



EXPEDITION DIARY Namibia 2007

By Peter Schütte

29 August 2007

Hello everyone and welcome to Biosphere Expeditions' Namibia 2007 diary. I'm Peter, your expedition leader for the upcoming four slots, and you will be hearing from me regularly over the next few weeks.

Yesterday I arrived met up with Matthias, Biosphere's founder and managing director. We went through paperwork and packed up the equipment – more is stored at the Okomitundu study site in Namibia. Harald, one of our scientists in Namibia, just rang to tell us the Land Rovers are ready and waiting!

This will be Biosphere's 7th expedition on cheetahs in Namibia and for the last couple of years leopards and brown hyaenas have also joined in.

Later today I will be boarding a flight to Windhoek where it is warm (30°C) and sunny, so don't forget sunscreen!

I am looking forward to meeting the scientists and we will get everything ready for the first team members arriving next Monday.

I will write again from Okomitundu.

Peter Schuette
Expedition Leader

31 August

Made it to Namibia, but my luggage did not, so here is a word of warning. Apparently Johannesburg airport luggage handling is in chaos and there have been lots of cases of luggage not making it in time. If you are coming via Jo'burg, ask at check-in whether you can retrieve your luggage there and then re-check it for your Windhoek flight. This should give you the best chance of emerging with your luggage in Windhoek.

But on to brighter things: we're all getting ready for you here, the farm and cars are prepped, most of the equipment is ready and we are all looking forward to slot 1's arrival. A couple of days ago our interns also found tracks of the three collared cheetahs nearby, so it seems they have kindly proceeded to the farm in time for the expedition's start! Looks like we just need you lot to get going now....

4 September

We spent the last days before the arrival of the first team members with preparing equipment and datasheets, last shopping etc.

Yesterday Harald, Alex, Tim and me met the first slot team members in Windhoek. Everybody made it there in time (with all their luggage!). After the two hour drive to the study site at Okomitundu, we went straight into the introductory talks and risk assessment. Those who want to drive then joined the Land Rover off-road driving course led by Harald and myself whilst Alex, Tim and Sibylla (Okatumba interns) took the non-drivers for a drive to arm the box traps.

All team members had first sightings like kudu, oryx, springbok and hornbills and later in the evening around the campfire mosquitoes were spotted too ;-) !

This morning we started with a late (7:30!) breakfast, then Harald and Sibylla took everybody with two Land Rovers to check the box traps. No cheetah captured, but a honey badger in trap no 4 and a big male baboon in trap no 6. Not a bad start.

The rest of the day we spent with presentations and talks about the research, explaining datasheets, research activities during the expedition and teaching team members how to use things like GPS, compass, radio telemetry equipment...

P.S.: My luggage was delivered on Sunday afternoon!!!

5 September

After two days of training and listening to presentations, we split up into our survey groups. Harald led the spoor tracking group with Linda, Angela and Uwe. They spotted fresh tracks of the three male cheetah coalition. They also had to check box trap no 2 and had to release a stubborn porcupine which did not want to get out!

The box trap group (Sibylla, Hanne, John and Keith) had to check the other box traps, nothing was captured, but there were hyaena tracks around trap no 1! The box traps are located on trees where cheetahs frequently mark their territory or on places where leopards or brown hyaenas are passing by, or they are baited. Once captured, the animals will be immobilised to take blood samples and fit radio collars. That's the plan anyway ;)

Lots of tracks were spotted by the waterhole observation team (Tim, Kelly, Helga and Karin). This helps to determine prey density.

I took the telemetry team (Ralf, Susi and Claudia) to Mathildenhöhe where we got signals of female leopard F009. We tried to get more signals for triangulation, which was not that easy, but our efforts were rewarded! We not only got signals, we also found her fresh tracks!

After the report-back of all groups and Sibylla's presentation about carnivores, we split into the afternoon working groups.

The afternoon activities are:

Data entry – the bonus here is that you get to do something afterwards like hiking or horse riding.

The game count team drove 20 km seeing kudu, oryx, ostrich, warthog etc. and finding fresh hyaena tracks. Game count also allows calculations about the game/prey density.

The marking tree and the spoor tracking group went together to do some telemetry work and the search for tracks led by Harald, who was disappointed because the telemetry team in the morning followed the female leopard not "his" three cheetahs (there were no signals of them!!). Sadly we could get no signals at all in the afternoon. The compensation was seeing four giraffes and more fresh tracks of "Harald's" cheetahs.

It's still a little bit too hot for this time of the year during the day, in the early morning 14°C, later 30°C with the sun beating down and back to long sleeves for sitting round the camp fire in the evenings. Welcome to Africa!

6 September

Harald's telemetry team received signals of our female leopard again. But today she is on the neighbouring farm. Telemetry point no 6 was the good one. Signals of a moving F 012, the other female leopard carrying a radio collar. There was no time left to try a triangulation, but they spotted eland, kudu, hartebeest and oryx!

Spoor tracking today was really exciting. The group led by Birgit followed a leopard track up to a small plateau. Once on the plateau they found lots of bones – a leopard's dining room!

8 September

Yesterday's telemetry made Harald happy! Tim and his team got signals of two of the cheetah coalition, F005 and F006, on the neighbour's farm!

Today's team triangulated F012 with a heroic effort of climbing camelthorn trees (very long thorns!) to get a little bit further off the ground for a better signal. Spoor counting and spoor tracking is quite successful too - we found a lot of tracks of leopard, hyena and cheetah. So they are all here - somewhere, we just need a little bit of luck to see or capture them! But it's early days.

This morning's spoor counting team - they also had to check box trap no 2 - followed a fresh cheetah track getting closer and closer to the trap. But a couple of metres before the trap the cheetah turned away! So close!

Also the exhausting walks in the sandy riverbed to find more cheetah marking trees bring positive results, as it appears that some trees have been reactivated by the cats.

Everybody is now well into the daily research activities, so we are collecting data, data, data! For example, yesterday afternoon's game count saw a record number of animals with 28 different encounters including kudu, oryx, steenbok... and bat eared fox!

But it's not only work, work, work. Everybody is enjoying the chats during the lunch breaks or at the campfire -having a beer or two - in the evening! And Leica (the border collie) keeps everybody busy throwing balls or sticks, Bruno (the labrador) and Bundu (cocker) always need to be patted vigorously. I think they absolutely love it when the expedition is around!

9 September

The Sunday started with a closed box trap no 1 again. These mongoose play a joke with us! And again there are hyaena tracks around. The box trap team continued on their way finding a porcupine in box trap no 2 and a young female baboon with a little baby holding on tightly to her belly. The other groups were very successful with spoor tracking yesterday afternoon and spoor counting this morning. They found cheetah tracks, which could be followed for several kilometres. Once lost Pete, one of our Bushmen trackers with amazing skills, found them again and again. Close to a known marking tree, they spotted tracks of three cheetahs, probably our male coalition. Furthermore fresh (<24 hours) tracks of two cheetahs one female leopard and a huge male leopard were detected during the walks through the bush.

In the afternoon the whole team drove up to the Kuduspitze, the highest mountain in the Okomitundu study site (1647m) - the whole team? No! Kelly, Angela and Keith hiked all the way up through the thorny bushes. This took 1.5 hours, exhausted but happy we met them on top to experience a stunning view of the study site. Later on the way back to base camp the students prepared a table with cold drinks on Mathildenhöhe where everybody enjoyed a beautiful African sunset.

11 September

On Monday's day off everybody went with Birgit, Tim and Sibylla to Omaruru. Time for some shopping and in the afternoon they visited the Omaruru Game Lodge with an amazing game drive. Antelopes, giraffes, elephants and hippos to photographed and observe! This is what many people think of the "real" Africa, and, yes, it's great to see these animals right in front of you, but they are basically in a very large zoo. The real Africa is in our study site. Sure, it's not crawling with game and other animals as it is in the safari lodges, but at least when you do see something, you know it's a truly wild animal, not a zoo showpiece!

Tuesday - back to work, the box trap group found, as usual, hyaena tracks around trap no 1, but this time they put the bait on top of the cage. So we hope to avoid the mongoose going into the trap triggering it. Baboons again investigated trap no 2 so today two little ones were released by Birgit. The other teams - busy with observations and game counts - little by little discover the whole set wildlife in the study site, such as eland, of course kudu and oryx (first calves were seen), warthog, springbok, jackals and an incredible number of steenbok.

This week we also started checking the perimeter fence. There are always poachers around trying to hunt game with dogs and donkeys or snares. If damage is detected there is always a farm worker with the team to fix the wire.

One big group led by Sibylla and Keith (data entry worked during lunch break today) went to Kuduspitze's foot to surveying the area. While climbing up the mountain on Sunday, Keith detected scat and a sandy, promising looking area. And, sure enough, they found two leopard tracks, albeit very old ones. Kelly, almost always late for coffee in the morning, missed the sunspiders caught by Hanne. Uwe really enjoys taking photographs of them - biologists :) The kitchen keeps us happy serving lunchboxes and in the evening oryx steak or boobotje!

12 September

Today was the day! I took Karin, Helga and Kelly to check the box traps. The long way to box trap no 1 was rewarded! A brown hyaena was sitting in the trap calmly and just staring at us. First we thought, it's a juvenile male, but Birgit's inspection later in the day found that it's probably a female (it's not that easy to see with hyenas!). We will know for sure after tomorrow's examination when we will immobilise the animal. Hopefully he/she is an adult, then we can put on a radio collar! Unfortunately we don't have a collared hyaena yet. Last year's two captured animals were too young for a collar. So this would be the first!

So we informed Harald and the whole team and everybody is really excited and happy. We left the animal with water in the box trap, Birgit is preparing everything for tomorrow. Wow, what a success!

Usually it takes more than 140 trap nights to catch an animal in a trap (one night with six armed traps is six trap nights!). Normal work continued and after few results during the last few days (only single signals), telemetry was successful today. They managed to get a triangulation of F009, our female leopard, which was caught and collared last year. "Stumpy" (she has a very short tail) is reliable, she is always around!

Watch this space for further news on the hyaena examination....

13 September

The whole team went out to the box trap this morning. On the way we checked box trap no 4, which was open and empty. The other four traps we secured yesterday so that we did not have to check them this morning whilst we are busy with the hyaena.

The animal was extremely timid and watched Birgit and Harald carefully when they got closer to immobilise him. Him, because later on during the examination Birgit diagnosed that the animal is a healthy small adult male (approx. four years old).

Birgit darted him and after 10 minutes we could bring him to the examination table. The body weight was 34 kg and the neck circumference 48 cm, so we could put a radio collar on! This is the first collared brown hyena in the study site. He will give us information about where the den is and in which area he roams around. Unfortunately it was not possible to take blood samples. Hyenas have got a very special metabolism and blood circulation with low blood pressure. This makes it really difficult to take blood samples. But a lot of other samples were taken such as fur, smears of ear and muzzle.

After fitting an ear tag and the collar we laid him down in the shade to wake up, which took over one hour! He got up, still drugged and staggered about like a drunkard! Later in the afternoon we received his signals moving into the area where we presume the den must be.

After the exciting morning we kept on working in our normal groups on our usual activities of game count, border fence and data entry, etc. In between the afternoon activities we armed all the other box traps again for tomorrow's round of checks. Alex's team not only got signals of our newly-collared hyaena - they also had signals of two of our (Harald's) cheetah coalition! So the task for tomorrow's telemetry group will be to try a triangulation.

Quite a few leopard tracks were found over the last few days. A big male's for example very close to box trap no 3 (when the trap was not armed during the hyaena examination!) but luckily he didn't even notice the trap. Imagine the leopard would have walked into and straight out of the trap again whilst it was disarmed. How annoying that would have been!

15 September

Yesterday the last day of data collection by the first team was completed. Again THAT porcupine was trapped in box trap no 2 and again it didn't want to leave... We found many spoor today such as male leopard close to trap no 3 from Thursday, in the riverbed next to trap no 6 a female leopard and large a hyaena track around trap no 4! Whilst spoor counting, the team found two very fresh hyaena tracks. Unfortunately we also found spoor of poachers with donkeys and dogs again and the waterhole observation team led by Alex has seen people crossing the farm.

I would like to say a big thank you to the first Biosphere Expeditions team for all the work collecting data and filling in datasheets! We had a lot of success in the last two weeks. 9 captures (one carnivore!), a large amount of tracks (12 x cheetah, 15 x hyaena, 18 x leopard) and lots of game sightings. I am sure the memory of the capture and examination of the brown hyena will stay with you for a long time! Not to mention the beautiful sunrise next to Eulenkuppe, the freezing mornings, all the steenboks around, the dogs and the honey badger!

19 September

After a hectic Monday morning in Windhoek shopping and organising, Sibylle, Tim, Alex and I picked up the new team members at Casa Piccolo. The usual procedures and lectures followed in the afternoon and everybody went to bed really early after this long day.

On Tuesday we checked the box traps (nothing, not even spoor) and put bait in some. Game was spotted by the team members such as hartebeest, kudu, ostrich ... Then Harald and I continued with presentations, explaining the equipment ...

Yesterday this year's second team split up into the four working groups to starting the first day of data collection and this was to be the day of unusual encounters!

The telemetry team led by myself found a desperate guinea fowl in box trap no 1, which must have entered the trap after the box trap team led by Harald checked the trap. Brave Nancy released the poor animal. On our way back to base we saw a rock monitor lizard just in the middle of the farm road, escaping into a tree. What a primeval animal!

Sibylla's spoor counting team found an old female cheetah spoor and the day of strange animals continued: they saw a pangolin, very unusual because they are nocturnal. Next to box trap no 4 we found massive leopard tracks, the spoor tracking team will follow them this in the afternoon. A neighbour reported some cattle losses, so we want to find out if it could be this leopard.

It's always interesting and exciting to meet different people from different countries and backgrounds. In this slot we have a whole variety from the UK, USA, Germany and Taiwan.

20 September

Today we had a lot of action! I went out with Mary Beth, Jenny and Pearl to check the box traps. The first one, where we put new bait yesterday was closed but empty. We could find tracks of a honey badger and spoor of digging underneath the trap. Somebody (the honey badger) was interested in the bait! In trap no 3 we found a really unhappy juvenile. I immediately released the animal and it ran away. Such a beautiful small cat!

Telemetry was successful today, they managed to do a triangulation of leopard F012 in the western part of the study site. She was moving, so it'll be exciting to seeing where she will be tomorrow.

And today was also the tracker's day. We found nine tracks of different animals! Five leopard and four cheetah tracks. A female cheetah passed by trap no 2, missing it only by two metres. Like the leopard in the last week! Why don't they go in? But it was a great successful day nevertheless.

24 September

In the afternoon I dropped Harald and his team to check marking trees. Shortly before dropping them off, an African wildcat shot out off the bush. What a nice surprise seeing this cat.

The game count and waterhole observation groups report a lot of sighting. Kudu, oryx, hartebeest, eland, steenbok, ostrich, baboon, warthog, impala, hyrax, cory bustard and jackal were all spotted. The record is a group of 64 (!) kudu so far.

The search for spoors whether by chance or during spoor counting also brings good results. The teams found seven leopard, three cheetah and three hyena tracks in the last few days.

The box traps, however, are successful only in capturing porcupine and baboon so far.

On early Friday morning a neighbouring farmer informed Harald and Birgit that she had seen a cheetah cub in the middle of the gravel road obviously looking for its mother. So Birgit went with her team to following the mother's track but they could only follow it to the border fence of one of the neighbouring farms we don't have access to.

Early Sunday morning brought a nice surprise. The box trap team radioed that there was a brown hyena in trap no 1. Birgit went there immediately to find that the animal was a juvenile. So Birgit and Harald decided to do a "hot release", which means no examination, just setting the animal free. The reasons for this decision are: the animal is not adult, so we can not put a collar on and it's always difficult to take blood samples because there is only very low blood pressure with immobilised hyenas. So an immobilisation would be unnecessarily stressful for the animal. Everybody met up at box trap no 1 and took good photographs of Harald releasing the hyena.

In the afternoon the whole team drove up to Kuduspitze for telemetry and a short walk (Kathy, Chris, Jens, Tim and Alex hiked up!), later enjoying the stunning sunset and celebrating Nick's birthday!

Today is the day off and the whole team went with Harald, Alex and myself to Omaruru for shopping and joining the game drive at the game lodge with rhinos, elephants and hippos in the afternoon.

26 September

Back in the real wilderness of Okomitundu. Yesterday we placed new bait in box traps no 3 and no 5 and the teams started their daily field work again.

Poor Harald had a small accident while blowing up a balloon for his kids it burst and a part of it hit his eye. So he had to go to Windhoek to see the doctor but luckily it's only two scratches on the retina, he'll be okay within a few days.

No fresh tracks found in the morning - nothing to follow in the afternoon, so I took the spoor tracking team equipped with the telemetry stuff to the western part searching for "Harald's" cheetahs. No sign of them, but instead we had very strong signals of female leopard F012, first moving then resting. We followed the signals and found her position on the foot of a hill. The search with binoculars was successful – the luckiest expedition leader on earth could see the beautiful cat for two seconds just disappearing behind bushes and rocks! WOW!

After dinner the team split up into three teams. Two teams doing night observation (full moon!) at Alter Damm and Felixposten and the rest went with Tim for telemetry work in the Apostelhills searching for the collared hyena.

After a short night we went out this morning as usual. At the report back (Harald is with us again – with one eye ;-)) a successful triangulation of F 012, several game sightings at Johannesposten and a two days old leopard spoor were reported. The box traps team and myself had to release two juvenile baboons, which were really scared when Kathy and I went to the trap to set them free.

30 September

The last days of the 2007 second team's data collection were quite successful and exciting. While climbing up hills for telemetry one team disturbed a troop of baboons complaining about the trouble-makers in their territory. And the efforts led to results: we had a lot of signals and triangulations of the leopards and a few of the newly collared hyaena. While spoor counting and checking the border fences our teams found a lot of evidence of poaching such as donkey and dog tracks as well as cut wires. One of the teams found very interesting sign of poachers such as a comb (!) and a wooden arrow in Herero style!

Several tracks of cheetah, leopard and brown hyaena were spotted in the last few days, a new marking tree was found and the observation team on Felixposten on Friday morning had fourteen sightings including a troop of approximately thirty baboons.

Mary Beth, Jenny and Pearl went out with me spoor counting on Friday morning and we were really lucky to see another African wildcat for several minutes close to the farm road.

The second slot has come to an emotional end and team members travel back home or continue their adventures. A big thank you to everyone for your hard work in the field. I'm sure you will not forget moments such as Nick's birthday at Mathildenhöhe, the release of the juvenile brown hyaena and the sightings of African wildcat and leopard!

A special thank you to our vet from Georgia, US who fixed one wounded horse, you have done a great job!

I am now in Windhoek for the next few days as we have one week off. Looking forward to slot three in a week.

10 October

Again we have quite an international mix here for slot three and everybody settled in on Monday. With the introductory talks and presentations now completed, this morning we split up into the teams and started the field work. Richard, Inga, Gabriele and Sue went spoor counting with Oliver and our tracker Piet. Like the telemetry team (Corinne, Pascale and Elliot) led by myself there was not much to report.

Sibylla took Pamela, Jan and Julie out to check box traps. This was also uneventful, but they spotted a group of at least 25 impala, some ostriches and a snake (they are still busy debating what species it was). Peter and Paul were dropped at Alter Damm for observation. Last night and the night before were really cold (about six degrees centigrade in the morning) and quite windy, so not many animals were seen.

But everyone now has an idea what the daily field work is like and we look forward to collecting more data in the days to come.

11 October

The morning has started promising. The telemetry team got signals of F012 again and managed a triangulation, so we now know quite well where her territory is and where she usually hangs around during the day. Additionally Assa found a very fresh track of her just on the road. In the afternoon Birgit and myself went back managing another triangulation and Birgit and some of the team members thought they saw her, but I still don't believe it :-> In the days ahead we will keep looking and then we'll see, if it was a rock or F012.

Sue, Inga, Gabriele, Richard, myself and Piet checked the box traps when we came across a honey badger in trap no 5 and another one just outside. It seems like the juvenile was inside the cage, the mother outside very concerned and busy digging and investigating the trap for a release of her youngster.

So better call the "bagder-man"! All of you who have been here during a honey badger capture/release know Harald's stories about the dangerous beast that can, when provoked, be extremely dangerous.

We called our scientist to release the creature with the spoor counting and observation team joining us, and so we went close to the box trap with two cars. Birgit - jumping from the car onto the top of the trap, the mother honey badger must have been still around, lifting the gate and the creature ran out of the trap directly underneath the Double Cab car hiding on the back axle! Great!

Now everybody stayed in the car, on the roof rack, on the back of the Double Cab or (Birgit) on top of the box trap with one young honey badger sitting underneath the car and another angry one somewhere around! So we tried to persuade the youngster to leave by driving around in the riverbed and finally after several tries the youngster jumped off disappearing into the bushes.

So, please everybody, never make Harald an object of ridicule again about honey badgers. Just believe him! These are really dangerous animals ;-) they attack cars from underneath especially when there are people on the back!

By the way, we also captured and released a juvenile baboon this morning and in the afternoon we replaced bait in two box traps and one riverbed hoping to attract leopards and hyaenas.

15 October

The last few days we have been busy with intensive field work. We came across closed traps with warthog or baboon, as well as empty ones. No carnivore captures so far with this group. But F012 is always around, we constantly have telemetry signals of her. We could also record some signals of one animal of the male cheetah coalition, namely F005.

Peter and Paul solved the mystery of the F012 sighting last Thursday. They went for an observation shift back to the rock (telemetry point "T5") and it turned out that Birgit's leopard sighting was a rock after all. What a pity!

Observation and Game Count activities were very interesting this week. Lots of sightings, almost a new record (a group of 60! kudus) and interesting observations of animal behaviour on a very windy day. For example, one oryx needed more than an hour to decide to drink from the waterhole. We also saw an ancient warthog and an aardvark, very unusual for daytime!

Again the team found signs of poaching as well as four fresh cheetah, two leopard and one hyena track around trap no 1.

Unfortunately we did not manage to do a triangulation of our newly-collared hyaena, so we have to try a night telemetry shift next week again! This will be exciting - lying in wait for the hyaena in the dark.

Spoor tracking in the afternoon, led by Sibylla and Piet, managed to following two parallel cheetah tracks, probably F005 and F007, for quite a distance and Harald (originally busy with game count!) was keen to see the animals, but the two teams chasing the cheetahs through the bush ran out of time and it got dark! But they must have been very close, they had such strong telemetry signals!

Sunday's afternoon started with five brave hikers (Elliot, Ester, Richard, Sibylla and myself) trying to beat the record up the Kuduspitze and missing it only by a few minutes! On the way down five lucky hikers and the rest of the team (who drove up) spotted a klipspringer and a troop of mountain zebras just before enjoying a stunning sunset!

20 October

One of our morning activities, namely spoor counting (you sit together with a tracker on the bonnet/wing of one of our Land Rover Defenders and watch out for spoor on the farm road) was very successful. A lot of spoor were detected. All together as many as during slot no 1, so there is no disturbance through our movements. One cheetah track of two animals - probably F005 and F007- led directly to the box trap at Kuduposten. They surrounded the kraal, had a look into the trap but the track ended twenty centimetres in front of the cage. Another example how patient a field worker must be to have success with the studies. One day they will walk in again!

We continued to chase hyena F014, but only some single weak signals reached us. Also during night telemetry brave Birgit took a team just in front of the den's entrance.

Observation gets more and more interesting. Animals shift their activity to the morning now because it's getting really hot during the day, so all teams report many sightings at various observation points.

On Wednesday afternoon the spoor tracking team following a female cheetah track, which was spotted in the morning, found spoor of a cheetah hunting probably a springbok, but no fresh kill was found.

Thursday morning Harald's nightmare continued! The box trap team reported a honey badger in trap six! After a closer look they found that the honey badger was stuck with its head in one of the gates, so Birgit and Harald decided to immobilise the youngster to get him out of this dangerous situation. So OWR's first immobilisation of a honey badger took place. Once darted successfully by Harald we freed him and took pictures. What's not on the picture is how smelly this beautiful animals is!

During the last few days of this year's third group it has been very hot and cloudy, everybody expected rain but there was only a few drops and a little bit of thunder. Now I am sitting in Windhoek waiting for Monday's arrival of slot no 4 and here is a huge downpour of rain, as always with thunder and lighting!

This morning we had late breakfast, then after Harald's summary report we made our way to Windhoek where the major part of the team spends the afternoon in the city before flying home. Thank you all for your participation and all your efforts. Safe travels.

26 October

The last team for this year's Namibia expedition is now familiar with the study site. Daily data collection activities went perfectly smoothly from the third to the fourth group. Unfortunately the box traps stay frustratingly empty. Probably the cheetahs went further away following their prey to regions where rain has already fallen. So at the moment we have also few spoors and activity around the marking trees. But we hope that us changing the baits in box traps 1, 3, 5 and 6 will be rewarded in the next few days!

During the day it gets really hot now, so we have shifted the afternoon activities from 15:30h to 16:00h. During game count in the afternoon we have an average of 21 sightings on both transects (A and B) mostly groups of kudu, hartebeest, oryx, springbok, lots of steenbok, ostrich, cory bustard, warthog and, of course, baboon.

Very reliable are the leopards F009 and F012. Almost every day we receive signals, so we are able to do triangulations for a better calculation of their home ranges. Sometimes the teams are really close (the signals are very loud and strong) but the animals themselves are so well camouflaged and really hard to spot in the bush.

Because of the full moon the visibility is very good in the night, so we've been putting in observation shifts at Alter Damm and Felixposten yesterday and tonight, sitting on a rock in the middle of the night listening to many strange noises seeing zebras, oryx and duikers approaching the waterhole. At Alter Damm one group spotted the very elusive caracal, the other group an aardvark!

28 October

On Saturday morning Sian, Ellen, Sandro, Esther and Assa had to check the box trap at Zebraposten during spoor count on transect 1. Gates were closed - it was a big male baboon set free by Sandro and Assa.

Fresh hyaena tracks, but no signals. Harald's assumption is that our hyaena must have somehow destroyed the transmitter – they do have extremely powerful jaws after all. But female leopard F009 is still around close to base, we heard strong signals from telemetry point 1 (veranda at swimming pool ;) even yesterday late in the evening. And we could hear warning calls of impala and others. This morning Sibylla with Verena, Peter and Stuart completed another triangulation of her and in the afternoon we will be busy with more telemetry from the highest mountain in the study site, Kuduspitze.

Everybody is looking forward to tomorrow's day off, the heat around midday is now pretty bad, so we need to cool down in the pool now and then ;))

31 October

It seems like the animals are coming back to us. Spoor count could record couple hyaena and two cheetah tracks. Around box traps no 2 we found a female leopard spoor, unfortunately only around the trap! Observation is getting more and more exciting, yesterday's team at Felixposten has seen 35 animals and this morning's group could observe a snake eagle killing a sand growse. At telemetry point six, just south of Johannesposten, we found leopard scat and had strong signals of F012. Continuing the chase for cheetah signals of F005 and F007, we drove a long way on the main gravel road to cover a bigger area and the area north of the main study site.. This work was unfortunately unrewarded. No signals of our coalition.

After the release of a warthog from trap 6 the highlight of the day was the giraffe sighting by Ellie, Andy and Roger during checking the border fence. And they spotted two very fresh cheetah tracks, one leopard track and a dead fox. What an action in one afternoon!!!! Spoor tracking in the afternoon followed the cheetah tracks found in the morning and could find a spot where the predator was hunting an oryx! So they are around, we just have to find them!!!

Today's afternoon when I just came back from Windhoek the first rain fell in Okomitundu! Game count got wet and we have been impressed by Matt's well chosen gear including the red umbrella! Just before the rain came Sian, Sandro and Ellen spotted all four giraffes again approximately 10 km far away from yesterday's spot.

1 November

On telemetry we got strong signals of F009, just like yesterday, and while trying a triangulation the signals got stronger and stronger. Only just could I prevent crazy Ellie from running towards the signal when suddenly Andy shouted: "I can see her"! And there she was just lying on a rock 150 m away from us! So close! We spent half an hour observing and through the binos we could see her eyes observing us too. Eventually we had to leave to go back to base.

3 November

On the last day of data collection Harald and his team managed a triangulation of both female leopards. The box trap team had to release a baby baboon. The 2007 expedition has come to the end and after two months of field work Okomitundu will now be a much quieter place. Let me thank everyone for their excellent contribution. It was vital for making the expedition a success! So long and I hope to see you on another expedition in the not too distant future.

Peter Schuette
Expedition Leader