

ACTIVITY AT JUNGLE DEN



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It seems as if Alaika has a litter of two cubs, which are approximately five months old. When I checked the camera trap at Jungle den the beginning of July there was not much activity, but I knew that Alaika had moved her cubs from the den that was close to our darting site in May, possibly because of our disturbance. I assumed that Tosca was still denning at Jungle den and I also assumed that Alaika had quite large cubs already. But the large cubs seem to have been Tosca's offspring and Alaika was the mother of the younger cubs. I downloaded photos from the camera trap at Jungle den at the beginning of September again and we got lots of photographs of the cubs and Alaika, often together at the den, but we also got images of Helene, Tosca, Tony and another unnamed adult. All of these adults carry dead seal pups to the den to provide extra food to the cubs, but it also means that a large number of jackals is hanging around at the den, scavenging from the leftovers. When I last went to the den I counted 10 jackals in and around the bushes and the camera trap also captured images where the cubs and jackals are feeding 'together' outside the den.

When we did not manage to fit a new collar to Tosca during the darting season in May this year, I was initially quite disappointed, especially because I thought that she was the only breeding female of the

Altas Bay Clan (the former Peninsula Clan). Discovering that Alaika was lactating when we recaptured her and fitted her with a GPS telemetry collar was a surprise and it is such a bonus to be able to observe her now.

I have not managed to analyse all camera trap photos yet, but I'm convinced that Albert, one of Tosca's cub of last year will also be on them. I estimate that the clan has a minimum of six adult animals, possibly two sub-adults and two cubs. It is amazing that they established themselves so well, considering that the Peninsula clan animals moved into the vacant territory around Atlas Bay only two years ago.

I will do some direct observations at the den

later this month and will also analyse Alaika's denning behaviour in more detail for the project's annual report.



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HELENE COPIES ALAIKA AND DARWIN DISAPPEARS – THE FUN OF STUDYING SUB-ADULTS

Everything looked promising for our newly collared sub-adult female, called Helene. I found her easily close to Atlas Bay for her first download and her movements indicated that she was following in Tosca's and Alaika's footsteps. And I was excited, as it also meant that I could have a look at the Altas Bay Clan's social interaction with having two females collared there. But, as you can already guess – nothing comes easy with brown hyenas. A few days after I had done Helene's download, I drove the same route to try to find Alaika for her download. To my surprise I received Helene's mortality signal at exactly the same location, where I had downloaded her data only a couple of days earlier. This was no fun. I did not think for one minute that Helene may be dead – I was convinced that the collar came off, just the same way that had happened with Alaika's collar two years ago. Sub-adult brown hyenas play a lot with the cubs and do a lot of muzzle-wrestling. The cubs manage to grab onto the collar and shake pretty well. And: even brown hyena cubs have got strong teeth and jaws. So I grabbed my telemetry equipment and started tracing the collar. The signal lead me to Jungle den – what a 'surprise' – where I found the collar on top of a boulder, nicely exposed and nibbled on. Well, the good news is that Helene is alive, as I can also see on the camera trap images, but that we will have to wait until we can recapture her to follow her movements in detail. Life is never boring when studying brown hyenas - that's for sure.

Also Darwin, our GPS collared sub-adult male, does not give us any detailed information about his whereabouts since he has been collared. He has not lost his collar as far as we know, but he just disappeared. Gino and I tried to find him in July, but we did not have time to do a long distance search flight. We could not find him in the coastal area though and also checked in inland areas such as around the Kaukausib fountain and the Tsaukaib Mountains. Gino will be back at the end of September and we will have three days to do an intensive search for Darwin. We will search the entire Sperrgebiet National Park, parts of the Namib Naukluft Park and on farms bordering the National Parks. I really hope that we will find him – if not, I can just hope that he comes for occasional visits to the coast and that we will pick up his signal then.



WEB PAGE

WE ARE ONLINE AGAIN. YOU CAN FIND US AT WWW.STRANDWOLF.ORG – THANKS TO RYAN ANDERSON AND THOMAS KLIMECK, WHO HAVE SPENT MONTHS TRYING TO SORT OUT THE OLD DOMAIN MESS. WE ARE UNFORTUNATELY NOT LISTED IN THE GOOGLE SEARCH ENGINE YET, BUT THOMAS WILL DO HIS BEST TO CHANGE THAT. YOU CAN HELP BY JUST VISITING THE SITE! YOU CAN ALSO FIND US ON FACEBOOK NOW.

FUNDRAISING EVENT

Mr. Schick from the Interessen-Verband der Auslandsjäger in Germany is going to give a talk for the Bundeswehr Jägerkameradschaft Hannover in Hannover on 4 October at 19:00 h. He will also raise funds for the Brown Hyena Research Project on that occasion.

CAMERA TRAP DONATIONS

We need camera traps!!! The traps are not only destroyed by hyenas (see below), but they also suffer in the harsh environment. We have lost two Camtrakkers due to extensive corrosion despite all efforts of preventing the moisture to get inside the unit. We also lost a Bushnell Trophy Cam. The batteries were drained within two days and we assume that there is a short somewhere in the system. We will try to have it locally repaired, but don't have much hope. Camera trapping is extremely important for us to be able to monitor clan composition and changes in activity and abundance of the clans. A good camera trap costs between N\$ 5000 and N\$ 6000, but we can get camera traps with acceptable levels of quality for half the price. If you

know of anybody who may be interested in sponsoring a camera trap, please let me know.

DE BEERS DIAMOND ROUTE CONFERENCE

I gave a talk at the De Beers Diamond Route Conference in Johannesburg at the end of August. Les Underhill from the Animal Demography Unit at the University of Cape Town and I also met with Duncan MacFadyen, who is the manager of research and conservation for the Diamond Route properties. He is interested in a detailed study of brown hyena movement, activity and abundance on the reserves and we have planned to incorporate this into a larger PhD project on brown hyenas in South Africa.

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

I'm happy to announce that I was accepted as an honorary research associate at the Animal Demography Unit at Cape Town University for a period of three years.

RECIPE FOR DISASTER - HOW TO DESTROY A CAMERA TRAP...

You take one unit of metal cage, made of thick expanded metal, mount one unit of camera trap onto a wooden pole inside the cage and cut openings into the cage that are only large enough (about a pinch) for the infrared beam and the camera to function. You switch the camera on and leave it there over several nights. By the time you return the camera trap should be 'finished' and have taken lots of photographs. This is the perfect scenario. Well, we had to deal with damage to camera traps before, but nothing prepared me to my visit to the camera trap in Atlas Bay valley. The cage was torn into pieces, the camera trap housing bitten apart and the inside ingredients (camera and battery) missing. We found the camera about 10 metres away from the trap – completely destroyed and we finally also managed to find the 6 V battery, also bitten into pieces in one of the bushes nearby. I managed to rescue the SD card from the camera, but it was exposed to the elements for quite some time and I can't download any images. I will take it to a specialist in Windhoek at one point and hope that they can still retrieve some data, and most importantly that we find out who the culprit was.

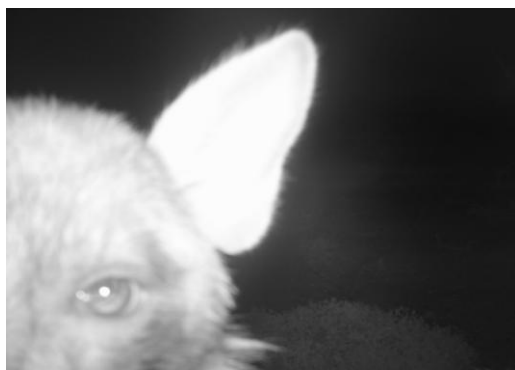


CAMERA TRAP MONITORING

We are down to nine working camera traps, but we get great images of brown hyenas, many of these good enough to do a proper ID, which will help us in finally doing some abundance estimates for the study areas at Elizabeth Bay and Bogenfels. Other than this we are obviously getting many funny photographs from the trap at Jungle Den. The cubs are always busy and sticking their noses towards the trap and even licking it (as a result, we get a lot of blurry photos).

The camera trap in the Tsaukaib Mountains is the most exciting one: we got photos of caracals again and also finally some really good images of brown hyenas. We captured some Klipspringers, but the most frequent visitor to the trap is a Cape hare. It seems as if we've set-up the camera trap in the centre of his territory. Birds also seem to like the cage and we even had a bird nesting on top of one of the cameras. In the coastal areas we get lots and lots of jackal images, but porcupines also finally get captured more frequently.





Obelixa is one of the hyenas that is captured most frequently around Elizabeth Bay, but we also managed to get really good ID shots of two other uncollared hyenas in the same study area. We did not get any photos of Darwin, which confirms that he has left the coastal area. The den at E-Bay ghost town is still active, but the Camera trap is unfortunately not working any more – corrosion. I have also set-up a camera trap close to Obelixa's natal den. I will report more about this in the next newsletter.

FUNDRAISING AND DONATIONS

Reinhild Dettmer-Finke donated €200 to the Brown Hyena Research Project. We've been working together with her for a documentary about Kolmanskop and other mining ghost towns.

The **Nedbank Go Green Fund** approved our human-wildlife-conflict grant application and will support the project with N\$ 151 800.

We were successful with our grant application to **ESRI** and they are supplying ArcGIS 10 (ArcEditor), the Spatial Analyst and Tracking Analyst extension to the Brown Hyena Research Project.

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

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