings were many years ago. I was tempted to follow the badger, but thought better of it, as I know how aggressive they can be. Maybe next time...



Bat-eared fox near the Black Mountain



Honey badger



Baboons

We are looking for funding for the following equipment (or alternatively sponsoring of second hand equipment):

- Two to three person dome tent (suitable for harsh environment and strong winds)
- Laser range finder
- Night-vision binoculars
- Pet immune motion detector (to use at the bait to be alerted when a hyena is at the bait, but not when jackals are at the bait)
- Camera traps

FUNDRAISING AND DONATIONS

The **Chevron Namibia** renewed their donation and donated N\$ 15000 towards fuel expenses. With the increasing fuel prices, we are very grateful for this generous donation.

Walter Rusch became a friend of the Brown Hyena Research Project and **Morag Burrell** renewed her membership. Thank you very much for your support.

Luderitz Safari's and Tours collected over N\$ 700 for our slot tin. Other slot tins are at **Grillenbergers Bottle Store**, at the **Environmental Information Centre** at Kolmanskop and the **German Club**.

The following grant proposals are still pending, but we hope that the committee will sit in January 2008:

- Brown hyena conservation in the Sperrgebiet (Nedbank Go Green Fund)
- Brown hyena conservation along the Orange River (SKEP)
- Interspecific relationships between spotted and brown hyenas (SKEP)

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

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OK Grocer	Luderitz Safaris & Tours	Trygve Cooper	Erich Looser	Oranjemund Moth Club
Raleigh International	Riaan Laubscher	Volker & Daggie Jahnke	Jürgen Syvertsen	Walter Rusch
		Rene Rossler	Morag Burrell	



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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!