

THE GLOBAL LEOPARD PROJECT ERINDI NEWSLETTER 5

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LEOPARD CUBS OF ERINDI!



It has been a short 6 months since the leopard project began at Erindi and it has certainly been the most incredible time in my life. When Phantom Tree Female (Tash) was captured and fitted with a radio collar Dr Douw Grobler explained that she had never suckled cubs before and that she was pregnant (probably for the first time) with 2 tiny developing foetuses. These cubs would have been born in about December 2007 and because we had seen no sign of them by April, we thought at first that something may have happened to them. Usually a mother leopard will start taking her cubs to kills when they are around 3 months of age and by the time that these cubs were about 5 months old, we had almost forgotten about the possibility of their existence.

After a long night out following the different leopards of the project, I headed towards Phantom Tree Females territory. She had killed a large springbuck ram and the carcass was lying in a small open clearing beneath a tree perfect for the leopard to hoist it into if need be. They were so small that I did not see them on the kill at first but I noticed something moving. I picked up the binoculars to take a closer look and I could not believe my eyes...it was a tiny spotted face staring back at me! Immediately I noticed that the one cub was a little larger and a little braver than the other and it took quite some time for me to accept the fact that the brave cub was a female and the other a small male!

It still has me in wonder every day, why this incredible female leopard is prepared to share the secrets of her life with us...she certainly is the queen of Erindi!

"Internationalize the plight of the Leopard"



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THE LEOPARDS OF ERINDI

MICROLIGHT FEMALE (TSKAPAE)

Overview May/June 2008

As if it was not exciting enough that Phantom Tree Female brought her cubs out onto the reserve for us to view, Microlight Female provided some fantastic sightings as well! Only from the microlight (of course) as she still will not allow us any where near her with a vehicle! It was noted that she was returning twice a day to the same koppie and Ruan had spotted her lying on the rocks a few times as he flew over. Her behaviour had me thinking and so I went up with Ruan in the microlight to try and confirm a suspicion...Did Microlight Female also have a cub hidden among the boulders? We spotted her quite quickly sitting below us. She watched the strange flying object without being worried in any way and so we circled around her a few times thoroughly enjoying the amazing sighting! And there it was, I though my eyes were playing tricks on me, 1 cub sitting beside mum watching the microlight fly by! The cub appeared to be about 3 months old and certainly was not as brave as Microlight Female, when we flew a little closer the youngster headed into a cave between the rocks!

A great deal of work is lined up for this leopard as we would very much like to habituate her in the future. It will take a great deal of time and patience but we hold high hopes that in the future she will accept people and vehicles as she has accepted the noisy flying machine in her world. We have stopped following her on foot for now as we do not want to cause any unnecessary stress for her while she has a tiny cub but in the near future we will begin all this again.

PHANTOM TREE FEMALE (TASH)

Overview May/June 2008



By the day this leopard becomes more accustomed to the vehicle and she allows us deeper into her world. Over the past 2 months she was located with 6 different kills, springbuck and one young kudu which she hoisted into a Corkwood tree. Where ever she can, she follows an interesting pattern of hoisting these kills as soon as the sun sets and at first light, she takes the carcass out of the tree and hides it in the thickest possible shrubbery! There are many threats especially towards the cubs and on one evening when she had captured a large springbuck ram (possibly too heavy to hoist) she was faced with a new danger. The wild dogs were released onto the reserve and 2 males had managed to find the kill. She did not run, she in fact faced up to one of the wild dogs and she gave him a good boxing! The cubs ran in different directions, the little male ran for cover and stopped almost too late as the cover he had chosen was my vehicle! He made a sharp turn and disappeared into a thicket of bushes! The brave female

cub adopted a completely different tactic, she bolted into the highest branches of the closest tree right beside the vehicle! She watched the wild dogs very carefully as they devoured the kill and

soon fell asleep due to all the excitement! When the danger had passed Phantom Tree Female called the cubs out of their hiding places and the family re-united with face rubbing and cuddling!

GUINEA FEMALE

Overview May/June 2008

Guinea Female spent almost all of the past months on the large mountain range that is the core of her territory. It seems that she is able to sustain herself with food and she only heads to low lying areas on the odd occasion. When ever she does this I try and spend as much time with her as possible and although she has she has not been viewed I am often only meters away from her, visual prohibited by the thick bushes.

It has been very interesting to note that Jakkals Draai Male is often very close to Guinea Female and this certainly open doors on the “sociability” of leopards. Are they more sociable than we think? Time will tell!

GERH MALE (GEE)

Overview May/June 2008

Gerh Male truly seems to have gone “backwards”! He has taken to hiding way from the vehicle and any sort of hiding place seems good enough for this young leopard! While following him late one night I could not understand how he was constantly managing to escape the spot light. I was trying to give him a little space but my confusion reined when I did get closer because there seemed to be no possible explanation to why I was unable to see him. I moved closer again and suddenly came to the conclusion that he was right beneath the vehicle? It was a definite possibility as I then noticed a large aardvark burrow certainly big enough for the leopard to hide in! His tracks gave him away, he was in the hole beneath the ground and his patience was admirable. After waiting a few hours for him to emerge I switched the spot light off for a moment and he managed to leave his hiding place before he disappeared into the dark of the night! I decided that perhaps approaching the leopard on foot as we do with Microlight Female was the next best option to working with Ger Male.

“The morning was crisp but the sun was shining and the beeps from the leopard’s radio collar indicated that he was in a drainage line surrounded by thick bush. I headed in on foot to approach the young male on foot for the first time and at that point I had no idea of what his reaction would be. It was quite phenomenal...he hid in a thick small patch of trees and he allowed me to approach to within about 20m. He did not move and his camouflage was so brilliant that I could not see him. So believing that he could see me (and could probably hear the beeps of the telemetry) I stood quietly for more than an hour, neither of us moved. When I did decide that it was time to go, I checked the area to see which was my best route out, one that would not disturb the leopard. He was ahead of me, to my right and behind me there were trees and as I looked left towards the only open gap my adrenalin began rushing as there was only the middle portion of a large Western Barred spitting cobra sliding through the long grass! The problem was that I was not sure which side the snakes head was!! Decision time, to go the direction of the leopard, the thorny trees or the snake! I stepped through the grass, my knees reaching my ears as I made my way past the snake and I finally breathed when I reached the vehicle!”

JAKKALS DRAAI MALE

Over view May/June 2008

Being one of the “berg tiere” there is very little opportunity to access the areas where Jakkals Draai Male moves. He is almost always on top of a mountain but interestingly we have noted that he appears to be expanding his territory. From time to time he disappears from the mountain altogether which he did not do during the first 3 months that he was followed. He is very often close to Guinea Female and the reason for this is not yet known.

For the first time since he was fitted with a radio collar, I had spectacular viewing of Jakkals Draai Male during June. He was moving around at the base of the mountain in an area accessible to a vehicle. I followed as sensitively as possible for 3 hours and as I rounded a corner he was sitting about 30m away from me! He sat very quietly watching for a few minutes before he lowered his body below the grass line and slunk away. I had visual a few times during the night and it was wonderful to see that his condition was perfect and that he allowed me to take a few looks at him.

SPECTACULAR SIGHTINGS

Wild Dogs The wild dog pack split into 2 groups when they were released. 2 males formed a pack and these moved away from the boma area soon after release. They managed to survive by scavenging old carcasses (unusual behaviour for wild dog) and by robbing Phantom Tree Female of a kill!

The main pack moved into a den site right beside the boma and 2 of the females gave birth to pups in the old unused aardvark burrow. It is unusual that 2 female had youngsters as wild dogs usually have an alpha pair that are the only breeding animals in the group. Perhaps this occurred because the males and females were newly united and 2 females came into oestrus at the same time. As there were no “dominants” at that point, both fell pregnant and comfortably shared the den. The pack of 3 that gave birth to pups in their boma very sadly got too close to the main pack also with pups just out side the boma. All the pups were killed and a few of the adults sustained various injuries possibly due to an interspecies confrontation.

Honey Badger the search has been on for this ferocious little creature that has disappeared. We have no idea if something has happened to him or if he has just moved a long distance out of telemetry range. We do hope that he will re-appear at some point soon.

Pangolin a great deal about the movements of this unusual creature has been learnt since the transmitter was fitted. The pangolin does not move very long distances but stays within a specific area. The creature has been noted to feed during winter months between sunset and midnight and heads down holes for the early hours of the morning and daylight time.

Snakes It has been incredibly difficult to follow the puff adders and the first python fitted with transmitters as the range is very small. A large female python was given a large radio tracking device and she is viewed regularly.

Lions The Triosphere film crew have spent a great deal of time with the lion pride and most of the females have cubs which provide spectacular viewing for guests visiting Erindi.

Spotted Hyenas the hyenas are doing exceptionally well at the den site. 5 youngsters of different ages were noted indicating that 3-4 females in the one clan are reproducing.

SUPPORTERS OF THE GLOBAL LEOPARD PROJECT

- **Erindi Game Reserve:** Home of the Project: Erindi
- **Pulse Africa:** A contribution from every booking made with Pulse Africa is put towards the GLP.
- **Catchco Africa Dr Douw Grobler:** Capture, equipment and constant support
- **Londolozzi Private Game Reserve Rangers:** Ongoing data capture
- **Florissa Keisel:** £5 000-00 (data capture equipment)
- **Rick and Lindy Dekker:** Photographic equipment, binoculars, literature & support
- **Vlasta and Keith Ross-Jones:** Ongoing funds and support
- **Warren Pearson and Juanita:** Inspiration & GLP logo
- **Heidi-Lee Stockenström:** GLP logo