

## AN UNUSUAL CASE OF SNARING IN A FREE-LIVING SPOTTED HYAENA *CROCUTA CROCUTA* FROM THE KRUGER NATIONAL PARK

V. DE. VOS

*National Parks Board of Trustees  
Department of Research and Information  
Private Bag X402  
Skukuza  
1350*

On various occasions over a period of three months an adult spotted hyaena *Crocota crocota* was reported near Skukuza Rest Camp in the Kruger National Park, Republic of South Africa, with a snare around his neck. When first seen the animal was clearly in distress. Later, after a lapse of about two months, it became obvious that the animal had somehow adapted to the circumstances. It was in no immediate mortal danger from the snare and only exhibited slight discomfort.

The animal was, however, an embarrassment to tourist traffic and after a few unsuccessful catching attempts, it was decided to destroy it. This report documents the subsequent clinical findings.

On outside appearances the neck lesion was already in an advanced state of healing, leaving only scar tissue and complete skin regeneration in a few areas (Fig. 1). At a point just below the angle of the left jaw, a wire protruded from the healed-over lesion in the neck and led via an open wound channel to the mouth where it was wedged tightly between the fourth premolar and the first molar (Fig. 2). The free end of the wire extended rigidly into the mouth, and lay in a deep gash or trough in the tongue (Fig. 2). This lesion involved about half the musculature of the tongue, but was already healed, leaving only a scar and the obvious disfigurement.

On dissecting the neck lesion it was found that the wire was embedded deeply in the subcutaneous and intramuscular tissues of the neck (Fig. 1). Dorsally and laterally the wire was enclosed by tough fibrous tissue. On the ventral aspect of the neck, just below the larynx, the wire was enclosed by a channel of firm cartilagenous tissue, allowing for free movement of the wire.

The animal was in good physical condition and had a fairly full stomach.

The snare was made of 12-14 gge (2,5 mm x 2 mm) oval steel wire.

From the clinical findings it was possible to reconstruct the line of events that must have taken place. It is obvious that the hyaena got caught by a wire snare which pulled tight around the neck just behind the head. In the ensuing struggle the hyaena must have bitten at the wire, whereupon it wedged tightly between his teeth. This probably prevented further tightening of the noose around

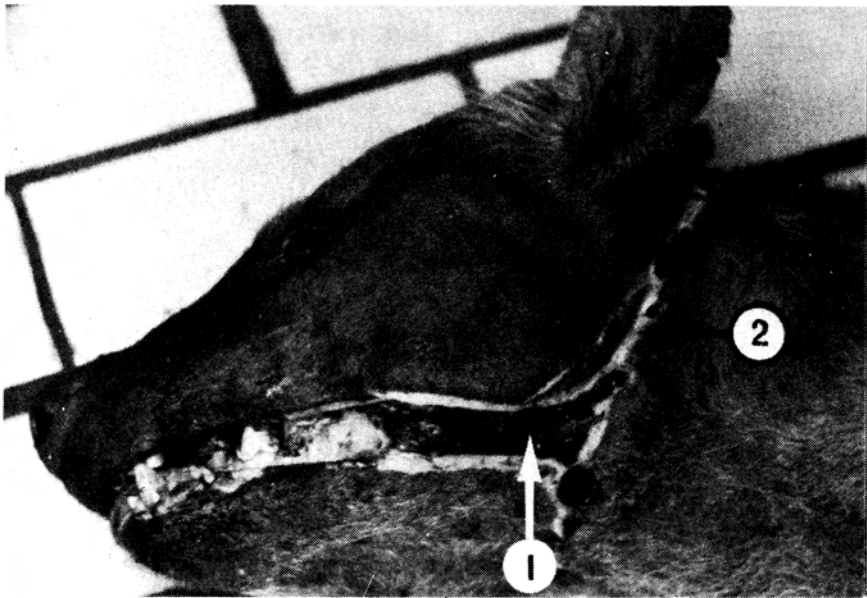


Fig. 1. Side view of a spotted hyaena showing lesions that were caused by a wire snare. Note: 1. Wire deep in cheek wound as indicated by arrow point. 2. Partially healed neck lesion.



Fig. 2. View of the mouth of a spotted hyaena with a wire snare, showing: 1. The wire entrapped between the fourth premolar and the first molar. 2. The tongue lesion which was caused by the free end of the wire.

the neck and death through suffocation. The wire eventually got turned or bent off at the level of the teeth on the right side, leaving the wire noose tightly around the neck, the wire wedged tightly between the left teeth and the free end rigidly protruding into the mouth. The tongue lesion was caused either by laceration at that stage or eventually by pressure necrosis.

The clinical findings provide an indication of how the animal adapted to his predicament afterwards, the most salient features being:

- (a) The foreign body intrusion into the neck was effectively counteracted by enclosing it with fibrous tissue and a bony cartilagenous channel at the ventral aspect of the neck, preventing further injury to underlying vulnerable tissues like the larynx, blood vessels, nerves, etc.
- (b) After the wire passed through the skin by a process of pressure necrosis, healing took place with full regeneration of the skin in certain areas. It is contemplated that in time very little of the neck lesion would have been noticeable.
- (c) The tongue lesion was completely healed, leaving only a trough (Fig. 2) which corresponded to the wire in the mouth. The wire and mouth lesions did not prevent eating and in the end apparently caused only slight discomfort.
- (d) A good physical condition and full stomach must be taken as further confirmation of successful adaptation.

The case as described must be taken as a feat of remarkable adaptation and survival in the face of adverse circumstances, which also includes a free-living competitive environment.