

ELIZABETH BAY MONITORING

We have set up camera traps around Elizabeth Bay. The mining area there will be extended and changes in activity and movement of resident brown hyenas has to be closely monitored. After initial hick-ups with the camera trap equipment, we finally managed to get five camera traps working, which results in downloads of around a hundred images every second week. Many of these images show brown hyenas and to our surprise: not only nose and hair shots – we even get really good images for brown hyena identification (see following page). The hyenas are denning at the old Diamond plant in the ghost town at the moment and the camera traps captured several images of the cub (we assume that it is only one cub) and of adults visiting the den or, as in case of Obelixa, carrying food back to the den.



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Obelixa carrying food to the den

adult brown hyena at the den site (date is 2011...forgot that the New Year started)

cub exploring the beach close to the den (date 2011)

We've got at least three different adults visiting the den, but it is too early to do an abundance estimate. However, we should know a lot more about the Elizabeth Bay clan for our next newsletter. If we are successful in collaring animals of the Wolf Bay clan in May, we will also try to collar animals of the Elizabeth Bay clan and maybe replace Obelixa's collar. It should still be good for a year, but Tosca's collar's battery, which should have had the same lifespan, already expired at the end of last year (see previous newsletter).

Namdeb's Environmental Team also participates in the monitoring by doing regular carcass and spoor counts along Elizabeth Bay beach. The beach seems to be an important foraging area judging from Obelixa's GPS data and the disturbance of the beach through mining activity could have negative impacts on the clan, as they don't have access to a mainland seal colony. The next mainland seal colony lies approximately 15 km to the north at Atlas Bay, but it falls within the territory of the Wolf Bay clan. Obelixa managed to sneak to the colony during the pupping season on a few occasions, but generally stays outside the other clan's territory. With hopefully collaring animals of both clans this season, we will get information about the interaction between the clans.

WHERE IS OBELIXA?

Obelixa has always been easy to find. Her download was due in February and I was confident that I would find her easily. I drove to the ghost town at Elizabeth Bay first, as she had been spending a lot of time resting close to the den. I did not find her there and therefore continued to drive to Bain's Bay, the other area where I usually find her, but I received no signal. This was not worrying yet, as it sometimes happens that one only finds the collared animal on the second day, but I did not have any success on day two either. This had not happened with Obelixa before and I finally became extremely worried when I did not even have a picture of her on any of the camera traps. The camera traps that are set-up along a riverbed at Bain's Bay usually only featured Obelixa with very few exceptions. This time there were photos of other hyenas but not of her. Initially I only feared that the collar malfunctioned, but now I was worried that something had happened to her.

There was not much that I could do than to wait for my next trip to check the camera traps in the hope of her re-appearing again. The two weeks in between camera trap checks were definitely too long this time and I decided to go out earlier. Again, I did not receive a signal at Elizabeth Bay, but on my way to Bain's Bay, I finally received a very strong signal. I was so relieved and excited to see where she had been when I was searching for her. I plotted her data on the computer and saw that she had been in an area that I did not search on the first day, but on the second day of my search she had been resting inside one of the ghost houses. I should have had a signal when I was searching for her in that area. Remembering all the camera traps that failed in the ghost town, I just smiled and blamed the lack of signal reception on the Elizabeth Bay ghost again...

However, her data revealed that she is not the mother of the cubs, as she visits the den far too irregular to be nursing cubs. She carries food back to the den though which is evident from the camera trap photos and was even photographed walking to the den together with another adult brown hyena. Her next download is due at the end of March. We will do an aerial download this time and hope that the ghosts don't swallow our signal again.

Obelixa having a good time lying in front of the camera trap – yawning



Bushnell

01-05-2011 19:30:29

ROADKILL NO 6 AT ROTKOP

It is hard to believe, but another brown hyena was killed on the road near Rotkop in plain view of one of our brown hyena warning signs. The animal is a young female and we have not determined her ID yet. We will do the necropsy later this year.



BROWN HYENA ADOPTIONS

Mr. Thomas D. Long sponsored Mr. Richard Gill's adopted brown hyena named Andy for another year. Andy belongs to the Wolf Bay clan and we will try to fit it with a GPS collar during this year's darting season in May.

Mr. Samuel Cunard adopted the brown hyena cub Otis for his daughter Maddie. Otis was born at the den inside the old Diamond Mining plant in the Elizabeth Bay ghost town and is related to Obelixa, who visits the den regularly to provide food for the cub. We don't know whether Otis has got any siblings. So far we have only caught Otis on our camera traps.



Otis in front of the old diamond plant at Elizabeth Bay

ANNUAL REPORT

Our annual report for 2011 is available. Please visit www.strandwolf.org.za to download a copy.

CAMERA TRAP MONITORING

Twelve camera traps are up and running at the moment. Three at Van Reenen Bay/Bogenfels, five around Elizabeth Bay, two at Atlas Bay and one in the Tsaukaib Mountains. Our protective cages used to work very well and prevented damage to the traps, but our subadult hyenas from Atlas Bay, that also destroyed parts of our field camp last year, learned to 'attack' the camera traps through the opening at the top of the cage. The first image below shows the two culprits who managed to nibble at the Bushnell camera that took the photo, which damaged the seals and infrared flash. I managed to repair it with epoxy glue, but decided not to risk to set it up in the moist coastal climate again and mounted it in the Tsaukaib Mountains instead. What a fantastic decision, as we captured a caracal on the trap during the first two weeks of operation. I'm excited to see how many other species we will capture on camera that we have never seen in the areas before, although we know of their presence from tracks that one occasionally encounters.



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OUR TIME WITH THE HYENAS (DEC. 2010 - JAN. 2011)

We arrived at the beginning of December in Lüderitz – a sweet coastal town in the middle of nowhere – to work for the next 7 weeks with Ingrid and the brown hyenas. We came from the green, fertile north and had a bit of a strange feeling while driving further and further into the barren south. However, we soon fell in love with the rough charm of the “Sperrgebiet”. Apart from the rich wildlife (which you maybe wouldn’t expect at first glance), it was the scenery with its beautiful beaches, endless nature and the abandoned ghost-towns that gave (and still give) us the feeling that we experienced something truly unique.



The same is true for the work in the project. Ingrid is such a warm and welcoming person and we felt completely integrated into the project from the beginning on. We’ve mainly been in charge of the camera traps, what means that we set them up, checked them regularly, entered the pictures into the computer and, if necessary, removed the traps again. We had a busy time with them as some consequently refused the co-operation and therefore demanded all our creativity and attention to convince them otherwise. However, good and often funny pictures of hyenas and jackals have been a highly motivating compensation and it was always exciting to check the cameras and see if there have been hyenas the night before.

Besides that, we dug out hyena skeletons (kind of a comical situation in the first moment but definitely pretty funny – and interesting!), searched for hyena signs in the study area and helped Ingrid in the office. We’ve been really lucky, not only in that we saw our first hyena



within the first week, but also as there have been two active hyena dens during our time in the project. This led to one of the best moments of our stay: nighttime observations at the dens. What an exciting experience to spend the night in the observation hide and stay awake to wait for (and finally see!) the hyenas!



Another highlight was our weekend in the research station at Van Reenen Bay, a beautiful beach in the south of the Sperrgebiet. There is an observation hut not far from the research station and we spent the early mornings and the late evenings sitting on the hill and watching the huge seal colony underneath us. From time to time, jackals roamed along the colony in search of their next meal, but with their big seal parents around, the pups had only little to worry about. In the nighttime, we fell asleep to the howling of a small jackal-family, which must have lived under the building.

The 7 weeks in Lüderitz have been an absolutely awesome time. We met so many nice and caring people, lived in a ship wreck in the middle of the town, learned so many things and above all, had many, many great and unforgettable moments in the Sperrgebiet and with the hyenas.



FUNDRAISING AND DONATIONS

NAMDEB renewed their generous annual donation which covers the majority of our annual running costs.

The **Interessen-Verband der Auslandsjäger** in Germany generously donated € 1500. This is their second donation and we are extremely happy that they decided to renew their donation in 2011. We will meet one of their representatives in Lüderitz in April and will discuss then what the funds will be used for.

The **Kansas City Zoo** confirmed their on-going support and Dr. Kirk Suedmeyer, their Director of Animal Health and Research, will participate in this year’s darting season again.

Mr Nils-Günter Schultze donated N\$ 288-12 to the project.

We have applied with the **Predator Conservation Trust** in the UK for a donation of 1300 to upgrade and purchase equipment for our field camp.

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

Namdeb Diamond Corporation	MFMR	Steve Appleton	Walter Rusch	Chris Voets	Chris Bird
Chevron Namibia	Luderitz Safaris & Tours	George Shimaneni	Beppo Family	Louise Yates	Coastway Tour Service Station
Predator Conservation Trust UK	Gino Noli	Kolette Grobler	Jessie Salb	Nicole & Adam Baden-Clay	Kansas City Zoo
OK Grocer	Kathy Peard	Wilfried Erni	Mildred Salb	Antje Burke	Mikita Brotzman
Luderitz SPAR	Jessica Kemper	Erich Looser	BP Swakopmund	Coastway Tours	Oklahoma City Zoo
ESRI	Jean-Paul Roux	Jürgen Syvertsen	Erongo Agencies	Kirk Suedmeyer	Interessen-Verband der Auslandsjäger
MET	Trygve Cooper	Morag Burrell	Mrs. Traut	Helmut & Herta Syvertsen	
	Volker & Daggie Jahnke	Luderitz Backpackers	Christine Lindner		
	Ronel v.d. Merwe	Westair	Nils Schultze		



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