

Newsletter

Winter 2007 /
Spring 2008



Welcome to the latest issue of the Predator Conservation Trust newsletter. This issue contains details of grants made by PCT to two of the projects we support as well as updates from the projects.

GRANT TO LISE HANSEN'S CAPRIVI CARNIVORE PROJECT

In late September 2007, the Trustees of the Predator Conservation Trust received a request for funding from Lise Hanssen for the Caprivi Carnivore Project. After evaluating the proposal, the Trustees approved funding for the project. The funding will cover a number of items essential for the project to get fully up and running. The main item is a dart gun (plus darts) for use in tranquilising animals to allow collars to be fitted and blood samples taken. Also covered by the grant are a number of items of medical and veterinary supplies including the animal tranquiliser Zoletil which will be used when darting the Spotted Hyenas being studied, visual identification collars, fuel and various other items.

DONATION OF BOOKS AND EQUIPMENT TO LISE HANSEN'S CAPRIVI CARNIVORE PROJECT

In October 2007, PCT received a donation of a digital SLR camera plus lenses and a flash-gun along with a number of reference books, research papers and other equipment for Lise Hanssen's project. PCT Trustee Anthony May was travelling to Namibia on holiday in October and delivered them to Lise in Windhoek.

GRANT TO BROWN HYENA PROJECT

In October 2007, the Trustees of the Predator Conservation Trust approved a grant to the Brown Hyena Project to contribute to the costs of a darting trip and access to research reports and other scientific literature.

Darting and collaring of hyenas is done on a regular basis - there are currently five collars that still have to be fitted and a veterinarian has to supervise the handling of the animals.

A proportion of the funds granted will go to cover these expenses. The remaining funds will be used to purchase scientific literature and books.

The Brown Hyena Project has no access to libraries and to become a member to use on-line library services is too costly for the project. Since they are using highly sophisticated technologies such as GPS telemetry and camera trapping, it is essential that they keep up to date with improved and new ecological and statistical analysis methods.

Following Ingrid Wiesel's talk to FFI in Chester in September, FFI made a donation of £500 to PCT for Ingrid's project. The latest grant from the Predator Conservation Trust consists of this £500 plus a further £500 from PCT funds, giving a total grant of £1000.

Additionally when Ingrid visited the UK, PCT were able to donate two reference books which had been donated to PCT and which are unavailable in Namibia.

INGRID WIESEL'S VISIT TO THE UK

Ingrid Wiesel from the Brown Hyena Research Project visited the UK in September 2007 and during her brief trip she travelled to Chester to give a talk to the North West branch of Fauna and Flora International (FFI) on September 7th. The talk was only arranged just over a week before it took place but despite this there was an excellent turnout.

Ingrid's talk was well received and the audience had plenty of questions afterwards. After a short break the audience was shown a short film about Ingrid and her work - "The Brown Hyena lady" which was originally made for and shown on South Africa's 50/50 program.



Ingrid Wiesel



Ingrid's talk provided the audience with an abundance of information about the Brown Hyena, where they are found, their behaviour and much more, as well as giving them an introduction to the Brown Hyena Research project.

Many thanks to everyone at FFI North West.

PAINTED DOG CONSERVATION PROJECT VISITOR CENTRE OPENS

The Painted Dog Conservation (PDC) Project Visitor Centre opened on 3rd September 2007. A steady flow of people have already stopped by to witness the work carried out by the project and learn about the life of painted dogs. The Children's Bush Camp re opened after the school holidays and the PDC launched a new aspect of the programme, which aims to bring as many parents as they can possibly handle to the visitor centre. The children arrive on a Tuesday and by Friday, their last day, they are completely "at home" and longing to stay. PDC collect the parents from their homes on the Friday morning and bring them to the Visitor centre for a guided tour, which ends at the Bush Camp, where they enjoy lunch with the children then sit and watch the plays or songs the children have created to describe their stay at the camp. It's a very emotional heart warming experience and is already having a hugely positive impact on the parents who now witness their children's delight first hand. Lives are being changed, of that there is no doubt.



The new visitor centre at the Painted Dog Conservation project.

Lise Hanssen's Caprivi Hyaena study - November 2007 Report

For space reasons, the following is a shortened version of Lise's trip report. The full version is available to read on our website.

On 23 October I travelled to the Kavango and Caprivi Regions for a two week long field trip. A grant from the Predator Conservation Trust provided funding for field equipment and initial start up costs for this study. I was accompanied by Anthony May, a PCT trustee.

Before venturing east towards the Caprivi I met with Apollo Kannyinga and Philip Steyn from the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) in Rundu to discuss the study and received some valuable input on working in the area and potential collaborations.

We camped overnight at Ngepi Camp and briefly met with Helmut Tjikurunda who is based at Mahango Game Reserve on Saturday morning to let him know that I was in the area. Thereafter we drove to Buffalo and the Popa Falls Community Campsite to locate Liep to facilitate introduction to members of the Kyaramacan Trust, a body representing the community living within the Bwabwata National Park (formerly the Caprivi Game Reserve).

Liep was unavailable so we proceeded to Cheto, approximately 100 km east, where my last point of contact had been with the Chairman and the committee members of the Kyaramacan Trust. On my previous trip I had presented my project proposal at their community meeting.

At Cheto we were told that the individuals we were looking for were at Omega, which we had passed en route. We drove back some 40 km to Omega only to discover that some major changes had taken place within the Kyaramacan Trust and that there was a new acting Chairman. I was invited to a meeting on the following Monday, but was unable to attend as I had to travel to Katima Mulilo. From Omega we drove east to Susuwe. I reported at the MET office where Loida, the officer on duty, explained how I should fill in the register and provided me with a permit for the prescribed number of days. We set up camp at Bum Hill, a community campsite on the Kwando River.

The following day we drove around the core conservation area and found the fresh spoor of a single spotted hyaena walking along the track for a number of kilometres. In addition we found a hyaena latrine, but there was no fresh scat present. On our way back from Horse Shoe (a large body of water within the Kwando River system) we got stuck where the sand in the track had been churned up by a large truck. Both four wheel low range and difflock were useless as the diff was buried in the sand and only a hi-lift jack or a winch (none of which I had) would do the job. Four hours later we were jacked and pulled out after I managed to get a message by cell phone to Sean Brain from Susuwe Island lodge.



The 4WD vehicle firmly stuck in the soft sand

That evening we paid a visit to Alan Cillier, who has the trophy hunting concession on the Kwando and has a camp in Susuwe. He shared some interesting observations of both hyaenas and lion. One observation was of a male lion being mobbed by a group of about twenty hyaenas within the Susuwe area. Another interesting observation occurred at a site where bait had been hung in a tree. A large group of about twenty to thirty hyaenas were swarming around the bait, but not one attempted to eat it while it was hanging up. Attempts to get close to them with a vehicle made them scatter, but they were approachable on foot.

A number of sources have reported that there appears to be no resident lions in west Caprivi. When tracking individuals that have been occasionally observed, both Alan and Sean have found the spoor leading over the border into Angola in the north and Botswana in the south. Similar reports have come from some of the NGO field staff and from John Wambach, who holds the Buffalo concession to the west. A number of sources attribute this to the large numbers of spotted hyaenas in the area. When asking a number of community members where I could find hyaenas/dens, they replied "they are everywhere." Interestingly lions seem to reside on the Botswana side of the border where there is unlikely to be a marked difference in hyaena numbers to West Caprivi. Dave Ward related an incident where lions killed livestock in the east Caprivi swam across the Kwando River and ate them on the Botswana side in full view of the Namibians.

Before further field work could continue, we needed a hi-lift jack so we drove to Katima where I had a brief meeting with Shadreck Siloka at MET. A night drive to the latrine revealed nothing new although we did pick up one pair of hyaena eyes in the headlights on the road close to the Namibia Defence Force (NDF) Army base on the way back to Bum Hill.

The following day on the road south in the east Caprivi we passed a large number of well made livestock kraals which we photographed for future reference.

I also met with Bazil Roth to discuss basing myself at Kubunyana campsite and Sean Braine at Susuwe Island Lodge where he gave us the locations of three active hyaena dens on very detailed map of the Kwando Flood plain. In addition I met with Richard Diggle from IRDNC in Katima to discuss collaborative work in the form of a survey with the conservancies and communities on Human Wildlife Conflict in the Caprivi.



Modern technology means that Lise is able to write her field trip reports and email them from the field via the cellphone network. Finding somewhere comfortable to sit and write the report is more difficult however.

On the return journey west we took the old golden highway, a bush track that zigzags through the Caprivi, to look for spoor, dens, latrines or scat indicating hyaena activity. We marked two more latrines and two probable den sites on the GPS. I hope in future to be able to learn from community game guards as they have intimate knowledge of the area and the wildlife.

I arranged a meeting with Liep and Alfred who is in charge of the Kyaramacan game guards to discuss possible assistance in locating dens sites throughout the west Caprivi. Unfortunately they both had been called away for a meeting so I missed them. Car trouble resulted in us leaving the Caprivi Region for Windhoek much earlier than planned. I will be undertaking a second field trip for a longer period of time before the end of the year.

The area and the species are new to me and I have discovered through this field trip that some innovative field techniques will be required in order to fulfill the objectives of the study. Other decisions based on the findings of this field trip include the following:

After discussion with Richard Diggle I plan to develop the HWC survey in collaboration with the game guards and NGO's operating in Caprivi that can be carried out by the conservancies themselves. With the assistance of the Kyaramacan Trust, locate a number of clans for intensive observation within the interior of Bwabwata away from the core areas as there are fewer disturbances. Over time possibly compare this to a clan outside the protected area within the conservancies of the east Caprivi.

Due to the relatively good cell phone network coverage as well as the international border problem, I will make use of GSM and GPS collars which have a built in VHF facility rather than only VHF collars.



Sunrise on the Okavango river at Ngepi camp

PAINTED DOG CONSERVATION PROJECT UPDATE

December was one of those months I will never forget. It was dominated by Starvation Island again, with Jealous and I spending two weeks on the Island with a film crew, who had come to document the progress being made by the five dogs we released in August. We named the dogs, the "Musango" pack. Musango translates as "in the bush".



For a week or more we had been battling with horrendous, stormy weather, which transformed Lake Kariba from a proverbial millpond into a washing machine, within minutes. Not great fieldwork weather and even more difficult for filming. It seemed as if everything was wet, all the time. If it wasn't from the rain then it was from sweat, because when the storms blew away, the sun came out and dried you up momentarily, but as the temperature raced into the 40's you "cooked".

We battled with boats - mainly because they kept breaking down or the people we were borrowing them from kept taking them back. The last issue wasn't their fault. They had commercial operations to run and were trying to help us out as and when they could. Other people let them down and it became a chain, which we were at the end of. I made a mental note to add a boat to our fleet of vehicles, but that's for the future.

Jealous and the film crew were on the drifting boat. I had gone back to camp to try and make arrangements for yet another boat because the Croc Farm needed theirs back, again. I failed to get a boat and resigned myself to the fact that we would have to camp on the island itself for the remaining days, which was something I had been avoiding as I felt it may influence the dogs hunting. Our own miserable comfort level would drop a peg or two as well. But we had to do it, not only because of the deteriorating boat situation but also because it was still not clear if the dogs were successfully providing for themselves. We had seen them kill a couple of baby impala and they looked healthy, but they weren't hunting as we thought they would or should. There was no alternative, we would have to camp on the island and endure the stormy weather.

Then the radio message came in. It was delivered to me third hand. 'Jealous has radioed and said that the boat ran aground and damaged its steering, now they are drifting down the lake towards Katete'. "And they don't have any fuel left".

Those of you who know me well can imagine the colour of the words I used at that moment. "I have only left them alone for a couple of hours and now this", was the polite version after I regained my senses.

I gave instruction to get some fuel organised and we set out in the camp's speedboat. The one that had been breaking down but was now "fixed". The wind had been blowing hard all morning and so the lake was rough, too rough, under normal circumstances for such a small boat. We managed to get a few hundred metres out into the bay and it was obvious that the speedboat had not been fixed. A wave smashed us into one of the many dead trees that are a feature of Lake Kariba, "Fossil" trees that stand like tombstones to remind one of the forests that existed before the lake was created.

We turned back. The mechanic set to work "fixing" the speedboat again. I sent a car to the Croc Farm with a message that they must send out a rescue boat as well. The car returned two hours later. The message had been delivered and the Croc Farm was sending a boat. I relaxed, a bit and

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attempted one more phone call to a boat hire company. While doing this I looked out across the lake and saw the Croc Farm boat, the rescue boat, towing another Croc Farm boat back into its harbour!! No-one saw the look on my face then. I half expected someone to jump out from behind a tree and tell me "this was just a joke, there is a hidden camera filming you". Just like those Candid Camera or Just For Laughs reality TV shows. No-one came forward. At that moment I would have paid anyone, any amount, for a reliable, fast boat. This was Jealous, who can't swim and the film crew adrift on Lake Kariba. It was now 5pm, five hours after the initial radio message had come in. there was perhaps one and a half hours of daylight left. But this was Jealous and the film crew; I had to go and search for them.

I hurried a couple of guys from the camp onto their small fishing pontoon, which has a 9 hp engine. It's slow, very slow. It's meant for idling along the backwaters with a cooler box of beers by your side and a vague hope of catching some bream for dinner on your mind. It's not a rescue boat. The guys told me to get off the boat, saying it wasn't safe. They would go and search. I wouldn't hear this.

"Jealous is missing and he can't swim". I told them. The film crew were also on my mind. I also recalled the day Greg crashed his plane and the search for him. I shivered, though it wasn't cold.

So we set out into the rough water on the small pontoon, heading towards Katete. The night closed in quickly as we reached the search area. There was no sign of the drifting boat. I wondered if it had sunk and thought of Jealous not being able to swim. I also thought of the crocodiles in Lake Kariba. Apparently there are a lot. For a while the moon helped us see our way, until the next storm blew in. Then we were engulfed in a world of darkness and fear. The guys lost their bearings and I thought I was going to lose my life. The lake chewed us up like a lost sock in a washing machine. We grabbed the rail of the pontoon as if our life depended on it. It did. I thought about my family and in particular Sam, my ten-month-old son.

The storm broke but the lake stayed rough and we attempted to get back to camp. The guys were lost but I was able to guide them in the right direction until they recognised where we were. Eventually we made back to camp. It was 2am. I thanked them for getting us back, for their bravery and asked them to wake me up at 5am. They asked me if I would like anything to eat!!

At 5am I was up. Astonished but delighted to hear that Jealous had managed to get another radio message through to say they were safe and actually not that far away. The original message, delivered third hand, had been "translated" incorrectly and in fact they had not drifted towards Katete. They could "see Katete". But they had drifted into the bay of an island near Starvation Island and had spent the night quite safe and sound, unlike my two comrades and I.

The Croc Farm sent out a boat to tow them home and after a cup of tea plus a long talk we went back to Starvation Island and the dogs. Our reward was seeing the dogs hunt, chasing down impala like their life depended on it. Even the weather gave us a break and we enjoyed a few memorable days with the dogs on the island. Jealous and the assistant cameraman were charged by an elephant at one point but Jealous smiled as he does and walked back to pick up the equipment they had dropped when making their escape.

The main thing was that the dogs were doing ok. I drove back to Harare when the two weeks were over, my hand numb from two scorpion stings and held Sam in my arms for a long time. Jealous and I will be back on the island at the end of January.

Peter Blinston



CHEETAH CONSERVATION BOTSWANA UPDATE

Cheetah Conservation Botswana (CCB) have published their book, CHEETAH: A Predator Resource for the Students of Botswana, the first such publication to be developed by CCB.

Designed for use by students of Secondary Level, its five chapters introduce cheetah history, biology and behaviour and discuss the status of the species, while also introducing measures available to farmers to reduce conflict with predators. Placing the cheetah in context, the publication also introduces the other carnivores common to Botswana. Its 74 pages are richly illustrated in colour and feature an activity section at the end of each chapter. While strengthening pupils' knowledge about the cheetah and other predators, the activities also exercise student abilities in subjects such as English, mathematics and geography.

CCB plans to distribute copies nationwide, in stages - as funding for reprinting hopefully become available to us over the forthcoming years. Initially, twenty-five schools will each receive forty copies of the book, accompanied by the new CCB CD-ROM.

The book is available to download in pdf format from the predator Conservation Trust Website.

CCB are also about to publish a suite of new community resources, in English and Setswana, and are commencing work on an integrated livestock management book and new community posters.

BROWN HYENA PROJECT UPDATE

Tosca hasn't been an easy Brown Hyena to study right from the start. So why should it be different when the time comes for her collar drop off?

We located her position while we were flying in search for Tony. Once we landed, we went to the area to do the collar drop off.

The collar was already in recovery mode, meaning that it sends a different VHF signal to the normal one, as the battery voltage is low. We triggered the drop off from a distance of about 500 metres and walked towards her to retrieve the collar. At one point I knew that we were pretty close, but suddenly, the signal started to come from a different direction. Well, we knew what this meant: either the collar did not drop off, which we regarded as unlikely or the collar was still attached to the mane or Tosca did not want to part with her collar and carried it away. We followed the signal for a while until Steve spotted her in the distance. We went back to the vehicle and tried to find her again, as we assumed that she would look for another resting site soon. However, we could not find her again, which meant that we had to fly for her the next day.

We quickly located her (or the collar, as we were not really sure that the collar dropped off) the next day. She or the collar was not far away from the area where we tried the drop off the previous day. We drove to the area and very carefully approached the hill, where the signal was coming from. We finally realised that Tosca was not there any more, as she would have already jumped out of her resting site due to all the noise we were making. At least we knew that the collar came off, but it was quite tricky to find it. The signal was coming from all over the place and the rocky outcrop had many holes, which could have been resting sites. Finally we found the collar deep inside one of these holes, and: the collar was bitten into pieces. The belting was completely destroyed and the GPS receiver had nice hyena bite marks in it. So what happened was that the collar did indeed drop off and that Tosca decided to keep her trophy.

She nibbled (and nibbling with hyena teeth is quite something...) nicely on her collar before we could retrieve it.

The collar is definitely beyond refurbishment, but Gino and I still had a good laugh about it. Hyenas are always good for surprises!!! However, I was a bit concerned that Tosca might have damaged the data unit and the trip back to town seemed to take ages. At home, I downloaded the data and 20 minutes later I was really smiling. We collected over 37000 data sets and the data from July indicates that Tosca might be the proud mother of cubs again. I will check out the den site soon to see whether we are right.



WEBSITE UPDATE

The website (www.predatorconservation.com) continues to receive increasing numbers of visitors. The site has been considerably expanded over the past few months with updates on all the projects we support, we have added more information about different carnivore species, as well as lots of additional photographs and some additional video clips.

We have just added an interview with Lise Hanssen which was carried out in conjunction with the Safaritalk website (www.safaritalk.net). If you wish to read the interview, it is located in the wildlife & conservation section of the forum on our site.

Because of space limits in the newsletter we are unable to include all the project updates we receive, but these are all made available on our website. Lise Hanssen has provided two versions of the report on her field trip in October/November 2007 - a short version for the newsletter plus a full length version for the website.

WHAT CAN A DONATION OF US\$25 DO?

Some people may believe that a small donation is unlikely to be able to do much good, but this is not actually right - any donation, large or small can help conservation projects in the field.

To illustrate this, we've put together a list of examples of what could be funded by a single donation of 25 US dollars (around £12.50)

- Anti Poaching Unit scouts wage for one week *or*
- A pair of boots for Anti Poaching Unit scout *or*
- A months food rations for Anti Poaching Unit *or*
- One weeks supply of food for 4 dogs at the Painted Dog Project rehabilitation facility *or*
- One weeks salary of Painted Dog Project rehabilitation facility staff member *or*
- Cost of one child attending Painted Dog Project Children's Bush Camp *or*
- One days fuel for tracking Wild Dogs or Hyenas *or*
- 1 small hyena bait (goat or sheep) *or*
- 5 tranquilizer darts (2ml) *or*
- 100 charges for tranquiliser dart gun *or*
- 2 tyre repairs *or*
- 5 visual ID collars for spotted hyenas

This list does illustrate how far even small sums of money can go to help. The fact that US\$25 can fund an anti poaching scout for a week is quite amazing - especially when you consider that for every person in employment in Africa, they are estimated to be supporting another 15-20 people on their salary.

Please consider making a donation to help us fund more vital work. This can be done via our website or by post

PREDATOR CONSERVATION TRUST ON FACEBOOK

The Predator Conservation Trust now has a presence on facebook. Members of facebook can search for and join the Predator Conservation Trust group. We made the decision to join facebook in an attempt to expand the audience for news about the projects we support. If you are a facebook member we hope you will join the group.