

# Newsletter

Winter 2005



## A BUSY END TO 2005

December 2005 was a busy time for the Predator Conservation Trust with two grant applications being approved and funds dispatched. A grant was made to the Painted Dog Project in Zimbabwe to purchase a new dart gun which has now been shipped to Zimbabwe where it is already being put to good use.

The second grant made was to help the Brown Hyena Research Project purchase video equipment to enable them to film their behaviour at night.

With two grants being made, the decision was taken to delay the newsletter by a few weeks to enable us to include information about these grants. Unfortunately the Trustees busy day jobs have resulted in a longer than anticipated delay.

The next newsletter will be issued around the middle of 2006.

## LISE HANSEN

Lise is currently working with author Fransje van Riel on a book Fransje is writing about Lise's life as well as working with a South African TV company to produce a wildlife television series.

Lise is also providing assistance on a number of articles for the web site.

She expects to be starting a new conservation field project later this year.

## BROWN HYENA RESEARCH PROJECT SEEN ON BBC TV

In June, Ingrid visited Agate beach just North of Luderitz to fit the collars funded by the Predator Conservation Trust to some of the Brown Hyenas in that area. One hyena arrived at the bait but was already wearing a collar, yet Ingrid was unable to detect a signal from it so concluded it was either a faulty radio collar or was an old visual collar (a standard collar with a reference number on it), so decided to dart the hyena. Dr Flip Stander was assisting and fired the dart at which point the hyena ran off. Despite following and searching for some time, the hyena could not be located in the dark. A further search the following morning failed to find either the dart or the hyena, so it is unclear whether the hyena was hit and simply hid too well or whether the dart missed. The following night, another darting expedition failed with the two hyenas observed around the Luderitz sewage farm simply remaining safely out of range of the dart gun.

In September, Ingrid again visited Agate beach on a darting expedition, this time with Dr Mark Jago - a vet from Otjiwarongo who has lots of experience of wild carnivores. Bait was put out and quickly attracted a adult brown hyena which was clearly unhappy with the presence of the nearby vehicle and it decided not to come too close. Luckily later that same night, two younger brown hyenas came to the bait and one of these was quickly darted with its partner following later on that same night. Both the hyenas were fitted with the PCT radio collars before being allowed to recover from the anaesthetic and wander off.

*(Continued on page 2)*

Both the collared hyenas were females - possibly half-sisters, and these are believed to be the two which had been spotted on Ingrid's failed trip in June around the sewage farm. The darting trip with Mark Jago was filmed by the BBC for their TV series Animal Park: Wild in Africa which also included the work of Africat, Afrileo and Cheetah Conservation Fund.

The area around Luderitz is dominated by the Sperrgebiet, or forbidden area. This area is strictly off-limits to visitors without permits due to fact that diamond mining still takes place here. This means that there are huge areas of wilderness with very few people around, and this does allow the wildlife to live without interference from man, but it does make it harder for research projects like the Brown Hyena project to carry out their work as any vet wishing to travel with Ingrid to assist with darting of hyenas has to apply for and obtain a permit. This does have strict limits regarding the validity period so darting trips cannot simply be extended for a few more hours or days if they are unsuccessful at first. Added to this is the fact that the town of Luderitz has no resident vet, which means when darting has to be carried out, Ingrid has to arrange for a vet to make a special trip to Luderitz. The Sperrgebiet is a huge wilderness area with no proper roads other than those to the diamond mine itself, and the dirt tracks that lead to the research areas are in places barely more than tyre tracks in the sand which soon disappear if not used regularly.



*The Brown Hyena Project landrover parked in the Wolf Bay area of the Sperrgebiet*

## **PREDATOR CONSERVATION TRUST FUNDS AFRICAN PAINTED DOG CONSERVATION**

One of the most endangered large carnivores is the Painted Dog, also known as the African Wild dog, and the Cape Hunting Dog. These beautiful animals have been ruthlessly persecuted by man to the point where they are extinct in most areas where they formerly lived and only a few small populations survive. The Painted Dog was generally regarded as vermin and was persecuted in farming areas under the auspices of protect livestock, and even in many national parks under the misguided intention of protecting antelope populations. Now however they are no longer persecuted in national parks, but they still face a difficult future for a number of reasons, one of which is their need for large areas of land to hunt in (the average home range for a wild dog has been reported as over 750km<sup>2</sup>).

The largest populations of Painted Dogs are found in Tanzania, Botswana and Zimbabwe, with smaller numbers found in other countries such as Namibia, Zambia and South Africa.



The trustees of the Predator Conservation Trust are pleased to be able to help in the fight to conserve the Painted Dog by funding a grant to the Painted Dog Research Project based in Zimbabwe.

The Painted Dog Research Project was founded by Greg Rasmussen in 1989 and is now a unique, thriving and successful conservation project. Based on the edge of the Hwange national park, the painted Dog Research Project works in a number of broad areas to conserve the wild dogs:

- Building close links to the local communities
- Education
- Research
- Rescue and rehabilitation
- Relocations
- Anti poaching initiatives
- Campaigning for legislation

The Painted Dog Research Project has recently succeeded in getting the Zimbabwean government to give special protected status to the wild dogs - quite a feat given Zimbabwe's current difficulties.



The Anti poaching teams patrol on a daily basis searching for snares left by poachers which they then remove. It is estimated that 10% of snares will if not removed eventually kill an animal, so when you consider the fact that the anti poaching teams have removed over 10,000 snares in the last 4 years this shows the incredible impact they are making. While poachers don't set snares for wild dogs the snares don't discriminate in the animals that they kill and so dogs have been killed by the wire snares.

Greg and his team have also started fitting the dogs with special radio collars that have a steel plate attached to catch a snare and prevent it killing the dog.

Like the Brown Hyena project, the Painted Dog project has had success in reducing the number of animals killed on the roads by getting special road signs erected.

Painted Dog Conservation opened their Iganyana Children's bush camp in 2004 to teach the children from the local area about wildlife in general and the wild dogs in particular, and this is already proving very popular with over 1200 children having visited the camp already.

For a conservation project to really succeed in the long term, it is important that the local population feels part of it and that they see the benefits of conserving the wildlife. Greg and his team have had great success in getting the support of the local community, which has helped them avoid the worst of the problems Zimbabwe has endured in recent years.



One of the successful community projects that is run is an arts and crafts centre where the old wire snares removed by the anti poaching teams are used to make wild sculptures which the local population then sell to Painted Dog Conservation who then export them and sell them abroad. This means the people who take part are able to earn money and thus see direct benefits to Painted Dog Conservation. A recent addition to the project was to allow the local children to attend when they are not at school (the local police requested that Greg do this to keep the children occupied and out of mischief). Rather than the children being paid for their sculptures, the project instead pays their school fees for them instead.

Painted Dog Conservation recently carried out a wild dog reintroduction. Painted dog puppies had been confiscated from wildlife traffickers trying to smuggle them out of the country to South Africa,

and after being hand reared they were introduced to an island in lake Kariba which had a large quantity of game but which has had no predators for some decades. The game animals were unused to predators, so the wild dogs which were having to learn to hunt for the first time were on an even footing and hunted and fed themselves for several months before being darted and reintroduced to the wild in Matusadona national park.

Painted Dog Conservation identified that their 13 year old dart gun was in urgent need of repair/refurbishment, a process that will lead to it being out of action for up to eight months while it is sent back to the manufacturers (the bureaucracy associated with shipping a dart gun which is classed alongside firearms is horrendous). Obviously the project could not function properly for that length of time without a dart gun, so they approached the Predator Conservation Trust for funds to purchase a new dart gun. This would allow the original to be refurbished without the project field work suffering and would result in them ending up with two dart guns - which as the project is going from strength to strength will be of enormous help and needed.

The trustees of the Predator Conservation Trust were extremely happy to be able to help Greg Rasmussen and his team by funding the full cost of the dart gun plus a number of low impact tranquiliser darts at a cost of around £1200.

### **PCT SUPPORTS BROWN HYENA RESEARCH PROJECT WITH NEW GRANT**

Brown hyenas are the top predator along the southern coastal Namib Desert. They regularly prey on Cape fur seal pups, which they find at several mainland breeding colonies. The Brown Hyena Research Project has been studying the foraging behaviour of brown hyenas at mainland seal colonies since 1997. The main method was the investigation of dead seal pups to gain data about hunting success and prey choice. Direct behavioural observations of foraging brown hyenas started in 2002. The seal colony at Van Reenen Bay was observed during the seal pupping season (November to January each year) to record the behaviour and hunting success of brown hyenas. Observations were restricted to daylight hours and no observations have been carried out at night so far.

Seals and brown hyenas behave differently at night and the daytime observations might therefore not apply for night-time foraging behaviour and the change in the behaviour of the seals at night might have an influence on brown hyena hunting success. Furthermore, brown hyenas are nocturnal animals and only a few individuals can be observed during the day with decreasing frequency during the progressing seal pupping season, as the high temperatures in summer prevent brown hyenas from foraging during the day.



*Brown hyena hunting seal pups during the day.  
Note: seal pups would not run into the sea at night.*

*Photo taken by B. Kolar*

*(Continued on page 5)*

Some of the known and expected behavioural differences between night-time and daytime are:

#### **Brown hyena:**

- As a nocturnal species foraging mainly takes place between 17:00 and 9:00
- Almost entirely nocturnal in summer and more active during day between August and November
- As a result, more competition between brown hyenas should be observed at night (something that has not been observed so far, but the fight wounds seen on hyenas suggest that a lot of fighting takes place at the seal colonies at night)
- Increased competition with black-backed jackals

#### **Seals:**

- Seals rest on-shore at night and avoid fleeing towards the sea (as a result, hunting success of brown hyenas might be higher)
- Density of seals is high at night and as a result, it might be more difficult for brown hyenas to locate vulnerable prey
- Seal pups are more mobile from January onwards, when brown hyenas mainly forage at night. Mobility of seals will have an influence on the hunting success and the project has no data set for the period from January to November yet.

To enable the night time observations to be carried out, the Predator Conservation Trust have just made a grant of £1200 towards the purchase of a DVD camcorder to be used with existing equipment. The camcorder will allow the images captured using a highly light sensitive lens to be observed and recorded ( a video recorder or television is impractical as the observation hut has no electricity). The camcorder can also be used to record daytime observations for later viewing and comparison against the night time images.

The next study in Van Reenen Bay is planned for February 2006. The Brown Hyena Research project has a British student volunteer from the University of East Anglia, working on the behavioural study which will include the night time observations with the new camcorder

#### **FLIP STANDER**

Following Dr Stander's decision not to comply with the conditions of the Kunene Base Camp Grant made to him by Predator Conservation Trust, we will no longer be funding any of his future work.

#### **PAINTED DOG PROJECT JANUARY 2006:**

The current rainy season is one of the best people can remember around here, the promise of good crops in the fields lifting everyone's spirits. For the wildlife too, the coming year already promises to be one of plenty. Hwange National Park looks amazing, the bush so thick and vibrant, which makes game viewing difficult, however there is life everywhere, seemingly in great abundance. The hugely debated elephant population are noticeable by their absence, adding more fuel to the arguments over population densities and numbers. With so much water about, every pan and depression in the sandy soil full or overflowing, this is indeed a time of plenty, unless, you happen to be searching for dogs!!!!

Ask Jealous, next time you see him, what it is like to search for the dogs in an immense African thunderstorm!! He will greet you with his famous smile if you talk about the rains in relation to the crops in his fields, but you will get a different reaction if you ask him about tracking the dogs at this time of year. Only last week, we had to send a rescue party out to pull him from the mud!! Luckily he was within the range of our radio network and so he was able to call in and give his position. We drove out to him through an impossible storm, visibility reduced to a metre or so in front of the tdi. We found him sat in the back of his landrover, looking like the proverbial drowned rat!! His landrover does not have any windows. He was stuck axle deep and it took us a while to dig and then pull his vehicle out. He was concerned that he had "lost" the Umtchibi pack, I was concerned that he would catch pneumonia and quickly drove him home in my tdi, so he could take a hot shower and get some warm food inside himself.

Our adventures earlier in the month had been a lot more rewarding, even in the rain. The Umtchibi pack have quickly filled the void left by the Sethule, who dissolved as a pack following the death of the alpha male towards the end of 2004 and the disappearance of the alpha female during 2005, being at least nine years old, she has probably died as well.

Greg managed to get the first collar on the Umtchibi pack in November last year, however two of the adults have dispersed from the pack since then and so we were concerned that we would lose our ability to locate them if the collared dog also dispersed, thus a concerted effort was made to fit at least one more collar. So, 5am brought on a familiar scene of Jealous and I driving out to find a pack of dogs, coffee in hand.

The rains wash away the spoor (footprints) that Jealous can usually follow with ease, while the thick bush absorbs the signal emanating from the radio collar, which means that we have to get within approximately one kilometre of the dog wearing the collar before we will get a signal. One kilometre out of a home range of over 750 square kilometres, that takes some doing.

However, we know the dogs like no other, except Greg of course, who's intensive "training" had prepared us many years ago. Discussing all the recent sightings as we drove along, Jealous and I determined our main search area and began to dissect it, listening through the headphones for that familiar high pitched "beep", sent out by the radio collar and picked up by the receiver in my tdi. After a couple of hours driving the signal came in; beep, beep, beep.

While driving around we use an omni directional antenna to pick up the signal from the radio collar. This type of antenna picks up the signal but does not give any hint of the direction, so we quickly switched to the directional antenna and homed in on the dog's position. We soon found the dog wearing the collar, named "Beans" and the rest of his pack mates, lying around a small rain water pan, their stomachs indicating that they had clearly enjoyed a good meal the night before or a snack that very morning; five adults and nine hyper active pups.

As Jealous and I prepared the darts, the pups moved around the vehicle, very relaxed, investigating tyres, hot exhaust pipes and any loose brake cables or wires. With the rifle and darts ready, Jealous identified the alpha male and slowly manoeuvred the tdi into position so I could dart him. Using a range finder, I determined the distance, set the pressure gauge on the new Dan-Inject rifle, which had been generously donated to us by The Predator Conservation Trust, and took aim. Jealous touched me on the shoulder and whispered "leopard". I turned around, a puzzled expression on my face "did you say leopard?" As I uttered these words, the place erupted, dogs racing after the leopard, which made it to the safety of a near by tree. The noise was deafening, fourteen over excited dogs and one snarling leopard perched up a tree. However it was over in a matter of seconds, the dogs having showed the leopard, who was boss, returned to their leafy shade and the leopard jumped down and melted away.

Grinning from ear to ear, Jealous and I turned our attention back onto the dogs and I darted the alpha male, who flinched slightly as the dart hit him, then walked down to the pan for a drink. This we did not want, as he could actually drown when he began to succumb to the anaesthetising drugs while lying in the water. We moved closer and as soon as it was obvious that the drugs had taken effect we jumped out of the tdi and picked him up. The rest of the pack stood ten metres away watching us. The darted dog was fine and without further delay we fitted his protective radio collar with our "audience" of thirteen dogs watching every move.

With the collar fitted we moved "Pita" into the shade of a thick bush, well away from the water and gave him the reversal injection. By now the rest of the pack had got bored and moved some 50 metres away into their own shade bush. After a few minutes Pita began to wake up and stagger around, looking for his pack. One of the pups saw him and began to approach cautiously, probably wondering why his father was behaving so strangely. Once he was sure it was his father, he mobbed him, in some sort of a role reversal of the "Prodigal Son". The rest of the pack could not ignore this and all joined in, racing around, excitedly, seemingly welcoming the return of their missing leader.

*Peter Blinston*