



Caprivi Carnivore Project

Newsletter – June 2011

Field activities

Despite the many pans throughout the Caprivi still holding plenty of water, baiting activities have commenced for 2011. Many animals do not visit the floodplain areas during the wet season and even a few months into the dry season due to availability of rain water throughout the area. There is so much field work that needs to be undertaken this year in order to fulfil the project goals that baiting got underway in early April.



Sanzo Omuramba (left) and Malombe Pan (right) where water is still available for wildlife well into the dry season. These water sources are located approximately 20 km west of the Kwando River.. Both photos were taken on the 25 June 2011.

The old baiting area that was used to lure in and capture the Kwando Clan during 2009 was re-established in order to capture collared individuals to replace old GSM collars with new ones. The cubs photographed at the dens during early 2010 when they were approximately 6 weeks old are now 16 months old and they also have to be captured for marking purposes. I was assisted in setting up the bait sites by Forster Tetuka and Davies Chelezo, Community Game Guards from Mashi Conservancy, and Zorick Musole, Game Guard from Mayuni Conservancy and also a member of the Game Monitoring Unit of the Mudumu North Complex. I also need to thank Coster Munama for donating meat and Moscow Mawaya and Mishak Fulai for always making meat available to me when they have it. Although the bait site soon attracted the attention of CCC-4, the collared male hyaena, he was photographed by infra-red camera looking extremely nervous. The reason for this became clear very shortly when the bait was visited by a large adult male and young adult female lion. In fact the baiting site attracted attention from many species other than spotted hyaenas. Due to the bait being eaten by raptors and other large carnivore species, it was decided to move it to a location away from the floodplain where there was less predator activity, but still within the home range of the Kwando Clan. The new site was located approximately 3 km down the Malombe Pan road from the junction with the track to Nambwa campsite. The new site was found by the study clan within a few days, but once again the meat was pilfered by a male leopard and the remainder was visited by two very large male lions. The bait site was moved back to the floodplain as avoiding other predators was not possible wherever the bait was situated and the first bait site is far easier to access.

It seems that while water is available in other areas of their home range, spotted hyaenas adapt their home range use spending less time along the floodplain. As a result we had to adapt the way we lure them in to the bait by improving their chances of discovering that food is once more available at their favourite tree. With a combination of replenishing the bait regularly and making very long scent trails that run from Long Lagoon all the way along the main track to the bait site, spotted hyaena activity has increased. CCC-3, CCC-4 and the dominant female hyaena from the Kwando Clan are now regular visitors. Zorick Musole, Alfred Shibongo from Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) and myself have attempted sitting up on a few occasions to recapture the collared hyaenas, but our efforts have been unsuccessful. I would sincerely like to thank Dr Frank Chitate, the state vet from Katima Veterinary Services, Erastus Simaata, the plant manager for MeatCo in Katima, Monica Shikongo, the warden for Bwabwata Park and Alfred Shibongo, a ranger with MET for their support for the predator work being undertaken in the Caprivi.



Forster Tetuka setting up a bait site



A large adult male lion visits the bait tree



Zorick Musole and Alfred Shibongo arranging the bait

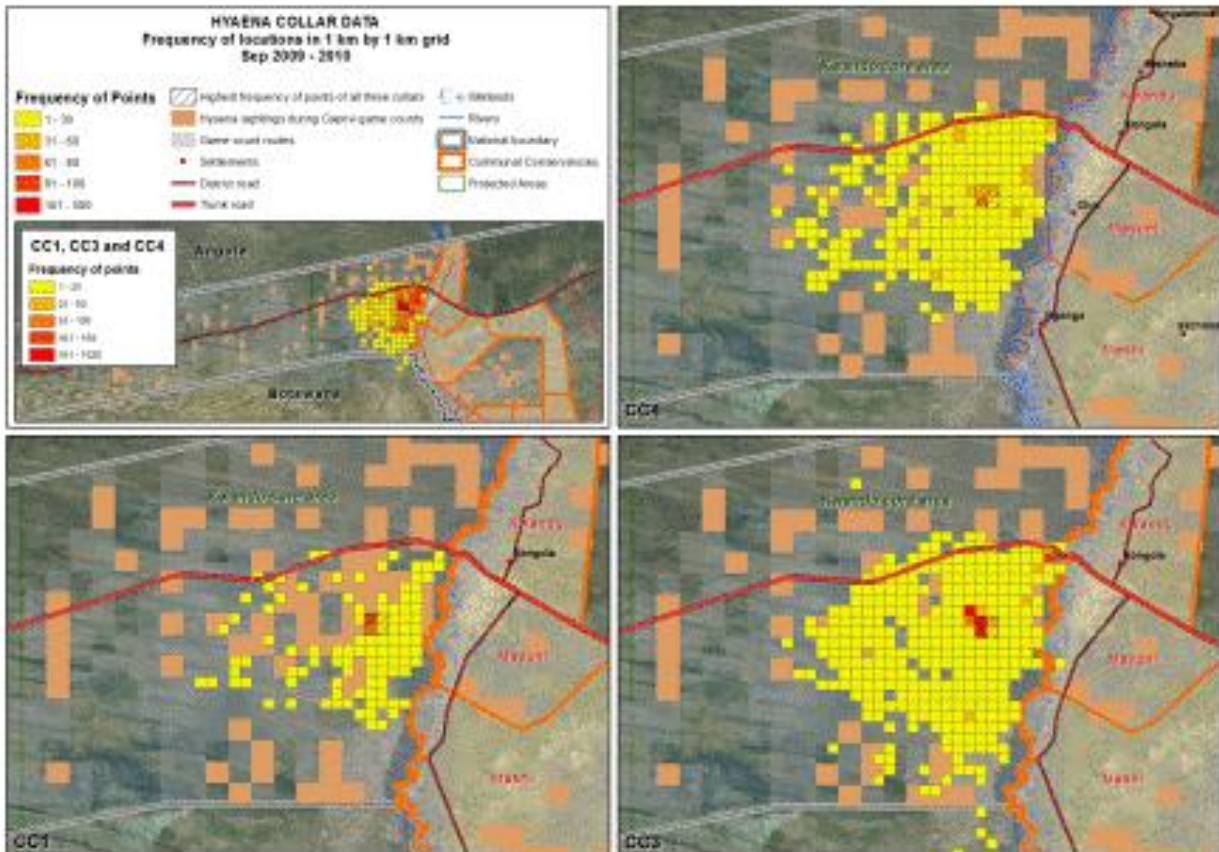


The single unmarked adult from the Kwando Clan visits the bait

New hyaena developments in the Kwando Core Area

In the past year there have been a number of significant changes in Bwabwata National Park. One that affects spotted hyaenas in many ways is the settling of a pride of lions in the Kwando Core Area. These two species have a very interesting co-existence, which has often been misinterpreted by wildlife managers. Spotted hyaena numbers have been blamed for the suppression of lion populations in many parks in Africa. This in fact is not the case, as hyaenas and lions fulfil different niches in the system. For the first time in many years there have been observations of interaction between these two species in Bwabwata. During a transect foot count in September 2010, a spotted hyaenas was observed scavenging off a lechwe killed by a lion (Z. Musole). An adult spotted hyaena carcass was found in the Sanzo Omuramba during a foot patrol in March 2011 by MET park staff. Backtracking from the carcass revealed that the hyaena was killed by a lion (A. Shibongo).

Thanks to Sylvia Thompson, GIS expert for WWF in Namibia, new home range maps have been developed from the collar data. Sylvia divided the home range into a grid of 1 km x 1 km blocks to look at frequency of collar locations. As one would expect, the most visited place of all is the area where the dens are located, but the next most popular place turns out to be the kitchen scrap dumpsite at the army base within the park. I paid a visit to the army base one morning to investigate and ask the staff about their kitchen and eating routine. I was shown around the base where old bones could be found scattered around the cooking area and right where the Sergeant's feet were planted in the sand was a large hyaena track. While all this was going on, we were being watched by a very tame troop of baboons who were sitting inside the dumpsite hole, happily eating away at squash pips and vegetable peels. Hyaenas are incredible opportunists and must be visiting the army base during the night when all is quiet to take advantage of the free food that is available to them.



The red areas show the highest frequency of marked hyaena locations. GIS by Sylvia Thompson (WWF in Namibia)

Large Carnivore diversity in Bwabwata National Park (West Caprivi)

Large carnivore observations by members of the public are becoming more frequent. Together with spoor observations as well as photographs from the infra-red cameras placed within the park, these records are slowly putting together a bigger picture of not only large carnivore species, but also age classes and social group sizes. All this information has been obtained indirectly without any form of interference with the animals themselves and is incredibly important for management and conservation as well as long-term monitoring. Large carnivores are also one of the biggest tourist attractions and along with the sheer numbers of elephants; these regular sightings of extremely popular species are bound to promote the Caprivi Region as a tourism destination.

Since late 2009, lions have regularly been seen and heard throughout the Kwando Core Area. It is now common place to wake up to the sounds of lion roars echoing across the Kwando River. During 2010, these lions settled and over time observations of groupings, sexes and ages as well as locations have contributed to how the pride is made up, where they are spending time and what they are eating. This information has been entered into a database and will contribute to the newly revised Large Carnivore Atlas Project.

The Kwando Pride is made up of two adult males, three adult females, one young adult female and two sub-adults of which one is male. In April the young female was observed mating with one of the adult males (N. Le Roux), so the pride might possibly be on the increase in the near future. To date prey species include Lechwe (Z. Musole), adult buffalo (D. Stephens) and impala (S. Mayes). Although there is no information on trans-boundary movement, this is highly likely as they do occasionally disappear for days to weeks on end. While in the Kwando Core Area they have been observed between the Angola border and south of Horse Shoe and as far west as Malombe Pan turnoff where they were observed lying on the tarmac of the Trans-Caprivi highway (S. Mayes). This area within Namibia covers approximately 400 to 500 km²

A collared male lion was observed on one occasion only near the border of Namibia and Angola (W. Cillier), but has not been seen again. After being in touch with a number of ongoing lion studies within the Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA TFCA), it appears that this lion ventured to the Caprivi either from Hwange in Zimbabwe (N. Elliot) or Chobe in Botswana (G. Neo-Mahupeleng).



Three adult lionesses kill and eat an impala at the turnoff to Susuwe Ranger Station. Photo: Simon Mayes



A sub-adult male lion photographed at Horse Shoe by a guest from Susuwe Island Lodge.

In addition to lions, there have been frequent records of leopards, cheetahs and wild dogs. Leopards are regularly captured on infra-red camera with the same individuals photographed in different areas giving an indication of their movements. Different leopards are often photographed in the same area, which indicates a degree of overlap of home ranges. Pack size for wild dog is estimated at approximately 12 to 13 adults with one known pack using the Kwando Core Area as part of their home range. Cheetah numbers are estimated at one adult using the core area and two adults outside the core area. The spoor of an adult and one cub were seen as recently as ten days ago passing Susuwe Ranger Station and moving in the direction of Angola.



Wild dog near Susuwe Ranger Station – July 2010



Group of wild dogs near Nambwa – September 2010

Although photographed three months apart, this is the same pack of wild dogs identifiable by individual markings and natural scars. This wild dog is identifiable by the damage to its left ear. Photos by Simon Mayes

East Caprivi

On the 10th June, the decomposing carcass of a spotted hyaena was discovered by Betty Fulai from Ngonga. It was assumed that the hyaena had been poisoned. On the 11th June, Mishak Fulai assisted me in performing a post mortem. On examination of the four day old carcass, we immediately discovered that the two legs on the right hand side were badly broken, which suggests that the hyaena was hit by a vehicle, probably a truck, on the Kongola/Mudumu Road. It must have been able to stagger approximately 1 km off the road where it died of its injuries. The hyaena was an adult and although most of its abdomen had been consumed by maggots making it hard to establish its sex, it is likely a female because it estimated to weigh approximately 70 kg. I managed to rescue a few samples of muscle tissue and various organs, but the decomposition was quite advanced. The stomach contents were intact and I removed coarse bristly hair, one claw and the remains of a small hoof that did not resemble anything of livestock origin. The hair came from a single prey item as it was the same consistency and colour. After washing

the stomach contents and drying it out, the colour and consistency of the hair resembles that of a bat eared fox. This is fascinating as prey remains recovered in a spotted hyaena scat sample also from the east Caprivi appear to be from a aardwolf, also an insectivore.

The search for scat to identify prey items continues in the Mudumu North Complex. Thanks to the efforts of Dave Ward who covers tremendous distances between the conservancies of the east Caprivi, the collection continues to grow. Most scat has been collected on the boundary of Mudumu National Park, while an entire latrine was located within Wuparo Conservancy in Mudumu South Complex. These scat samples will be analysed and the contents reported on in the next newsletter.

The prey remains need to be thoroughly examined using the correct techniques to identify the species with absolute certainty. Presently we are on the hunt for a Namibian student who would be willing to take on this task as practical training for one of their projects.



Mishak Fulai assists with the post mortem



Dentition of a young adult spotted hyaena. Photos: D. Stephens

Human Wildlife Conflict

Monitoring the vigilance of farmers over their livestock has commenced within the Mudumu North Complex. The driving of “cattle transects” takes place one or two nights of every week to observe how many head of livestock have been left without protection from predators by not being guarded or herded into kraals at night time. To date, there is a marked distinction between the wet season and the dry season although far more transects need to be covered in this study before any significance can be drawn from the results. The difference could also possibly be due to MET distributing funds to the conservancies, through the Game Products Trust Fund, during the latter part of 2010 to be used to reimburse farmers who suffered losses to wildlife. Strict criteria govern the distribution of these funds, one of which is that livestock need to be put into kraals at night time. Livestock losses are investigated within 48 hours by Community Game Guards to make sure that any claims are genuine. Interestingly, Mayuni Conservancy did not pay out any money for losses to spotted hyaena for the period of 2010 (Z. Musole) although spotted hyaenas are still considered the biggest problem predator of all. Three genuine claims for losses to leopards were paid out for 2010. The study of human-wildlife conflict is long-term and will be ongoing.

West Caprivi

Now that hyaenas are starting to respond within the Kwando Core Area, efforts will extend to the areas further away from the river systems. These areas include settlements of park residents as well as the multiple –use areas where subsistence livestock farming is taking place within Bwabwata. It is expected that the density of spotted hyaenas and other predators will be far lower than in the core areas. Satellite collars will be used instead of GSM collars as the cellphone network has proved unreliable for transmitting GSM collar data, often with months or in one case an entire year without results. The data will be used to guide management decisions for spotted hyaenas within the protected area of Bwabwata. In addition, livestock farming methods will be assessed in order to understand the factors contributing to livestock losses to predators within the park as well as its mitigation.

Website and Facebook

The Caprivi Carnivore Project is about to get its own website thanks to Hedy De Bats from De Bats Digital Imaging. Spotted hyaenas need good PR above all else for their successful conservation and the website will assist in this process. In addition, the Caprivi and Kavango Regions will be promoted along with other large carnivore species. All newsletters and reports from the project will be available on this website as well as additional resources about Namibia, conservation and large carnivore species. The website will also be used to acknowledge the much appreciated project support from the various sponsors. Thank you so much to Hedy De Bats for this most generous contribution. The website address will be circulated as soon as the website goes live on the internet.

In the meantime I have started a Facebook page for the project. This page has links to where project information can be found. In addition photographs from project activities are posted in albums for public viewing. There has been much interest in the album containing regular updated photographs from the various species that have been visiting the bait sites. The address for the Facebook page is:

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Caprivi-Carnivore-Project/172030466142464>

For people who do not use Facebook, but would like to view the photos from the Bait site visitor album, click the following link:

<http://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.222427011102809.65991.172030466142464&l=61745d033b>

Project Sponsors for 2011

I would sincerely like the following sponsors for their support of the research and conservation of spotted hyaenas in the Caprivi Region of Namibia.

- Wilderness Trust based in South Africa that fund conservation projects throughout southern Africa
- Nedbank Namibia's Go Green Fund that contribute to three conservation projects annually in Namibia
- Raymond Van der Meer and the Trustees of DierenPark Amersfoort Wildlife Fund in the Netherlands
- Prince Constantijn and the Trustees of the Prince Bernhard Fund for Nature in the Netherlands
- Ministry of Environment and Tourism for their generous support and guidance.
- IRDNC for providing me with a home in the Caprivi and for all their support in so many ways.
- WWF in Namibia for their guidance, support and assistance in the field.
- Malcolm Taylor and Dunlop Tyres in Windhoek for keeping the research vehicle on the go
- Predator Conservation Trust in the UK who are long-term sponsors.
- Lucie Burgers Stichting in the Netherlands.
- Namibia Nature Foundation for undertaking the administrative support for the project
- Hedy De Bats for a beautiful website that will do any hyaena proud.
- Lucas Oberer for his donation.
- Mark and Charlie Paxton and Shamvura Camp in Kavango for all their support.
- John Inglis from Area 51 Productions in Cape Town for donating a brand new tent and its extension.
- Fransje Van Riel for all her time acting as my sounding board as well as her excellent fundraising skills.

A special thank you goes to the communities, conservancies and game guards of the Caprivi. This project truly is a team effort.



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