Volume 2, Issue 3

MAY/JUNE

GLOBAL LEOPARD PROJECT

Erindi Game Reserve

2009

CAPTURE SUCCESS!

During May 2009 we were incredibly lucky to have Dr Douw Grobler join Erindi Private Game Reserve to finally capture and fit implants to all the young leopards that we have been following. The rate of growth of young leopards is fast and thus we had decided that implants instead of collars (that could become too small) were the best option to be able to locate the youngsters. We were not sure how long the young leopards would still be with their mothers but it seemed time was running out.

Phantom Tree Female had already left her cubs to head off to mate with a male and we were unsure if she would collect them again after she had mated.

Before Dr Grobler arrived this question was answered. Phantom was found with a Springbuck kill and she did not collect the youngsters...she had officially left them. This would make location of the young cats very difficult and we needed to find them so that tracking devices could be fitted.

Fortunately Yana Female was on a kill with her youngster (Erindi Male) when the Doctor arrived and we had managed to capture Microlight Female on the day he arrived to replace her collar.

Dr Grobler had very small unobtrusive implants with a 7 year lifespan. This would mean that we would not have to re-capture the leopards very often to replace tracking devices. Erindi Male was the first leopard to be captured. Dr Grobler darted him and fitted the implant and everything went fantastically well. The young male was not influenced by the experience and when he woke he walked past the research vehicle and he headed off with his mother. Microlight Female who has had a collar for almost 2 years had her collar removed next and a tiny implant

The Capture Team with Microlight Female

LOSS OF A LEOPARD...

One of the most wonderful aspect of the leopard project is the positive response and help that we always receive from both farmers and hunters.

During June 2009 a neighbor of Erindi called us to let us know that he had found a leopard that had died and that the leopard was wearing a radio collar that he had retrieved. He not only returned the collar to us but he allowed us onto the farm and showed us where the leopards body was. Very sadly he was a vital part of the research project. It was Ger Male who was around 4-5 years old but who had not yet even managed to established a territory of his own.

His injuries were difficult to see but it appeared as if he was injured by a large male leopard...

Inside this issue:

Interesting observations:

- *3 Female leopards left their cubs as soon as they came into estrus for the first time after the cubs were born.*
- *All 3 females followed the males that they were mating with out of their own territories.*
- *Although leopard kill jackals when the opportunity arises, they do not always eat them.*

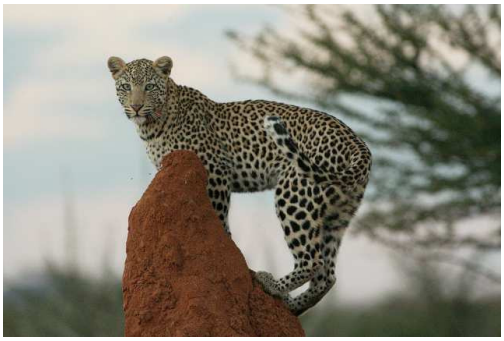
HONEY-THORN FEMALE

When Honey-thorn Female was first brought out into the open by her mother Phantom Tree Female she had an aura of "importance" surrounding her and we were all worried when Phantom left the cubs and we could not find this little female.

We searched for the entire month of May for her and we looked for tracks but alas there were absolutely no signs of where she was.

The fact that Phantom had not collected her for kills and the numerous sightings of her brother without her had us all wondering if we would ever see her again…

And then on the first day of June she re-appeared out of the wild Erindi landscape. She joined her brother Commiphora Male who had by that time



Honey posing on a termtarium.

a tracking device. I headed out to where she had been spotted early in the morning but there was no sign of her. We sat all day with Commiphora and then all though the night hoping that she would return so that we could place a radio collar on her. By the following morning spirits were low as there was still no sign of the young female. And then suddenly...there she was! No worries about the vehicle at all!

She was free darted with absolutely no hassles and within 2 hours she was awake and heading off to try and find something to hunt!

Later in the month due to her amazing acceptance of the vehicle, a film crew that was visiting Erindi to record footage of pangolins and termites decided to spend a morning filming Honey.

She played the role fantastically and she climbed every termite mound that she passed giving the film crew excellent footage!

The great importance of this female is that in the future she will be raising the

GUINEA FEMALE

This "mountain tiger" has not changed one little bit! She still traverses on the mountain range in the centre of the reserve and she rarely ever ventures onto flat land for long enough for us to locate her with the research vehicle.

We have still not had any confirmation on whether she has cubs and because we only get general position data from her collar by daily location and it is difficult to pinpoint exactly where she is and what she is doing!

Once we have tested the GPS collars we will try and get one for Guinea as this will automatically give us daily positions that will be very valuable for the scientific research.

MICROLIGHT FEMALE

Although Microlight Female still has a true dislike for the vehicles, she never ceases to amaze us when we fly in the microlight to see how she is doing!

We flew on a few occasions and each time our sightings from the blue sky were beyond spectacular! This magnificent leopard would be lying in an open dry river bed and she would simply watch as we circled close above her to check her condition. We were close to the point when we needed to change her collar but we still had a little time so we were not focusing on trying to capture her specifically. We had set a cage trap for another male and female leopard and it was a shock to find Microlight Female sleeping in the trap!

The leopard was far from her own territory which would only happen if she was under the "protection" of the territorial male because she was mating. The set of 2 leopard tracks at he trap helped us unravel the story. Microlight Female was mating and she had followed the male leopard out of her territory and through his defended area. We believe that this is the male we would like to fit with a tracking device as we need to know the extent of his territory. It appears that he covers the areas of at least 3 different females on Erindi and he could be father to many of the cubs.

The day that we captured Microlight was the day that Dr Douw Grobler arrived and fortunately he had a tiny implant that he was able to place just beneath the leopards skin in her neck.

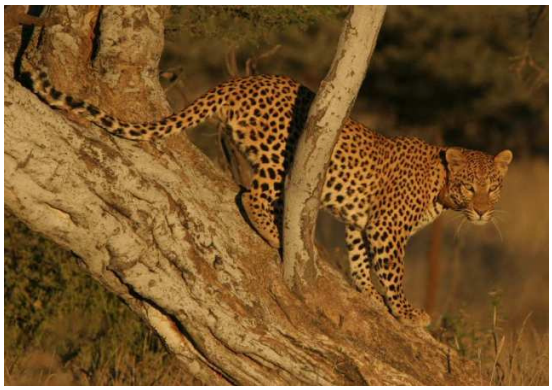
Dr Douw Grobler inserting the small neck implant.

This was a replacement for the radio collar that she wore for over 2 years and is so unobtrusive that she will not even notice it! We will now be testing the implant over time.

XINKOVANYANA FEMALE

During May 2009 Yana became a very different leopard. In 8 manths we had not viewed her a single time in a tree and she did not hoist a single kill. In May she suddenly started hoisting her kills and almost every day she would climb a tree to rest in and watch the area. What caused her sudden change in behavior, we do not yet understand.

During this period she led Erindi Male to his last kill. Between the 2 leopards they killed 3 warthogs in the same place over a 5 day period. It was due to this that we were able to fit Erindi Male with a tracking device. Shortly after this Yana changed her behavior even more. She called regularly from the top of a tree, she began to mark her territory profusely and she rolled and rubbed herself on everything that she could find...Yana was coming into estrus and this would answer an important question. Would it be the estrus and mating of a male that would cause her to leave her youngster or would she only leave him when she was ready to give birth to the next litter?



Xinkovanayana Female descending from a *Boscia albitrunca* after a daytime rest in the tree canopy!

Yana located the male and she mated with him. During this time she left her territory and she followed the male "under his protection" through territories of other females. Once the mating was over she headed straight back to her own territory and she started to hunt.

Yana Female's first kill when she returned "home" was a Steenbuck and at this point our question was answered.

She did not collect Erindi Male to take him to the kill...she had finally left him to fend for himself in the world.

We will be watching her carefully and after the next few kills will know for certain if she still has ties to the young male that she has worked so hard to raise.

PHANTOM TREE FEMALE

Phantom Tree Female started showing signs of coming into estrus almost a month before Yana Female and in May we had a very hard time keeping track of her as she was constantly out of the reserve and out of her own territory following a male that she was mating with.

We found her within Erindi only a few times, once with a large springbuck kill that she hoisted and did not call her last 2 cubs to.

The only place that she checked regularly in the reserve was the den site where she gave birth to Honey-thorn Female and Commiphora Male.

"Male leopards play a huge role in the raising of their cubs...they protect their own young from other males which will kill them if they find them"

In June she spent less and less time in the reserve presumably still mating with the same male north of Erindi. If the hypothesis that we are trying to prove is true, her next litter will be kept safe by the father who spends a great deal of time outside Erindi. For the cubs to be safe, Phantom will keep them where the male is and they may be raised very sadly, outside of the protection of Erindi. Only time will

COMMIPHORA MALE

Commiphora Male is a very special young leopard that has come a very long way. As a cub he was never very confident and his mother often failed to find him to take him to kills. He was always dominated by his sister at food which is very unusual behavior in leopard society. During May after his mother left him he appeared to be dong extremely well. His confidence was up to such a degree that he was regularly found in the open by game drive vehicles. He spent a great deal of time at on of the dams that was slowly drying up. Here he spent his time stalking and chasing every creature that arrived for a last drink before all the water dried up. He managed to kill an unsuspecting jackal at this waterhole which he hoisted professionally but later decided not to eat it!

The young male chased birds and often ended up with a mouthful of nest! He tried his paws at a porcupine one evening with no success! Shortly after this he subdued his fist proper meal, a young blue wildebeest.

Commiphora Male with his first warthog kill hoisted.

ERINDI MALE

During May this leopard was till a "baby". He was fed and looked after by his mother and he had plenty of time to play in between. Early one cold winter's evening Yana Female collected Erindi and led him towards a kill. They bypassed a row of small gabbro koppies and on they other side in his playful state Erindi manage to catch a Steenbuck lamb. His hunting skills stopped right there and Yana could only look out for danger as the young male played with what should have been a meal and not a toy! It took the young leopard 48 minutes to kill the small creature, a very long time, and the lambs distress calls were sure to draw attention to the position of both leopards. Fortunately no danger appeared and Yana waited patiently for the young male to learn his lesson.

Erindi Male a month after he became independent.

When it was all over she continued towards her kill and Erindi dragged his prize as he followed. Both cats headed up a small koppie to where Yana had hidden her kill and both leopards fed on their own meal at the same time. It was shortly after this that Yana led Erindi to his last provided meal. She then came into estrus and Erindi became independent. By that time we had fitted a small tracking implant but unfortunately the implant range is only a few hundred meters making it extremely difficult to locate him. While out searching for him one night we hit a stroke of luck...in the road ahead of us was a large agitated porcupine with a hungry leopard behind it! The leopard was Erindi and he was looking fantastic! We spent the night with him thinking we would find him easily after that but this was not the case. It was almost a month later that I managed to locate him again, this time while I was climbing koppies trying to get signal, he was investigating the vehicle! He was suddenly an adult looking almost 10kg

GOOD BYE TO GER MALE

We think we are strong when we begin a project where we are simply the "observer". The GLP is like a "guest" in the wild, we do not interfere with anything, we simply watch what we see and we information is thus recorded.

When André (one of Erindi's neighbors) called to say that he had found a leopard that had died we asked for the number that was on the collar...it was Ger Male. At this point it was accepted that young male leopards do not always make it to adulthood and this was understood.

Feelings of detachment all dissolved however when André returned the leopards collar to us and took us to investigate what could have happened. It was an unbelievably sad moment especially considering the fact that Ger Male had been doig so well. He was half way toward becoming territorial and he was a good sized leopard. Upon careful investigation of what remained of the once spotted prince, we found puncture wounds through his neck and half his face was swollen and damaged...bites fit the teeth of big male leopard.

At the age of 4-5 years Ger Male was fatally wounded by another male leopard.

UNIDENTIFIED LEOPARDS

There were a number of sightings of unmarked leopard on Erindi Private Game Reserve in May 2009.

Early one evening 2 small cubs were spotted on the eastern side of the reserve. The cubs were oblivious of Ruan and his vehicle and they played for a time right in front of him!

The young female leopard that grew up in the southern portion of Erindi and on Gert Schwaring's farm has become incredibly relaxed with the presence of vehicles. She was spotted close to the road one cool afternoon and to my surprise, she did not run from the vehicle! She in fact allowed me to approach closer and her comfort zone was an incredible 30m! When the vehicle was at 30 she slunk away but not very far and she then allowed us to approach again to 30m! We played this "game" for about 4 hours and it was amazing how accepting she was. This female we have called "Nebula Female" and as soon as we have new collars we would like to include he in the project.

A young male that we believe is Microlight Female's youngster is being spotted regularly in the female's territory. He does not stay around for long but 2 minute sightings of him are becoming regular. This is an important leopard for the research and we will also include him as soon as we can.

CAPTURE SUCCESS!

It is fantastic that we were able to remove the collar from Microlight while still having a small unobtrusive tracking device to locate her.

The challenge then really began, the other 2 young leopards (Commiphora Male and Honey-thorn Female) had to be located while Dr Grobler was still on the reserve. Luck was on our side...just after Microlight Female headed off into the night one of the game drive vehicles located Commiphora Male.

We headed up to try and keep track of him so that he could also be given a small implant and fortunately we found him where he was left. We stayed with him all night to determine what his movements were and at sunrise he killed a jackal close to the vehicle. This was the best thing we could have wished for as the young male leopard would not move far from his meal. Everything was prepared and the following evening he was capture and fitted with and also implant.

Thanks to Dr Douw Grobler almost all the leopards (except Honey-thorn Female) were found and fitted with tracking devices. And imperfect timing!

Honey-thorn Female was the last of the young leopards to be fitted with a tracking device.

We tracked and followed Commiphora Male daily hoping that at some point he would join up with his sister and finally on the first of May Honey-thorn Female met up with Commiphra Male. She was the last of the young leopards that needed a tracking device and again everything went fantastically well when she was captured. When she awoke she was as relaxed with the vehicle as before and this was the last time that she was seen together with her mother and her brother meaning that our timing of finding her was impeccable!

Thank you to all that helped make the locations and captures a success!

SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AIMS

The GLP recently received an e-mail from a concerned person about the "conservation friendliness" among other aspects about the project.

The project aims to be as conservation friendly as possible and thus we would like to share the scientific research aims of the GLP here. The main research project being conducted is a long-term study of male leopards. Male leopards are the target for all trophy hunting yet we do not completely understand the life of these animals or the important role that they play in a leopard population. The research aims to unravel this mystery by answering certain questions. How many male leopards make it to independence and at what age do they become independent? How long does it take a male leopard to establish a territory, how far from where they were born do they settle down, what role do they play in cub raising and how long does it take for them to raise cubs with regard to leopard infanticide. At what age can leopards be removed from a population without negatively effecting it and how can we accurately age these cats? What happens when males are constantly removed? To study these aspects we must be able to view behavior. Many researchers worldwide are working on answering these questions and the GLP is sharing all data with these projects to help ensure "sustainable utilization" of the species. Ultimately this is conservation and these questions must

"CONSERVATION " can be described as the "sustainable use of natural resources".

GUESTS

In order for the scientific aims of the GLP to be met we must be able to view leopard behavior and the only way that this is possible is by the building of a positive relationship between people and leopards. Through habituation (elimination of a response - in this case fear of vehicles and people - without reward or punishment) we are able to record natural leopard behavior without influencing it. Coupled with habituating the Erindi Leopards for scientific research purposes we are able to give an alternative to "consumptive use" of these creatures. Eco-tourism is the most feasible "non-consumptive use" of a species and allows leopards 100% protection while meeting social and economic needs of humans and at Erindi we have managed to make this work!

When the project began in 2007, a 2 month period consisted of 450 hours field work and only 50 hours of leopard viewing by just 1 person. In 2008 only 40 guests had leopard viewing over a 2 month period but in 2009 over a 2 month period 261 ecstatic guests had phenomenal leopard viewing! This has contributed to the Erindi Leopards receiving FULL PROTECTION

GLOBAL LEOPARD PROJECT

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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, 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.

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

GOLD GLOBE MEMBERS

N$ 30 000-00+

~ Vlasta & Keith Ross-Jones: 2006

~ 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 her movements when her mother leaves her.

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

~ SATELLITE/GPS COLLARS

€ 25 000-00 EACH

FOUNDERS OF THE GLP

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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.