

ALFIE'S GREAT ADVENTURES

We did it – we retrieved Alfie's GPS collar. In the last newsletter we reported, that we had difficulties locating our inland brown hyenas and that we therefore decided to use the remote drop off device for Alfie's GPS collar to drop it off before the scheduled time to ensure that we get the necessary data for our sponsor's progress report (Namibia Environment Fund) and to possibly get information about Vicky's whereabouts. During the tracking flight in the middle of July, Gino and Kathie received Alfie's VHF signal from a mountain close to the eastern boundary fence of the Sperrgebiet. They circled the area, but could not get a visual of the hyena, but nevertheless decided to trigger the drop off. Everything went perfectly according to the change from tracking VHF signal to the recovery signal, but since we had learned from the difficulties with Halenge's GPS collar, they decided to search the area thoroughly in order to ascertain that the collar really dropped off. Finally Alfie appeared out of his resting place, probably to investigate why the big yellow bird in the sky doesn't disappear. So finally Gino and Kathie could see him. Just as it should be, the collar was not around his neck any more, so the drop off worked fine, but: Alfie did not want to let go of his collar and was carrying it in his mouth. Definitely not what we had in our minds and knowing the strong jaws of the hyenas, Gino and Kathie got worried that he might nibble on it a bit too hard or even worse, carry it to a den site where the cubs can use it as a new toy. Therefore they followed him for several kilometres. Finally he seemed to have enough of the circling plane and sat down looking at it dropping the collar. Unfortunately we could not retrieve the collar the same day, as it was already late in the afternoon, when Gino and Kathie landed in Luderitz and we also needed the help of Trygve to guide us through unknown territory of the Sperrgebiet. He knew of roads close to the mountain, where Alfie was resting and we started early the next morning driving into that direction. We were still worried, that Alfie might have grabbed "his" collar again and were more than relieved when we heard the recovery signal on the VHF receiver. The collar was still somewhere in the area. We walked to the GPS position, Gino had recorded as Alfie's sitting position and not more than 10 metres away from it we found the GPS collar on top of a bush, nicely dropped there for us to pick it up.

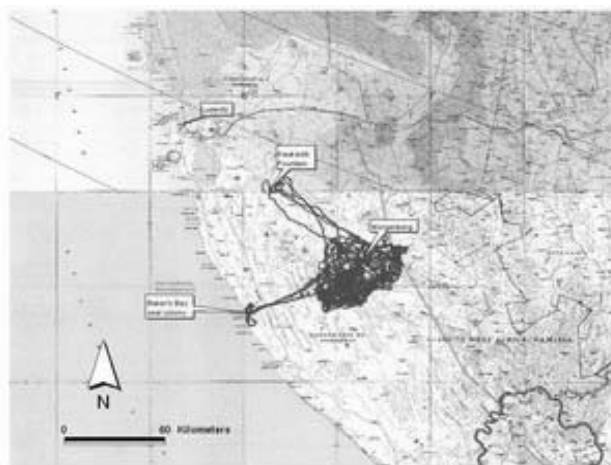


Alfie's collar on top of the bush.

The drive back to town felt longer than it actually was, but the excitement to find out what Alfie had been doing for the past five months was too great. Later that day, we downloaded more than 14 000 GPS locations. We were not too surprised to find out, that Alfie only used the waterhole in the Kaukasib, where we fitted the collar, before it rained in his "real" territory and water was available there. That definitely explained why we initially had difficulties locating him. The core of his territory is 60 km south-west of the Kaukasib fountain.

Nevertheless, what really surprised us was that he visited the Baker's Bay seal colony twice during the five months that data was recorded. The seal colony is obviously not within his territory and actually a little bit too far away to fall within his "normal" home range. He uses a kind of corridor to reach the coast, but does not forage along the beaches. He aims for the seal colony.

More about Alfie's adventures on page 3.



Alfie's movements

Thanks to Gino Noli and Kathie Peard for "making Alfie" let go of his collar. Thanks to Trygve Cooper for helping us to retrieve the collar.

SLOT TINS

Kolmanskop Curio Shop collected N\$ 329-26 in their slot tin and Luderitz Safaris and Tours collected N\$ 489-35.
Thanks very much.

BROWN HYENA WEB PAGE

Our web page has not been working for several months. The problems are still not solved, but our co-sponsor, Upstart Technologies, is trying to get us online as soon as possible again. Sorry for the inconveniences in the meantime.

BOGENFELS TRAPPING TRIP: ATTEMPT NUMBER 1



Linda de Jager from Strings Media came with her team to do a documentary on the Brown Hyena Research Project for SABC's 50/50 show. We managed to convince Flip Stander to help with the darting of brown hyenas in the Bogenfels area to fit another GPS collar for the pre to post impact study in connection with Namdeb's Pocket Beach Mining Project. The collar was sponsored by the Nedbank Go Green Fund again and was the first to be fitted on a hyena before the construction of the new mine begins. So altogether it was an extremely important project. We had already found a perfect site to dart brown hyenas with lots of activity on a regular basis. So all four of us, Flip, Linda, Chris, the camera man, and myself squashed into my Land Rover and waited in anticipation for the brown hyenas to come to the bait. Nothing! No, not right, plenty of jackals eating all of our bait. At least the guys had a bit more space in the car than Linda and myself. It definitely felt like spending ten hours without moving in a jumbo jet – economy class. Still, we did not give up. We tried a second night, even using the camera trap mechanism as an alarm, so that we could at least get some sleep. And you guessed right: only jackals again. The next morning even the Landy did not feel too good and it took three hours for him to dry out before he wanted to start. At least we spent two nights at Bogenfels – not many people do that. As Linda and Flip had to leave, we decided to plan an "attempt number 2" trip for later this year. More about this on page 2.

ANIGAB CAMERA TRAP STUDY

The Anigab brown hyenas really like our camera traps. The second last film revealed photographs that were too close to be developed. The negative just shows a huge brown hyena nose. Anyhow, the latest film has some nice hyena shots, but again, one animal tried to get in very close contact with our camera. Instead of identifying brown hyenas through the stripe pattern on their forelegs and their natural ear notches, I should actually consider to do a hair count....

On a serious note, the camera traps are working well with all the modifications we had to do. We still can't use cameras on both sides of the trail, as the hyenas dig out the cables and destroy them. We will make a plan in near future.

A student from Hamburg University is planning to do a Master's study with the Brown Hyena Research Project in 2007. She has planned to use camera traps for density estimates.



Can I get any closer?

FINDING VICKY

Even after having retrieved Aflie's collar we have not been able to find Vicky by tracking in Alfie's home range. Therefore we decided to do a tracking flight covering the area north of Luderitz, along the Koichab, pass Aus and Rosh Pinah, down to the Orange River and back to Luderitz over the Sperrgebiet on higher altitude. We received Django's signal fine over 40 km – he is fitted with the same type of collar – but still no sign of Vicky. There are only two options left: her collar is not functioning or she is not living anywhere close to the Sperrgebiet. We can't do more at present, but theoretically the battery of her collar only expires in January and we will try to monitor the Kaukasib fountain, where we darted her, after the rainy season – maybe she will go back there to find water.



Finally reaching the Orange River after 2 ½ hours of flight.

NEWS

For the past three months a brown hyena has been keeping the Luderitz community without much sleep. The hyena is foraging in town and keeps all dogs on high alert. We haven't been able to identify the animal yet, but hope to do so in near future.

Thanks to Helmuth Syvertsen, Gerry, Schalk, Debbie and Wynand for reporting the wild animal in town.

The Brown Hyena Research Project was featured on SABC's 50/50 show in July. We received a lot of positive feedback, which was very encouraging.

Thanks to everybody who e-mailed after the show to give us support.

We gave a presentation at the Luderitz Montessori school and also distributed carnivore posters to the Diaz Primary school.

Thanks to Namdeb for printing the posters and to Alex and Karen MacKay for editing them.

We also gave presentations at the Wildlife Society in Winhoek, the Etosha Ecological Institute and at the Cheetah Conservation Fund in September.

Barbara Kolar, one of our last year's students, presented a poster at a conference in Germany. The poster won second prize.

We had a visiting scientist, Mr. Brian Kuhn from the University of Pretoria, working on bone accumulation at brown hyena dens. He identified thousands of bones at four den sites on the Luderitz Peninsula. We will receive a progress report, once his work is finished.

Dr. Jim Roth from the University of Central Florida came for a visit in July. He will do a presentation about the variation in seal consumption by brown hyenas in the Namib desert estimated using stable isotopes at the 2006 SICB meeting in Orlando, USA.

BOGENFELS ATTEMPT NUMBER 2 AND AGATE BEACH TRAPPING: ATTEMPT NUMBER 1

I hardly want to report about failed trapping trips any more. But that's just life with brown hyenas. As reported on page 1, we planned another trapping trip for the Bogenfels area for June. Flip arrived two days before Linda and Jaqui, the camera man, could be in town. Therefore we decided to make the best out of the time and to already go to Bogenfels to give it a try. We did not really expect to dart a hyena and sure enough, even with a new alarm system for animal movement, built by Erich Looser, we only attracted jackals to our bait. We were not too happy and decided to go for a good coffee at our camp at Van Reenen Bay. Before driving to the camp, we decided to scan the seal colony for hyena activity, not expecting much. But: luck was on our side and a beautiful male brown hyena was foraging there. Despite our lack of sleep and need of coffee, we decided to wait until it left the immediate colony area to dart it. It took a long time, but finally the hyena decided to leave the seals and Flip darted it. The hyena dropped a few hundred metres from the beach and we were finally able to fit the GPS collar for our pre to post impact study. What a good feeling. Django – named by Jürgen Syvertsen, who adopted him – recovered nicely and we went back to town, giving the film crew the "bad" news – they had missed it all.



As we had no other collar to fit in the Bogenfels area, we decided to finally fit the three VHF collars that were sponsored by the Predator Conservation Trust in the UK at Agate Beach just north of Luderitz. We pre-baited two sites and decided to try it close to the Luderitz sewerage area – brown hyenas forage there every night. We were lucky. Just after sunset, the first brown hyena arrived at our bait. Unfortunately it was already fitted with a collar and I had not planned to exchange collar. But we could not receive a VHF signal from the collar, so it was either not an animal from our study area or the collar failed or it was a visual collar from many years back. We decided to dart. The hyena ran off in eastern direction and we started to search the area for the sedated hyena. Nothing. We could not find it. We searched for over two hours and finally had to give up. There is the possibility that the dart did not hit the hyena and we checked the area on the next day during daylight and still could not find any sign of it. Still, there was the mystery about the collar. I checked the footage of the film crew and there were only two possibilities: it was either Minerva with a faulty radio collar or a hyena that was fitted with a visual collar on the Luderitz Peninsula in January 2000, known as LHB 116.

Nevertheless, we still had no luck and tried the following night again. A large brown hyena came to our bait around midnight, but was extremely skittish and Flip had no chance of darting it. At around 2 a.m. we gave up and went back to town. On our way back, we saw two brown hyenas foraging around the sewerage plant.

Too late to dart now and Flip had to leave the following day, so we only observed these two young hyenas playing in the vegetation. Again no darting luck for Linda & Co, but beautiful night-time footage of two hyenas interacting with each other and that in itself is quite special.

EXPLORING THE INLAND AREAS OF THE SPERRGEBIET AND FINDING ALFIE'S DEN

Trygve invited us to join him on a trip to his patrol camp at Gabusib, just east of the Klinghardt Mountain range. One of the reasons was to hike in the area around the Morgenberg to possibly find Alfie's clan's den site. His GPS data showed an accumulation of fixes taken in that area at night, which probably meant that he visited the den to socialise with clan members and to provide the cubs with food. Already the area around the Gabusib camp showed lots of brown hyena activity, but not from Alfie's clan. On day two we went to Morgenberg and walked towards the GPS position we recorded from Alfie's data set. The area was covered with brown hyena signs. Lots of resting sites under rocks, plenty of latrines and some very fresh paste marks. Peeking around one of the rocks finally revealed an accumulation of bones and fresh carcasses. We knew that we had found it: the active den site of Alfie's clan. We slowly and quietly walked around it and could see at least three entrances with lots of fresh brown hyena spoor going in and out. A fresh Springbok carcass was probably their last night's meal.

One thing became very clear: without the help of GPS technology, we would have never found the den site. This specific inland area of the Sperrgebiet consists of vast gravel and sand planes, some dunes and only some larger mountain ranges. Alfie uses an area of 1400 km² as his home range, far larger than the coastal hyena's home ranges of up to 600 km².

Thanks to Trygve for showing us all those special areas, not only at Gabusib and Morgenberg, but also taking us many other incredible sites. I will never forget the drive back through the central Klinghardt Mountains.



AGATE BEACH TRAPPING: ATTEMPT NUMBER 2

One thing is for sure: we don't give up easily. In September, Dr. Mark Jago from Otjiwarongo, visited Luderitz on very short notice to help the BBC Wild in Africa Production team to get brown hyena footage for the part about the Brown Hyena Research Project. We only had two nights to try to collar one of the Agate Beach hyenas and judging from our most recent experiences it was a long shot. I only arrived back in Luderitz one day before Mark was due to arrive and pre-baited two areas. Both of them did not show too many brown hyena signs, but during the check on the next morning we saw, that at least three brown hyenas went to the bait at one of the sites. Therefore we decided to try and dart them there.



Mark Jago and the MacKay family with the first brown hyena

It was nearly full moon, so we were lucky enough to be able to see the bait nicely. At 20:45 the first brown hyena arrived. We could not believe our luck, but had to realise quickly, that it was an experienced adult that did not trust the vehicle parked close by. Our bait was not interesting enough to convince it to come close and the hyena disappeared after a while. We prepared ourselves for a long night waiting. Finally just before midnight two brown hyenas appear in the area. One of them went to the bait quite quickly and we were able to dart it straight away. It was a beautiful four to five year old female and we fitted one of the Predator Conservation Trust's VHF collars. We transferred her into the recovery cage and waited for the second hyena to go to the bait. That hyena was unfortunately more interested in its partner in the cage and finally I realised that those two hyenas must be the young ones we saw some months earlier near the sewerage. But: the waiting paid off and we managed to dart the second hyena at 2:00 a.m. Also a beautiful female, but about two years younger than the other one. I was surprised, as I thought that they might have been siblings of the same litter, but I still think that they are at least half-sisters. Both of them recovered well and we already managed to locate the first hyena a week later. She was resting close to the Luderitz sewerage in the mountains.

Thank you to Mark Jago for helping us to radio collar those two hyenas, named Steffi and Ilse, and the BBC for their financial support. Thanks to Willem Swiegers for providing the bait and the Luderitz Spar and OK Grocer for storing the bait for us. Thanks to everybody who joined us that night.

FUNDRAISING AND DONATIONS

The **Nedbank Go Green Fund**, **SKEP** and **Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund** are supporting the inland demography study for a period of two years. We will fit four GPS collars with remote data download option in the larger Kaukasib/Klinghardt Mountains area. The **Namibia Environment Fund** still hasn't decided yet, whether they will continue supporting this project, but we should hear from them latest in November.

Namdeb is supporting the pre to post impact study near Bogenfels with four remote data download GPS collars. We will fit the collars in October/November this year. One of the Bogenfels hyenas is already fitted with a GPS collar that was sponsored by the **Nedbank Go Green Fund**.

A big thank you to **Marek Hrywniak** who provided the funds to buy a dart gun. We purchased a Pseudart 389 dart gun and it will be used for the first time when the next vet is visiting. This dart gun will help to make our darting work more flexible.

Thanks to **Jürgen Syvertsen**, **Wilfried Erni** and the **Swiegers** family for providing bait for the project. Thank you to **Luderitz Bay Shipping & Forwarding** for renewing the sponsoring of their brown hyena for another year. The **Luderitz Backpackers** helped us with accommodation for our students and collaborations partners.

Thank you to **Strings Media** for their generous donation and for making such a nice documentary.

Our grant application to the software company **ESRI** was successful and we received a single user licence for their programme ArcView 3.0.

A big thank you again for accepting our slot tins goes to **Luderitz Yacht Club**, **Bay View Hotel**, **Coastway Tours**, **Sandrose**, **Luderitz Safaris and Tours**, **Kolmanskop Curio Shop**, **Grillenberger's Bottle Store** and **Namibia Wildlife Resorts**.

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

Namdeb	GraphPad Software, Inc.	BHP Billiton	Coastal Electric & Hardware	Jean-Paul Roux	Erich Looser
Caltex	Benguela Enterprises CC	Divpac	Nest Hotel	Trygve Cooper	Lino Scanavino
Siemens	Hottentot Bay Investment Cc	Raleigh International	ESRI	Volker & Daggie Jahnke	Jürgen Syvertsen
Shell Solar	Wilderness Safaris	Luderitz Bay Shipping & Forwarding	MET	Johann du Toit	Morag Burrell
Predator Conservation Trust	Wildlife Trust	First National Bank	MFMR	Frikkie Kraamwinkel	Beppo Family
OK Grocer	Namibia Nature Foundation	Luderitz Yacht Club	Luderitz Safaris & Tours	Rene Rossler	Willem Swiegers
Trucksan	Sidewinder Films	Luderitz SPAR	Riaan Laubscher	Ronel v.d. Merwe	Luderitz Backpackers
Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund	Forbidden Land	Windhoek Optics	Andrew Cunningham	Steve Appleton	
Nebank Green Fund	Coastway Tours	Wild Horse Trust	Alex MacKay	George Shimaneni	
Namibia Environment Fund	4x4 Adventures	Upstart Technologies	Gino Noli	Gisela Wolters	
	Namibian Breweries	Diaz Point Exploration	Kathy Peard	Kolette Grobler	
		Seaflower	Jessica Kemper	Norbert Klosta	
				Wilfried Erni	

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\$, £

Name:

Postal Address:

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Date: Signature:

Thank you very much for your support!

**Nedbank Namibia
Go Green Fund**



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BROWN HYENA RESEARCH PROJECT DETAILS:

www.strandwolf.org.za

P. O. Box 739 Lüderitz

Tel.: ++264 (0)63 202114, Fax: ++264 (0)63 202114

e-mail: strandwolf@iway.na