

The Hyena Scientist

Sy Montgomery and Nic Bishop

Nikhil Bhagwat

Star Teen Book Reviewer For Be The Star You Are! Charity

www.bethestaryouare.org

The book “The Hyena Scientist” by Sy Montgomery and Nic Bishop describes the authors’ experiences of monitoring a den of hyenas in Kenya with zoologist Kay Holekamp. It is said that hyenas are hated by many people because they bite children, are stinky, are weird, and more. However, Kay, who has been studying hyenas in Kenya for decades, has proven that this is not the case. She has shown that the hyena is a very smart and brave species. She has also shown that the hyena is unique compared to the other species. For example, hyenas have many unique habits that they do to maintain their lifestyle. For example, hyenas have their own sets of commands to communicate with the other hyenas in their den, and hyenas tend to groom themselves and other members of their den. Other ways that hyenas are unique include the amount of food they consume. The organization of a hyena society is also very unique. In a hyena society, females rule over males, and each member of a hyena society has its own assigned role. Males, on the other hand, tend to leave their original clan to find other clans for mating and other purposes. One example of a female who rules the den is a hyena named BUAR, or Buenos Aires, whose life has been monitored by Kay ever since BUAR was born. She rules the Talek West Clan, one of the biggest hyena clans. When the authors reach the camp that Kay and her friends are staying at, called Fisi Camp, they learn about many of the aspects of the camp, such as the “choo” and the unique shower system. Then, early the next morning, everyone splits into two groups to track the hyenas, which have been radio-collared. During this time, Ciera, one of the people who works with Kay, makes observations about the hyenas using GPS and radio signals. These observations are used to show patterns that occur in the hyena society. These radio signals are used to calculate the frequencies of the hyenas, which can be used to figure out how far away the hyenas are. For example, the observers use the radio signals to conclude that Helios, the second-highest ranking hyena of the hyena society, is within fifty yards away. They also make observations about the amount of lions in the area and use certain commands to share specific observations with the others. Using all of this information, Kay can figure out what exactly hyenas do. Another important aspect of hyenas towards research about them is their waste, which can be used to compare the amount of hormones/testosterone in immigrant males and males who haven’t left their mother’s group. A few hours later, however, the hyenas hear a cattle bell and dash into a hole, since the people who are bringing the cattle are coming towards the hyenas, meaning that the hyenas could be speared by them. Then, rain starts to occur because of an event called El Niño, preventing the people from observing the hyenas. As a result, Kay and the others have no choice but to go back to the camp for the rest of the day. However, things only get worse at sundown; the river started to overflow and reach the level of the camp until around 11 P.M.

The next day, the effects of the flood on the camp are visible, as nearly everything has been covered in mud or destroyed. To help with that, everyone decides to buy everything that was lost last night. When they get back, they notice an unknown hyena and her two cubs.

Unfortunately, it only rains harder that day, so research on the hyenas can't be done that day either. Even worse, when they realize the river has reached a height of 50 mm, everyone moves all of the materials, data, and machinery to higher ground. They use the car of Lawi, another one of Kay's friends also helping her at Fisi Camp, to move the items and valuables at the camp to a higher-elevated place. Eventually, the water stops rising. The team is still unable to research the hyenas until a few days later. On the day they can finally observe the hyenas again, they discover a few lions, along with some topi, gazelles, and other animals, but they can't seem to find any hyenas just yet. Finally, at 5 P.M., they discover two hyenas that are collared, named Otis and Tilt. The team discovers more hyenas as well as some hyenas doing a signal that Kay hasn't figured out the meaning of yet. Eventually, however, at 6 P.M., rain starts to pour again, so the team has to return back to camp. The next day, the team returns to look for young male hyenas. Unfortunately, there are no male hyenas that can be darted for study. They return a few hours later, only to realize a clan war within the clan is occurring. The clan war lasted for four minutes and occurred between three dens. It also created a lot of questions about the effects of the clan war on the boundaries and the territories of the dens, as well as that it showed how there has been tension within the clan for a while. Before long, the next day arrives, and everyone goes to a den called Dave's Den and darts a hyena named McDonalds. The drug in the dart (Telazol) has been delivered, and information about him has been recorded, such as body measurements, vitals of his blood, and the taking of a sample of something called "hyena butter" from his body, which can be used to figure out information related to his genetics and reproduction. After all of this is completed, Kay drives back to where she found McDonalds and lets him go, assuring everyone else that he will be okay from the tranquilizer dart. Once that is dealt with, McDonalds' blood samples are put in a centrifuge, where the blood is separated into its individual components. These samples, along with the "hyena butter" from hyenas, can be used to solve many mysterious questions. Later, Ciara receives a phone call about a group of hyenas. When everyone goes to the area, she sees a group of hyenas chasing a gazelle to test to see if the gazelle is worth chasing for food, known as a "test-run". The group of hyenas realize that the gazelle is too strong and decides to not eat the gazelle as prey. Then, the hyenas walk towards the observers in something called a "border patrol".

There were many things that I liked about this book. One thing I liked was how it provided many facts about hyenas. It also provided a lot of information about how information about hyenas are recorded and monitored, and it persuaded me that hyenas are not as bad as they seem. However, I didn't like how this book was very short, because it was very interesting. I would recommend this book to people ages 13 and up, since there were some confusing terms and information in the book. I would definitely recommend this book to someone else.

Recommended Titles:

Crow Smarts by Pamela S. Turner

The Octopus Scientists by Sy Montgomery

Kakapo Rescue by Sy Montgomery