

SPOTTED HYENA CAPTURE

We ventured onto new territory: we collared our first spotted hyena at the Wild Horse trough near Aus. The collaring is part of our first human-wildlife conflict study around the eastern boundaries of the Sperrgebiet and Namib Naukluft National Parks. One of the results of our carnivore questionnaire from 2004 was that farmers regarded spotted hyenas as a medium to high risk conflict species. Several livestock losses were reported and also sadly some spotted hyenas were killed on farmland. Furthermore, spotted hyena roadkills were reported on a regular basis and we finally managed to get funding from SKEP to look more into the lives of the spotted hyenas in our area. We hadn't got the slightest idea, where to look for the animals, although we occasionally got sightings reported from the tourist concession holder in this area at Klein Aus Vista and from Telanie Greyling, who was studying the wild horses there. However, we had to book a vet and just take our chances in finding them. The MET vet Mark Jago, his wife Laura and daughter Isla flew to Luderitz at the beginning of October to help with the capture and collaring. We decided that



Spotted hyena captured at the wild horse trough near Aus

our best chance was to try it around the wild horse trough, as Telanie had seen the hyenas in the mountains to the north-east of this area just the previous week. We placed our bait close to the mountains and believe it or not, just as we were ready inside the vehicle, the first spotted hyena approached our bait. It circled around the bait and vehicle for about one hour and silently 'whooped' once to possibly alert other spotted hyenas in the area. We all got goose-bumps, as it was really amazing to hear this animal during an otherwise completely silent night. Finally the hyena approached the bait, we darted, but: once again missed. However, we searched for the dart or possibly darted hyena until midnight, but found no sign of it. We decided to call it a night, as we moved so much around the area, that any other chance we might have had seemed to be close to zero and we rather wanted the animals to relax again. Nevertheless, as we were all completely awake, we decided to drive to the horse trough to see whether there was any activity. We couldn't believe our eyes, when we arrived there and saw three sets of spotted hyena eyes looking at us. We discovered quickly that there was a dead horse at the trough, an old stallion that must have died a few days ago. We had already heard about this animal. Telanie saw it the previous week and new that it would die soon. So we knew that we had to go back to the trough to try and dart the hyenas there the next night. And we guessed right: shortly after 22:00 h, two spotted hyenas walked to the trough and we managed to dart one of them one hour later. It was a large female in an excellent condition. She weighted approximately 75 kg and was about 10 to 12 years old. We fitted the GPS collar, which was programmed to take 24 GPS positions per day. The spotted hyena recovered well and walked off after feeding a bit more on the carcass towards the mountains at 6:00 in the morning. We had one more night to fit the second collar. Although both hyenas came to the bait again the next night, the only one that was feeding on the carcass was the collared female. The other animal kept its distance, not really feeling to comfortable with the vehicle around. However, against all odds, we managed to collar the first spotted hyena and with the first data download, we will be able to see where else these animals live and might be able to plan our next darting trip a bit better.

Thanks to Mark, Laura, Isla, Jessica, Donovan, Steve and Marge for joining the darting trip. Also big thanks to Willem and Ingeborg Swiegers for organising the bait and helping with other logistical problems. Many thanks to Piet and Christine Swiegers for organising our accommodation at Klein Aus Vista and for being very helpful in planing the darting trip.

RADFORD AND MINERVA IN AND AROUND TOWN

The Luderitzbuchters and also some visitors to Luderitz had some very exciting sightings to report. First of all, Radford started roaming around town again in August. At least this time he visited our streets during more civilized hours and not as before in the middle of the night. He was also seen by some tourists around Kolmanskop early in the morning. Other tourists that were not that lucky to see Radford during their visit to the ghost town caught an amazing glimpse of Minerva near Agate Beach. It was the first sighting of Minerva since we replaced her VHF collar with a GPS collar in June this year. She looks as if she is in a very good condition. We will only drop off the collar in July next year and hope that we will be able to see her a few more times before then.



Minerva near Agate Beach

Thanks to Julia Bird and Pieter Nelisse who reported Minerva's sighting and also provided us with the photograph of her.

WHAT DOES TONY DO ON THE MARCO FISHING PROPERTY

While doing our reconnaissance trip to Aus for the spotted hyena darting, we received a phone call about a brown hyena that was 'trapped' inside the Marco Fishing property in town. Steve and I headed back to Luderitz immediately and asked Jessica and Jean-Paul to go to the fish factory to keep an eye on the trapped animal. When we arrived in Luderitz, we also alerted Fabienne and Gunther Berens to give a helping hand. Luckily, all my equipment was packed for the spotted hyena darting trip, so that we arrived at the fish factory very quickly. The animal at this point had moved between a wall and a building without any way out on the far side. We discussed briefly what to do and decided to build a 'wall' out of fishing boxes outside the building and to chase the animal into this large 'cage' to be able to catch it with a catch pole and to sedate it to move it out of town. Mr. Klosta and Mr. Laufer helped us to build this 'cage' and once we were finished we had to face our self made reality: who is going to catch and who is going to inject. Well, not much of a choice for the injection, as I had to do it, but Steve luckily volunteered to catch the hyena with the catch pole. Once he had it, I had to enter the 'cage', being then trapped by myself, hand-inject the animal and get out as quick as possible. Everything happened very fast and I just remember that I got out of the area in one piece. The hyena went down quickly and we carried it to my vehicle to drive it out of town. But: unexpected complication: where did this animal come from. Was it an Agate Beach Clan member or Peninsula Clan member. Well, from Radford and Tosca's known movements, I decided that it was more probable that the animal was part of the Agate Beach Clan, so I decided to take her there.

The animal was an old female, possibly between 14 and 16 years old. We fitted a radio collar to be able to track her movements in future, although we all agreed that she would probably not live for very much longer. After Tony, that was the name we decided on, woke up, she tried to walk back towards town. Fabienne and I had a hard time to convince her to walk into northern direction, jumping up and down, trying to chase her away from town. Finally she moved north and as it was getting dark, we left the area. But now, obviously the story did not end here. When Gino came to Luderitz for our aerial telemetry flights, we obviously wanted to find Tony straight away. We flew over Agate Beach, north to Hottentotsbay, around town, so everywhere, where an Agate Beach Clan animal would be. But: nothing. No signal at all. Well, we had to find Tosca anyhow and flew to the Peninsula, still scanning for Tony's signal. We found Tosca first (see next article) and after recording her position scanned the rest of the Peninsula. Suddenly, close to Grosse Bucht, we received Tony's signal. We flew south and further south and further south and eventually found Tony just east of the Wolf Bay seal colony. To say that we were surprised is an understatement. I think I could not close my mouth, that's as astonished as I was. What was Tony doing down there. Sureley she must have been an Agate Beach animal. We tracked her again the next two days and



Tony 'trapped' at Marco Fishing

always found her close to Wolf Bay. I realised then that I had released poor Tony in the wrong area. She is a Peninsula Clan female. I felt really bad about this and it is no wonder that she wanted to move south again after she woke up from her sedation. Fabienne and I therefore chased her into the wrong direction – and this after a day which obviously had already been pretty bad one for Tony...



Fitting the VHF collar



Tony waking up...

Thanks to Dirk Joubert and Johann Scombie for reporting Tony at Marco Fishing. Thanks also to Mr. Klosta and Mr. Laufer for keeping an eye on Tony while she was at the fish factory. Also thanks to Jessica, Jean-Paul, Fabienne, Gunther, Yannick, Steve and Marge for dealing very professional with a new situation.

TOSCA AND HER “ATTACHMENT” TO HER COLLAR

Tosca hasn't been an easy hyena to study right from the start. So why should it be different when the time comes for her collar drop off? We located her position while we were flying in search for Tony. Once we landed, we went to the area to do the collar drop off. The collar was already in recovery mode, meaning that it sends a different VHF signal to the normal one, as the battery voltage is low. We triggered the drop off from a distance of about 500 metres and walked towards her to retrieve the collar. At one point I knew that we were pretty close, but suddenly, the signal started to come from a different direction. Well, we knew what this meant: either the collar did not drop off, which we regarded as unlikely or the collar was still attached to the mane (see what happened with Halenge) or Tosca did not want to part with her collar and carried it away (see what happened with Alfie). We followed the signal for a while until Steve spotted her in the distance. We went back to the vehicle and tried to find her again, as we assumed that she would look for another resting site soon. However, we could not find her again, which meant that we had to fly for her the next day.

We quickly located her (or the collar, as we were not really sure that the collar dropped off) the next day. She or the collar was not far away from the area where we tried the drop off the previous day.

We drove to the area and very carefully approached the hill, where the signal was coming from. We finally realised that Tosca was not there any more, as she would have already jumped out of her resting site due to all the noise we were making. At least we knew that the collar came off, but it was quite tricky to find it. The signal was coming from all over the place and the rocky outcrop had many holes, which could have been resting sites. Finally we found the collar deep inside one of these holes, and: the collar was bitten into pieces. The belting was completely destroyed and the GPS receiver had nice hyena bite marks in it. So what happened was that the collar did indeed drop off and that Tosca decided to keep her trophy. She nibbled (and nibbling with hyena teeth is quite something...) nicely on her collar before we could retrieve it. The collar is definitely beyond refurbishment, but Gino and I still had a good laugh about it. Hyenas are always good for surprises!!! However, I was a bit concerned that Tosca might have damaged the data unit and the trip back to town seemed to take ages. At home, I downloaded the data and 20 minutes later I was really smiling. We collected over 37000 data sets and the data from July indicates that Tosca might be the proud mother of cubs again. I will check out the den site soon to see whether we are right.



Thank you so much Tosca for giving us so much insight into your life. I guess it is just fair that the collar will not be fitted again to another brown hyena... Thanks to Gino for as always showing his talent in doing perfect aerial telemetry flights. I was so excited this time that I did not even think about getting sick and thanks to Steve for helping with the search for the collar.

DOWNLOADS: SPOTTED HYENA, CASPAR, RODIN AND RAY

We did remote download for all of these animals in November and December. I'm not going to report much on these download in this newsletter, but we managed to download Caspar, Rodin and Ray once and not much changed to the movement seen in previous downloads. But we also managed to download the first spotted hyena data set and could see to our surprise that the spotted hyena stayed within the boundaries of the park and hadn't crossed over to farmland yet. Her first home range estimate is 4000 km². She spends a lot of time in the Koichab Pan and also ventures far into the northern dunefields. She is not as regularly at the wild horse trough as we thought, which highlights, how lucky we were to capture her there in the first place. I will report more in the next newsletter.

A PROJECT STUDENT'S STORY: KYRA

So there I was on a plane, flying over bush, then desert as far as the eye can see, into Luderitz, Namibia. Ingrid met me and took me on a tour of the town. What a surreal little place, nestled amongst seemingly barren rock, with dunes stretching up and down the coast for miles.

Wildlife is limited by such harsh conditions, but for my first month I would be working with mammals that numbered many thousands – Cape Fur Seals. I obtained an entry permit from Namdeb, as the seal colony was situated within the restricted entry diamond area, and so there I went, everyday to collect data. The job was sometimes pretty gruesome for such a squeamish person as myself. It involved pulling out dead seal pups from in amongst fully-grown adult seals and determining how they'd died as well as taking measurements such as length, width, girth, age, sex, blubber thickness and weight, and then attaching a tag to one of the flippers so that I could return to the carcass the following day. Causes of death were starvation, heatstroke and of course killed and eaten by Brown Hyena – the principle reason for which I was gathering this data.

On some occasions I stayed overnight in a little wooden hut perched on top of a cliff with a splendid view of the colony and the crashing sea below. Sitting outside enjoying the sunset, I'd see a few jackals wandering around, scavenging the remains of the dead seal pups I'd tagged that day. The data collection ended, and so I began to do other jobs for the project. The visitors' information centre was moved to Kolmanskop and articles from scientific journals were typed up and referenced. I began to accompany Ingrid when she drove around the Sperrgebiet with her aerials, and when the radio signal was good, we managed to download the data from the GPS collar of a female hyena called Tosca, darted the previous year. This was very exciting, as we knew she had cubs and must have them very close by, hiding out in a nearby den. The downloads were then sifted through, checked, plotted, and then transferred onto a map of the area so that the exact movements of the hyena could be tracked over time. I loved to do this as we could really see the distances these hyenas travelled to feed at the seal colonies, as well as determining rest sites and possible new den sites where she would be hiding the cubs. Sometimes I did some trekking in the area and then I'd note down the GPS position whenever I saw any signs of hyena activity. I'd find latrines (some very recently used!), rest sites, seal remains, paste marks and spoor. I longed to actually spot a hyena, so I was ecstatic when Ingrid asked me to join a few darting trips planned for the next two months.



Sonya and Kyra with Rodin

We would take along some cow pieces as bait, bed rolls, food and warm clothes, and spend a few days and nights on the coast with all of the equipment we would need to dart, cage and collar a hyena. What an amazing experience! We slept under the stars and would take it in turns to keep an eye on the bait for any sign of a hyena, which was challenging on a moonless night with the wind and sand howling around the camp. Jackals would turn up, sniffing us in our bedrolls, stealing our shoes and eating the bait. Finally, after nearly two months of darting trips, we managed to dart a hyena. There he was, an eight-year-old male lying in front of me. What a beautiful animal, such long fur and such big paws! I was so excited but had to stay calm while the vet took blood samples, Ingrid fitted the GPS collar and took measurements that I jotted down on the data sheet. Twenty minutes later the hyena was coming around, so we hid behind a dune and watched him get to his feet. He was very unsteady at first but as the effects wore off he made his way down the coast and then inland. Only when he was a speck amongst the sand dunes could I finally contemplate the experience I'd just had, and then Ingrid asked if I would like to give this hyena a name. What a privilege! I named him Rodin. A month later and my time with the Brown Hyena Project had come to an end. I was very sad to leave but bursting with ideas and possibilities that may be open to me now that I'd had this experience, and excited about what I could now do with the knowledge I'd gained. What a fantastic time in Luderitz!

NEWS

Morgan Hauptfleisch's booklet "Monitoring the Sperrgebiet and adjacent areas – Best practice guide for monitoring key indicators for the succulent Karoo ecosystem, with special focus on the Sperrgebiet National Park and adjacent areas" is available. With our help, the brown hyena was chosen as an example for the monitoring of a flagship species.

I visited Robin Line's Wild Dog Project in November to help him with the first remote data download. More information will be available in his next newsletter.

I was invited to give a talk in Windhoek for the NNF's 20th anniversary celebrations. The talk was held in the Franco Namibian Cultural Centre and was very well attended. Other speakers were Robin Lines (Wild dogs) and Jock Orford (Lions).

FUNDRAISING AND DONATIONS

The **Wilderness Safaris Wildlife Trust** renewed their donation and donated N\$ 30000 towards telemetry equipment. We will buy another GPS collar from these funds. Thank you very much for this very generous donation.

The following grant proposals are still pending, but we hope that the committee will sit in January 2008:

- Brown hyena conservation in the Sperrgebiet (Nedbank Go Green Fund)

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

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BROWN HYENA RESEARCH PROJECT
Contact Details



BROWN HYENA RESEARCH PROJECT WEBSITE:
www.strandwolf.org.za

P. O. Box 739 Lüderitz
Tel.: ++264 (0)63 202114, Fax: ++264 (0)63 202114
e-mail: strandwolf@iway.na

If you would prefer to do a bank transfer, the details are as follows:
Brown Hyena Research Project – Nedbank Namibia
Lüderitz Branch, Branch Code 461610
Account number: 11010015204

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\$, £

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Thank you very much for your support!