MALE ROCK HYRAXES *Procavia capensis*
RETURN TO FORMER HOME RANGES AFTER
TRANSLOCATION

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Feeding of rock hyraxes by tourists at the Storms River Mouth rest camp in the Tsitsikamma Coastal National Park, Republic of South Africa, has led to taming of the hyraxes, soliciting of food from tourists and occasionally to aggression resulting in tourists being bitten. As a result it was decided to capture and translocate a number of the tamer hyraxes during 1981. At the rest camp the hyraxes occur in well defined groupings (Fairall & Crawford 1983, *S. Afr. J. Wildl. Res.* 13: 25-26). All the animals caught were from the Sandbay – office group.

A release point was selected at Steilkop (Fig. 1), an area suitable for colonization but not then utilized. In all 25 animals were captured and held near the research laboratory at Paul Sauer-hoek until a sufficient number had been obtained for translocation. On capture the hyraxes were tagged using serially numbered “floy” fish tags to which were attached Petersen discs of different colours enabling individual recognition at a distance. The animals were aged (Fairall 1980, *S. Afr. J. Zool.* 15: 15-21) and sexed before being transported to Steilkop in batches.

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Four hyraxes, three females (36 months, 24 months and <12 months of age) and one male (36 months old), escaped at Paul Sauer-hoek. The young female was recaptured near the laboratory after frequently being observed in its vicinity for a period of two weeks. The two older females sought cover in the surrounding indigenous forest and were not seen again. The male escaped on 25 September 1981 and was seen back in the Sandbay-office vicinity on 4 December 1981 and subsequently. The laboratory area is surrounded by tall indigenous forest which was never entered by the hyraxes occupying the coastal strip, although they sometimes entered the dry shrub forest between the coast and the moist high forest (*pers obs.*). A tarred road of about four km joins the rest camp area with the Paul Sauer-hoek complex. The first two km runs through indigenous forest or fynbos and the last two km through the rest camp to the Sandbay-office area. It is assumed that the male hyrax used this route to return to his territory.

Four batches of hyraxes totalling 22 individuals (18 females and four males) were released at Steilkop between 14 September 1981 and 6 November 1981. Five of the females were estimated to be less than 12 months old, three about 24 months of age and 10 older than three years. One male was about 24 months of age and the others three years or older. Each batch of hyraxes was transported by road over a distance of about 70 km. Hyraxes were seen at the release point on 24 October 1981 and again on 6 November 1981, showing that some had survived the translocation in the short term.

Five months after the last release the carcass of one of the older males with its tag still intact was found near a small stream about 200 m northeast of Sandbay. The state of the carcass was such that the cause of death could not be determined. The release site at Steilkop lies about one km east of the Storms River which enters the sea about 800 m east of Sandbay. A narrow suspension bridge crosses the river and must have been used by this male in returning to the Sandbay vicinity. A separate group of hyraxes is established in the vicinity of the bridge, along the route that must have been followed.

Two of the four older males removed from the Sandbay-office group are therefore known to have returned to the vicinity of their former home range, but none of the twenty females have since been observed in the area of the rest camp. It appears as if older males have the ability to move considerable distances through and across unknown terrain to their former home ranges and show a tendency to re-establish themselves in their earlier territories.

Sex and age compositions of 58 hyraxes caught from the major groupings in the rest camp area during 1981 are shown in Fig. 2. It is apparent that few males of less than three years of age occur in these groups. By contrast the age distribution of females is relatively uniform and numbers of males and females three years or older do not differ markedly. Males are presumably evicted from the main groupings until about three years old, but once established in an area seem to show a greater degree of site fidelity than do females.

Fig. 1. Sketch map of the study area.

Fig. 2. Age distributions of male and female rock hyraxes caught from the major groupings in the Storms River Mouth rest camp during 1981.