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Ranger Rick

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**At Home
With
Hyenas**



BY ELIZABETH SCHLEICHERT
PHOTOS BY SUZI ESZTERHAS

The spotted hyena **above** looks like a pooch, doesn't she? She even seems to be showing off a prized chew toy. But that's really the horn of a *wildebeest* (WILL-duh-beest). Where did she find it? Check out the photo at **right**.

Are you getting the picture now? Hyenas live on the plains of Africa where wildebeests graze. And those 'beests are a favorite meal.

How does a hyena, the size of a large dog, snag a creature nearly twice its size? First, it lopes toward the wildebeests, scattering them. Then it zeroes in on the weakest one and chases it—sometimes for miles, until the weary victim gives up.

But where is that female off to with her horn?

JAWSOME CREATURE!

A spotted hyena carries off a prize (left)—the horn of a wildebeest. A hyena looks like a dog but is powerful enough to go after—and kill—large grazing animals such as the wildebeests below.

Spotted hyenas are ferocious hunters. But that's only half the story here in . . .

HYENA HAVEN



HANGING OUT, HYENA STYLE

Just before dawn, and then again in the late afternoon, it's party time! Hyenas living at the den (left) come around to visit Mom and her new babies (circle at left). During visiting times and at many other times of the day, Mom lets her cubs nurse (below).



HYENAS AT HOME

That hyena on page 26 is carrying the wildebeest horn to her two young cubs to gnaw on. The little ones are waiting for her back at the den.

And what a place that den is! It's home to a dozen or so hyena mothers and their cubs, from newborns to "teens." (The den group belongs to a larger clan of hyenas living in the area.)

The den is a maze of narrow underground tunnels with many entrances. Here, moms can't

squeeze into the tunnels. But the smallest cubs can. The tunnels offer escape from enemies, such as lions.

CALLING HOURS

For hours a day, a hyena mom lolls around the den. Now and then, she welcomes visits from other den dwellers. She squeals softly to her callers, as if saying "hi" to them. The "teenagers" at the den are especially friendly and eager to greet the latest batch of babies.

Most often, a hyena mom has a litter of two. At first, the cubs' fur is dark brown. But, over time, it turns lighter and becomes spotted.

The little cubs hardly ever leave their mom's side. They spend hours a day just napping. (It's a tough life, right?) As they get bigger, they start to explore and play around the den entrance. But they still need Mom, especially come nursing time. Hyena mothers may nurse their cubs for nearly two years!

Fast Facts:

- Spotted hyenas are also called laughing hyenas. But their eerie giggles aren't laughs. They are signs of fear or anxiety.
- There are four hyena species that live in Africa.
- Spotted hyenas mostly hunt and bring down their own meals. But other hyena species eat already-dead animals.



GROWING UP HYENA

The littermates spend lots of time in wrestling matches, nipping and shoving each other. The winner of these fights becomes the "top dog" of the two.

In fact, all of the hyenas at the den have ranks. Some are more "important" than others. The ones with the highest rank have first pick of sleeping spots, for instance. And a high-ranking female gets to bring meat back to her cubs. (A lower-ranking one doesn't. Other hyenas often snatch it before she reaches the den.) And guess which cub winds up eating the meat? Yup, the winner of those wrestling matches!

This may seem unfair. But it helps keep things orderly here in hyena haven. 🐾

BECOMING BOSS

A cub digs into lunch, getting first dibs over his littermate (above). How come? Because he's proved himself the winner in fight after fight (below).

