

# THE GLOBAL LEOPARD PROJECT ERINDI NEWSLETTER 4

Natasha de Woronin

MARCH/APRIL

2008

## THE ECOTOURISM VENTURE OF ERINDI...

Huge amounts of excitement and work mounted during March and April as Erindi prepared for the last leg before the start of the ecotourism venture. The lodge transformed into something spectacular, game drive vehicles started rolling in and the big changes truly began!

After many lectures and hard studies, Bennie and Reinnhardt embarked on their first long distance travel as they headed off by aeroplane (a first time for them both!) to the EcoTraining ranger course in South Africa. They arrived safely and we look forward to news on how they have been getting along.

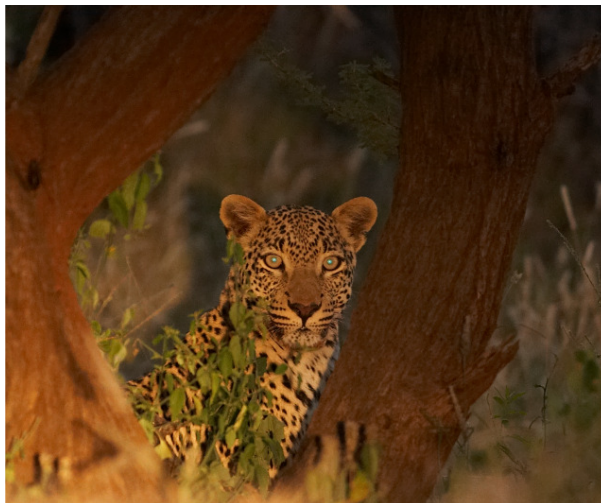
The Global Leopard Project has also had its first phenomenal break through that will allow the research to continue full steam ahead. PULSE AFRICA decided to contribute a percentage of every booking that they make towards the project and this is incredibly exciting news for the Leopard work! Huge thanks to the Pulse Africa Team for believing in the Global Leopard Project!

A number of signs indicating unidentified Leopards on the reserve were found and 3 sightings of unmarked Leopards have given us a good indication of territories and cats adjacent to the study animals. A female was spotted by Oom Anton on the road early one morning. She appeared to be stalking Springbuck and this viewing was less than 2km from the lodge! In June, well known Dairen Simson will be visiting Erindi to train the team to capture Leopards with foot snare traps. All the areas where Leopards are moving will be targeted as capture sights and we truly look forward to learning from Dairen when he arrives.

The Leopards of Erindi have given me some fantastic information but have also made me work incredible hard during the past 2 months. Due to the thickness of the bush, following Tskapae Female has been very difficult and there have been no sightings of her at all. The 2 "berg tiere", Guinea Female and Jakkals Draai Male have remained on their mountains for much of the time and in April, Gerh Male seemed to disappear from the reserve. A huge amount of work needs to be done to get everything back on track and to find out exactly what all the Leopards are doing. This work needs to occur at night as the Leopards of Erindi are mostly active during the dark hours and thus May will be dedicated to as many night observations as possible.

Phantom Tree Female is certainly the star of the Leopard project. She allowed me to view her regularly and she was located with 4 kills during March and April. She has not however allowed the guest game viewing vehicle to approach and this may be because the vehicle is not the same as the one she is used to.

*"Internationalize the plight of the Leopard"*



Sightings of Phantom Tree Female become more spectacular each time she is located.



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# LEOPARDS OF THE ERINDI LEOPARD PROJECT

March/April 2008

## MICROLIGHT FEMALE (TSKAPAE)

The Microlight Female has been named due to her unbelievable tolerance for Ruan flying the microlight above the Leopard and she simply sits and watches! During late summer, this was the only way that we managed to get viewing of her due to the long grass and thick vegetation cover.

Exact location of Microlight Female is still acquired by finding her on foot and she still seems to be incredibly tolerant. On numerous occasions, the telemetry indicated that she was incredibly close. At this point, I tend to stop and let her move away without pursuing her. When I advance, I often find her tracks within 20-30m of where I was standing. During the heat of the day, Microlight Female will often remain in thickets that she allows me to walk around before she moves out from beneath her shrubby hiding. She tends to rest in areas where the grass is taller than a meter, sometimes higher than I am!

## PHANTOM TREE FEMALE (TASH)

Phantom Tree never fails to amaze me and she has provided some phenomenal viewing during all night data capture. She was located late one night at the base of a mountain. She sat out in the open watching the vehicle approach and at that moment, one of the large male lions roared close by. When the Lion roared a second time, I realised that he was getting closer and I turned the spot light off so as not to give the Leopards position away. When I did a quick scan of the area with the light to check what was happening, a Lioness bolted past the vehicle and the Leopard headed up the mountain incredibly calmly! I then realised that the Leopard was on a kill that she had not hoisted and the Lions had discovered this too! As the Lioness began feeding, the male rushed in and there was chaos as the two tawny cats scavenged the last of the Leopards dinner. By this point, Phantom Tree Female was over the mountain and out of sight!

During March and April, this Leopard was located on 4 kills, once during the daylight hours. For the first time, she allowed me to view her from less than 30m in the day but after a while, she did move away as the sight of the vehicle seemed to be too much! She does however seem very relaxed during the day if she is on a koppie and it was incredible to watch and photograph this agile creature chasing Rock Hyrax over large boulders.



In late April, I managed to locate the Phantom Tree Female shortly after sunset. She was hunting out on the open plains in an area that appeared vehicle friendly although the night proved incredibly challenging! The Leopard was running after a herd of Springbuck in a manner that I have seen only cheetah use! Following her and appearing to be waiting for a free meal were 2 very relaxed Spotted Hyena and a Black Backed Jackal. They seemed to be ruining her chances of capturing anything and hours later, after much hard work of trying to stay with her I relocated her in a thicket again in a full stalk. A distress call indicated that she had managed to subdue prey but it was only at sunrise that I discovered what she had captured...it was the Jackal that had been ruining her evenings hunting!

## GUINEA FEMALE

For only the second time since she was captured, Guinea Female was spotted before sunset lounging on a rock. She was watching the vehicle very carefully while I was standing on the roof trying to locate her exact position. I climbed down to get binoculars and she remained in the open long enough for me to see her well and assess that she was in excellent condition.

A few weeks later while I was taking GPS readings of where she was, I discovered that each reading was inaccurate. This was because she was moving down off the mountain directly towards the vehicle. This was one of the first opportunities that arose to approach her with the vehicle and I think that I was in a state of shock and disbelief when I

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spotted her in a thicket sitting completely un-hassled by the vehicle! I was able to follow her a little way before she disappeared into the undergrowth. I managed to relocate her a second time and again, she sat quietly listening to the night and sniffing the wind...Incredible!

## GERH MALE (GEE)

It is very difficult to know when to pursue a Leopard and when to remain over sensitive. Gerh Male started off having an incredible tolerance for the vehicle and allowed viewing when he was on a koppie. He was located a few times on flat ground, one of these opportunities ended up with 2 flat tyres and the Leopard disappeared into the night! The second opportunity occurred during the day and although I followed Gerh Male for more than 5 hours, I did not manage to get a single glimpse of him. When the chance to get close to this young male Leopard again arose, I chose not to pursue him as long. Unfortunately this was again during daylight hours and he moved away from the vehicle quite quickly, again resulting in no visual. From the beginning of April, Gerh Male spent almost all his time among the cattle on Gert Schwartings farm and keeping track of him has proven a huge challenge. We are hoping to use the microlight to follow his movements more carefully in the future.

## JAKKALS DRAAI MALE

For the first time since Jakkals Draai Male was fitted with a radio collar, he was spotted by G.P. in the early hours of the morning heading up a mountain. And to add to that excitement, he was not alone! This adult male had a female following him through the territory of Guinea Female, almost a certain indication that the two were mating. Data up to date has indicated that Jakkals Draai Male has a territory no larger than that of a female but as we gather more information, more will be revealed as to how large an area he covers.

## SUPPORTERS OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

- **ERINDI PRIVATE GAME RESERVE:** Home of the Leopard Project
- **PULSE AFRICA:** Contributions from every booking made.
- **CATCHCO AFRICA:** Capture, training, equipment & support
- **Londolozi 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
- **Warren Pearson and Juanita:** Inspiration & GLP logo
- **Heidi-Lee Stockenström:** GLP logo

## OTHER ANIMALS OF THE ECP

**Wild Dogs:** 2 new groups of Wild dogs were introduced into the Erindi bomas. A group of 7 males and a pack consisting of 2 males with a female were released. The dogs spend almost all of their time at the one corner of the boma where all the packs can see and interact with each other. A massive scare occurred when Jakkals who takes care of the packs discovered that 2 males were missing from the new group of 7. We set out to find tracks and set traps to try and recapture the missing Wild dogs and then it was found out that they entire pack was still in the boma, but they had split up. Dr Douw Grobler came through to Erindi to assess the situation and the packs were carefully separated into new groups. 3 Males from the group of 7 were left as a pack and the remaining 4 males were introduced to the 3 original

females. Three packs now consist of a group of 3 males, the group with 1 female and 2 males and the main pack up for release onto the reserve in May consisting of 3 females and 4 males.

**Honey Badger:** Although careful watch is kept on the movements of the Honey Badger, he was not viewed during this period.

**Pangolin:** The Pangolin spends most of his time in one specific area and is active only during the late night hours.

**Snakes:** A beautiful new Python was fitted with a stronger implant transmitter and released shortly after the operation. The snake moved for a few days before it disappeared down a Warthog burrow possibly to hide from the looming cold weather.

**Lions:** These tawny cats have been providing great game viewing for guests. The adult males tend to get active after dark and are very exciting to follow as they head through the game filled plains at night. The males have how ever been pursuing a young male on the reserve and Lion dynamics appear to be altering. The young male is often split from his sister due to the conflict caused by the dominant males. This has made the young male shy but his sister is incredibly relaxed with the vehicle if she is alone.

Etosha Wyfie seems to have left her hiding place in the mountains and returned to the plains. Hopefully in the near future there will be improved sightings of hers and the other cubs on the Erindi.

**Spotted Hyenas:** These creatures have been proving extremely elusive apart from the times when they are located following a Leopard. The Spotted Hyenas will approach the vehicle with great interest providing great viewing.

## SPECTACULAR SIGHTINGS

**Cape Fox** was spotted twice in different areas in three days! The one appeared extremely accepting of the vehicle in the rising golden sunshine. A further 2 Cape Foxes were spotted on different occasions leaving Erindi with the notion that the population is fairly strong.

**Aardwolf** was spotted on both evening game drives while Mnr Joubert and his guests were out.

**Marabou Stork flocks** spend midday soaring over the plains. Ore than 200 of these huge birds rest in the water of Vlei by night and during they day they circle the reserve in search of a meal.

**Springbuck herds** numbering more than 300 gathered together in the grasslands of Erindi providing spectacular sightings.

**Eland herds** of more than 100 were spotted grouped together on regular occasions.

**Black Rhino** sightings have been spectacular with a magnificent bull viewed regularly very close to the Old Traders Post Lodge.

**Black Eagle** adults were seen soaring together above a mountain and 2 juveniles of different ages were seen on various occasions.