

THE GLOBAL LEOPARD PROJECT

ERINDI NEWSLETTER 3

Natasha de Woronin

FEBRUARY

2008

AND THINGS CAN ONLY GET BETTER!

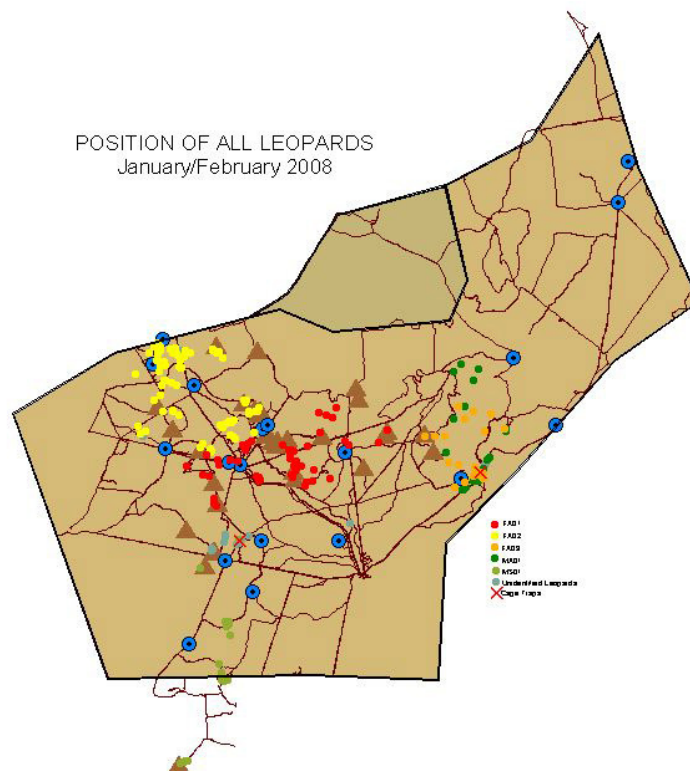
During January 2008 an adult male Leopard was viewed crossing the main road during the early hours of a summer's morning. Gerhard and I returned to where he was spotted to track him and to look at possible ways to capture him so that we could fit him with a radio collar. From his tracks we deduced that the male had sprayed various bushes with urine on his route and this indicated that he was a territorial male. Male Leopards are a very important link in the Leopard research at Erindi Game Reserve as only females had been tagged thus far.

We set the trap in late January and within 11 nights of capture effort we had captured what appeared to be the territorial female Leopard of the area! (Guinea Female). The night after Guinea Female was collared we did not reset the trap in case she went into it again. It was on that night that our male Leopard returned to investigate!! Would we ever get to collar him?

We continued to set the trap each day in February and after a further 6 days of capture effort, early on a Sunday morning, there was the male Leopard sitting incredibly calmly in the trap! I could not believe my eyes and I radioed the Erindi team on their day off to help with collaring and sample taking! This is the first adult male of the project and we are truly excited about the information that he will reveal about the Leopard population on the reserve.

We utilised the last radio collar that we had on this Leopard named the "JAKKALS DRAAI MALE" and thus capture will end for a time while we get to know the movements of the 3 most recent additions to the project.

"Internationalize the plight of the Leopard"



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LEOPARDS OF THE ERINDI LEOPARD PROJECT

February 2008

TSKAPAE FEMALE

Date of Capture: March 2007, re-captured 12 September 2007

Estimation of maturity: Mature adult female that showed signs of having had cubs in the past.

Reaction to vehicles: Terrified!

Reaction to people on foot: Unbelievably accepting!

PHANTOM TREE FEMALE (TASH)

Date of Capture: 7 September 2007

Estimation of maturity: Pregnant for the first time when captured

Reaction to vehicles: This female is slowly but surely accepting vehicles

Reaction to people on foot: Runs away

GUINEA FEMALE

Date of Capture: 31 January 2008

Estimation of maturity: Adult female that appeared to have suckled cubs before

Reaction to vehicles: Not yet located with a vehicle at close range

Reaction to people on foot: Unknown

GERH MALE (GEE)

Date of Capture: 25 January 2008

Estimation of maturity: Non-territorial male viewed with an adult female (possibly his mother)

Reaction to vehicles: Accepting

Reaction to people on foot: Very shy to people on foot

JAKKALS DRAAI MALE

Date of Capture: 10 February 2008

Estimation of maturity: Adult territorial male

Reaction to vehicles: Unknown as yet

Reaction to people on foot: Unknown as yet

SUPPORTERS OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

- **ERINDI GAME RESERVE:** Mnr Gert Joubert & Mnr Paul Joubert, Home of the GLP
- **CATCHCO AFRICA:** Dr Douw Grobler. Capture, training, equipment and constant support.
- **Londoloz Private Game Reserve Rangers:** Ongoing supportive data capture

- **Florissa Keisel:** £5 000-00 (data capture equipment)
- **Mrs I.L. Dekker:** Funding and inspiration
- **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 FEMALE

Overview February 2008

Tskapae Female has been incredibly shy of noisy engines and thus we decided to spend a few extra hours following her at night with the vehicle. Perhaps the plan would indicate whether or not she will ever accept the vehicles and if not, the idea to view her via other methods could be planned. After following her at a fairly close distance (unfortunately not close enough to get a viewing of her), I spotted eyes in the long grass ahead. Was this the moment, my heart began to pound with excitement as I thought I would get a first viewing of her from the vehicle. And then... I drove into a deep aardvark burrow, dropped telemetry aerial and she ran away!! At that point the decision was made that to expose her to vehicle engines but only as close as will not disturb her. When locating Tskapae Female on foot, she allows me to get unbelievably close and before the grass became as tall as an elephant, I was beginning to get regular viewing. Due to the fact that following her on foot disturbs her far less, this is the method we are going to try and habituate her to. Perhaps in the future she will allow a guest or two at a time to see her from ground level. This will be an exciting new way of viewing a Leopard!

PHANTOM TREE FEMALE (TASH)

Overview February 2008

The Phantom Tree Female is certainly becoming the star of the Erindi Leopards. During the month she accepted the vehicle from ground level for the very first time. When the spot light was shone on her in the past she would move away very quickly but with the red filter fitted on the light, she allowed me a half hour viewing before she moved out of sight into thick bush.

Only 3 days after she appeared to accept the vehicle completely, I located her in the early hours of a stormy morning. It was very interesting to note that she was walking in long grass plains and resting in among the vegetation were solitary Springbuck. The antelope were not in the safety of a group, and the Leopard appeared to know exactly what she was looking for. Within a very short period of time she had subdued an adult female Springbuck and she showed no signs of discomfort as I watched! She listened very carefully to the sounds of the night and after plucking and feeding on her meal, she began to walk away possibly because she heard something. As she moved, she flushed a second Springbuck which did not run very far. She immediately began to stalk again and what an unbelievable sight it was to watch her capture this creature in open grassland! This was a young ungulate and she did not begin to feed out in the open. Instead she dragged her kill into a thicket and she allowed me to follow and watch even thou the vehicle engine roared behind her!



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A week later she changed her hunting tactics and I was lucky enough to spend 3 hours with her as she attempted to catch Guinea fowl sleeping in the trees! A number of times she stalked a tree and when the moment was right, she launched herself into the tree, leapt down in one motion and chased the birds as they flew off! This hunting expedition was not successful however and she remained hungry!

GUINEA FEMALE

Overview February 2008

Guinea Female returned to the area where she was captured just 5 days after we fitted her with a radio collar. The trap was set at the time for the male Leopard yet she made no attempt to reach the bait. She hunted beside the trap and she managed to capture a Blue Wildebeest calf! Incredibly, she dragged the carcass all the way up a small mountain over huge rocks and fallen trees! She fed nearby for a few days before she moved deeper into her territory! Unfortunately we had no sight of her and all information was taken from the radio collar, tracks and signs. Every thing indicated that she was doing well after having been radio collared but it is always important to see how the Leopard is doing after capture.

Towards the end of February I had still not had a visual of Guinea Female and I decided to spend a full night with her to try and see how she was getting along. What a wonderful night it turned out to be!

At around midnight where the telemetry indicated she was, a group of Kudu alarmed frantically. I strained my ears to hear what was happening but the alarming stopped and I sat quietly in the dark. After 2 hours of simply sitting listening to the beep of her collar, there she was! She had captured a young Kudu and she was in the process of hoisting it up a tree on the side of the mountain. As I watched her power in complete amazement, I noticed that above the mountain, a total lunar eclipse was in process! Words cannot describe the incredible experience of that evening!

GERH MALE (GEE)

Overview February 2008

This young male Leopard has been noted to spend the greatest part of his time among the cattle on Gert Schwarting's farm neighbouring Erindi! Gert has been incredibly kind and allows us to follow the Leopard when he travels across the fence. At this point he has not been noted to cause any trouble with the cattle and due to the fact that he has a radio collar, we are able to follow his movements among domestic stock.

Gerh Male did secure his place in the Leopard Project when he sat in full view on a koppie allowing Mnr Gert Joubert and his guests to have a fantastic sighting!

JAKKALS DRAAI MALE

Overview February 2008

The Jakkals Draai Male is the newest addition to the Leopard project and he has proven to be incredibly difficult to get an exact position of since he was collared. This beautiful male Leopard spends most of his time on top of a large mountain and he appears to be what many local farmers all a "berg tier", Afrikaans for a Leopard that lives on a mountain. I had no viewing of him after he was collared and hopefully we will discover more about how he is doing and where he moves in the months to come.

OTHER ANIMALS OF THE ECP

Wild Dogs: With the unfortunate bad luck that hit the Wild Dogs in January, another loss occurred to the pack. A healthy female got tangled in the electric fence and the pack now consists of just 3 females. The exciting news, however, is that 10 new Wild Dogs will be introduced in the month of March.

Honey Badger: The Honey Badger has been noted to spend most of his time in a fairly small area. Perhaps his reduction in movement is contributed to by the good rains and excellent food supply in the reserve.

Pangolin: After attempting to locate this very elusive creature for months, I finally found the pangolin and had a wonderful sighting of him as he foraged in the lush grass!

Lions: Carlo spends every day locating the Lions and the more time he spends with them, the more these tawny cats accept the vehicles. There are a number of new cubs that have been viewed and it is going to be very exciting to watch them grow up and begin new prides on the reserve.

SPECTACULAR SIGHTINGS

A pair of **Striped Polecats** certainly brightened up a long drive from one area to another in the early hours of the morning. The two appeared as if they were dancing in the road and at the sight of the vehicle they shuffled up a termite mound to watch giving me a full view!

RANGER TRAINING

Along with turning a farm into a game reserve there is a great deal of training and dedication required from every one. On one hand there is the habituation of the animals to ensure that they will allow guests to view them and on the other hand there are people that must benefit from the changes. Reinhardt and Bennie are of the local Otjiherero tribe and they have both been dedicated to Erindi for more than a decade. Due to their amazing existing knowledge and fantastic personalities, Reinhardt and Bennie have begun training as rangers/guides for the future lodge.

In April they will be travelling to South Africa to the world renowned Kruger National Park to attend the EcoTraining ranger's course. This is a wonderful opportunity for them and they have already put in huge amounts of effort to prepare for their experience ahead learning about trees and trying to get a hang of the scientific names!