

# THE GLOBAL LEOPARD PROJECT ERINDI NEWSLETTER 1

*Natasha de Woronin*

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2007



Phantom Tree Female (Tash), the second female Leopard captured at Erindi allowed us to view her shortly after she was fitted with a radio collar.

## **THE BEGINNING OF A NEW ERA...**

During 2007, Erindi Private Game Reserve in Namibia embarked on a new era and began a venture known as the “Erindi Conservation Project (ECP)” and ecotourism. An incredible mind set change occurred in this 71 000ha reserve when all hunting was ended to make way for this fantastic new undertaking. One aspect of the ECP is a Leopard Project that has high ambitions!

Having begun in the Sabi Sands Game Reserve as a game ranger in 1998, Leopards became a strong part of my every day life. Less than a year later, a life long dream of mine was fulfilled as I moved to Londolozi Private Game Reserve, the world’s renowned home of the Leopard. Almost 30 years ago, Londolozi began the same journey as Erindi has decided to embark on today.

From the mid 1920’s, Londolozi was involved in the hunting of predators including Leopards, due to the belief that fewer predators would ensure more ungulates. In 1978, the first ever close relationship between men and a single Leopard began. Less than 30 years later, this phenomenal connection of trust exists with more than 30 Leopards moving on and off the Londolozi property.

It is interesting to note that many projects involved in Leopard work get very few opportunities to view their subjects. In many instances, even though a Leopard may be radio collared and able to be tracked, it does not mean that one will get a view at all.

This fact poses an interesting question...what is the key factor that initiates viewing relations between people and Leopards? Is it simply that there are certain Leopards in the world that will allow us to become part of their life? Perhaps in time, we will know more.

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Capture and collaring of Leopards at Erindi began in 2007 and it was in March that the first female was captured and fitted with a radio collar for information gathering. During September 2007, the attempts to capture and collar these cats were accelerated and a pilot study ran over three weeks of the month. Within the first week, a beautiful female Leopard was found and fitted with tracking equipment by Dr Douw Grobler and JJ van Altena of Catchco Africa and the Erindi team. Only 8 days after her capture experience (named Tash), this female allowed me to view her for the first time ever! A magic moment frozen in time...

The Leopard originally collared in March 2007 (Tsakapae) was also recaptured during this time but for unknown reasons, she has not yet allowed us to view her.

The creation of the Global Leopard Project (GLP) has been inspired by the plight of Leopards around the world. In Africa, we live on a diamond mine of Leopard information that can surely aid all others of the species. Londolozi has Leopards that trust people and these cats provide unique base line information from direct observations that is valuable to all existing projects. Erindi has Leopards that have recently become completely protected and this is a prime area to begin the human/leopard relationship and record the process. Perhaps models like these and others occurring through Leopard research around the globe can be linked together to ensure that any decisions regarding the fate of the Leopard be done so based on sound information. If we all connect together and ensure that information is easily accessible, we can make a difference to improve awareness of Leopards around the world.

*"Internationalize the plight of the Leopard"*

# THE LEOPARDS OF THE ERINDI LEOPARD PROJECT

September 2007

## TSKAPAE FEMALE

- Tskapae is an adult female Leopard that has been noted to have had at least 1 litter of cubs to date.
- First captured and fitted with a radio collar by Ruan Cloete and Paul Joubert in March 2007.
- She was recaptured by Natasha de Woronin and Rynard on 12 September 2007 and fitted with a new collar.

## PHANTOM TREE FEMALE (TASH)

- Tash is an adult female Leopard although she appears to be quite young.
- First captured and collared on 7 September 2007
- Allows viewing on occasion
- She has been viewed with a small male Leopard

## SMALL MALE

- Small unidentified male Leopard that appears to be very young. He has been seen moving with Tash and it appears as if he follows her.

## SUPPORTERS OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

- **Erindi Private Game Reserve:** Home of the Project: Erindi
- **Catchco Africa:** Capture
- **Londolozzi Private Game Reserve Rangers:** Ongoing data capture
- **Florissa Keisel:** £5 000-00 (data capture equipment)
- **Rick and Lindy Dekker:** Photographic equipment, binoculars and literature
- **Vlasta and Keith Ross-Jones:** Ongoing funds and support
- **Heidi-Lee Stockenström:** GLP logo
- **Warren Pearson and Juanita:** Inspiration & GLP logo

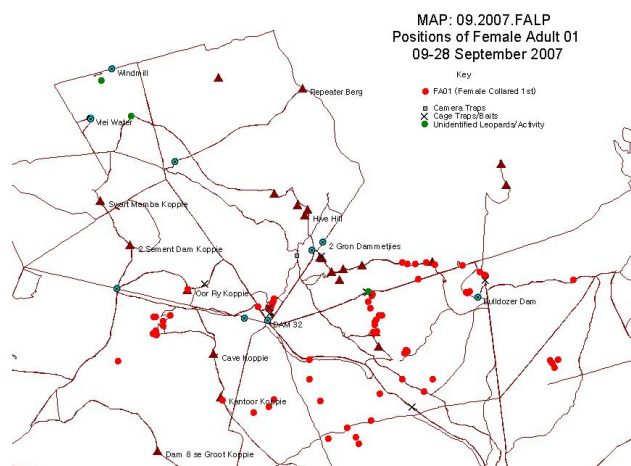
# TSKAPAE

## Overview September 2007



Captured and darted for the second time in September 2007.

Tsakapae weighed a phenomenal 36kg when she was captured for the second time in September. Unfortunately she is very shy of vehicles and she has not allowed us to get close enough to view her as yet. Both Tsakapae and Tash were captured in the same place just days apart. As data is gathered we hope to understand the relationship between these 2 Leopards as they seem to co-exist quite closely together. By analysing various genetic samples we will be able to assess whether the 2 cats are related in any way.



Map showing movements during the pilot study in September 2007.

# PHANTOM TREE FEMALE (TASH)

Overview September 2007

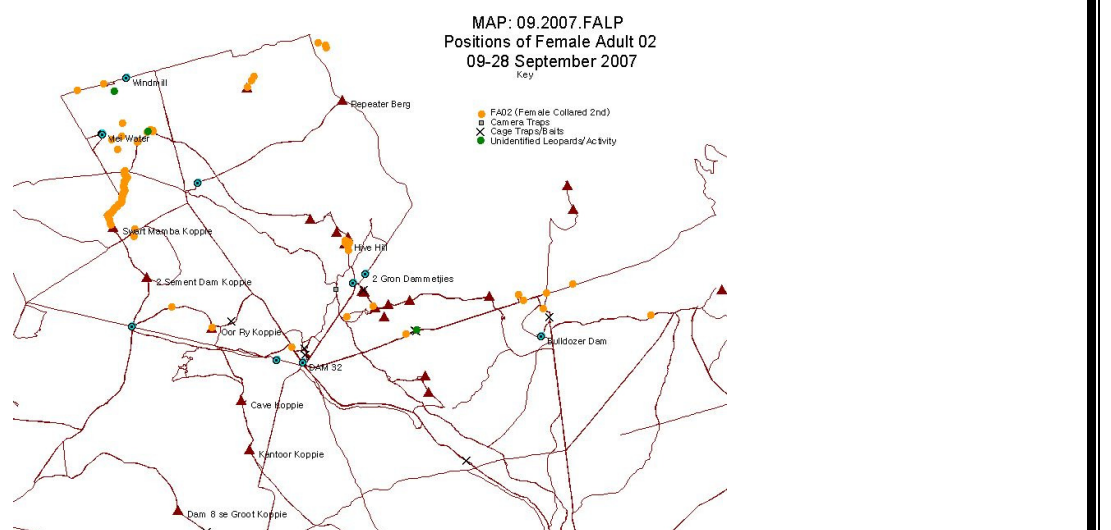


THE Phantom Tree Female (Tash) allowed me to view her for the first time 8 days after she was captured.

Tash has already provided us with some very interesting information. She appears to spend the day light hours on rocky outcrops and koppies. She moves away from low lying areas and the reason for this is as yet unknown! Perhaps she feels safe during the day where she can see anything approaching from a long distance away.

She has been incredibly accepting of the vehicle and although she will not let us view her during daylight hours, she has sat 20m from the vehicle comfortably in the dark. An exciting break through occurred one evening just before the dark hours when Tash was sitting out in the open on a large rock. As the vehicle approached, she descended from her view point and she began to slowly slink away. Something made her stop however and she hid behind a bush watching the car for a little while. She appeared to make the decision that she was not in any danger and she turned and began to head back to the same rock. She ascended elegantly back to where she was to begin with and there she sat out in the open for a time that felt like eternity!

Is it simply that this Leopard has decided to allow us to view her and how will time effect the relationship that has already begun?



Map showing the movements of Tash during the pilot study in September 2007.

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## CAMERA TRAP SURVEY

Due to that fact that we may not be able to capture and collar all the Leopards on Erindi (although we are certainly going to try!) we aim to put camera traps in various areas of the reserve. This will allow us to take photographs of all the Leopards and other animals moving through that position. During the pilot study, we had 1 camera trap and although we did not get any photographs of Leopard, we were fortunate enough to get a snap shot of an unsuspecting aardvark that walked through!

## OTHER ANIMALS OF THE ECP

### Wild Dogs

During September, a group of 4 female Wild dogs from Kwandwe Private Game Reserve in the Eastern Cape and 3 males from Pilansberg in the North West Province were introduced into the holding boma at Erindi. After only a few days together, the male and female groups merged and began to function as a single pack. Wild dogs occurred naturally in the area in the past but most of these have been sadly eradicated due to human/predator conflicts. Hopefully in the future, better understanding of all predators will aid in their survival in a people dominated world.

It will be exciting to see how the Wild dogs fare in their new surroundings although Erindi is noted to be very similar in habitat to the reserves where these highly endangered animals have come from.



7 Wild dogs were introduced into the holding boma at Erindi in September 2007.

### Honey Badger

While trying to capture Leopard, a male Honey badger raided the trap regularly until he was finally captured! The opportunity was not missed to fit him with a tracking device and Dr Douw Grobler fitted the honey badger with an implant to allow is to track him daily.

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From him we hope to learn a great deal about the unusual habits of this creature. The badger is incredibly accepting of people and he allows us to follow him on foot from time to time while he forages. We hope that this will become an educational experience in the future for any people interested in following with cameras from ground level.



Following the Honey badger on foot is an experience not to be missed!

## Pangolin

Thank you to Jonathan Swart, ecologist of the Sabi Sand Game Reserve and probably the person who knows more about Pangolins than any other, one pangolin at Erindi has also been fitted with a tracking device. The creature is not as easy to follow as one might think and as yet, he has managed to disappear underground each time he has been located! This has not deterred the Erindi team and with a little more experience, we will be finding the pangolin regularly and hopefully showing this very strange creature to our guests of the future!

## Snakes

During the month of September, 3 snakes were fitted with tracking devices. 2 Puff Adders and one Python all received anaesthetic to allow the Catchco team to fit them with radio implants.

## Lions

Erindi has a pride of Lions that consists of 2 spectacular adult males (Blondie & Groot), 3 females (Pride Female, Stomp Stert and a smaller female) and 4 sub-adults that were raised in the reserve. A second solitary female known as the Etosha Wyfie spends all her time away from the main pride. A number of the Lions are fitted with tracking collars for daily location and to ensure that the Erindi neighbours feel safe in the unusual case that they leave the reserve.

## SEPTEMBER SIGHTINGS

**Striped Polecat:** Mostly unheard of and rarely seen, this wonderful creature has appeared before vehicles at night providing some spectacular viewing!

**Aardvark:** Regular sightings of aardvark have encouraged the Erindi team to find ways of tracking them with the future hope that more people will have the opportunity to see one.

**Lions:** The world renowned and incredibly beautiful Etosha lions roam the flat lands of Erindi. The population is small and during September, various pairs of these tawny cats were seen mating which can only be good news for the future!

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**Black Rhino:** Erindi boasts an incredible Black Rhino population and sightings of up to 4 of these animals together always brings excitement!



Af Oor is just one of the Black Rhino at Erindi that provides fantastic viewing.

**Aardwolf:** This is yet another very special and unusual animal that frequents the plains of Erindi during the hours of darkness and sightings are regular.

**Bat Eared Foxes:** The social Bat eared fox is often spotted basking in the early morning Namibian sun. Future plans are to identify den sites that can be visited regularly.

**Springhares:** As the sun sets on the plains and spotlights sweep across the landscape, Erindi appears to become a display of Christmas lights as Springhares graze.

**Cheetah:** Numerous Cheetahs roam the Erindi landscape but these creatures are still rather shy although sightings are regular. With the present habituation program there will phenomenal cheetah viewing in the near future.