



Three Cubs and Three Mothers

by Ingrid Wiesel

The last three months have been one of the most exciting ones for our entire team and possibly also for our hyena clans at Atlas Bay and E-Bay. None of our clans had an active den where cubs were raised for some time and our main breeding females Alaika and Obelixa are quite old now so that there was the possibility that they had stopped reproducing. I did not expect anything exciting when I checked the images taken by our camera traps between October and November. I had nearly given up on the hope that KC Sowande, our young female, would give birth – she looked very large on images taken in September, but was then hardly captured on camera traps and was impossible to find her for GPS data downloads. It was the most amazing day, when I discovered Alaika carrying a tiny, about one month old cub, to Jungle Den. This was so unexpected. I then checked the camera traps that are set-up in the E-Bay clan's territory and found Obelixa resting regularly at Pipe Den. This is not unusual, she really likes this site, but suddenly an image taken at the end of October showed her carrying a small cub, possibly also only one month old, to the den. What a surprise.

The "old ladies" both gave birth almost at the same time. Since then, Obelixa and Alaika have moved their cubs between dens. Alaika unfortunately sustained quite a serious injury to her lower jaw and we hope that it heals well enough so that she can continue foraging and supporting her cub. Now, with two females breeding, I would have expected to see KC Sowande visiting Obelixa at the den on a regular basis. Balu and Obelixa's offspring from last year both visit her and the cub at the dens and Clyde Too and another subadult hyena visit Alaika and cub – so all of them are doing, what brown hyenas are supposed to do. What was happening with KC Sowande – we occasionally picked her up on camera traps, so we knew that she is healthy and alive, but she did not seem to be interested in the den. But suddenly she was there. Was it just a delayed response? No: she also gave birth and brought her cub (we know that there is one for sure) to the communal den. She gave birth at another den further inland and her cub seems to be the same age than Obelixa's. All three females and cubs seem to be doing well at the moment and we will keep you updated.



Obelixa with her cub at Pipe den

SLOT TINS

Luderitz Safaris and Tours collected N\$ 483 in our slot tin and Namtib Biosphere Reserve collected N\$ 841.

Another tin is at Klein Aus Vista.

All coins count! Thanks very much.

NEW TEAM MEMBER

We've got a new team member in Germany. Sabrina Karthun is organizing and entering camera trap data.

Welcome to the team and thanks for having the time and motivation to help the project.

FUNDRAISING

Anna Bennett gave a talk about the Hyena Project at the Adelaine University Wildlife Appreciation Society Group in Australia. She then donated AU\$ 100 to the project.

David Senn und Brigit XXXXX are long term supporters of the Project and supported us with a donation of € 138

Missing Hyenas, Collars and More

by Sarah Edwards

All of us were extremely excited to see the first photos of Obelixa's cub recently. Being quite an old lady we didn't think she was going to breed again, so we were shocked to see a camera trap photo of her carrying a cub in her mouth. Obelixa settled with the cub at a den in a pipe near the EBay mine and we enjoyed lots of very cute photos of Obelixa, the cub and Obelixa's offspring from last year. However all of a sudden the photos stopped and we didn't see either mother or cub on the camera trap for a long time. Added to that we weren't picking up her collar VHF signal anywhere. What could have happened to her? Was she simply underground somewhere in a den, with the signal blocked, or had she died?

At the same time we hadn't got a signal from KC, another female in the EBay clan who had recently started to look fat or possibly pregnant on the camera traps. Where was KC now, where was Obelixa? During a trip to EBay Henny and I were excited to pick up KC's signal from the pipe den where Obelixa had last been seen. Seizing this opportunity we did a download of her collar data which revealed she had been denning on a mountain 14km away. We thought she had brought her cub/s to EBay, but the question remained - what happened to Obelixa.

To the rescue came Riaan Burger from Namdeb who kindly flew us over the entire study site to check for Obelixa's signal from the air, in case she had gone far from the places we usually search for her. As soon as the Cessna 210 climbed and headed towards Atlas Bay we pick up Clyde 2's signal and then Alaika's, Wallace's and Balu's, but still no Obelixa. During the flight we heard Wallace's collar had a low battery and would need to be dropped off. Riaan suggested a short flight two days later, so with all fingers and toes crossed we took to the air again. This time we found Wallace and triggered the collar drop off from the air and continued towards EBay to try and find Obelixa. After another two circuits over the entire study area still nothing from Obelixa, things were really looking bleak.

As soon as we landed I drove to where we had triggered Wallace's signal to try and search for the collar. I found him snoozing under a rock, collar still on, most likely stuck in the long mane hair. He saw me and made a run for it, 4km across the bay, collar still attached. As I head back towards the car, BOOM, an explosion of hyena from a rocky ledge close by. This hyena however didn't run away but turned and checked me out. I quickly checked for signal and its Balu, another male from Wallace's clan. As I was calming down from the shock I get a call from Henny, she's at EBay and has seen Obelixa!!! Yes definitely Obelixa, with her distinctive ear notch, at a den close to the pipe den. Hallelujah! Go Obelixa! But no signal, her collar had stopped sending the VHF signal. But she's alive and at a den so fingers crossed the cub is still alive too. KC is at a den close by with two cubs. So I drive to EBay to try and download her collar data, and who is also at the den...Wallace, collar STILL on!

It really was an exciting and exhausting couple of weeks, and I would like to say a huge thank you to Riaan for his awesome flights which really helped us out at a difficult time. But at the end we now know Obelixa is alive and well, KC has cubs and her and Obelixa have their cubs close and most likely are helping each other with babysitting duties. Alaika, the main breeding female from the Atlas Bay clan has also had a cub, so it really is an exciting time for the Brown Hyena Research Project. The main question now is for how long will Wallace keep his collar before it falls off? We're currently taking bets.



Alaika with her cub



Alaika and sub-adult at Jungle den



Obelixa and last year's offspring at the den

Tswalu Update

by Sarah Edwards

In October I was lucky enough to attend and give a presentation at the De Beers Diamond Route Conference in Johannesburg. The conference is attended by various researchers all working on De Beers properties throughout southern Africa. The variety of talks given was amazing; from rhino ticks to archaeology, pangolins to urban wildlife in Johannesburg. I gave a presentation on our collaborative project with Tswalu Kalahari

which looks at occupancy and density of brown hyenas on Tswalu Kalahari Reserve, South Africa.

The Tswalu project started in August this year when Inga and I travelled down to set up 22 camera across the reserve. Ingrid and I had already selected general areas for the camera traps to ensure a good spacing covering all areas of the reserve so Inga and I just had to pinpoint exact locations. Most of the time it

wasn't too difficult, however at one location a pride of lions was resting exactly where we wanted to set up a camera trap! We left and came back the next day when the lions had moved off. We had a great week on the reserve and seeing wildlife we don't get in our study area such as giraffe, buffalo, lion and meerkats was

fantastic. It was exciting to receive the first lot of camera trap data from the project in September, we had plenty of brown hyenas as well as lion, leopard, cheetah, caracal and even aardvark. We are looking forward to seeing how the project progresses over the next year.

Henny Grewe - Volunteer



Hyena signs everywhere

When I arrived in Lüderitz to volunteer for the Brown Hyena Research Project in October my hopes for seeing a hyena during my stay were very slim. As they are nocturnal creatures and very illusive and the volunteers before me only had very few sightings during their stay I certainly did not expect that it would turn out completely different for me!

During my 4th week of volunteering I had my first trip alone to the Sperrgebiet study area. From the photos of the last check it seemed that Alaika would be denning at Jungle Den. The drill was if we get a signal from any hyena close to the dens or see a hyena we obviously do not approach to keep the disturbance as minimal as possible. So I took the telemetry equipment with me, went slowly round the back, climbing the big rocks at ..

the back of the den area, peaked over and there it was: a big, beautiful hyena and even collared. Since it was a collared hyena and I did not get signal I wanted to go through all the frequencies of our collared hyenas. It was so super exciting. I was in a little shock as I could not believe my eyes, so it took me a while to get through all the frequencies when the hyena saw me

Luckily my sight did not chase it away, but it started moving and curiously watched me as I retreated and even followed me quite a bit over the rocks. It seemed like it wanted to make sure that I am leaving. The question still is who could it have been? Maybe Amadeus or Clyde 2? Unfortunately I could not get a photograph so this will stay an unsolved mystery. Since we all got very worried what has happened to Obelixa we were very fortunate that Riaan Burger took us on a flight over the study area last Sunday in order that we can try and locate her. Flying over the Sperrgebiet was clearly one of the most exciting things I have experienced in my whole life. It was the proper "Out of Africa" feeling! It was so great to see all the places we drive and walk and look and check for any signs of hyenas just to get a bit more understanding of their ecology. From the air the entire region looks so hostile that it seems completely insane that any living being could be able to survive out there. But I am put right every single time I go out there. It is such a vivid ecosystem. Of course all the plants and animals are well adapted to the harsh conditions but I am truly amazed again and again.

After having an astonishing view over the Sperrgebiet, Lüderitz and the Peninsula we drove to where we picked up the signals. While we were at Ebay we thought we might check the camera trap, where Obelixa was last seen on and we downloaded KC from, to see if Obelixa was on the photos. We approached very carefully since there is always a chance of us simply not getting a signal from the hyena if it is underground or some rocks blocking the signal. While Sarah was busy with the camera trap I decided to go up the mount and see if I can pick up or see anything on the other side of the den. The second I was on top I saw two little furry beings emerging from the other entrance of the den!!! I could simply not believe what I just saw, turned around immediately and told Sarah and Riaan. This all happened within milliseconds so we could not get the photos. We left the scene as quick and quietly as possible and checked from further away if we could see any adult hyena e.g. Obelixa, but not luck on that thought. So we continued our search for the others. Being back on the ground the signal situation is a completely different story. Clyde 2 gave us a bit of a hard time getting close enough for a download. As it was already quite late we had to give up finding him. On our way back to the Kolmanskop gate I saw something big and brown gliding over the salt pan we were driving past and asked Sarah to stop the car so I can get a better look through the binoculars. Hyena!!! Carrying a big seal carcass towards Alaika's denning area. Just unbelievable! What a wonderful day!

This week I went on another Kolmanskopp trip to check our entire camera traps in that area. It was very, very windy but I had one of the most exciting and best sightings ever! I tried to get as many camera traps done on the first day so when I got to E-Bay it was already quite late. I checked all the camera traps around E-Bay with the dodgy feeling that this is the time the hyenas might be active and we do not want to disturb them. So when I saw a fresh seal carcass at one of the dens I decided not to go too closely and check on it in the morrow. I was really tired the next morning because I hardly got any sleep as the wind was shaking the car so heavily. Soon after I packed up all my stuff and got going I received a faint signal from KC coming from the den where we saw the cubs on Sunday. While getting the hand antenna out I thought I was still dreaming when I saw KC just crossing the road in front of me!!! She must have come from the den and went into one of the buildings using the steps like it was the most natural things for a hyena to do. I saw her again walking between some houses off towards the coast. I thought if KC just walked the other way she cannot be at the den with the fresh carcass, so I might be able to get the photos from the camera trap and we can check if Obelixa is on the photos. For some reason though I had the gut feeling to approach slowly and check very thoroughly as we did not know what happened to Obelixa. When I was almost on top of the den (it is a big old raised railway line where you can walk on top and the den is down below) I saw a big brown shaggy thing with a big chunk missing at the left ear. That could have only been Obelixa!!! So I went back to the car to tell Sarah the news on the phone when suddenly KC passed my car walking towards the Railway Den, maybe to check on Obelixa?! After a short while KC made her way towards the coast again. I went back towards the den to make sure that the brown shaggy thing I saw was Obelixa. All that time I did not receive a signal, so her collar must have run out of battery. This time I got a very good look and it was

definitely her. What an exciting morning!!!! Adding to this I saw another hyena the evening before. It was the same area where we saw the hyena carrying a seal carcass on Sunday. Seemed like this uncollared one is part of Alaika's clan and was on its way towards the seal colony again.

It seems like I have just come at the right time to volunteer for hyena sightings. Although the wind can make the field trips very unpleasant and hard, all these wonderful sightings and experiences are so worth it and I am very grateful being part of this brilliant project. Thank you!



Bogenfels Arch



E-Bay ghost town



Luderitz 1st & 2nd lagoon

Den Activity Study

by Inga Jaenecke

Those of you who do not only read our Newsletter, but also follow us on Facebook already got a taste of the amazing camera trap images that were collected in the course of the denning activity study over the last month. For those of you who don't follow us on Facebook, let me get you up to date. We have a "baby boom" in the Sperrgebiet at the moment. Our two breeding females, Alaika as well as Obelixa, have cubs again. And there is the possibility that also our young adult KC Sowande has a cub right now. To be more sure about this we have to wait for the next camera trap checks which will hopefully give us a better insight. Not only our hyenas are currently spending time with their offspring, but we also have a jackal family with 3 pups living in one of our possible hyena dens.

As I am still in Europe at the moment and cannot collect data myself. It always takes some days until I finally receive the most recent camera trap images. You cannot imagine how hard it is to hear from Ingrid and Sarah what is happening at the den sites and not being able to directly see it myself on the images. Therefore a lot of patience, but also excitement are currently related to my data collection. However, the waiting is worth it, as the images are always amazing. It is great to see the hyenas and their different behaviours and also their regular interactions with jackals. Some of the images show that hyenas are not happy about jackals following them back to their den site and they show defensive behaviour towards those jackals, by chasing them away. Nevertheless, hyenas are not less inquisitive and curious. On one of our camera traps a hyena was sneaking around a jackal den a couple times and consequently was chased away by a jackal. This just shows how protective these two species are over their cubs, although they are sometimes using the same den site, just not at the same times, but subsequently upon each other. Apart from the interaction between hyenas and jackals we also always get images that show the social interaction between hyenas. Especially now that we have active dens it becomes clear that the hyena mother spends a lot of time with her cub at the den site. Additionally other adults or sub-adults join them. This makes the viewing of all images an exciting, but also hard job. Sometimes it is difficult to say how many hyenas are currently visible on an image, which of them are actually collared or which are at least ID'able. But fortunately with progressing time I get a better eye for it. Additionally to the social interaction between hyenas we always get images of only one individual being visible. These individuals are either just walking past, inspecting our camera traps, only resting, providing food to the cubs, just feeding on a seal pup themselves, etc..

As you can imagine there is and will be plenty of work to do until the end of my study, which I am already looking forward to do. And I cannot wait to be back in January and go on with the data collection myself!

Last but not least, a big thank you to Ingrid for her supervision and support! And also to Sarah and Henny for putting a lot of effort in checking the camera traps while I was away!



Obelixa and her cub



Obelixa resting in front of her den site



Alaika and her cub



The jackal family

HELP NEEDED...

- We are still looking for contributions for the refurbishment of three GPS telemetry collars. We need to replace Obelixa's, Wallace's and Balu's collars.
- We drove 22 000 km this year and are urgently looking for contributions to vehicle and fuel expenses for next year.
- We need a replacement desktop or laptop for our students – even second hand, as long as it runs Windows 7
- We need Lithium batteries for camera traps

If you are interested in supporting the project, please e-mail strandwolf@iway.na or hyenaconflict@gmail.com

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

NAMDEB DIAMOND
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Predator Conservation
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