



Newsletter

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Darting Season Surprise

by Ingrid Wiesel

This year's darting season was full of surprises, but a full success. Kirk Suedmeyer once again was supported by the **Kansas City Zoo** to travel to Namibia to help with this year's collaring. Claire Fukomoto, a vet tech from the Honolulu Zoo also joined our team. We replaced four collars with three Iridium satellite collars and one visual collar and fitted one UHF GPS collar. Inga and Claire are reporting more below, but I would like to tell you about one capture that I will remember for a long time.

After successfully capturing and collaring Lilinoe and Obelixa at E-Bay, we captured a collared male brown hyena. We immediately assumed that it was Balu, as Wallace's collar drop-off had been triggered by previous staff members in December 2014 (but unfortunately never retrieved). It was unlikely that this hyena was Amadeus, who is missing in action, and was collared near Atlas Bay in 2013. We collared 'Balu' together with Namdeb's Northern Area Manager Brad Wood and his family, who joined us for a

night. The capture went well and 'Balu' walked into the night with his new collar. We only had to capture one more collared brown hyena: the breeding female KC Sowande. She has always been a bit more challenging to capture and we knew that we needed patience to get her. To our surprise, we caught the last collared hyena the next night. We were so relieved and fitted the Iridium collar that was allocated to her. After fitting the collar, I lifted the hyena's hind leg to take a photograph of its genitals: It was a male! What was going on? Kirk immediately thought that he had darted one of the hyenas with a new collar (Lilinoe or Obelixa), but we had marked all new collars with white tape and the collar that I had just removed was old. I quickly checked the collar's frequency, as there was a chance that the animal was Amadeus. But, what happened then was absolutely unexpected – the hyena that was lying in front of us was Balu. How could that happen? We had captured him the night before and fitted a new collar. There was only one possibility: the other hyena was Wallace. Once we returned to camp, I checked the removed collar from the previous night and my suspicion was confirmed. Well, we would have eventually figured out our mistake through id's from the leg stripe pattern, but this shows us again not to jump into quick conclusions and to always double check. Well done Wallace, for shocking us and making us laugh...



Collaring Wallace (photo Brad Wood)

IVA Talk

A gave a talk at the Interessen-Verband der Auslandsjäger meeting in Suthfeld-Riehe in March. I talked about the Tsau//Khaib (Sperrgebiet) National Park's habitats and its different brown hyena clans. The talk was well received and we received a generous donation.

Road-kills

Two brown hyenas were killed on Namibian roads since June this year. One road-kill occurred near Aus and another one near Swakopmund. There were also three horses killed by vehicles in the Garub area.

HELP NEEDED

We are urgently looking for funding to refurbish four GPS telemetry collars for our darting season in 2016.

If you are interested in supporting the project please contact Ingrid at ingrid.wiesel@strandwolf.org

Spotted Hyena Predation Study at Garub

by Ingrid Wiesel

We have finally started our collaboration with the Namibia Wild Horse Project at Garub near Aus. Telané Greyling, Christine Wullf-Swiegers and I have been talking about looking at spotted hyena predation on horses for a long time. In 2008, we managed to fit one GPS telemetry collar to an adult female spotted hyena. However, time and financial constraints were the main reason why we did not continue with the study until recently. Telané noticed that the predation impact on horses had increased and she speculated that 79 horses were predated on by spotted hyenas during the drought between January and December 2013, the majority being young animals. During 2014 more adult mortalities may have been due to predation. Furthermore none of the foals born during 2014 survived and since January this year more foals went missing and predation is the most likely cause.



To monitor spotted hyena presence and abundance in the Garub area we have set-up 13 camera traps, two at the trough at Garub and 11 in the area between Klein Willem and Hasenberge. Our GPS telemetry data showed that spotted activity was highest in those areas. Since the commencement of the study, we were able to photographically capture and identify five spotted hyenas and we also occasionally capture its smaller cousin, the brown hyena. I will keep you informed about the progress of this study. We are still looking for collaboration partners or sponsors, who can financially contribute to the purchase of GPS collars in the hope of establishing a long-term project.

Den Activity Study

by Inga Jaenecke

Time is flying and so did my den activity study. After more than a year I handed in my thesis end of last month. I have to admit that it feels like something is missing without having to enter or analyse my data and of course without constantly knowing how our cubs are doing. By now all three of them are almost 1 year old. We found out that Alaika and KC got their cubs end of September '14 and Obelixa got hers begin of October '14. I still cannot believe how lucky I was that our three females got cubs while my camera traps were set-up and how many data I was able to collect. During the one year of data collection I got 8,191 hyena images at den sites of Alaika and 24,352 hyena images at den sites of Obelixa and KC. This amount of data made it possible to analyse different aspects of the activity and provisioning behaviour at den sites for the Atlas Bay and E-Bay clan. Therefore the main findings of my thesis were as following:

Firstly, hyena activity at their den sites was higher during active than during inactive periods. Den sites were predominantly used for birthing and raising of the cubs and therefore attendance of hyenas at den sites was associated with this. Secondly, the solid food provisioning to the cubs was similar in both clans. Nevertheless, the food provisioning had to be treated with caution, as sample size was small. Therefore differences might have been possible due to different occurrence of food sources in both clans' home ranges. Thirdly the attendance of adult and sub-adult hyenas at their den sites occurred during dawn, dusk and at night. When comparing adults and sub-adults of the same clan with each other a significant difference was visible. Nevertheless, when comparing adults and sub-adults between both clans, no significant difference was visible. Lastly, the activity of cubs at den sites was similar to the

attendance of adults and sub-adults, as they were also mainly active during dawn, dusk and at night. Furthermore cubs of both clans did not show a significant between each other.

Due to these results I was able to conclude that our brown hyenas showed the same behaviour at den sites as brown hyenas in other parts of southern Africa.

At this point I would like to thank everyone again for their professional and personal support which made it possible to successfully complete this Master Project.



Apart from my den activity study I was also responsible for all the additional field work that needed to be done. As always, the GPS telemetry downloads played an important role and also as always Alaika made it extra difficult for me. During each camera trap check I tried to get a signal from her, but I was never lucky to be anywhere close to her. Although I spent a lot of nights close to the den sites, which we knew were active, Alaika never showed up. This hide and seek game went on for a long time. Just a few days into our darting season we got her signal again close to our Bain's Bay riverbed camera trap. Ingrid and I decided to try our luck and went on a hike towards the direction where Alaika's signal was coming from. I have to say that the area mainly consists of hills and gullies, in which it sometime needs a lot of patience to make out the exact location, but we were so happy and keen on finally being able to make a download of her that nothing could stop us. So we slowly approached towards where she must have been lying. We were just a few hundred meters away, when an un-collared hyena jumped up next to us. As we were so focused on Alaika, we must have overseen the hyena resting so close to where Alaika was. Obviously Alaika also got aware of us and all we saw of her was a shade disappearing behind a hill. We were so close and still so far from making a download. After this we decided that we should try to move our darting set-up to Atlas Bay the next night, as we knew she was in the area again, and we were planning on darting hyenas of this clan anyway. The first night at Atlas Bay no hyena showed up at our bait, but the second night we were lucky, Alaika really showed up. As we knew her collar was still working, we didn't have to dart her, but we only needed to do a download. The bait kept her busy for a long time and

as no one made a move to dart her she was not as skittish as she normally is. So we were finally able to do a download from the car.

In contrast to our Atlas Bay hyenas, our E-Bay hyenas are a lot easier to dart. I always have to grin when I think of our E-Bay hyenas during the darting season. At university we learned that animals are getting capture shy really fast, which means that once they were captured (or in our case darted) they avoid these situations in the future. Well, all those people who came up with those theories, definitely never met our E-Bay hyenas. Every year they come back to our bait, some already after a few hours and some after a few days. But in the end we were able to dart all of them and it was great to see that they were in such good conditions. It was a special experience for me to see my adoptive hyena Balu again and to get all the data from the last two years back to see where he was all the



time. And of course it was great to see Obelixa, KC and their cubs foraging at the bait who supported my study without even being aware of it. Thank you :).

Volunteering during the darting season

by Claire Fukumoto



This past June I had the opportunity to volunteer and assist the Brown Hyena Research Project in their annual darting season. Upon arriving in Luderitz during a mini sand storm it still was still such a relief to touch ground after travelling for nearly three days across the earth from Hawaii. I had fallen in love with Namibia and it's wildlife when I had first visited back in 2013 so I was so thrilled to be back again. Working as a veterinary technician at the Honolulu Zoo I had come to love working with our two spotted hyenas there and had always been fascinated with the coastal brown hyenas of Namibia. I was so excited to have the opportunity to work with brown hyenas in the wild. I wasn't sure what to expect or if we would be lucky enough to be able to dart any in the field this year. The hope was to be able to place four of the satellite GPS collars available on a few selected females and possibly a male. If we were very lucky any extra hyenas we were able to dart would be fitted with visual collars.

The next day after a busy morning of preparing we were finally on our way to set up at the E-bay house. For the first couple of nights we would be targeting the Elizabeth Bay clan and using the old Casino building as the darting site. Unfortunately what we had planned to be the first night of darting was foiled by torrential rains and winds that would have made darting impossible. It was definitely an interesting sight to see water flooding down the main hallway of the house from all the wind pushing the rain under the door.

The next day though overcast was much calmer and late afternoon we set up the site for darting. My job was to assist Dr. Kirk Suedmeyer once he had darted the hyena and determined that the animal was safely immobilized. This included monitoring vital signs, drawing blood, taking rectal temperatures, monitoring anaesthetic depth and anything else that he, Ingrid or Inga needed help with. One of my other duties was to assist in spotting and locating of the hyenas once they received the initial dart. This job was by far the most stressful part of the whole

immobilization process. It required that once we visualized the dart hit the hyena at the bait we needed to track that hyena with the spotlight and try not to lose sight of it at all costs. The terrain depending on where the hyena ran after it had been darted would make it extremely difficult to find or visualize if you lost sight of it and it was recumbent. Once we had set up the bait and were settled in Dr. Suedmeyer was positioned in his ghillie suit below us outside as we sat at an old window frame waiting for any of the hyenas to show up. Not long after the sun had fully set and there was just enough ambient light to see where we had set up our bait I could hardly believe my eyes when somehow if by magic an unmistakable silhouette of a brown hyena came into view and walked silent as a ghost over to the bait. I couldn't believe our luck and my heart was pounding so hard from excitement. I literally was holding my breath as I could see the hyena lining up perfectly at the bait and hearing Dr. Suedmeyer charging his CO2 rifle in preparation to fire the dart. There was flash of green as the dart hit the hyena and it took off into the night. Luckily it didn't go to far and ran fairly straight. Having the privilege of seeing this free wild animal up close for the first time is something that will stay with me for the rest of my life. The hyena we darted was a female sub-adult from the E-bay clan and in very good health. We successfully fitted her with a collar and she recovered successfully. On a side note I was allowed the privilege to name her "Lilinoe" which is name of the Hawaiian goddess of mists. Shortly after regrouping and setting ourselves up again I couldn't believe our luck when yet another hyena came out to the bait. After another successful dart landed we were able to assess our second hyena of the night. It turned out to be the beloved matriarch of the E-bay clan, Obelixa. We were all so thrilled and pleased to see that she was still in good health in spite of her age. After two successful immobilizations we called it a night not wanting to push our luck.

The next ten days were filled with so many wonderful memories and experiences. We ended up darting a total of five hyenas this season. It was truly a privilege to be able to witness the incredible passion and dedication from Dr. Wiesel, Dr. Suedmeyer and Inga to make the Brown Hyena Research Project successful. I truly hope to return one day soon.

A Visit To Luderitz

by Raquel Monge

Traveling has been one of my favorite hobbies. I was born in a beautiful city in Spain called Zaragoza where I grew up among a wide variety of different cultures. I grew up traveling with my family on vacations throughout all of Spain. When my sister and I were older, my parents wanted to take us farther into different countries of Europe. I decided to be a musician, my future wasn't in Spain. I moved to Puerto Rico to complete a bachelors of music, and later I moved to a small town in the USA, Akron Ohio, to complete a masters in music. Today, I'm still living in Akron as a junior in Biology working to finish a graduate degree as a doctor in veterinary medicine.

Living in different countries, I have had the opportunity to know people from all over the world. Almost six years ago, I met Ms. Joan James, the Operations Manager for a shipping & forwarding company in Luderitz. Today Joan is my best friend. When we started talking, I only knew about Namibia from geography class. I didn't know much more than where Namibia was located on a map. I checked quickly on Google to know more about Luderitz and Namibia. As my friendship with Joan grew, my interest to visit and learn about this country increased. Last summer I travelled to Luderitz for my third time.

Luderitz is a little town situated in the Coast of Namibia. It's part of the Namib Desert, a land made of rocks, sand and high winds. The painteresque houses and the buildings give the town an eclectic taste with a wide variety of colors. Since I have a great interest in animals, during my visits I have tried to learn more about their local wildlife such as the African penguin, the Cape gannet, the different types of cormorants, seals, whales or dolphins. During my last trip, Joan introduced me to Dr. Ingrid Wiesel who is the coordinator of the Brown Hyena Research Project and with whom I had the privilege to work as a volunteer. Working with Dr. Wiesel and her assistant Inga, a German student finishing her master's degree, I had the opportunity to learn a lot about hyenas, their habits and behavior.

To make an exploration trip into the "field" one needs to carry a complete survival kit for desert weather conditions. The project member carries an organized step-by-step procedure of work that needs to be performed with the most efficient results and in the most efficient time (since one is exposed to wild life and each minute is very important). In addition, the team member must have a permit to work in the field. All the areas in which they work are owned by Namdeb, which is the biggest diamond company in Namibia. The work requires considerable patience to get the best results.

My favorite experience in working with the Brown Hyena Team was my opportunity to talk with Dr. Wiesel and Inga about their work with the hyenas.

Prior to this trip, the extent of my knowledge was that hyenas were scavenger animals. They normally go in groups to provide foraging for the herd.

I thought they were dangerous predators to be feared. During those days with Dr. Wiesel and Inga, I learned that hyenas may be very sociable animals even sharing company with jackals and springboks. Inga is normally in charge of setting up cameras in strategic areas of the field to study a specific group of hyenas that live close to the coast. The diet of these hyenas is composed of seals, birds or other dead animals that the ocean washes ashore. One time, I had the opportunity to go into the field with Inga. It was an amazing experience. Once we crossed the Diamond Border Area, I saw only rocks and sand. What little plant life I did see looked dead. We drove on a long gravel road that felt like it would never end. But suddenly, I saw some signs of life. We saw small groups of springboks and Oryx with some birds hanging around. We also saw a jackal that stopped in front of the car - the perfect picture. What a special moment! Viewing that jackal was magic! I felt like I was part of a Peter Pan adventure. The purpose of this trip was to show a couple of men the position of each camera along two big diamond areas. The two fellows volunteered to check the cameras for the next few months while Dr. Wiesel and Inga were out of the country. The cameras are strategically positioned in areas where it is known hyenas operate; close to their den, areas where they like to hang out. One way to look for hyena activity is to look if there is any sign of dominance along the small bushes. Hyenas like to urinate and leave part of their fur on the branches to say who is in charge of that area. We changed the battery of a couple of cameras. These cameras take pictures when movement is detected. Years ago, some hyenas of this herd were sedated and installed a GPS collar for further studies. These collars are amazing pieces of equipment. Each battery has a long life, between 2 to 3 years. The collars can read hyena body temperature and other physiologic measurements and tell via the GPS a hyena's exact position. I had the opportunity to work with these collars. My job was to remove the batteries for replacement. The work required very precise calculation of what tool, strength and technique should be used since the collars were very well built. After three days my mission was accomplished. The most special thing working with these collars was that they were still dirty from the hyena's use. I could smell how a hyena smells. I recall that smell still. When I go back to Luderitz, one of my biggest dreams would be to see a hyena in the wild. They now occupy a very special part of my interest.

Tswalu Kalahari Reserve Collaboration

by Ingrid Wiesel

It was time again to set-up camera traps at Tswalu Kalahari Reserve in South Africa. The Reserve is collaborating with us for our brown hyena density modelling study that started in June last year. Sarah and Inga had set-up up camera traps there in August last year, but half of the camera traps were malfunctioning and the placement of the traps had to be reviewed, hence equipment was removed in December. Gino Noli and I travelled to Tswalu to set-up the new equipment together with Dylan Smith, Tswalu's conservation manager, and to train Kelsey Green, a conservation student on site, who would be responsible for the checks. It was amazing to be back in the Kalahari and it showed itself from the best side: we saw leopard, wild dog, cheetah on a kill and very special, a pangolin. We also saw our first Tswalu brown hyena near the lion boma, waiting for some left-over meat. The camera trap set-ups also worked very well and we all felt happy with their placement. The first photographs below show their 'capturing' success.



I will receive the first data set at the end of September and will present a poster at the De Beers Diamond Route Conference in Johannesburg in October this year. I think you all can look forward to some amazing camera trap photographs in the next newsletter.



Tswalu and Brown Hyena Project team members setting up camera traps at Tswalu

FUNDRAISING

- The **Interessen-Verband der Auslandsjäger (IVA)** in the **Germany** donated € 600. The **IVA** is one of our long-term sponsors by now – thank you very much.
- **Dr. Gabriele Liebisch** donated € 150, **Felicitas and Tom Weinert** donated € 100, **David and Gudrun Winston-Smith** donated N\$ 1000, **Maike Prickett** donated N\$ 200 and **Raquel Monde** donated N\$ 300. Thank you very much for your support.
- **Christine Wulff-Swiegers** from **Klein Aus Vista** donated N\$ 1500. Thank you very much for your continuous support.
- **Theo Klatte** from **Windhoek Optics** supported us by cutting and donating spare lenses for our camera traps. The lenses are frequently sandblasted and with his help, we can prolong the life of our camera traps.
- **Kai Neckel** has offered to use his aircraft for aerial telemetry when he is in Namibia and we have planned a first flight once we have fitted our refurbished collars to spotted hyenas around Garub.
- **NAMDEB** has donated a Ford Ranger bakkie to replace our previous project vehicle. We will report more in our next newsletter.

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

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