

Erindi Game Reserve

2009

YOUNG LEOPARD FATALLY INJURED...

Commiphora Male was doing fantastically well on his own in the world. He managed to make a few good sized kills which his sibling, Honey-thorn female had not even begun trying yet.

Commi did however take a very keen interest in warthogs and although he had managed to kill a youngster successfully he had a few incredibly close encounters with these potentially dangerous creatures.

He wondered a long way from the safety of his mother's territory in pursuit of warthogs one day and I struggled to keep up with him. I left him for a few hours and when I returned to find him he was back in the safety of

his mother's territory. To me, the extent of his injuries were unknown but I could see that his left flank was heaving in a strange way. I returned to the lodge to ask for advice from the Erindi Ecology team and although we did not want to interfere with nature's plan we formulated a way to aid the young leopard if the need arose.

I returned shortly there after to find that where I had left Commi resting, his beautiful body lay lifeless in the golden grass.

Upon close inspection of his injuries we discovered that he had a deep wound in his chest through his ribs at the angle only

a warthog tusk could make & this had punctured his lung. Sadly, even if we had interfered, there would have been no chance for his survival...



Less than 24 hours after he was injured, Commi was lifeless where he had last lain down to sleep.

INFORMATION BOOKLET

The Global Leopard Project at Erindi Private game Reserve is incredibly fortunate to have the support of Freddie Hertzberg, a local gentleman from Walvis Bay. Freddie visited the project in July 2009 and he has come up with the most wonderful

idea that we are slowly gathering information for. Freddie believes that a booklet with photographs on various aspects of leopards will help local farmers to identify their problem animals and deal with this in the correct manner. It is important that people

understand the implications of removing a leopard from an area before the act and the pamphlet will hopefully help them make the right decisions.

Freddie will be publishing this for us... WE THANK YOU VERY MUCH FREDDIE!

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Scientific Progress of the Project...

- *The scientific aspect of the Leopard research at Erindi Game Reserve focuses on the often persecuted male leopards.*
- *4 Males became part of the project in 2008/2009.*
- *Although the sample is small, 50% of these males did not reach the territorial phase of their lives due to natural injuries.*

PHANTOM TREE FEMALE

Ever since Phantom Tree Female's cubs (Commiphora Male & Honey-thorn Female) went independent she has become more and more difficult to locate.

It appears that Phantom has moved her territory north out of Erindi Game Reserve to make space for her daughter.

She is very rarely within the reserve boundaries and we are not sure where she is hunting. We have located her in her old hunting grounds occasionally with her "regular Springbuck" kills.

This has truly posed a new question to me and the un-thought possibility that leopards are not simply generalist hunters.



LEOPARDS: Generalist or specialist hunters?

The largest percentage of Phantom tree Female's kills have been noted to be springbuck and the reason that this seems unusual is that another female on the reserve has never been seen to kill a

springbuck?

Is it possible that phantom has become a springbuck specialist and why? Is it because the largest proportion of ungulates in her territory are springbuck or because she has simply found a successful method of hunting them?

Phantom has never been seen to kill a warthog yet Xinkovanyana Female kills mostly warthog...a pattern is emerging and this could be interesting especially to farmers. A 'specialist' leopard that hunts game on a livestock farm

may stay away from livestock and may even keep other leopards away from the domestic animals...this would make the leopard very helpful and it could benefit the farmer. More questions to answer...

MICROLIGHT FEMALE

Microlight Female has still not been located since her radio collar was removed and even by conventional tracking we have had no luck finding her.

It is almost certain that she will be looking for a new den site in the near future and that she will have cubs again.

Microlight Female is very important to the leopard Project even though she will never accept vehicles. Her territory is in

the heart of Erindi and knowing her movements and cubs ensures that we understand the dynamics of the leopard movements on the reserve.

Dr Douw Grobler recommended that we try and get a GPS collar for this female as any movement of vehicles around her

causes her to change her natural behavior as she constantly moves away.

Vehicles also place unnecessary stress on her and with a GPS collar we can monitor her from the microlight and the collar will record her daily movements.

"For leopards that are stressed by the movement of vehicles, GPS collars are essential"

HONEY-THORN FEMALE

Honey-thorn Female is truly "blossoming" as a young leopard although she is not yet out of the woods and into the world of adult leopards! She still has a long road to travel before she can hunt successfully, establishes territory and has her first encounter with the territorial male where she finally settles down.

Honey has become a great hunter of Guinea fowl but she will have to learn to

hunt larger game to sustain herself. One afternoon when every game drive vehicle bumped into her (36 guests were luck enough to see her on this day!) she appeared to be following a scent trail of some sort. She displayed the 'phlemen' grimace a number of times and suddenly she was stuck in a small *Acacia* tree, the horns



Honey with a Springbuck kill.

of a female oryx almost piercing her white belly. The oryx cow moved away for a minute and she descended and in seconds had an oryx calf hoisted into the small tree. 9 Ecstatic guests watched her make her first large kill. Thereafter she managed to kill another oryx calf, a juvenile red hartebeest and an adult springbuck. Her skills are improving daily...

XINKOVANYANA FEMALE

During September 2009 Yana began displaying some very different behavior to what we were used to.

She was constantly calling and marking territory and she was heard mating with a male on a few occasions. When the habituated females mate we are unable to get visuals of them as the males are not accustomed to vehicles, the males continually move away from the vehicle and the females constantly follow!

She also appeared to go backwards with her acceptance of the research vehicle. She took more than half an hour to relax when she was followed and thereafter she was back to her normal 'self'. This time frame has slowly become longer and any pres-

ence of other people in the vehicle made the situation worse. On one occasion she was in a tree when we approached and when she spotted people in the vehicle she impolitely hissed at them and she bolted!



Yana completely relaxed in the presence of the research vehicle.

It took almost 3 days for me to locate a warthog kill that she had made as she constantly moved away from me.

When she did accept the vehicle she was a completely different Leopard again...she emerged into the open on a large rock and she lay completely relaxed while I approached to 10 meters. On this occasion she got up and followed the vehicle in the open as I was leaving her.

This behavior is very interesting and I was fortunate enough to have a cat vet to ask about this. Domestic cats often display similar behavior when they are gravid and searching for a place to give birth...Perhaps Yana is pregnant and she will relax again when she has had her next litter of cubs. We watch with baited breath...

GUINEA FEMALE

Guinea is still fit and healthy although we have seen very little of her.

G.P Britz, one of the Erindi guides has been very dedicated to helping with location of this leopard and he was fortunate to have a wonderful sighting of Guinea Female.

She was about 40-50m up in the mountain relaxing in the shade of an *Acacia* tree. She watched the vehicle very care-

fully for a while and then she displayed the best of Leopard tactics...she stood up and simply blended into the rocks and disappeared!

We take regular GPS positions of where she is moving and she is a vital marker for the project. Her territory and movements start a new study of the mountainous are

"What is the difference in territory size between Leopards on flat land and those dwelling in the mountains?"

of the reserve and she will hopefully also be fitted with a radio collar in the near future.

The question has arisen about territory size and it will be very interesting to find out if the Leopards

dwelling solely in the mountains have smaller or larger territories than those in the flat areas of Erindi.

MALE LEOPARDS OF THE PROJECT

From data collected and communication with both farmers and hunters we have identified the need for information on male leopards in Namibia. Males are almost always targeted by the hunters as these are the "trophy" cats and of 3 leopards persecuted by farmers for killing livestock, all were young males that appeared to have just reached independence.

Thus the main study and subject for the

Leopard research is the Ecology of the Male Leopard. Very sadly this important part of the research keeps taking a back step.

4 male Leopards had become part of the Global Leopard Project during 2008/2009.

2 males were killed, one shortly after independence by a warthog and the second around the age of 4 years killed by what appeared to be a larger male Leop-

ard. At this stage the sample is very small but 50% of the study males did not reach territoriality. One male collar died early and another male is missing...



Male Leopard found dead by the neighboring farm.

ERINDI MALE

Erindi Male was last spotted in August 2009. He was a vital link to the research project and the most awful aspect is the fact that we have no idea if he is alive or dead.

He is the male that has gone missing and he was also the most relaxed of the leopards in the presence of vehicles.

It has been discovered that although tracking implants are less obtrusive to the Leopards, most of these cats move onto neighboring farms and if something happens to them implants are almost impossible to notice. A collar is easy to see and when Ger Male was killed the people that found him were able to contact the project immediately.



The last sighting of Erindi Male...

Thus collars will be used as the tracking devices for male leopards that have dispersed from their natal areas.

We began a search for this male Leopard by trying to locate his abdominal implant but so far there has been no sight of him.

We will begin with cage traps and baits hopefully set with remote cameras to find out his whereabouts but this is now like searching for a needle in a haystack...and the needle keeps moving!

It is also possible that Erindi Male, being so relaxed has caused problems outside the reserve...or he may have had a fight with another male.

We will continue the search and we will keep our hopes up.

We hope to have positive news in the next few months but by now we should have "bumped" into this very relaxed leopard somewhere on the reserve...only time may reveal what has happened to him.

UNIDENTIFIED LEOPARDS

There was a great deal of Leopard activity in various areas of the reserve during this time. A Leopard that was incredibly accepting of the vehicles was spotted on more than one occasion crossing the Main Rd near the lodge and guests were amazed when they opened their curtains early one morning as a Leopard was drinking at the waterhole in front of their room!

Tracks and sightings of young male

leopard were seen regularly around the central section of the reserve and these are almost certainly the tracks of Microlight Female's youngster "Huges Male".

By this stage he would have reached independence.

Due to the fact that Comiphora Male was killed,

the GPS collar that we would have used on him is now to be placed on this young male. It was exciting to confirm his gender and towards the end of Sep-

tember he was actually seen by a number of vehicles!

He was shy but there is hope that this young male can be habituated if collared.

"The son of Microlight Female (Huges Male) has been earmarked for the next GPS collar"

WALKING WITH LEOPARDS

In late 2007 it was discovered that Microlight Female was far more relaxed with me locating her on foot than trying to approach her with a vehicle. This opened a new door for the Leopard Project as working with Leopards on foot is a phenomenal experience.

It was thought that Honey-thorn Female may also accept people viewing her on foot and the plan was to try this at some stage.

Honey seemed to think the same thing...While following her in the vehicle one afternoon one of the vehicle tires began to gush air. We waited until Honey was well away before we began to jack up the vehicle and change the flat. All of a sudden the beep



Honey-thorn Female approaching us while we were changing a flat tire.

from her radio collar increased in volume and as I turned she was no more than 10m away! She had come to investigate as I kneeled and she continued to get closer until she reached 5m! At this point I stood up and she backed away and hissed at me!

LIVESTOCK CONFLICT

During mid 2009 it was noted that there were numerous livestock losses in the areas surrounding Erindi Private Game Reserve. It was discovered that a great deal of these problems were caused by young dispersal leopards, possibly those that had recently gone independent of their mother's.

This interestingly correlated with independence of 5 young Leopards within the reserve. It definitely appeared that at the same time in the year, many young cats had reached the same "phase".

On a neighboring farm a Leopard charged the farmer inside his henhouse and the gentleman narrowly escaped. The leopard was a young male, almost 2 years of age.



A goat killed and hoisted by Nebula Female .

Closer to Erindi a young female Leopard (called Nebula Female) also went independent and she took to killing a goat on Schwariting Farm. She took her meal into a tree on a small koppie on the reserve boundary and in typical Leopard fashion she consumed her prize over a 3 day period.

We need to watch Nebula Female carefully and ideally we must get a tracking device on to her. We hope that there is enough wild game on the farm to sustain her but it is vital that we monitor her movements and come up with a plan to deter her from the livestock if the situation worsens.

CONCERNS EXPRESSED BY HUNTERS...

There is a great need for researchers to understand all aspects of a study animal including those that we may not completely agree with. Hunting is a very real part of the world of Leopards in Namibia and it is vital that we communicate with the hunters as their knowledge of Leopards is vital to the sustainability of the local population.

It has been noted in Namibia that almost all Leopards hunted are male and the

greatest proportion of these are young males. These have not yet established territory and the implications of this are not fully understood.

Concerned hunters have noticed that the Leopards that they are managing to find are suddenly old cats often in poor condition with literally no teeth...in a natural

"The natural balance controlling male leopards appears to be altered by hunting as male Leopards are not well understood"

situation, these are cats that would have been eliminated by new incoming males. It would appear that the unnatural removal of young males is negatively influencing the natural replacement of old males. This concern has opened a new study and indicates the important need for long term data on males.

GUEST PHOTOGRAPHS

The Global Leopard Project uses photographs as RAW data to record Leopard behavior and from time to time guests are fortunate enough to see a Leopard while the research vehicle is elsewhere. The research team left Honey-thorn Female in the heat of midday while she was staking out a water point from a cool *Boscia albitrunca* tree. A game drive vehicle spotted her a few hours later and by this time she had managed to catch a juvenile red hartebeest! It was

a massive kill for such a small leopard and she was unable to move the carcass to cover. Luckily our guests were able to take fantastic photographs of Honey with her kill before she was robbed.

If our guests had not shared these pictures with us we would have had no record of this kill. Every piece of the puzzle of Leopard behavior is vital to the studies being conducted and we are eternally grateful for any information.



A huge thank you to all our guests that share their photographs with us, they are incredibly valuable..



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The mission of the Global Leopard Project is to “internationalize the plight of the leopard through communication and research”.

We are dedicated to the gathering and sharing of data from wild leopard populations to aid in improving understanding of leopards as individuals and ultimately in the future holistically as a species.

We aim to improve awareness of the leopard through ecotourism and media, to contribute towards reduction of livestock/wildlife conflict and to help ensure that utilization of leopards occurs in a sustainable manner.

The Global Leopard Project is based at Erindi Private Game Reserve in the Central Western region of Namibia near Omaruru, truly one of the most amazing conservation areas on earth...

GLP SPONSORS, MEMBERS & FUTURE GOALS

FIELD SPONSORS

~ ERINDI GAME RESERVE: Home of the Global Leopard Project and the leopards.

~ CATCHCO AFRICA/DR DOUW GROBLER: Capture and training.

~THE DIGITAL DARKROOM: V. & K. Ross-Jones: Camera, computer & data recording equipment.

ONGOING SPONSORS

~ ERINDI GAME RESERVE: Monthly donation, accommodation, vehicle, fuel, capture and tracking equipment.

~ PULSE AFRICA: A contribution from every booking made with Pulse Africa is put towards the GLP.

PLATINUM GLOBE MEMBERS

N\$ 50 000-00+

~ FLORISSA KEISEL: 2007

~ V. & K. ROSS-JONES: 2006, 2009

GOLD GLOBE MEMBERS

N\$ 30 000-00+

~ Rick & Lindy Dekker: 2007

SPONSOR A LEOPARD/GPS COLLAR

~ FREDDIE HERTZBERG: GPS Collar

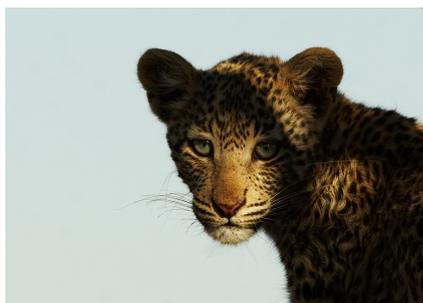
~ KAREN BUCHANAN & DEREK JONES: GPS Collar for Erindi Male

~ BEV LEWIS & ANDRZEJ JANDZIOL: GPS Collar downloading equipment

TULLIANA FIELD MEMBERS

N\$ 1 500-00

~ Dr Andrzej Jandziol & Dr Bev Lewis



Honey-thorn Female, one of the young leopards that we are raising funding for. We need a GPS collar so that we can follow movements of Honey & other leopards on the project.

We are currently trying to raise funding to improve and expand the research work on Erindi Game Reserve and to begin aiding farms that have conflict with leopards. In order to do this we are currently working towards acquiring the following equipment:

~ DIGITAL CAMERA TRAPS

+/- US\$ 500-00 EACH

~ GPS COLLARS

€ 2 500-00 EACH

FOUNDERS OF THE GLP

N. de Woronin

Dr Douw Grobler

W. Pearson

Ruan Cloete

G.P. Britz

Pieters Horaseb

Reinhardt Ngarinombe

Erindi Private Game Reserve

There are daily running costs that we are able to fund through guest experiences and leopard viewing trips at Erindi Private Game Reserve.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you would like to know more about the project or the Leopard Experience trips.