

DJANGO'S LIFE AT BOGENFELS

Sometimes things just don't go as planned. As reported in the last newsletter, it took us quite some time to finally dart one of the Bogenfels hyenas to fit a GPS collar for our pre to post impact study in the new mining area. We finally managed to fit the first of five collars to Django, a healthy male, while he was foraging at the Van Reenen Bay seal colony. During the following two months we occasionally flew over the area and tracked him on all occasions. Everything seemed fine until we went



Django with badly damaged collar and eye infection

for a site visit in September. We arrived at the Van Reenen Bay seal colony and immediately received Django's collar's VHF signal. The first excitement was over quickly when we realised that the pulse rate of the signal indicated that the collar had dropped off. The collar was not programmed to drop off that early, which meant, that the equipment most probably had a malfunction and that the drop off had triggered prematurely. We determined the direction of the signal and started walking towards it, expecting to find the collar lying somewhere in the desert. As soon as we reached one of the hilltops overlooking the Van Reenen Bay seal colony, we saw, that a brown hyena was walking up and down the beach in order to find food. The direction of the signal indicated, that the collar was exactly at the same position than the moving hyena and it was clear, that the collar was still around Django's neck. We suspected that it was stuck in the long hair, as it happened with Halenge before, but we needed to make sure. We carefully approached the hyena and got close enough to see, that the collar was badly damaged, but that the drop off mechanism was not released. Therefore it remained a puzzle, why the pulse rate indicated drop off, but we assumed that it had to do with the damage. Unfortunately we didn't bring the remote drop off unit for the GPS collars, as we didn't expect any problems. To make things worse, Gino was not in town and we knew that we could only fly in November again to locate Django and to have the collar dropped off.

Also, Django was in a pretty bad condition. He had fresh bite wounds on his neck and new ear notches in his ears, so he must have had a pretty bad fight with another hyena. He seemed to have an eye infection as well, as his usually brown eyes had a bluish appearance. We consulted a vet, who reckoned that such infections could stem from bacterial infection or trauma, which was both possible for Django. Without treatment he could turn blind, but there is nothing we can or want to do: that is just life in the wild. His condition was the more a reason to try to relieve him of the collar as soon as possible. Luckily there came some unexpected help from Jean-Paul Roux and Rod Braby, who were flying for the whale censuses and offered to take the receiver with them to try to locate Django while they were flying up and down the coast. I could hardly believe it when they returned with the good message that they had found him close to the seal colony. Therefore I had to take the chance to drive to the study area, hoping that he might stay in that area for a bit longer, as his condition was not the best. As soon as the weather condition was favourable, I drove to Van Reenen Bay, stopping first at Bogenfels to give it a try there. I climbed up the arch and got a very strong VHF signal of Django's collar. I couldn't miss the chance and didn't try to get a visual before releasing the remote drop off – I triggered it just there and then. I walked into the direction of the collar and after about one kilometre of walk Django suddenly jumped out of his resting site, as he must have seen me approaching. Unfortunately the collar was still around his neck and he moved off and at one point was too far away, so that I couldn't make out whether the collar dropped off in the meantime. But, it did. While I was following the signal of Django's collar, the direction of the signal suddenly changed and I found the collar in between some bushes. I wasn't sure how bad the damage to the computer chip was and was extremely happy to find out, that we could download around 1500 positions. The collar actually still recorded positions up to the time when I retrieved it. Not many technical things would still work in such a state. We don't know how Django is doing, but we will go on another darting trip before Christmas and we hope that we will see him then.

Thanks to Jean-Paul Roux and Rod Braby for not only looking out for whales.

ADVERTISEMENT

Gary Frier, a Cape Town based artist, advertised the Brown Hyena Research Project on his pamphlets. You can have a look at his amazing artworks at www.friersart.com

THANK YOU VERY MUCH

BROWN HYENA WEB PAGE

The web page is operational again. We urgently need to update it, but will postpone that to next year. Nevertheless, all newsletters and other reports can be downloaded from the "News" page.

Thank you very much to **Riaan Laubscher** and **Upstart Technologies** for continuing to sponsor the site.

HOW IT FEELS TO DRIVE A REAL PROJECT VEHICLE

Our project got the most amazing surprise: Namdeb contacted us a few weeks ago and told us about their decision to sponsor a second-hand vehicle, as our present vehicle, which was also sponsored by Namdeb, but was one of their old mining vehicles, proved not to be reliable. We had endless repairs to the electrical system done and remember: had a nice cable-burn on our way to Anigab last year, just before reaching the dunes, which would have been a never come back journey otherwise. Going shopping for a new project vehicle was extremely difficult, as we had no prior experience in choosing the "right" one. We finally managed to find a fantastic second-hand Toyota double-cab in Windhoek and our management committee decided to go for it. We had an extra fuel tank, a water tank and an extra battery fitted and had the vehicle delivered to Keetmanshoop.

It went on its maiden trip to Ford Reef, when we were invited to speak about the Pocket Beach Monitoring Project in connection with Namdeb's Safety and Health programme. We never drove more comfortably into the desert.

During the last weeks, we had our telemetry aerial and radio fitted and just have to make it a bit more sandblasting-proof in the new year.

THANK YOU SO MUCH



Also thanks to Tristan Cooper, who had a look at the vehicle and gave the final thumbs up and to Holger and Helmut Plietz for giving us mechanical advise on the pros and cons of different vehicles.

ANOTHER SAD STORY

It unfortunately never ends: The most recent road kill happened right after one of our brown hyena warning signs, which were mounted next to the road at the beginning of this year. Fortunately the road kill was reported to the Brown Hyena Research Project early the next morning and we drove out immediately to collect the carcass.



Before: Merlin in 2003 before fitting the GPS collar (photo taken by B. Kolar)



After: Merlin before being dissected

Upon arrival at the accident site, we saw immediately that the carcass was gone. This has happened so many times in the past. Some people just pick up dead brown hyenas to either use parts for traditional healing purposes or for food. Not that it is only illegal to collect endangered animals, it is also extremely important for us to know, which of our study animals die, whether of non-violent or violent causes. Nevertheless, we discovered that the railway line worker's camp was close by and hoped to find out from them, whether they had seen the carcass and whether they knew of its whereabouts. As it turned out, some of the workers had removed the dead brown hyena from the side of the road, apparently just to get it out of view, but that is open to discussions, as some of them pointed out that our removal of the hyena is a waste of good meat. Anyhow, we unfortunately had to realise that the brown hyena was Merlin, a male animal of the Wolf Bay clan. He belonged to the same clan as Dollar, who was killed on the road at the beginning of December last year. The really sad thing about this story is that our decision to mount the warning sign at that place, came from data retrieved from Merlin's GPS collar. He crossed the road exactly there and finally found his end there as well. As many road killed brown hyenas disappear before we can collect the carcass, we have no indication whether our warning signs are successful. If no hyenas were illegally removed this year, then they are successful, as Merlin is the only victim for this year so far. Let's hope that it stays that way.

Thanks to Gisela Wolters for reporting the accident and Jean-Paul Roux for helping to find the carcass. Thanks to Fabienne Berens for assisting with the dissection.

BOGENFELS ATTEMPT NUMBER 3

We are really trying our best to fit the GPS collars on brown hyenas in the Bogenfels area, but most of the time we can only enjoy the beautiful scenery and have to observe jackals stealing our bait. Not that we are becoming desperate, but we are taking every opportunity at the moment to dart hyenas, even if it means to only go out for one night. We were very lucky to have Katja Koepfel, a vet from Pretoria visiting in November and together with Brian Kuhn, the palaeontologist from the University of Pretoria, we drove out for one night to catch one of these difficult animals. We were not expecting much, as our last two trips were really unsuccessful, as we spent nights on end waiting and considering studying jackals instead. But usually if you don't expect anything, things start happening: a brown hyena stumbled over our bait around midnight. We used our new dart gun to immobilise the animal. Everything went perfect and we started to search for the brown hyena after five minutes – nothing, but we found its tracks and there was no sign of it starting to stumble – it just moved into the mountains. After two hours of search, we gave up and had to live with the thought, that the dart did not go off and release the drug.



Enjoying the scenery

Maybe next time....

Thanks to Katja and Brian for an amazing trip, unfortunately without hyenas.

NEWS

The brown hyena roaming the streets of Luderitz is still keeping dogs alert and people awake. There was a little gap in its visits and we thought that it might have had enough of town, but just last week it was seen again. We also finally caught a glimpse of it, but still don't know which one of the animals of the Peninsula clan it is.

Thanks to Helmuth, Gerry, Ron, Crispin for reporting the sightings in town.

Brian Kuhn has finished his data collection at the brown hyena den sites last month. He survived the gale force winds and actually finally saw some brown hyenas while he was working at a den near Baker's Bay. We are looking forward to see his results and will keep you informed.

Vicky, the female brown hyena that was collared near the Kaukasib fountain, is still missing. We only have a few months left to find her and we will try our best to retrieve the collar.

The Namibia Environment Fund unfortunately did not approve of our proposal and therefore don't continue to support the inland demography study. They are usually not supporting pure research projects that have little socio-economic impact and we therefore understand their decision.

WE WISH YOU ALL A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR

THANKS FOR ALL YOUR SUPPORT



Also researchers get caught on the camera trap....

VAN REENEN BAY “HOLIDAY”



Mom, dad and youngsters

I decided to take a short break from town life in October to find some piece and quiet away from ringing telephones and the internet to continue writing my doctorate. For sure, I couldn't just sit and read and write and checked the seal colony for brown hyena activity twice during the day. My look-out post was on a cliff, approximately 1.5 km away from the foraging hyenas. Whenever I spotted a hyena on my checks, I sprinted down through the hummock dunes to get close enough to take ID photographs – I just couldn't let it be (in my mind field work comes first and writing second...). However, the brown hyenas never saw me approaching, but Murphy's law ruled and whenever I reached the end of the hummocks, the hyena disappeared over the cliff to the northern side of the colony. Didn't make me too happy, but the worst was, that running down the dunes was fine, but walking up again was not. I played the game three times and would have done it a fourth time if the opportunity would have presented itself, but somehow, probably for my own good, it did not happen.

Anyhow, I couldn't complain, as I had good company back at the field station. A pair of jackals with four pups and two helpers kept me company. Their den was under my bedroom, so that I did not get much sleep at night: the adults came back to regurgitate food several times and the pups greeted them nicely through intense howling. But I wouldn't have want to miss it for anything.

FUNDRAISING AND DONATIONS

Namdeb sponsored our new project vehicle and continues to support the Brown Hyena Research Project with monthly donations. They also sponsored four GPS collars for the Pocket Beach Monitoring Project, a pre to post impact study in a new mining area.

The **Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund** approved of our proposal and supports the brown hyena demography study in inland areas of the Sperrgebiet. The other project partners are the **Nedbank Go Green Fund** and the **Succulent Karoo Ecosystem Planning (SKEP)**.

The **Wilderness Safaris Wildlife Trust** continued their sponsoring for the Brown Hyena Research Project for another year and made a generous donation. Parts of their donation will go towards the repairs of Django's damaged GPS collar.

The **Predator Conservation Trust** in the UK also continued to sponsor our project. They contributed towards the purchase of a digital video camera with night-time video option. We will use this equipment to do the first night-time observations of brown hyenas foraging at seal colonies.

Thanks to **Jürgen Syvertsen** of **Luderitz Smokeries** and to the **OK Grocer** for storing bait for our darting projects. A big thank you to **Wilfried Erni** who always thinks about the needs of the project and donated so much bait, that it will last us for two trapping trips.

A big thank you again for accepting our slot tins goes to **Luderitz Yacht Club**, **Bay View Hotel**, **Coastway Tours**, **Sandrose**, **Luderitz Safaris and Tours**, **Kolmanskop Curio Shop**, **Grillenberger's Bottle Store** and **Namibia Wildlife Resorts**.

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

Namdeb	GraphPad Software, Inc.	BHP Billiton	Coastal Electric & Hardware	Jean-Paul Roux	Erich Looser
Caltex	Benguela Enterprises CC	Divpac	Nest Hotel	Trygve Cooper	Lino Scanavino
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Shell Solar	Cc	Luderitz Bay Shipping & Forwarding	MET	Johann du Toit	Morag Burrell
Predator Conservation Trust	Wilderness Safaris Wildlife Trust	First National Bank	MFMR	Frikkie Kraamwinkel	Beppo Family
OK Grocer	Namibia Nature Foundation	Luderitz Yacht Club	Luderitz Safaris & Tours	Rene Rossler	Willem Swiegers
Truckscan	Sidewinder Films	Luderitz SPAR	Riaan Laubscher	Ronel v.d. Merwe	Luderitz Backpackers
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Nebank Green Fund	Coastway Tours	Wild Horse Trust	Alex MacKay	George Shimaneni	
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				Wilfried Erni	



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BROWN HYENA RESEARCH PROJECT
Contact Details



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

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 a bank transfer, the details are as follows:
Brown Hyena Research Project – Nedbank Namibia
Lüderitz Branch, Branch Code 161071
Account number: 1610 007182

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\$, £

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Thank you very much for your support!
