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Female spotted hyenas that once sustained injuries from snaring continue to suffer damage for a long time - their reproductive success is reduced. Photos: Claudia Reiter

Many hyenas accidentally get caught in wire snares set by poachers.

- **ENVIRONMENT**

POACHING ALSO THREATENS HYENAS

Sling injuries reduce reproductive success

Among the victims of poaching in southern Africa, the hyena will not come to mind for most. A study shows that the consequences of wire snare poaching for the spotted hyena population have been grossly underestimated.

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By Katharina Moser, Windhoek

Although not a target for poachers themselves, numerous hyenas in southern Africa get caught in illegal hunting snares – and are severely injured, even if they manage to escape from them alive. This was determined by scientists from the Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research (IZW) in a study that was recently published in the zoological journal *Animal Conservation*. To do this, they analyzed the lifelong episodes of sling injuries in female spotted hyenas in Tanzania's Serengeti National Park from 1987 to 2020.

The lead authors of the study, Dr. According to Marion East and Prof Heribert Hofer, the risk for hyenas of dying in a snare is very high - in Serengeti National Park it is eight percent annually. "This is because spotted hyenas mainly prey on migratory herbivores, so they regularly travel long distances from their territories to the animal herds," the authors said. Many trapped hyenas can free themselves by chewing through the wire. The IZW scientists examined injured female hyenas from three observed clans and found that not only the individual but also the population is affected by the consequences of the snare injuries: "We were able to observe that females with such snare injuries did not have a shorter life expectancy," according to scientist Dr. Sarah Benhaiem. "However, we found a clear negative effect on the reproductive success of the females," says Sara Kaidatzi. The hyenas that suffered the injuries shortly before their first offspring had their first litter about eight months later at four and a half years instead of just over three and a half years. Also, more young of the affected hyenas did not survive the first year of life: instead of the usual 51 percent, only 42 percent of the young of a mother with a snare wound reached their first birthday in the Serengeti National Park. In addition, the litters of those affected are smaller than usual. Instead of 56 percent, only 36 percent of the boys were twins. who suffered the injuries shortly before their first offspring had their first litter about eight months later at four and a half instead of a good three and a half years. Also, more young of the affected hyenas did not survive the first year of life: instead of the usual 51 percent, only 42 percent of the young of a mother with a snare wound reached their first birthday in the Serengeti

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According to Dr. East, the reduced reproductive success of female hyenas that once injured themselves in snares may be due to increased inflammatory and immune responses to the injury. In addition, they can sometimes no longer cover such long distances to hunt their prey. "Our research shows that apart from the immediate fatalities, trapping hyenas can have unintended but profound effects on hyena populations, as females that survive capture in a wire snare with significant injuries have smaller litters, which are less likely to die." will survive," said Dr. East in summary. According to her, while these study results were only carried out with a small number of animals, they indicate