

DARTING SEASON

This year's darting season required a lot more planning than ever before: I wanted to take my family with into the field, with Max being 14 months old and quite 'field-proof' already. With a generous donation from the Predator Conservation Trust in the UK I was able to improve our field camp to make it a bit more 'child-friendly'. However, the improved camp also turned out to be a lot more adult friendly, as the large tent with veranda and awning offered a good protection against the wind and fog, which can become very important after spending the nights outside waiting for hyenas.



The new field camp (above) and Max helping with packing the equipment (photo Anna Bennett)

another animal to come. However, only Obelixa and Darwin returned. Both of them became regular visitors at the bait, filling their stomachs and looking fatter each day. At one point we knew that our time to move had come – and we also did not want to be responsible for overfeeding our two nightly visitors. It was time to move to Altas Bay to try to fit



Darting team working on Helene

This year's team consisted again of Dr. Kirk Suedmeyer from the Kansas City Zoo, two Australian volunteers, Anna and Paul, the hyena family (myself, Steve and Max), Ruttu and Gino and Kathie with their daughter Kay. The site that I had chosen first was a riverbed with a permanent spring close to Bain's Bay. I had set-up two camera traps there in December 2010. These cameras recorded many hyenas including Obelixa who likes to rest nearby. Therefore this site seemed perfect, also because I had planned to change Obelixa's collar for a new one. So the same old procedure started: dragging the bait, setting it up and finally getting ready for the night. Kirk brought a new dart gun, which we set up with a transmitter dart – we had not used those before and were very excited. In the past it was often difficult to find the darted hyena in the dark and we were hoping that the transmitter darts would solve this problem. The hyenas did not let us wait for long. Just after dark Kirk already attempted to dart the first hyena – unfortunately, the transmitter dart was a lot heavier than the other darts with which Kirk had practiced and it dropped before hitting the animal. But luck was on our side. The hyena came back and Kirk managed to dart it with a regular dart. The animal ran to the south and we started our search, but we could not find it. How much more bad luck does one need...the transmitter dart would have definitely been helpful. After more than an hour search, we decided to call it a night. On the way back to camp, we finally spotted the darted hyena, but it was already half awake and walking again. Kirk and I approached it to make sure that it was all right. The hyena looked like an adult with a few ear notches in its left ear. Relieved to have found it and confident that the hyena would return the next night, we all went to have a good nights rest.

The hyena unfortunately had different thoughts about its previous night's experiences and did not come back to the bait. However, a beautiful young male brown hyena approached the bait and Paul, supervised by Kirk, managed to dart him – with the transmitter dart. This time, we did not even need the transmitter dart, as we found him easily and quickly lying next to the road. Darwin – Anna and Paul choose his name – was in an excellent condition. We fitted a GPS collar and took other samples. Everything went smoothly, considering that the team had never worked together before.

Two hyenas in two nights – what a success. What would the third night bring...? Well, we darted a possibly pregnant Obelixa (see below) and fitted a new collar. Three hyenas in three nights – if this would continue I would run out of collars... But well, you can already guess: it did not continue like this. The following nights were packed with hyena sightings, mostly Obelixa and Darwin, sometimes feeding together, sometimes alone. Three nights later, Kirk could finally dart a hyena again. The dart bounced off, but we still searched the area to make sure that the drug was not released...We eventually spotted the hyena in a distance watching us, so Kirk went back to the bait to wait for

another adult hyena that belongs to the clan (Tony, Albert – far too many hyenas to choose from). Kirk and I went to the area to look for a good site. We first had a look at Jungle den, but the den did not seem to be active any more. However, we quickly found the new den in the mountains between the two seal colonies at Atlas and Wolf Bay and also found quite a good site to set-up the bait. The site turned out to be very successful – we darted Alaika during the first night. She came to the bait together with a smaller animal, which we think may have been her cub. Two nights later Kirk darted another female hyena, a subadult that came to the bait together with another, slightly smaller hyena. The hyena, which was later adopted and named Helene (see below), was in an excellent condition. I fitted her with Alaika's old collar, the one that she lost two years ago or should I rather say that was badly damaged by that year's cubs, who managed to rip it off her neck. Collaring these two females was a huge success, especially as we found out that Alaika is also breeding.

I will try to download each hyena's data in the middle of June and at the beginning of July again. I'm already excited to see where Obelixa will give birth, where Darwin and Helene are going and where Alaika moved her den to, as she unfortunately left the den after we had darted her.

All in all, we had a very successful season and I will keep you informed about the hyenas' whereabouts.



Taking blood samples from Alaika (photo: Anna Bennett)

Thank you very much to Steve and Max for being such a good family out in the field. Many, many thanks go to Gino, Kathie and Kay, who came all the way from Plettenberg Bay to help with family and work. Thanks to Kirk and the Kansas City Zoo for helping me collaring brown hyenas for the third time and thanks to our project volunteers Anna, supported by the Monarto Zoo and Paul from Australia.

AERIAL TELEMETRY OF OBELIXA

It had been more than a year that Gino and I went flying to download GPS data. Obelixa and Tosca were usually easy to find, so that I could do the downloads from the ground. However, I urgently needed to check the status of the den sites in the entire study area and Obelixa's download was due, so we met in Aus at the end of March. We checked the den sites at Tsau mountain, Morgenberg, Klinghardt Mountains, Münzenberg and Agate Beach. We also spend a lot of time circling around in the Tsaukaib Mountains in search for good denning habitat, to guide me in planning the mapping of this study area. None of the dens, apart from the ones that we did not check because I knew they were active, showed any signs of recent activity. Our search for Obelixa though was more successful. We found her easily, but her VHF signal indicated that she was still moving, which is not all too good for doing a data download. Suddenly we saw her, or at least we thought that it was her, as we quickly spotted a second hyena. Both hyenas disappeared into a cave-like resting site and I triggered the download. Suddenly they appeared again and we could not believe what we were seeing: the hyenas were mating! Obelixa did not seem to be all too disturbed by the presence of the plane, but the male walked off several times, but always returned to Obelixa's resting site. It was amazing to observe. We finished the download and headed back to Aus. We retrieved all possible data points and hope that we can find her den soon.



Obelixa at a resting site (photo: Anna Bennett)

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE: JUNE EDITION

Two years ago, Frans Lanting came to the Brown Hyena Research Project to try to take photographs of brown hyenas for a National Geographic Assignment. The June issue of the magazine finally features the article about Namibia and we are very happy to announce that the brown hyena that was photographed and filmed at Van Reenen Bay made it into the magazine and web page. Please have a look at <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2011/06/namibia-park/hyena-video>

BROWN HYENA ADOPTION

Mr. Holger Funk adopted the subadult female brown hyena of the Wolf Bay Clan that we collared in May. She was named Helene. We don't know much of her yet, but that will change soon, as the first data download will be done soon.

DIAMOND ROUTE CONFERENCE 2011

I could not attend the De Beers Diamond Route Conference last year, but Ronel van der Merwe presented a poster of mine. However, I will be able to attend this year and will present the same data in a talk. The conference will take place in Johannesburg at the end of August.

ROADKILL AT BOGENFELS

I unfortunately have to report the first mining related road-kill at Bogenfels Mine (Pocket Beaches): This is even more sad, as the rehabilitation of the



area will start this year and we nearly 'survived' the entire mining operation without accidents. The hyena was taken to Lüderitz for identification and to perform a necropsy, but I was in the field and nobody could get hold of me. I therefore only retrieved the carcass, thanks to Steve and Anna, five days later and you can imagine how horrific that was. I will still try to identify the individual by comparing it with photos taken by the camera traps in the area.

WEB PAGE DISASTER!

Our web page has unfortunately been off for the past two months. We are working hard to solve the problem and I apologize for the inconvenience. I hope that we will be online soon again.

CAMERA TRAP IMAGES

Here are few images that were taken by the camera traps while we were sitting in the riverbed waiting for hyenas to come to the bait: Darwin showing off his new collar, Obelixa going back to the bait, the famous porcupine (see below) and a hyena captured at Elizabeth Bay carrying a seal to the den. I had to remove two camera traps as they were starting to malfunction. Another camera trap was set-up at the den where we captured and collared Alaika. That camera trap also unfortunately did not work properly, but the manufacturer is going to replace it.



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INTRODUCING SEA.CO.DE SEA-COast-DEsert Research Group

A new Trust Fund, **SEACODE**, is going to be established in Lüderitz for the purpose of conducting independent scientific ecological research in the marine, coastal and desert environments of Namibia. **SEACODE** is going to be a not-for-profit and a non-advocacy scientific organization. The founding Trustees are Dr. J-P. Roux (Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources Lüderitz Marine Research and Animal Demography Unit, University of Cape Town), Dr. J. Kemper (African Penguin Conservation Project, Lüderitz), Dr. I. Wiesel (Brown Hyena Research Project, Lüderitz), Dr. J.T. Fennessy (Director Namibia Nature Foundation (NNF) Windhoek) and Mr. R. Braby (Namibian Coast Conservation and Management Project (NACOMA), Swakopmund). The main aims of SEACODE are to conduct ecological scientific research on (but not limited to) coastal predators (terrestrial as well as marine, including brown hyenas, jackals, fur seals, cetaceans, seabirds and shorebirds etc.) and their ecosystem functions, their habitats and conservation status and to promote ecological research and expertise in Namibia. I will keep you informed about SEACODE's activities in the newsletter, but also on our web page.

ANNA'S STORY:

Hi, my name is Anna Bennett. I am the Senior Carnivore Keeper at Monarto Zoo in South Australia. I have worked in the zoo industry for 10 years and have a passion for hyenas- a very misunderstood species. Early in 2010 my partner Paul and I visited Ingrid on our holiday through southern Africa. We spent a week in Lüderitz and learned all about the Brown Hyena Project. Ingrid took us to a den site where we amazingly saw 10 month old hyena cubs untouched and in the wild! That was it, I was hooked and I asked if we could be part of the next years darting season. So preparations began for the May 2011 field work. How exciting, a once in a lifetime opportunity and a dream come true!

I was granted paid leave and monetary support through Zoos SA (Adelaide and Monarto Zoo's, South Australia) to be able to participate in the field work which was fantastic. All the permits and visas were applied for and our journey to Lüderitz began. With only a week to go before arriving in Namibia, Ingrid was told that our visa applications had been rejected, for no real reason- this had never happened before and meant that all the darting plans would have to change as we would not be able to enter the Diamond Area. This was a HUGE disappointment for all involved. Luckily by the time Paul and I arrived in Lüderitz, Ingrid had appealed the visa rejection and been successful! Phew, we were all set to go now and catch hyenas!

This year's darting season was from May 7th-30th and the team was Kirk, Ingrid, Paul, myself, Gino, Kathie, their daughter Kay and Steve and Max. We were camped out in the restricted Diamond Area 1 for the whole time, under the African skies, surrounded by wildlife. We could not get over the landscape of that area. It looks so desolate and uninhabitable, but on our daily walks of the area, another world opened up- we found Baboon Spiders, Scorpions, Horned Adders, lizards, birds, other bugs and of course jackals, jackals, jackals and the elusive Brown Hyenas! Camp life was always busy, with little Max and his 'girlfriend' Kay toddling around, we all had to keep an extra eye on the curious jackals!



The team was successful at collaring 4 animals this year. I will never forget the excitement of scanning with the spotlight looking for an anesthetized hyena and finding it right there near the car as we drove along! Wow! This first animal was extra special as Paul had been the one to dart it- a once in a lifetime achievement that not many other people can say they have done! It was unbelievable to be so close to these animals. I couldn't help but compare them to the Spotted Hyenas that I am used to at work. The Browns have such large and pointy ears, really long and thick whiskers and amazing coats. Kirk successfully darted the other three animals of the trip, each one as exciting as the

last. A great achievement for all. For a lasting memento- I took some hyena footprints on canvas with paint for Ingrid!

Another highlight of the trip was seeing a Porcupine! Paul thought he had seen one during one of his nights sitting out with Kirk. The camera trap supported this and then there it was; only just visible as it looked like a bush in the dusk light- amazing to see! Another day Paul and I spent some time at the Atlas Bay seal colony- a smelly, noisy and fur-filled place. Incredible to be able to get so close to that number of animals and watch their daily life un-noticed.

I can't thank Ingrid enough for letting Paul and I participate in this year's field season. I really look forward to hearing about the movements of these collared animals in the future and am happy to know that I have helped in a small way to continue the research on the animals in this amazing area.

As a bonus, Ingrid said that Paul and I could name the young male that Paul darted. 'Darwin' seemed appropriate. Named after Charles Darwin and also a capital city in Australia! Good luck Darwin ☺

FUNDRAISING AND DONATIONS

NAMDEB is going to donate a vehicle to the project, which is going to replace the old Toyota Single Cab that was not in a working condition any more. The replacement vehicle is a Ford Supercab. We haven't got any more details yet, but should know more in a few weeks time.

Lüderitz Safaris and Tours collected N\$ 486-95 in the slot tin. There are also a tins at Klein Aus Vista and Rocky Shores Curio Shop in Lüderitz.

Mr. Holger Funk adopted a brown hyena for € 200, called Helene. **David and Gudrun Winston-Smith** donated N\$ 600. Thank you very much for your support!

The **Predator Conservation Trust** in the UK donated £ 1300. We purchased a large field tent and other camping equipment (see photo above). Besides **Namdeb**, the **Predator Conservation Trust**, is one of our regular, long-term sponsors.

I applied for a grant with the **Nedbank Go Green Fund** to do a human-wildlife-conflict study from April next year. We should know about the outcome by August.

Stealthcam (USA) replaced two malfunctioning camera traps free of charge. Thank you very much for your good customer service. We also experienced extremely good service from our South African camera trap provider **Camera Traps CC**.

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

Namdeb Diamond Corporation	Lüderitz Safaris & Tours	Kolette Grobler	Mildred Salb	Antje Burke	Kansas City Zoo
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	Steve Appleton	Beppo Family	Nicole & Adam Baden-Clay		
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