

## TOSCA'S COLLAR RETRIEVAL

Tosca's data download was due at the beginning of October. Sarah, our volunteer from the UK, and I drove to Atlas Bay to start with the search for her signal. We did not have to search for long, but the signal that we received indicated that the battery voltage of the collar was already low, which meant that I had to try to trigger the drop-off. We found Tosca lying together with another hyena close to Bains Bay. I triggered the drop-off, but when Tosca and the other hyena moved off, we could see that the collar was still attached. Well, this was not really a surprise, as the same happened with Tosca's previous collar drop-off. However, similar to the situation when Minerva's drop-off triggered collar did not want to come off, I had to fly to Europe three days later and therefore urgently needed to find Tosca again and/or the dropped-off collar. No such luck. We searched for Tosca the next day and Sarah did an intensive search the day after, but no sign of the collar or Tosca anywhere. Therefore we feared that the collar may have dropped off at Jungle den and that the cubs may have taken it deep inside the den, so that we could not get a signal. I unfortunately had to leave, but contacted Gino to find out whether he would be able to try to locate the collar from the air while I was away.



Kathrin and Daniel with the 'long lost' collar

Luckily he was able to fly in the middle of November. He quickly received a signal close to Kolmanskop ghost town. However, the thick fog made it difficult to navigate and Gino had to stay at high altitude. Wherever he received a strong signal he recorded a GPS position. Two of these positions were quite far apart and it became clear that the collar was still 'moving'. Therefore we all assumed that the collar still hadn't dropped off. This was unusual as the longest time a collar had stayed on after triggering the drop off was 14 days. In Tosca's case more than a month had passed. This was a very puzzling situation. Therefore, one of the first things I did when I arrived back in Luderitz at the beginning of December was to drive to the position that Gino had recorded to get some answers. To my surprise, I received a signal on my way to the recorded position. Good news...either the collar did drop off or...bad news...Tosca may be dead. Together with the two project volunteers, Kathrin and Daniel, I walked to Gino's recorded GPS position, but we did not find anything but could continue to track the collar. We came closer and closer to the railway line that is in the process of being built. There was a bit of truck movement and some workers studied us while we were getting closer and closer to their position. Suddenly the workers jumped into their trucks and drove off. I managed to get the attention of one of them, who waited until we arrived. I received a strong signal from exactly the area, where the trucks were parked and therefore ask the worker if he had seen a collar. Obviously the answer was no and he drove off. I feared that the collar would be buried under lots of layers of building sand and already told the volunteers to be prepared to dig for it. I tried to get as exact a position as I could with my telemetry equipment and suddenly spotted the collar!!!! The collar was lying nicely next to the railway line, some footprints and truck tyre tracks next to it. Well, we will never know what had happened, but it looks as if one of the truck drivers had the collar on his truck and threw it out when we approached, possibly guessing that we were looking for it. Therefore it also makes sense that Tosca's collar was still moving when Gino tracked it in November. We were so lucky to retrieve the collar and we got 13 000 data sets that still have to be analysed.

*Thanks to Gino and Jessica, who tried their best to find the collar while I was away.*

## OBELIXA'S DOWNLOAD AND DISAPPEARANCE ACT

The only brown hyena that is still collared is Obelixa. Her download was due in the middle of November. I managed to drive into her area in the middle of December and found her walking on the road leading through Elizabeth Bay ghost town, carrying a dead seal pup in her mouth. The two project volunteers were with me and we decided to follow her and wait until she finds a resting site for the day to trigger the download. We followed her to the old Diamond Mine plant where she disappeared inside. But, not only did Obelixa disappear, with her went her signal. That was strange, but there are deep tunnels inside the old plant, but the plant is not save any more and we could not follow her into it. However, we were surprised about the amount of hyena activity around the plant and I knew from many years ago that the E-Bay clan animals used these tunnels as a den. As we could not do a download without a signal, we drove back to the office and prepared four camera traps, which we wanted to set-up around the plant in order to find out whether there were cubs around and also to start with an ID catalogue of the E-Bay animals for a monitoring programme that is done in connection with the extension of the mine at E-Bay.

Everything seemed to be perfect and we drove out a few days later with our traps and with the download equipment. We received Obelixa's signal from the ghost town and triggered a download, which went very well. We then carried on and went to the plant to set up the camera traps. We had identified four good sites and set-up the first trap. When we checked the trap the next morning, close to 400 photos were taken to our surprise. I immediately knew that something had to be wrong. And indeed, the camera was malfunctioning and instead of only taken a photo when movement was detected it automatically took a photograph every 1.5 minutes. Well, equipment failure can happen, so we proceeded to set up two more traps – all of them malfunctioning...what was happening – are the E-Bay ghosts playing games with us? We decided to leave them out for one night, but of the hundreds of photographs that were taken, only a few showed evidence of hyenas – but we got images of at least one cub, so we know that the den is active. However, all camera traps are faulty and we have to wait for replacement cameras before being able to monitor the den in more detail.



*Thanks to Kathrin Trump and Daniel Krebs for all the effort that they put into the set-up of the camera traps. They are professionals in the field now.*

**Wat is jy, Kartoffel? By Marga Jonker & Alzette Prins**

This children book has been published at the beginning of the year and the authors dedicated the book to the Brown Hyena Research Project. At the moment, there is only an Afrikaans version of the book, but we hope that it eventually will also be published in English and German.

**Hyaena. On the naming and localisation of an enigmatic animal by Holger Funk**

Holger Funk was so kind to send us a copy of his publication. He writes about the wrong perceptions that developed about hyenas and looks at their history and their first zoological description. Please see more at <http://www.grin.com/e-book/155971/hyaena>

**BOGENFELS HYENA MONITORING WITH CAMERA TRAPS**

We've set up camera traps around Bogenfels and Van Reenen Bay to monitor the brown hyena population. This does not mean that we have given up on trying to collar animals there (see newsletter articles about various darting attempts over the past few years), but we just wanted to try a different method for a change. The camera trap that we set up at the northern end of the seal colony at Van Reenen Bay works very well. We got good identification shots – there actually has never been another camera trap that was so successful...no nose or hair photographs yet, whereas the other camera traps record the regular nose shots...We are busy identifying the animals and will hopefully be able to do the first abundance estimate in January 2011.



**The Brown Hyena Research Project**

wishes you a Merry Christmas  
and a very happy New Year!



## FUNDRAISING AND DONATIONS

The **Oklahoma City Zoo** partially funded Dr. Dawn Zimmerman's participation during this year's darting season. She looked at diseases and parasites. We hope that her project is going to be a long-term collaboration, too.

The **Kansas City Zoo** sponsored Dr. Kirk Suedmeyer's travelling expenses to Namibia. We are very grateful that he could help during this year's darting season again and are looking forward to see him again next year.

**Mrs. Val Bickley** from Australia donated AUS 100 to the project.

We collected NS\$ 400 in the slot tin at **Klein Aus Vista**.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

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

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