Easing the Ennemy
helping livestock farmers coexist with spotted hyaenas

Spotted hyaenas are among the most misunderstood and unloved carnivores in the world. These extremely intelligent, opportunistic and curious animals are often killed on farms in response to livestock losses or conflict with farmers.

Many freehold and communal farmers in Namibia use fences and/or holding pens (kraals) for livestock protection and livestock conflict with farmers. If nation-wide policies and perceptions are not changed soon, we could see the Namibian spotted hyaena population decline to near unrecoverable numbers. Our research over the past four years in southern Namibia has therefore focused on understanding hyaena activities and ecology to develop ways to reduce livestock losses and thus promote coexistence between farmers and hyaenas.

Our semi-permanent fencing can greatly reduce livestock predation and thus help farmers coexist with, rather than in large camps, our semi-permanent fencing system would fortify their grazing camps, particularly in areas of known hyaena activity. This fencing system can greatly reduce livestock predation and thus help farmers coexist with, rather than conflict with, the hyaenas.

Our simple designs provide an attractive option for protecting livestock in almost all farming systems, and we have offered free fencing materials to the farming communities in the south who would like to try our system. For communal farmers who have common grazing land, we have offered this free fencing material to prevent conflict with hyaenas.

Raising livestock in areas that have a hyaena population is a more contentious method that involves fencing the entire area to prevent the hyaenas from entering. This method can be very expensive and impractical, especially in areas of high hyaena activity, such as around hills and mountains to keep livestock out of high-risk areas, and then lowered once livestock are moved to graze elsewhere, thus re-establishing free movement of wildlife and reducing the likelihood of wild animals damaging the fence.

In large camps, our semi-permanent fencing can greatly reduce livestock predation and thus help farmers coexist with, rather than conflict with, the hyaenas. Many hyaenas are mostly active at night, so our designs are primarily for use during the day. However, our designs still work during the night for three and a half months. A wild clan of four spotted hyaenas visited the kraal frequently during this test period and attempted to gain access. Their best attempts (one lasting nearly 8.5 hours!) failed, proving our design has few or no weaknesses.

We placed a gemsbok carcass in the kraal as bait and monitored it with motion-sensitive cameras and by direct observations during the night for three and a half months. All four hyaenas that were observed nocturnally during this test period and attempted to gain access. Their best attempts (one lasting nearly 8.5 hours!) failed, proving our design has few or no weaknesses.

The next idea was to design a fence suitable for the type of grazing camps commonly used on farms in southern Namibia. These camps are usually temporary and covered at night but are not designed to be hyaena-proof. Instead, we designed a semi-permanent fence that could be lowered and raised (rather than swinging open like a gate). When hyaenas tried and failed to get into our test kraal that was baited with a gemsbok carcass, we began working on designs that would prevent hyaenas from digging under the fence to access the kraal. To prevent access through the gate, we tied camel thorn branches to the base of the gate. No covering was placed over the kraal to keep the design as basic and original as possible.

Our `droppable` hyaena-proof fence can be easily lowered and erected within a few minutes. As with the farm gates, we designed this fence to allow hyaenas to escape. Our `droppable` hyaena-proof fence can be easily lowered and erected within a few minutes. As with the farm gates, we designed this fence to allow hyaenas to escape. Our `droppable` hyaena-proof fence can be easily lowered and erected within a few minutes. As with the farm gates, we designed this fence to allow hyaenas to escape.

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