

DARTING SEASON 2010 AT WOLF AND ATLAS BAY

This year's darting season was the most difficult one that I ever had to face, since I was not able to spend the nights in the field together with the rest of the team. Therefore the main articles for this Newsletter have been written by team members, who were actually on site... As you will read further below, we did not manage to fit any collars this year. Many factors played a role from me not being out to help to having to deal with skittish adults and bold cubs/sub adults. But as usual, the hyenas also outsmarted us – we know the drill: The darting team set up the bait in Greenhouse gully in the hope of attracting some adult hyenas to the bait. No hyenas appeared during the first night, but two sub adults (see below) fed on the bait during the second night. However, the darting team decided to leave Greenhouse gully and to try their luck somewhere else. That was just what the adult hyenas were waiting for – as soon as the team had left the area, several adults were captured on my camera trap in Greenhouse gully – they were having a party! One of the adults was Tosca, the GPS collared female and mother of the cubs and sub adults. The camera traps also captured the sub adults again, running up and down the gully, playing and feeding on seal carcasses.



Thanks to Yen Hernandez, Kirk Suedmeyer, Corin Willers and Dawn Zimmerman for being part of the darting team and for not giving up! I know how hard it is.

ANOTHER ROADKILL AT ROTKOP



It is really sad that there is hardly a Newsletter where I don't have to report about a road kill. This time an adult female was killed at Rotkop, not far from where we have a brown hyena warning sign. The person, who killed the hyena lost the number plate and front bumper of its vehicle, but did not report the accident to the police or to nature conservation, so that we unfortunately don't have any detailed information about the accident. The hyena was in an excellent condition and was luckily neither pregnant nor lactating at the time.

As soon as I have entered all camera trap data for the annual report, I will be able to see whether she was captured on one of the camera traps in the area.

I unfortunately don't think that the situation on the tar road between Lüderitz and Aus is going to change. The amount of road kills is alarming and I hope that the Peninsula Clan that moved into the vacant Wolf Bay Clan territory does not face the same fate and becomes extinct due to clan members getting killed on the road.

Thanks to Melanie Carreras for reporting the road kill.

CUBS AND SUBADULTS AT JUNGLE DEN

I could see from Tosca's GPS data that she had been visiting Jungle Den on a regular basis. I knew that she had just raised two cubs there and was surprised to find out that she must have given birth to new cubs already. I set up the camera trap at Jungle Den and Atlas Bay valley again and got many photographs of the cubs – and also of Tosca's previous cubs. These two sub-adults eventually managed to bite bits and pieces off my camera trap, so that I unfortunately had to remove it from the den.

The darting team was working close to the den and often saw the sub-adults at the bait, but initially had no sightings of the cubs. Eventually the cubs must have been 'informed' by their older siblings that there was a free take away around the corner and off they went. It was an incredible night having all these young hyenas and many, many jackals at the bait. I was obviously sad that I could not come out at night to do see all the activity by myself. Therefore I asked Corin and Yen to spend a night at the den equipped with a video camera after the darting season had ended. They had a fantastic night and came back with lots and lots of jackal and hyena footage including really good footage of one of the cubs (see photo (Corin Willers)).

I will modify the protective camera trap cage soon and hope to be able to set up the camera trap again without having to fear further damage. The activity at the den is just too exciting to be missed. I will keep you informed.



OBELIXA'S AND TOSCA'S DOWNLOADS

Obelixa's and Tosca's downloads were long overdue, but with the planning of the darting season, the logistics of the darting season and the plane for doing our aerial downloads still in Windhoek, we only managed to drive into the study area at the end of August to download data. However, we were very excited to find out how Tosca had moved around the darting team while they were trying to capture hyenas and while they were working on her male offspring from last year. We also wanted to find out how much time Obelixa spent at E-Bay after she had 'stolen' the bait (see photo (Kirk Suedmeyer)).

Well, Tosca was not bothered at all by the darting team in the area. She moved freely to the den, spent time with the cubs and did not seem to be concerned at all that last year's cub was captured while she was in the vicinity. However, she never approached the bait and obviously knows that our presence and food is a bad combination. Obelixa moved to other parts of her home range after finishing the bait, but often rests in one of the buildings in the ghost town. She still does not seem to be denning, but I have placed one camera trap in her area and hope to capture images of her and other clan members soon.



MY DARTING SEASON 2010!

"I had an idea, however, I'm sure you already have something else to do, but would you like to come for this year's darting season...?" This was the first paragraph of the e-mail that the Dr. Ingrid Wiesel sent me on April asking me to help her on the darting season 2010. She mentioned also that the project will be able to apply for funding to cover my flight tickets and living expenses! I got to read almost five times the e-mail! I was speechless!

My name is Yennifer Hernandez; I'm a wildlife biologist from Uruguay, South America. I collaborate with Ingrid on the darting season 2009 of the Brown Hyena Research Project. For me was a life experience, in which I learn a lot as a biologist but I also, make friends for life. Last year I leave Lüderitz wishing to comeback, but I never think that I will be able to comeback so soon! The e-mail of Ingrid was a dream comes true!

Ingrid request my help since she was breastfeeding Max (her six months baby) so she was unable to leave Max alone and go to the field at night to catch hyenas! My mission will be became the "team leader" on the Darting Season 2010. What a challenge! But I take it without any doubt!

So, on July 16 I was starting my long travel from Montevideo (Uruguay) to Lüderitz (Namibia). I reach the Lüderitz airport on July 18 at midday! Yes almost three days of travelling, but worth it! My friend Elizabeth Swoboda was waiting for me on the airport, was so nice see her again. We drive to town; I reach my house, "The Samaki" (a bathhouse), take a brief shower, put my Brown Hyena Research Project t-shirt, field pants, and leather boots and start walking trough Ingrid's house. Once there, in the front door, I start knocking and I hear the barking of my old furry friend's: Sabi, Mac & Siggy (Ingrid dogs). Then, Ingrid opens the door, and she was not alone, she was carrying the little Max! I can describe the sensation of see Ingrid again, besides the fact that she is the project head researcher or in other words my boss, I consider Ingrid my friend! Also see the little Max was shocking since I leave Ingrid when she was pregnant of Max. I'm not a "baby person", but I must confess that the little Max really catches me and in fact I'm missing this little men!

Besides that I didn't sleep during the three days of travel, I was ready to work and full of excitement. I was back on Namibia! Later, the same day, we pick up the new volunteer, Corin Willers on the airport. One of the first tasks of Corin and I was the setup of all the equipment and the bait for the field before the arrival of Kirk Suedmeyer and Dawn Zimmerman, both vet's. I meet Kirk on 2009; with Dawn at the beginning we got a kind of communication problem, mainly debt to my accent! But we finally understand each other very well and we even make jokes together! The international darting team was composed by the Dr. Kirk Suedmeyer (U. S. A.), Dr. Dawn Zimmerman (U. S. A.), Corin Willers (Germany) and I (Uruguay). Two veterinarians, one Film Sciences student and one small and crazy wildlife biologist, what a team! (Photo 1)

The first darting night for the team was on the Lüderitz peninsula we try to capture the old and tricky Minerva but we didn't succeeds! We were hoping to remove her old collar and give her a nice GPS collar! Next year maybe...

Later, we move and set up the camp on Atlas Bay, to try capture some hyenas around the Jungle Den. The problem, the sub adults and the little cubs! We should not capture sub adults because we can't put collars on them, since they are growing! Sadly... that happens one night! In our first night on the Jungle Den area we saw this medium size hyena, a male, so shaggy that I was using the nickname of "Fluffy" for him (officially: LHb34m). We saw Tosca that night, a collared hyena, too smart to get closer to the bait. She was collared twice already! Was fine for us, we wanted to catch uncollared adult hyenas! On the second night the shaggy hyena shows up again around the bait.

Kirk darted this animal, after the hyena fall sleep we came closer to the animal and when we saw the size of the animal and check the dentition results to be a sub adult! Very bad luck! But we took a lot of samples and body measures before let it go. With the photos of the stripes patterns on the legs we are going to be able to recognize this animal on the future, on camera trapping surveys by example.



From Left to right: Dr. Kirk Suedmeyer, Corin Willers, Dr. Dawn Zimmerman & Ph. B. Sc. Yennifer Hernandez



LHb34m, the sub adult. A beautiful male. (3) With Dawn, Corin and LHb34m (Photo: Kirk Suedmeyer)



Our camp on Atlas Bay suffers the attack of a gang of hyena cubs and jackals! When we arrive to the camp very early on the morning, after a darting night, we saw a hyena cub running away from the kitchen tent and also a couple jackal's playing with toilet paper! After two tents destroyed, we move the camp to Wolf Bay. We test our luck on the Greenhouse galley, but we only feed sub adults hyenas and jackals. One night we share an entire night with two sub adults, the LHb34m and his sister. Was an amazing experience!

Finally we visit Elizabeth Bay, but we only saw Obelixa, she got a GPS collar on the last darting season. She looks so nice!

Brown Hyena Research Project

We even take some videos and photos of Obelixa at daylight (14:00 hs!). She is a star!

I learn a lot with this new darting season, which in fact was completely different to the one of last year. First Ingrid was not there, and she is IRREPLACEABLE! She is the “Hyena Lady” not me! I try my best but I make a lot of mistakes on the way, is not easy try to be a “team leader”. And this year we didn’t catch any adult hyena, and that is disappointing, but when you work with animals these things happens. Gus Mills (hyena researcher) says “Absolute patience not as a virtue but as a necessity – if one hopes to learn about animals.” But we got the chance to see this beautiful sub adults and little cubs playing in front of us, and that is priceless! And I make new friends, Dawn and Corin.

I’m very thankful to all the team. Thanks to Kirk and Dawn for his patience with me and for collaborate with the project. Thanks to Dawn for his help on the field and her sense of humor! Thanks to Corin for his help as my right hand, official 4 x 4 driver and official filmmaker!

To Ingrid a million of thanks for give me the opportunity of: Comeback to Namibia to collaborate with the project on a new darting season. Spent so many nights on the company of brown hyenas and jackals. Ride one last time on Carina in Aus, on the company of Christine, Ibrahim and her dog’s.

Ingrid thanks for trust on me to help you! And the most important... thanks for being my FRIEND!!

With Ingrid, Corin and Kirk, on a trip at board of the Zeopard., to watch some Heavyside’s dolphins. A cool day & end for the Darting Season 2010! (Photo: Jean-Paul Roux)



OF CLEVER ADULTS AND INQUISITIVE CUBS – THIS YEAR’S FARCE OF DARTING

Hello, my name is Corin Willers, I was a member of this years darting team and just finished secondary school, and have had thought about studying biology. But just to tell at the beginning, if fieldwork is always so unsuccessfully I’m not becoming a biologist. But the main reason of my allowance being a member of the darting team, as an unstudied, inexperienced learner, is my grandfather. Fortunately he was the doctor father of Ingrid, and for even more fortune they are still in good contact. So two years ago, when my family and I visited Ingrid the first time in Lüderitz, she offered me an internship at her brown hyena project, which we were able to realize this summer.

My main tasks were driving the team around the diamond area, watching Max, so Ingrid could work (because with two little siblings I was just perfect for that job) and finishing the fridge, which effected the chagrin of Steve and the other hungry researchers, who had to starve. I’m still sorry for this, but all the great experiences and the fresh air just made me so hungry☺.

But let’s try to start chronological. The first sign of things going wrong was already in an email of Ingrid to all of us, before the season even didn’t started, where she wrote „if worse comes to worse...“. The bad luck started to show up with the darting gun of Kirk, which got lost in Johannesburg and it took 3 days to get it back. So the first nights we had to use Ingrid’s gun, which we spend on the peninsula, on the same spot where Alaika was caught last year. Kirk and Yen stayed with the bait, Dawn and I waited in the car. Regrettably we had no success. We saw some, but couldn’t dart them. After some days we moved to Atlas Bay and build up our camp and tried to dart at the active den. Here we had to struggle with two problems. The first one were jackals. They ate all our bait and got quite used to this kind of feeding. When Ingrid and Yen visited Atlas Bay again, after everyone else had left, the jackals followed the car, hoping for food. And when we left our equipment these bold guys started to play and took it with them, so from time to time we had to search for our stuff in a 100 meter area.

The second big and real problem, were the cubs, or in this case to be more precise sub adults. It was hard for us to distinguish between sub adults and adults. Probably Yen prevented all of them not to be darted. For her they were all too „fluffy“. After some nights the sub adults found our campsite and got a bit too interested in it. We came back one morning and they had opened the kitchen-tent and also had destroyed my tent, in ripping of the cover and chewing the inner part. To avoid more damage we moved to greenhouse gully a bit in the north. We got rid of the sub adults and hoped for the adults, to come up there. After totally unsuccessful nights, with unbelievable cold and thick fog we moved another time.

At E-Bay was our third and final camp. Dawn already left us at this point and returned back home. But we still didn’t have success. We ,only’ saw Obelixa during the night stealing our bait and once during the day, which was totally amazing. But a hyena with a collar you can’t dart. So after Kirk also had to leave the season was over.

There was a bit time for Yen and me to do some hiking to look for some dens. On one day we met, near Wolf Bay, something like 3 many-horned adders, close to bite us. Because the guys we met had pairing season, and obviously we disturbed them. But as a little snake fanatic I was able to take some nice pictures☺.

I left a few days later after Kirk had left, with a package full of great experiences and some new friends. Even if we didn’t managed to catch some hyenas it was great to observe these animals feeding on our bait and

all the little problems and disappointments were worth it, just to be out there with the nature and the team. Thank you all for this amazing time, I felt so comfortable!



FUNDRAISING AND DONATIONS

Mikita Brottman adopted the male sub-adult that we captured during this season. His name is Albert.

Jesse Salb increased her annual donation and donated US\$ 100 to the project.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

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BROWN HYENA RESEARCH PROJECT
Contact Details



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

Dr. Ingrid Wiesel
P. O. Box 739
Lüderitz
Namibia
Tel.: ++264 (0)63 202114
Fax: ++264 (0)63 202114
e-mail: strandwolf@iway.na

DONATIONS:
Brown Hyena Research Project – Nedbank Namibia
Bismarck Street, Lüderitz, 9000, Namibia
Lüderitz Branch, Branch Code 461610
Cheque Account
Account number: 11010015024
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BIC: NEDSNANXXX
IBAN: 46161011010015024