

STRANGE OBELIXA SIGHTINGS

Obelixa's data download was due at the end of August and I did not expect any trouble with her. Finding her has been quite easy in the past and I did not assume that anything could be wrong with her, as she was in an excellent condition when we captured her in May. Therefore, I was extremely surprised, when I got a phone call from Manfred Anderson, a tour operator in the area, informing me that he saw Obelixa at the Elizabeth Bay ghost town and that she did not move once discovered and looked sick. I drove out the next day with the project's volunteer, Soenke Holch, but we could not find her near Elizabeth Bay, which was generally a good sign.



I drove the usually route to find her and we received a strong VHF signal at Bains Bay. I quickly downloaded the data and started to search for her. We found Obelixa resting in a hummock dune just 30 metres away from the beach. Once she saw us, she moved away a few metres, lying down now and then before moving a bit further. However, she did not seem to be too concerned about our presence. I remembered that she already seemed quite tame when we saw her at the bait the morning after we had collared her, so she may just be a very relaxed hyena. However, her behaviour was strange and I was concerned that she may have been injured by a vehicle in the mining area. Her belly looked big and swollen and I hoped that she did not suffer of internal injuries. However my first and more probable thought was that she may be highly pregnant – I would hesitate to move too much, too. So maybe we are in for a surprise...

The data also revealed that she moved 'normal' distances each day, so I relaxed and hoped for a litter of cubs soon. However, the tour operator reported seeing her around the ghost town again the next day – again, showing strange behaviour. I decided to give her a few days and went to look for her one week later. Strangely, I could not find her, but the good news were that she was not near the ghost town and that she must have moved.

I only had time to look for her in the middle of September again and found her at one of her usual resting sites. I could not get a visual, as the vegetation was too dense, but she is definitely still alive and well and maybe a mother by now. I will keep you informed.

TOSCA'S DENS

Tosca is definitely breeding at the moment. When we captured and collared her in May this year, we were pretty sure that she was pregnant. Since then, I have downloaded data three times and the data showed us the exact positions of the den sites that she has been using since then. As mentioned before, Tosca moved into the area around the Wolf and Atlas Bay seal colonies. I knew of many abandoned den sites in that area and Tosca started to use those. She has used three different dens so far and moved her cubs to a beautiful den just south of the Atlas Bay seal colony.

While we were capturing brown hyenas in the Atlas Bay area in May, some of my equipment got lost – rebars, to attach the donkey bait into the ground, were ripped out and carried away together with the bait. So I was little surprised when I visited Tosca's first den site after it had been abandoned and found two of my rebars and the remains of the donkey bait. I also discovered other trophies, such as a number plate from a government vehicle – possibly from the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources inspectors' vehicle. Nice toys for hyena cubs...



Recovered rebar next to Tosca's den

ALAIKA'S COLLAR

Wouldn't it be nice if life with hyenas would be easy? You collar them, download data and drop the collar off after three years deployment. Just one mistake in the equation: you forget about hyena cubs...Remember Maya's cubs from last year? Well, her cubs are not the only ones that are cheeky and too interested in the new necklaces that some clan members bring back to the den. But from the beginning: Gino and I flew to download Tosca's and Alaika's data in August. We found Tosca in the hills between Wolf and Atlas Bay, did the download and switched to Alaika's frequency. To our surprise, we received her VHF signal in the same area, but, it was a mortality signal. I knew somehow that she could not be dead and that the collar must have fallen off. Also, it was too much of a coincidence, that both signals, Tosca's and Alaika's collar, came from the same area, an area, where I knew of at least two den sites. I also downloaded Alaika's data and once I had plotted the data on the computer, I could see that Tosca used one of the dens in the hills and that Alaika had been a regular visitor to the den.

Steve and I drove out a few days later to recover Alaika's collar. She collar was intact, looked as if it had been pulled off Alaika with quite a bit of force, as some deep bite marks were visible on the belting. Other than that, there was no sign of blood or anything else on the collar indicating that Alaika may be dead. We scanned the area briefly for a carcass, being careful not to disturb the den site area too much, but could not find anything. So, it looks as if the cubs managed to pull another collar off...possibly just a matter of time until Tosca's collar meets the same fate. I have placed several camera traps in the area in the meantime to hopefully catch some images of Alaika, just to make sure that she is all right. So far no luck (see below).



Alaika's collar

THE CAMERA TRAP GALLERY



Brown hyena pasting on bush (hangar Stealthcam)

Both Camtrak camera traps have finally been repaired and Kirk Suedmeyer donated two Stealthcam camera traps to the project. I set up one camera trap in the Greenhouse gully close to the Wolf Bay seal colony, another one just south of the Atlas Bay seal colony and the two new Stealthcams at the old hangar near Kolmanskop, which is located along a territory boundary. The two Camtrak cameras are still giving problems, but with a bit of fiddling around, one usually gets them to work. The trap at Wolf Bay hasn't captured much yet, but the Atlas Bay camera trap captures many nose, hair and eye photographs (see below). Therefore I couldn't identify any animals on the images yet, but I know that Tosca, Alaika and Obelixa frequently pass through the area. I also captured some older cubs or young subadults on the trap, and since Tosca is using a den quite close by, these subadults could be from her previous litter.

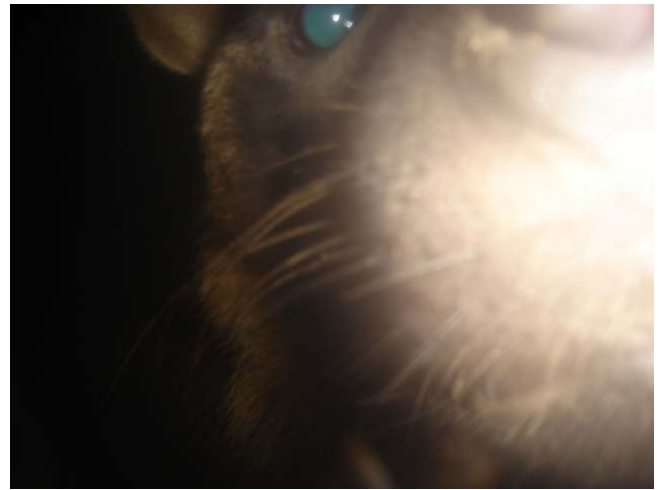
The Stealthcams work well. It is just difficult to set them up properly as one can't look through the viewfinder once the camera is attached to a pole, which initially resulted in upper body shots of brown hyenas marking some vegetation next to the hangar (see left). However, in the meantime I have adjusted the cameras, but haven't caught any hyenas again, just a Cape fox.

The Stealthcams also have a video function and I have planned to set one of them up close to Tosca's present den. These cameras are less disturbing to the cubs, as they work with infrared light instead of white flashlight. However, I first have to build a protective cage to ensure that the cubs and other hyenas don't manage to cause the same damage that they cause to GPS collars...

Atlas Bay Camtrak trap images:



Unknown, uncollared hyena



Can one get any closer?



Jackal becoming too interested in the trap



Jackals also have beautiful noses...

FUNDRAISING AND DONATIONS

Coastway Tours Service Station in Luderitz is sponsoring petrol to fill one tank per month. This will definitely keep us on the roads!

Helmuth and Herta Syvertsen donated 12V powered halogene spotlights to the project. **Antje Burke** also donated valuable field equipment: a tow rope, a jack, sandladders, mosquito net, camping chair, cast iron pod and a jerry can.

Kirk Suedmeyer donated two Stealthcam camera traps and memory cards to the project (see above).

Luderitz Safaris and Tours collected N\$ 595-45 in its slot tin. The following shops support the project by collection money in slottins: **Luderitz Safaris and Tours**, **Grillenbergers Bottle Store**, **Rocky Shores**, **Klein Aus Vista Curio Shop**. You can also support the project by buying brown hyena stickers and fridge magnets at **Klein Aus Vista**.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

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

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