

FIRST AERIAL DATA DOWNLOAD FOR CASPAR

The Gabusib hyena that we fitted with a GPS collar in December last year has been named Caspar in the meantime. The first data download was due at the beginning of January. I was lucky enough to be invited by Trygve Cooper to participate on a trip through the southern part of the Sperrgebiet, which would bring us through the areas, where we collared Caspar. I took the equipment with me and, to my surprise, found Caspar resting in the Klinghardt Mountains. What a perfect situation for the first download. When I plotted the data once I was back in my office, I was in for a big surprise. Although Caspar lives around the Klinghardt mountains, which are about 50 km east of the coast, he visits the seal colony to forage seal pups once every week. He follows a similar route to Alfie, who lives around the Morgenberg in the central parts of the Sperrgebiet and who visited the seal colony at Baker's Bay twice during the five months he was fitted with a GPS collar. Who would have believed that the seal colonies are of such importance for the inland hyena population. This discovery has great implications for the conservation of the Sperrgebiet brown hyenas, as land development on the coast therefore does not only influence coastal clans, but also inland ones. I'm more than excited to find out how these visits to the coast change over time and whether they are related to the seal pupping season. Since I had a good idea about Caspar's movement from the first download, it made it a lot easier to plan the aerial tracking route for our first aerial download flight in February. I was not really looking forward to circle around with the plane for 30 to 40 minutes to download the data, but not every day in a biologist's life is nice. Gino and I were confident that we would find Caspar somewhere around the Klinghardt Mountains, since the chance of finding him near the seal colony was small. So we flew for over an hour in Caspar's inland range without finding him. So we only had one chance left, turning towards the coast, where we found him just a few kilometres east of the seal colony.



Looking happy but being very sick after the first aerial data download (photo by G. Noli)

It took us about 10 minutes to figure out his position, as the signal bounced a lot between the mountains. The signal was strong and we decided to trigger the download. Gino started circling. Since I had to keep my eyes on the remote download receiver, I could not look to the horizon to give my stomach and brain the feeling that what was happening was all right. About 15 minutes into the download, I had to announce to Gino, that I was not too sure for how long I could still continue, as I felt pretty sick by then. Gino also was not feeling too well, but had the idea to circle the other way around. Did not help much though... Ten minutes later (it actually felt like hours later) I was struggling a lot. The download worked fine, but my body refused to accept the situation. However, there were only five more minutes to go before the download was finished and I refused to give up. Luckily, Caspar must have sensed my predicament and started moving. He possibly had more than enough of the funny yellow bird disturbing his morning snooze... We made it and received 700 of the 1000 possibly data points. What an achievement, but I'm definitely not looking forward to the next flight. However, the aerial download works and is definitely the solution for the inland hyenas. They range very far and the network of roads is very limited, which makes a download from the ground very difficult. On our way back, we also received Jewel's and Tosca's signal, but I could not face doing another download that day. Maybe next time...

Thanks to Trygve, JJ, Andrew and Israel to be so enthusiastic about Caspar in the Klinghardts and thanks to Gino for such an "enjoyable" flight.

GIRLPOWER



Getting stuck in the desert can be a lot of fun, especially if it's girls only. Surely, a man would not have gotten stuck in first place... Fabienne and I were on the way to meet Trygve and other people at Gabusib. They were on a trip through the Sperrgebiet from the south and we were about to join them for the last day from the north. I took a route that I thought I knew well, made one wrong decision and voilà, the car was stuck in extremely soft sand. Two hours of digging and moving only 50 cm at a time and we were out again. We didn't look to presentable any more, full of sand, but still smiling - and who cares anyway!

Thanks to Schalk, who was on standby on the radio in case the girls would not make it. Helps to know that somebody knows where you are.

EMMA IS DEAD

There is actually not enough space in one newsletter to write about Emma. I have known her since 1997 and was fortunate enough to follow her life for many, many years. I observed her raising four litters, often together with Gypsy II, who I presume is dead by now too. Emma was fitted with her first radio collar in January 2000. We replaced her collar twice and saw her alive for the last time in August last year. Gino and Kathie located her on one of our tracking flights on 21 January. She was close to the main road just around the Lüderitz town sign. It was unusual for her to be there, but we did not worry too much. A week later, Gino and Kathie flew again and received her mortality signal from exactly the same area. Needless to say, I rushed out immediately and found her dead next to a bush, close to the leak in the water pipes that supply water to some palm trees in the area. I'm not sure whether she was hit by a vehicle, but I rather think that she died of old age, just hanging around the easy accessible water supply. We were all very sad, not only because she was the last one of the old study group to die (most of them got hit by vehicles), but also because she was so special to us. Emma was even the star in one documentary, where the filmmakers tried to tell a story about her struggle to raise her two cubs.

However, we tracked her away from her den on 63 occasions during the six years that she was fitted with a radio collar. Her home range size including the Lüderitz Peninsula was 130 km² and her main foraging grounds were the beaches at Grosse Bucht and at the Second Lagoon.

We often found her resting near Grosse Bucht, but also close to town in the mountains between the railway line and the tar road. She also visited town at night, sometimes together with Radford, another brown hyena of the Peninsula Clan. We are not sure what happened to all her cubs, but it is possible that Tosca, the lactating female that is fitted with a GPS collar at present, is one of Emma's daughters. We are still waiting for the genetic results, but will keep you updated.



BOGENFELS ATTEMPT NUMBER 8

Well, the story about the Bogenfels hyens won't stop. This time Hartmut Winterbach from Swakopmund had time to join us for four nights for the attempt to fit the remaining three GPS collars. We decided to have two darting teams, as Jessica, Ronel, Kolette, Steve, Gino, Rene and Kyra, our volunteer, were keen on joining us. We also decided to use the method, which is now known as the "Shaun Method" (see previous newsletter), darting from bedrolls instead of using the vehicle. It is actually a lot more comfortable to spend the nights stretched out in bedrolls than cramped into car seats. Since we had never tried to dart at the northern end of the Van Reenen Bay seal colony and since most of the hyena activity seemed to concentrate in this area, we looked for good dart sites there. As usual, there was no hyena activity close to our bait during the first night, but night two became very exciting. First of all it started raining at 3:00 h in the morning. Not that it is enough to be exposed to the wind and sand, but rain... Seems to be the new thing for us to sleep in the desert, where it is not supposed to rain very often, and to just hit the few days per year when it happens. However, my theory of thinking that hyenas don't like the rain proved to be wrong, as the first hyena approached our bait just five minutes after it stopped raining. Unfortunately it was extremely skittish and once we switched the red light on to be able to dart, it moved away from the bait. However, the hyena stayed in the area for another hour until a second hyena joined it. Both animals were not collared, so prime targets for us. The second hyena moved straight to the bait and we darted it a few minutes later. But: we missed... Still, we could not be sure that we missed the hyena, as we could not find the dart around the bait. We searched for the animal for nearly two hours, scaring two other hyenas out of the area with all our activity. We could not find the animal and since it was already daylight when we stopped searching, we concentrated our efforts to finding the dart near the bait, where we found it in the end. So much for bad luck. We had two more hyena sightings during the remaining nights, one hyena moved past our bait with a seal pup in its mouth and Ray, our GPS collared male, also passed the bait. So again, no luck. The good news are that the hyenas are around and we just need to spend a lot more time outside to

be able to dart them. Nevertheless, the trip was great, we enjoyed fantastic braais, hiked to hyena city, where Hartmut encountered Ray the one afternoon, and we also enjoyed the honey liquor... After all these nights without sleep, all of us were pretty exhausted and I felt 10 years older instead of just one, as the last day of our trip was my birthday. My increasing age and lack of sleep also seemed to affect my ability to think clearly, as I suggested to the others to carry the cowhead that we used as bait on its legs...



Our new darting arrangement

Thanks to everybody who joined the trip. Also thanks to Wilfried Ernie and Luderitz Smokeries for providing bait.

RADFORD AND TOSCA: NEWS OF THE PENINSULA CLAN

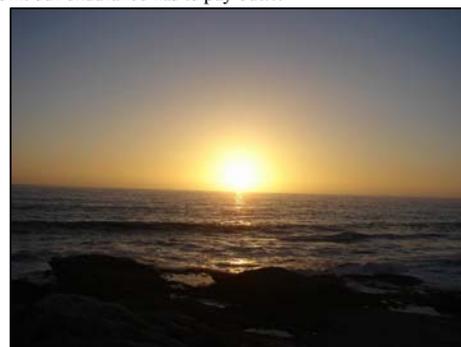


The Peninsula Clan went through quite a change due to Emma's death. The old era came to an end and we have some beautiful and young brown hyenas taking over, and it is time to get to know them a bit better. Tosca was fitted with a GPS collar in July last year, while she was still lactating. We already downloaded over 10 000 positions from her collar and could see when she moved her cubs to new dens and could also detect changes in her behaviour, not only denning related, but also foraging related. Tosca started to leave her usual foraging grounds at the Luderitz Peninsula to search for food further south at the Wolf Bay seal colony. This is the first time that one of our Peninsula animals was spotted this far south. Surely, it could be an individual change in behaviour, but with the shortage of food this year, it could also mean that the Peninsula hyenas need to extend their home range to find enough food. Radford, the other Peninsula Clan hyena, was spotted quite far south since the beginning of January. Since he is pretty habituated, he is also seen often during the day especially around town or around Kolmanskop ghost town. I was lucky enough to see him on a few occasions close to Kolmanskop, but to all our surprise I saw him at the Wolf Bay seal colony feeding on a seal pup at the beginning of March. This means that he behaves similar to Tosca. When he was spotted at Wolf Bay, he was quite curious about the vehicle and moved towards it, leaving the seal behind. However, his stomach must have determined behaviour, as he went back to his prey after checking the vehicle out, to grab the seal pup and to move away to a protected feeding site. Radford is in an excellent condition and I hope to be able to fit a radio collar soon.

Thanks to Chris Sivertsen who reported the sighting near Kolmanskop. James and Donna also reported a sighting of Radford in the same area on different days.

HOTTENTOTBAY ATTEMPT NUMBER 4

The Hottentotbay hyenas are as difficult to catch than the Bogenfels hyenas. We spent three nights just south of Kegelberg to fit the GPS collar that should have already been deployed in February last year. Sonja Metzger, our vet, Rene, Fabienne and Kyra joined the trip. Again, the difficulty is to be at the right place at the right time. We found a very good area with lots of fresh hyena tracks, but none of them came past during the first night. On our way back to town, we saw three different sets of tracks on the road, so the animals just went straight past us. We also received the signal of a radio collared female this first night, but she also moved into another direction. Still, we were full of hope. But apart from surviving really, really cold and moist nights (our darting spot was right next to the sea), having a poisonous scorpion under my bedroll and experiencing beautiful sunsets, nothing happened. We needed to leave the area after three nights, as we urgently have to fit the Bogenfels hyenas with GPS collars before returning to Hottentotbay. So at the moment, we are out at Van Reenen Bay for our Bogenfels attempt number 9, hopefully a successful one, but it is planned to go back to Hottentotbay at the end of March. At one point our endurance has to pay out...



NEWS

Our Environmental Information moved to Kolmanskop Ghost Town at the beginning of February. We are located in the main building and the tour guides have started to advertise our presence there. We already have many more visitors per day than at the old location at the Luderitz Waterfront and we have already been approached by tourist organisations to give regular talks to the tourists. We will still prepare more detailed posters about the Kolmanskop hyenas for display and will also start showing several documentaries that were done in collaboration with the Brown Hyena Research Project in the past at the centre.



My doctorate thesis is finally available on the internet. Its size is close to 3MB, so it might take some time to download the file. You can download the thesis at www.strandwolf.org.za on the News page. Google search should also provide you with other links to the thesis. I hope you will enjoy reading it.

We will present a poster at the Society of Conservation Biology in Port Elizabeth in July this year. The following abstract was accepted: "Predicting the influence of land development on brown hyena *Parahyaena brunnea* movement and activity".

FUNDRAISING AND DONATIONS

The **Oranjemund Moth Club** raised N\$ 6100 for the Brown Hyena Research Project during their charity ball at the beginning of March. This donation will be used for the Orange River hyena project, where we will fit two GPS collars and where we will monitor hyenas with camera traps.

Caltex continued with their annual donation towards fuel expenses and increased their annual donation to N\$ 12 000.

The **Predator Conservation Trust** in the UK donated N\$ 13 000 to purchase a roof rack for our project vehicle and to contribute to our darting expenses.

Albert Harness donated a fleece sleeping bag for our darting trips. In case it is suitable for our bedroll method, a further donation is possible.

We collected quite a lot of money in the **slot tins**. The Environmental Information Centre collected N\$ 88.66, Luderitz Safaris and Tours collected N\$ 410.45 and N\$ 716.35.

The following grant proposals are still pending:

- Brown hyena conservation along the Orange River (SKEP)
- Brown hyena conservation in the Sperrgebiet (Nedbank Go Green Fund)
- EnviroClub Sperrgebiet: The Luderitz youth is encouraged to run a "Biological Puppet Theatre" (Global Environment Fund)

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

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



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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
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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\$, £

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Thank you very much for your support!