

SPOTTED HYENA CAPTURE AT GARUB

In this newsletter, the spotted hyenas make the headlines! After spending many months trying to capture and collar brown hyenas, Amanda and I finally decided to try our luck with the Garub spotted hyenas – they were so easy to catch last year and we badly needed some success to boost our confidence. So when we received a phone call from Klein Aus Vista, informing us that a mare had died close to the horse water trough at Garub, we packed our things (well, the car was actually already packed) and drove to Aus. On arrival, we quickly had a look at the dead horse, which had already been partly eaten by hyenas the previous night. Therefore, we were full of confidence, that we would collar another spotted hyena pretty quickly. And here goes the story about the most unsuccessful and disappointing darting trip ever:



Exhausted stallion at Garub

All our hopes were up when at around midnight during the first night, three spotted hyenas appeared in the area. They were several hundred metres away from the dead mare and after some time we decided to play the piglet distress call to attract the hyenas to the bait. While playing the sound, one of the animals marched quickly towards our car, circled around it, but stayed at a good distance, so we did not get the chance to dart it. We still saw the animals in the area until 4:30 h in the morning before they disappeared into the desert. Well, this was not too bad for a start and since they did not come to feed at the horse, we were confident, that they would come close the next night. So again, we drove to the horse in the evening and I started to walk around in the area to get an idea into which direction the hyenas disappeared the previous night. Suddenly, I stumbled across another dead mare, just 100 metres away from the other one. Well, jackpot – fresh bait and the hyenas know that there is food around. So we dragged the other mare to our darting site and sat in the car in anticipation. Suddenly, at 21:30 h we heard two short 'whoop' calls – you can imagine our excitement. By then Christine had joined us, too and all of us were wide awake and hoping for the best. But that was it for the night: no sighting, no more vocalisation and three very tired team members.

We also discovered fresh hyena spoor at the horse water trough and therefore decided to drag the two horses closer to the trough. And again, we went out the next evening to give it another go. As our luck goes: we found ourselves caught in a very severe sandstorm. We could not see more than 2 metres in front of us, so even if the hyenas would approach our bait, we would be unable to dart them. Shortly after 20:00 h we thought that we saw some spotted hyena eyes on the ridge behind the trough, but no bait was eaten the next morning. Not much we could do: just go back to camp, catch up on some sleep and drive out again. The next night, one of the spotted hyenas went to the trough to drink, but once we switched on the spotlights, it ran away. It came back a few more times, but remained skittish with the spotlight. We had also dragged the horse carcasses a bit further away from the trough and our plan was to walk towards the feeding hyenas once they are at the bait. Well, bad plan. We did not see the hyenas feeding at the bait, but one of the horses had been dragged down the ridge by hyenas – we missed it completely. Next night, the same: hyena comes to the trough, spotlight on, hyena gone. Back to camp, sleeping, back to the trough. When we arrived at the tourist hide near the horse trough, we had company of a stallion in a very poor condition. It seems as if he was bitten by a snake, as one of his hindlegs was badly swollen. He stayed with us for a few hours before moving off into the veld. We did not see any hyenas that night, but when we checked the area for hyena spoor the next morning, we found the stallion that had died in the meantime about 200 metres away from our hide. And: the spotted hyenas had been feeding on him, while our eyes were locked into the other direction. They did not make any noises and sneaked around us perfectly. So again, we dragged the stallion to the other horses and unwilling to give up, spent the next night near the trough again. Nothing. Well, can't blame the hyenas. Having full stomachs from eating three horses would also make me rest for a while. We tried for one more night before returning back to Luderitz. Needless to say, nothing happened, but Christine checked the stallion the day after we left and he had been completely consumed by the hyenas. So again: they outsmarted us!!!

However, as usual, not a reason to give up. Two tour guides from Klein Aus Vista reported several spotted hyena sightings between the mountains Dikwillem and Klein Willem during broad daylight. We suspected that there must be a den in that area and when Gino and I flew for our data downloads at the beginning of November, we circled around the mountains and actually found a beautiful cave that looked like a perfect den site. In the meantime, we had made arrangements to go for another spotted hyena capture attempt at the beginning of December. The South African Wildlife Show 50/50 wanted to do a follow up on the brown hyena documentary that they had done three years earlier and they wanted to include the spotted hyena study into the story. As Amanda had left by then, we asked Renscha Beeker, the vet from Rosh Pinah to supervise the darting and she happily agreed. We were also very fortunate that Thorsten and Walter Theile from the Farm Namtib contacted us, as they had an injured horse on the farm that needed to be euthanized and which I could use as bait. Maybe the luck was on our side this time. On my way to fetch the horse from Namtib, I stopped at the horse trough and couldn't believe my eyes, when I discovered a dead horse. Well, so much for having more luck – the hyenas would have full stomachs again and our chance of capture was minimal. Still, I could not give up and returned with the bait to Klein Aus Vista a day later to meet with the film crew: Linda, Johan and Pierre. Renscha was to arrive a day later. We used the 'spare' day to walk to Klein Willem to have a look at the suspected den site – and: it was indeed a nice den site with lots of hyena faeces, prey remains and fresh spoor around. I felt really confident that we would be able to capture them in that area. So I gutted the horse and left the intestines in front of the den to give them a little appetiser before offering the whole bait the next night. It is really hard to continue with this story, as nothing happened during the two nights of capture attempts: no hyenas, no vocalisation, no nothing. Fair enough, we were about 500 metres away from the den with our bait, as we could not drive offroad to get closer to the entrance, but still, the hyenas should have picked up on the bait. Every morning we found fresh tracks at the den and one hyena even approached the bait but stopped about 20 metres short of it – too far to be darted (well, and we actually did not see the animal approaching). The Garub spotted hyenas turn out to be as difficult as the Sperrgebiet brown hyenas – I wonder who told them about us and our intentions... We really tried everything, darting from a vehicle, from our hide, on foot and from bedrolls. Well, I have planned to try boxtraps again, haven't got much hope that it works, but since nothing else does, I have nothing to lose... Still, both darting trips were wonderful, we all had a great time and enjoyed the area tremendously – and even all the flat tyres that my vehicle or I (as the driver) attracted, did not spoil the experience.



Spotted hyena den at Klein Willem – yes, we are flying – sort of!

Spotted hyena den at Klein Willem – yes, we are flying – sort of!

Thanks to Amanda and Christine, to Renscha for joining us on short notice, to Piet for helping with the 'darting' and to Linda, Johan and Pierre for their good sense of humour, and many thanks to the family Theile from Farm Namtib for donating the bait and welcoming me on their farm.

HYENAS CAUSE HAVOC NEAR SWAKOPMUND

If we can't capture Sperrgebiet brown hyenas and Garub spotted hyenas, why not trying further north? As previously reported, at least two sub-adult brown hyenas were causing problems at the guano platforms north of Swakopmund. Steve and I drove to Swakopmund at the end of October to try to fit a GSM collar on one of the hyenas with the help of Hartmut and Peter Sander, who had monitored the hyenas for quite some time. He knew of one area that the hyenas frequent often and we set up our bait and waited. First night: nothing, but when we arrived at the bait a bit later the next night, we spotted a brown hyena feeding together with two jackals. We approached the hyena carefully, but the animal managed to grab a piece of bait and disappeared into the darkness. However, later that night, the hyena came back, but once we switched on the spotlight, it did not want to get close, so again, our darting attempt failed. We arrived a bit earlier the next night, also to give Hartmut some time to do some practice shots with his dart gun. Lucky that we did so: Loading the gun, shot and: dart pops out – something was wrong. Again and again we tried, but the darts did not 'fly'. Steve drove back to town to fetch my dart gun, which worked and we relaxed a bit and waited for the hyenas to come to the bait. Unfortunately the hyena did not come back, so that we have to book this trip as another unsuccessful darting attempt – nothing new. However, the good news is that there does not seem to be a problem with brown hyenas visiting the guano platforms at the moment, so that the birds can settle on them again and the hyenas are safe for now.



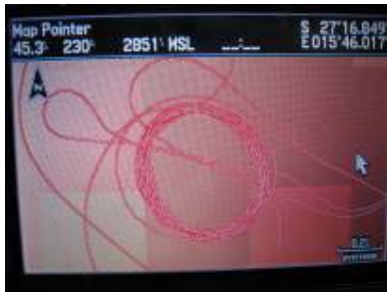
Two sub adult brown hyenas (P. Sander)

Thanks to Hartmut for joining and finally being able to work with his 'local' hyenas. Thanks to Peter Sander for organising the darting trip and for organising funding from BP (150 l of fuel) and Erongo Agencies (2 bottles of Zoletil).

RODIN CONTINUES TO BE FUNNY

Rodin's downloads have always been tricky: his VHF signal disappears, there are many interferences with other radio signals in his area, or he disappears into a cave and we lose radio signal contact. Not so this time: yes, finally a success story. Gino and I had just done Caspar's download in the Klinghardt Mountains – one of the usual sickening, tight circle downloads. So we were feeling a bit weak, but needed to do at least another download to make the flying worthwhile. We quickly received Rodin's signal near the Baker's Bay seal colony, but could also hear from the 60 ppm signal, that he was still moving. We found him approximately 4 km north of the seal colony, walking towards the colony along the beach. What a sight!

He was not concerned about the plane circling around him – and we followed him until he nearly reached the seal colony. The download went perfect and we hardly lost any lines during transmission. It was so nice to see him and he still seems to be in a good condition. He also enjoyed the surf now and then, wading into the water and checking the plane with his big, brown eyes.



Sickening Caspar download track



Relaxed Rodin download track



Aerial photo of Rodin during download

TRAGIC NEWS: SHAUN

In December 2006 Shaun, Emma and Phoebe Rambert came with the BBC to help us to capture and collar brown hyenas at Garub and Van Reenen Bay. Although we only spent a few days together, I really felt that I had made some new friends. We have been in contact now and then since the filming and many of my newsletters featured the 'Shaun-Method' of bedroll darting – a success story I will never forget. Therefore, I was extremely shocked to hear the tragic news that Shaun had died during a helicopter darting procedure in October this year. Many of you possibly know the Rambert family and also feel the loss.

The Rambert family suggested donations to the Brown Hyena Research Project in memory of Shaun. Emma has such a big heart and I herewith would like to thank her and everybody, who contributed to the Shaun-brown-hyena fund.



WEB PAGE

Many of you have probably realized that our web page is off-line at the moment. However, we are working on a new and improved page and hope to be on-line soon again. In the meantime, you can access the page at www.strandwolf.org.za/home. I'm really sorry for the inconvenience.

OONA'S EXPERIENCE WITH THE PLANE



Can you spot the spotted hyena?

We finally had our first aerial sighting of Oona, but she was not too impressed. We found her as usual in the Koichab pan in a nicely vegetated area. On our way there, we had already seen some Leppetfaced vultures, breeding in a large tree, which was already amazing, so we did not think that we would also catch a glimpse of Oona. She is usually pretty relaxed with our download circling procedures and usually stayed nicely hidden beneath the vegetation. Not so this time. She jumped out of her resting site and ran several hundred metres, before settling down again. Once we had disturbed her, we climbed to a higher altitude to avoid further disturbance, but we could still see her running through the hummock dunes. When she finally settled, we knew exactly where she was and therefore could do a very good download – not as good as Rodin's, but the best we ever did with her from the plane. The data revealed, that she has not been in the area around the horse trough since September and we are starting to wonder whether the three spotted hyenas at Garub belong to a different hyena clan than Oona's. I will also try to go on a darting trip to the Koichab pan to collar another animal of Oona's clan. We should be able to see then whether we are really dealing with two different spotted hyena clans in the area.

Thanks to Gino for coming to Aus to fly again. We actually managed to do all the work in less than two days. What a team!

FUNDRAISING AND DONATIONS

A total of N\$ 2399-03 was collected in the following slot tins: **Luderitz Safari's & Tours** (2 tins), **Kolmanskop Curio Shop**, **Environmental Information Centre** and **Klein Aus Vista**.

Mrs. Traut donated N\$ 200 to the Brown Hyena Research Project. We also have a new member, **Mr. Boris Pfander**.

The **Predator Conservation Trust** in the UK donated £ 1000 for the purchase of a UHF data download receiver from Televilt. This enables us to use the most recently developed GPS collars to maximise data retrieval and to minimise flying costs.

We would like to thank **BP** in Swakopmund and **Erongo Agencies** for supporting the brown hyena study in Swakopmund.

Klein Aus Vista already raised N\$ 44 through the sale of brown hyena road sign stickers and fridge magnets. These magnets and stickers are also available at our Environmental Information Centre at Kolmanskop. We would also like to thank family **Theile** from the Farm **Namtib** for supporting the spotted hyena study at Garub.

Mrs. Mildred Salb donated US\$ 250 to the project and adopted our most recently collared brown hyena 'Maya'. Thank you very much for supporting the project!

Namdeb continues with their annual donation to the Brown Hyena Research Project and the Environmental Information Centre. The donation for the financial year 2009 is N\$ 108000.

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

Namdeb Diamond Corporation	Luderitz Bay Shipping & Forwarding	Andrew Cunningham	Ronel v.d. Merwe	Luderitz Backpackers	Beppo Family
Chevron Namibia	Luderitz SPAR	Alex MacKay	Steve Appleton	Mark Noffke	Jessie Salb
Siemens	Upstart Technologies	Gino Noli	George Shimaneni	Mandy Noffke	Mildred Salb
Shell Solar	ESRI	Kathy Peard	Gisela Wolters	Pisces Environmental Services	BP Swakopmund
Predator Conservation Trust UK	MET	Jessica Kemper	Kolette Grobler	Westair	Erongo Agencies
OK Grocer	MFMR	Jean-Paul Roux	Wilfried Erni	Albert Harness	Mrs. Traut
Raleigh International	Luderitz Safaris & Tours	Trygve Cooper	Erich Looser	Oranjemund Moth Club	
	Riaan Laubscher	Volker & Daggie Jahnke	Jürgen Syvertsen	Walter Rusch	
		Rene Rossler	Morag Burrell		



NAMDEB
ON DIAMONDS WE BUILD

Nedbank Namibia
Go Green Fund



MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR!



BROWN HYENA RESEARCH PROJECT
Contact Details



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

Dr. Ingrid Wiesel
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 an electronic bank transfer, the details are as follows:

Brown Hyena Research Project – Nedbank Namibia
Bismarck Street, Luderitz, 9000, Namibia
Lüderitz Branch, Branch Code 461610
Cheque Account
Account number: 11010015024
Swift code: NEDSNANX

Post form to Brown Hyena Research Project, P. O. Box 739, Lüderitz, Namibia or
e-mail to strandwolf@iway.na

I would like to donate N\$/ZAR, Euro,US\$, £ _____

I enclose a cheque for the amount of N\$/ZAR, Euro,US\$, £ _____

Name: _____

Postal Address: _____

Country: _____ Tel.: _____

e-mail: _____

Date: _____ Signature: _____

Thank you very much for your support!