



# EXPEDITION DIARY Namibia 2011 (rotation 1)

By Jenny Kraushaar

21 January

Dear Namibia expeditioners

I hope everyone has had a great start to the new year. This is the first diary entry for the 2011 Biosphere Expeditions project to Namibia. My name is Jenny Kraushaar and I will be your expedition leader. I am on my way to Namibia, where I will meet Dr. Ulf Tubbesing and Kristina Killian, our scientists and together we will get everything ready again to continue our research on large cats on Ongos.

We have been busy building new box traps and they are now ready, with your help, to catch some more leopards and other cats. As the rainy season has started and water levels are quite high, please bring some adequate clothing and be prepared for humid weather and gorgeous sunsets. Everyone is looking forward to seeing you out here soon.

A few quick points of admin, before I go: the expedition leader mobile phone number in Namibia is +264 81 6208672. This number is for emergency calls only, such as being late for assembly due to late flights, etc. Excerpts of this diary will appear on [www.facebook.com/pages/Biosphere-Expeditions/132594724471](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Biosphere-Expeditions/132594724471) and the site to share pictures on is [www.biosphere-expeditions.org/pictureshare](http://www.biosphere-expeditions.org/pictureshare).

We'll see you in Africa :-)

Jenny Kraushaar  
Expedition leader

30 January

After the heavy rain during the last few days we were a bit worried if we would be able to collect the team from the assembly point. Luckily the level of the river dropped overnight so that we were able to cross the ford.

All team members were in a good mood when we met them. We were pleased to see that this team represents eight different countries, so we are really happy to welcome volunteers from Australia, New Zealand, Norway, Canada, UK, Netherlands, US and Switzerland. As this was the first day without rain we wonder which of them brought the sunshine. We discovered that they all have something in common: they are always late. We must give them dictation 'we must not be late'

31 January

It seems that Michael and Branko are real women as they kept their team members in neighbouring tents awake all night with their never ending chatter and gossiping. They even drowned out the frogs.

In the morning everyone was greeted by the rhinos who came for a visit at the lapa and after learning everything about changing tyres and how to clean Land Rovers, we had a fabulous lunch prepared out of "Omajova" (the huge mushroom that grows on the local termite mounds).

The afternoon was full of excitement as the "non-drivers" went out with Ulf for a game drive and David spotted a leopard on a kill. So this will be the spot for our box trap tomorrow....

## 1 February

Setting up box traps were the main activities of the day and almost everyone had an encounter with a black Mamba. (luckily it was found dead). It is only the first day of activity but we have already caught a leopard on the camera trap picture, found leopard tracks on the road and seen one hanging in the tree (our tame Induna). Unfortunately there are millions of caterpillars around and everyone got them everywhere. We all wonder if Charlene will make it on time for breakfast tomorrow...

## 2 February

Everyone was at breakfast ON time so we were able to make an early start with the activities. Unfortunately it was still raining but everyone was well prepared. Group 1 and 4 went to set up the third box trap while the other groups were busy checking camera traps and looking for tracks.

Box trap 1 and 2 worked very well last night and a porcupine and a vulture were caught. Mark, Lydia, Helge and Susanne went to the township of Katutura to gather information about the health status of domestic animals.

## 3 February

Foot game count between caterpillars, snakes, spiders and thorns - and no complaints! Thanks to everyone, you did a great job. In the evening we had a quiz about white rhinos and waterbuck, a 'balloon' story about mongooses and a nice demonstration from Branko, the black-backed jackal.

## 4 February

A very successful morning. After patting the rhinos everyone went out on activities. Charlene spotted leopard tracks in front of Induna's enclosure and Sharon, Branko, and Jessica spotted different tracks of a leopard with a cub. We then checked the camera trap and there we found a big male leopard looking straight at the camera. In the afternoon we weren't able to conduct the game drive as it was pouring with rain so we stayed back at the camp and enjoyed a presentation given by Ulf.

## 5 February

Day off. Almost everyone stayed back at camp and enjoyed heavy rain, thunderstorms and lightning. Our hero Branko saved Charlene's life in the wet river. The box trap caught a warthog which wasn't too happy about being trapped, so Michael released it. Jacobien, Mark, Michael and Sharon thought they were smart enough to escape the rain and went up the mountains but after only 10 minutes they got caught by thunder and heavy rain and the back of the Land Rover turned into a swimming pool. We are still busy drying all their clothes.

## 6 February

Wow! It finally stopped raining so we were able to do some telemetry work. Mark, Helge and Susanne were the lucky ones tracking Lucy's signal and finally spotting her. That was the first time we have seen her in the flesh since she was collared in May 2010. Great!

Another leopard was found on one of the camera trap pictures this morning, close to our box trap. Three words only about the afternoon: rain rain rain. By the way, in the Windhoek district it is the record rainfall for the last hundred years ;-)

## 7 February

We can't believe it. When we got up the sun was out. Happy birthday Charlene! We went to pick up 12 school kids from Katutura and we were happy to see 30 other kids going on a trip to an education centre in the desert, which was kindly sponsored by Biosphere and Stormsaver. We had a great morning with the kids and when it was time to leave we had difficulties getting them out of the waterhole. And hey, as we had a look at the afternoon sky we found big heavy clouds and thunder again so only a few volunteers went still out to count game and they got rewarded by a leopard sighting! This is the third wild leopard sighting within this slot, amazing!

Welcome Slot 2. Before we even introduced ourselves at Casa Piccolo, the team members had already learnt how to change a tyre. We only have three Land Rovers at the moment so Adam, Summer and Andrew were kind enough to volunteer to ride on the back of the Land Rover. Poor Summer figured out that she got a holiday visa for one week only, so we will take her to Home Affairs tomorrow.

14 February

First night in the bush and everyone was kept awake by frogs and baboons. After breakfast the team members were taught how to fill out datasheets, how to use a GPS, a compass, telemetry and how to change tyres on the Land Rover. In the afternoon we trained five team members in driving skills and we are wondering how they will cope with our washed out roads in the mountains.

15 February

Adventure day. Group 2 and 3 went out with Kristina, Jenny and Emanuel to set up a box trap and before they even got to the spot, they experienced the maximum speed of rhinos. Luckily Adam didn't follow the speed limit so we escaped just in time. After the friendly rhino chase, we found fresh tracks of a leopard attacking a red hartebeest, so we put up the box trap just next to it. In the afternoon, Summer, Davina and Andrew found out that it can actually hale in Afrika. Sorry guys, we didn't see that thunderstorm coming ....

16 February

Box trap 5 was set up this morning and we were probably being watched by leopards as there were fresh tracks around. Poor Milton, Avril and Pat had to bait Box trap 3 with a stinky warthog leg. During lunch break Milton, Andrew and Adam tried their best to repair a camera trap, but without success.

17 February

Summer, Milton, Tessa, Mona, Adam, Andrew and Davina were so excited about our new box trap that they decided to check it... at 6 am! The trap was closed but empty. On their way back they hit a road block of rhinos, so the foot game count start had to be delayed and after the heavy rain last night no one was prepared for the sunshine.

Pat did an incredible job walking the 4.3 km up and down the hills in rubber boots.

18 February

After Matthias and Angela realised this expedition is NOT a Land Rover Experience trip through Namibia, they actually got used to walking through the bush. They returned 2 hours late from their trip in the mountains and Matthias ended up naming his blisters Jenny and Kristina :-). We started the vehicle game count with thunder and lightning but only Milton, Avril and Pat caught the heavy rain.

Surprisingly we had a clear sky in the evening so we could sit around the campfire. Then Adam decided to change a flat tyre by the light of the full moon.

19 February

The day off was almost like a holiday. No clouds in the sky, no cars were broken, no caterpillar accidents, no one got lost, no one was chased by rhinos and everyone came back smiling. Summer, Andrew, Tessa, Mona and Adam decided to walk up and down the canyon and whenever it got too hot, they jumped in one of the waterholes.

20 February

After a "quite" normal morning of activities, group 2 had fun in the afternoon. They were meant to do a vegetation survey but when they had arrived at the main gate, Bernd realized he had lost his shoes. They must have fallen off the roof of the Land Rover where he had absent mindedly put them before the group set off from base. So group 2 had to do a new activity in the afternoon- SHOE TRACKING.

In the evening we started sorting out gifts for the school kids. As soon as our male team members spotted the soccer ball that Adam had brought, they were all ready for a barefoot soccer game at the lapa. Adam is now suffering from black and blue toes so he had to remove himself from the Tracks and Scats activity on Wednesday.

21 February

After surviving the kids in the morning, Group 4 went on a vehicle "spider count" which was meant to be the vehicle "game count". The girls sitting on the roof of the Land Rover had to fight their way through spiderwebs. However, even with their harsh screaming they still managed to see a few animals... these must have been the deaf ones. After dinner we were treated to a surprise for dessert: an unpeeled banana on a plate with a spoon.... someone forgot to fry them :-)

The nights have now become the time for soccer games where the spotlight and Land Rover headlights are turned into floodlights. Half of the team members are now injured but the girls almost beat the guys. ;- ) Stay tuned for the next exciting 'gender football' showdown.

22 February

Due to heavy rain, only seven brave people went out for the foot game count. They also had to cross the river and needed time to wring out their socks afterwards. Our evening presentation was split in two parts as the projector and the computer broke down at the same time. So we filled the break with SOCCER :-)

23 February

Almost a sunny day of activities. And the Hyaena seems back. We found her on one of the camera trap pictures. Two groups went to Katutura to interview local people today and got a good impression of how local people use their pets for protection.

24 February

The last survey morning started in the rain, so our tracks & scats group had to come back earlier. The telemetry group had success finding Lucy and more tracks close to Induna. The afternoon is filled with cleaning up, presentations and SOCCER of course. Unfortunately we couldn't have our last day sundowner at Elephant mountain due to heavy dark clouds.

28 February

All the team members from Slot 3 had been out for dinner the night before we picked them up, so everyone had already got to know each other by the time we collected them at Casa Piccolo in the morning. Luckily Gabi found out just in time that the Namibia Expedition is NOT a diving expedition.

After 2 days of training, everyone was confident enough to experience the African bush. We are very happy with our nine new camera traps that Alan brought along from the US and we have already put them up. So our number of camera traps has increased now to 13. Our fifth box trap was placed in the Mountains and poor John has already had a bad encounter with the caterpillars. The camera trap pictures proved our skills in tracking and showed a brown hyaena just where we found some tracks.

4 March

On Thursday we had a very early morning with everyone showing up for breakfast by 06.00. The foot game count started at sunrise and everyone came back talking about thorny bushes and spiders. In the evening, Greg and Dolly felt the itch to dance. Just before dinner a chilling noise was heard not far away from camp and we figured out it must have been leopard catching a baboon for its dinner. On Friday, we conducted our vehicle game count and spotted 28 red hartebeest, 15 giraffes, 3 ostriches, 46 oryx, 7 kudu, 20 eland, 37 warthogs, 31 zebras and on top of it group 3 spotted an African wildcat.

7 March

The data entry group had to look through 3000 pictures from our camera traps. When we suddenly heard cheers and screams of excitement, we rushed to have a look and thought it had to be a perfect leopard picture, but they were celebrating an ostrich picture! Later on, they also found three different leopard pictures taken by three different camera traps. The day off was very relaxed and everyone stayed back at camp. Thea and John were brave enough to release a big female warthog which was trapped in one of our box traps.

On Sunday night we had clear sky so decided to conduct a night drive after dinner.

10 March

After a very wet morning on Tuesday we were fortunate to still be able to conduct our vehicle game count in the afternoon. Poor Gabi got several thorns in her while in the back of the car so the "after dinner activity" was removing thorns from Gabi. As we had to remove one of the box traps, we found a very good new spot just behind the camp where we had found leopard and hyaena tracks the other day. Alan and Greg are still being a big help in solving some camera trap problems, they even walk up and down the lapa at night to check the settings. Thanks guys.