

The Cape Leopard Trust Newsletter

August 2006

Dear Cape Leopard Trust supporters, it is our pleasure to update you on all the news and latest developments of our project. We hope you enjoy it. Please Remember - contact us if you have any questions concerning the project or these stunning cats.

NEWS FLASH!!!

We were overwhelmed to hear that the Cape Leopard Trust (CLT) has been awarded a grant of R100 000 from the **Hans Hoheisen Charitable Trust**, administered by the **BOE**. The creator of this trust, Mr Hans Hoheisen, passed away in 2003 after having displayed exceptional commitment and generosity to the conservation and protection of endangered wildlife. We hope the “proof that one man can make a difference” will be perpetuated, with the aid of this funding, in our vision to make a difference in our environment.

LATEST NEWS

CLT Anniversary Fund Raising Event

Ilana - “Like Honey”

The date of our annual event on the August 26th has come and gone. I would have loved to see us launch another fund-raising event at the Two Oceans Aquarium this year. However, this was not to be. Instead, we have opted to invite all our supporters to our function in **March** next year. Ilana Wetzler, an absolutely dynamic and brilliant woman has come to the fore with a plan of action to set up **THE EVENT OF THE YEAR!!!** Ilana is the co-owner of **Serotonin Productions**, and has a knack for producing amazing shows (e.g. “**Like Honey**” – music to melt by) – all to “raise your levels” ... Now I know most of you know that I get quite excited about things, especially leopards, but this event is really going to be a Very special tribute to all our incredible supporters – so as soon as we have finalised a date, we will send this out & expect you all to diarise this as a must. In the interim, I will let you know if there are any other interesting happenings coming up this year.

NEWS ON OUR COLLARED LEOPARDS

“Houdini” & “Johan” GPS Downloads

On the 10th of June, we managed to capture and re-collar “Houdini”. It was a moment I will never forget! **Dr Andre van der Merwe**, our vet who remains an unbelievable supporter of our project, **Rika du Plessis** (Cape Nature) and I were once again the team to tranquilize and re-collar him. This was the fourth time we have caught him. Recent data downloaded from the GPS collars illustrates an expansion of his already large home range during the winter period. His home range is roughly 320km² now.

“**Johan**” – Well, Johan is simply Johan! Amazing!! The perimeter of his area is 112km! A simple MCP (Minimum convex polygon) shows his area as being OVER 700km². I don't think I need say another word about this cat. He's the Man!!

Kooitjie – Our Third leopard collared

Named '**Kooitjie**' (after 'Kooitjie Dawid se plaat' – a notorious 19th century San horse-thief and the name of the rock shelf in front of **Bushmanskloof lodge** where this leopard was captured), the 30kg, slightly built male leopard was estimated to be about seven years old.

Johan Burger (Cape Nature), Willem and I set the leopard trap in a valley on the foothills of the Cederberg mountains about one kilometre behind the lodge. On the 17th July the leopard was found trapped in our cage by excited Bushmans Kloof rangers who set out twice daily to check the walk-through cage trap.

One must always approach a triggered cage trap from the side so as to avoid the leopard being injured. Approaching from the front could have the animal charge you from within the cage and break its neck on the heavy barred doors. However, approaching it in the correct manner also means that you see very little through the vegetation surrounding the cage. **In this instance, the first thing the ranger saw was what looked like a leopard tortoise – till it growled!**

The rangers immediately contacted me. Andre (the vet) once again dropped all his day's work and rushed out to assist in the administration of the anesthetic before fitting the GPS collar. After ensuring that it was in good health and spirits, we released it back into the wilderness. We have managed to get our first GPS download – but it is still early days before we see how large his range is.

Bateleurs – Flying for Conservation (www.bateleurs.org)

Once again – the **Bateleurs** have played a vital role in assisting the Cape Leopard Trust in data collecting on the movements of leopards in the Cederberg. **Johan Ferreira** and **Jock Kannemeyer** have been on top form as per usual! We have had some awesome flights tracking all 3 collared leopards – succeeding on all accounts! It is very difficult to quantify the extent of this assistance – but, to give one an idea...If I were using traditional VHF telemetry equipment; one would have to be in the field every day tracking each individual leopard collared. Firstly, this would be physically impossible due to their massive ranges. Even if I were tracking just one leopard, the costs and time spent in the field would be astronomical. Secondly, the data would never be anywhere as accurate. For example – a recent study of snow leopard in Mongolia has managed to demonstrate how vital the use of GPS telemetry is. Home ranges of these cats using VHF telemetry were estimated as being between 14 & 47km², whereas the GPS data provided home ranges of well over 1000km². Incredible!

Our plan is to continue monitoring leopard movement in the Cederberg over the following 3-4 years, contributing to my PhD thesis on the ecology of leopards here. Downloads will be attempted once a month by aircraft and we hope to have 6 males and 6 females collared during this study period.

We presently have 3 leopard cage traps set in order to try capture and collar at least 2, hopefully 3 more leopards this year. The females remain elusive – even more so than the males – so it will be a major bonus to capture one soon.

SPONSORSHIP

Bushmans Kloof Wilderness Reserve

The CLT has once again received fantastic support from **Bushmans Kloof** towards our research. Fred Stowe, the manager of BK invited me to collect a cheque of R60 000 at their luxury reserve on the 7th July. This is the second year in succession that they have contributed substantially towards our work. I would venture to say that this is where “eco-tourism” is really putting its money where its mouth is.

Leopards Leap

Just when our sponsored Landy had made a significant impression on residents and tourists in the Cederberg, we decided we would just hammer the point home by having eye catching logo's put on the car. The **Leopards Leap** team put their heads together, took a few photographs and vital measurements of Kom-Kommer and then came up with a brilliant design for our signage. On the 24th of June, I was called in to Cape Town, where a team of signage experts took over and covered our vehicle from top to bottom in stickers. From this day on, I have been stopped several times and have turned several heads while in Cape Town. Many thanks must go to L.L for this amazing contribution, as well as a suitable supply of red wine to keep me warm during the cold winter nights in the Cederberg. I am now waiting for the summer whites they have...Mmm, Chardonnay!

!!!We have recently received yet another very generous donation from this conservation minded group. A comprehensive hospital plan has been fully paid for by them, making our board of trustees rest better at night knowing Willem & I have insurance in the event of any medical emergencies.

Supa Quick – Paarl

Kevin du Plessis, owner of **SupaQuick in Paarl**, has once again provided vital support to the project. Driving conditions in the Cederberg are extremely difficult, making it quite expensive when it comes to vehicle maintenance and tyres. Last year, Kevin sponsored 4 new tyres for Frikkadel. This year, he has done the same for our Landy. No questions asked! We are very grateful for this continued support and feel a lot more at ease driving out here.

Safari Centre

Johan Kellerman of **Safari Centre** made no bones about the fact that he likes the work that we do. I had approached him about various accessories we could put on the Landy. After much thought, we identified two essential items, one which he generously sponsored, and the other was provided at cost price. Now we carry as much diesel as we need (**fuel fully sponsored by Peter Turnbull of Eco Aire**), and have a roof rack for all our tracking equipment.

Bizarre Request

If anybody has some “throw-away” furniture they would like to pass on – our research base at Matjiesrivier Nature Reserve desperately needs some lounge furniture. Presently we have the back seat of “Frikkadel” as our lounge couch.

Willem passes his driver’s test

Willem has passed his driver’s test. We got to think that the whole testing system was a bit of a money-making racket after he had failed 3 times. Well, he got it on his fourth attempt. I still think people are being ripped off a little in this department.

PROGRESS OF OTHER CLT WORK

Nicole and the Leopard Conservation genetics project

Nicole has completed her Master’s thesis, obtaining an MPhil (Bergen University, Norway). Although she has completed her research, and we have a good idea of what her results are, we await the publication of her results in a peer reviewed journal before they can be disclosed – we wait in anticipation! I would also like to inform our supporters that Nicole will be taking a break from the Cape Leopard Trust. We wish her well with her endeavours. The CLT will continue to support further genetic research on leopards through the University of Stellenbosch and will keep you updated with any new and interesting developments.

Dassie Health Study

Sarah Smith (aka Kalahari Jane) is back in the USA after a difficult, yet successful pilot study on the health of our dassie populations. This was a study initiated by the CLT in collaboration with Colorado State University (USA) and Dr **Bill Horsnell** (UCT). **Jaco van Deventer**, **Dr Andre van der Merwe** & pathologist **Dr Tertius Gous** were of invaluable support in the implementation and results of this project. We are unable to provide explicit details on the results of this study, as the data are preliminary; however, it has resulted in a continuation of this exciting project.

Sarah worked incredibly hard here in the Cederberg and made some very good friends during her 3 month stay. The CLT can count themselves lucky to have had such an enthusiastic and dedicated person on the project.

Now before I depart from this topic – I am sure many are asking why the CLT are doing work on dassies? Firstly, dassies are known to be favourite prey for our leopards, and secondly, dassie populations in our mountains seem to have diminished considerably over the past 2 – 3 decades, possibly having a significant

impact on predator populations. This proves the benefit of having a charismatic “flagship” &/or “Umbrella” species such as the leopard to find out what is really going on in our environment.

Oorlogskloof Nature Reserve

A little patience will see me getting some very interesting camera trap information out to you soon. We have set up another short (4 week) leopard presence/absence camera trap survey in the Oorlogskloof nature reserve. What a stunning area! Ok, I cannot say it’s more beautiful than the Cederberg – but that’s because I am biased. We will have the results in about 6 week’s time. This project has been supported and co-funded by the Greater Cederberg Biodiversity Corridor (GCBC). Thanks, must go to Wessel Pretorius, Northern Cape Nature Conservation manager of the area – he and his team of field rangers were brilliant! You must visit this reserve.

University of Bristol – the U.K trip

I have just returned from a trip to Bristol to sort out all the bits and pieces for my PhD & spend some time discussing the project with my supervisor, **Prof. Steve Harris**. It was an amazing experience! The mammal research unit Steve runs are brilliant. The students who were at the university and not in the field during my stay were all very helpful, friendly and supportive of the work I am doing. I ended up returning to SA with excess baggage – textbooks and scientific papers acquired during my stay. The university is generously supporting me with a grant of £5000 which goes towards my tuition.

The weekend before I left, I met up with...

Tabs

Margaret Baran, alias Tabs, came out from the U.K. to visit the project in July. She and a couple of friends were taken out leopard tracking as well as to see the Anatolian Shepherd dog, “Tabs jnr” she sponsored to Cederberg farmer **Hennie Spamer** (Driehoek). Tabs (snr.) has now sponsored a second dog, “Jumbo”, to **Joubert van der Merwe** from the Biedouw area of the Cederberg. She has also provided funding to the tune of **£2000** towards my PhD over the following 4 years. Amazing!!

I was fortunate enough to spend some time with Tabs in the UK. We met up with a couple of friends (“Stoaty” & Tam) of hers on the weekend before I left, taking a trip down south to Bournebouthe, Poole & Bath. We did a couple of interesting walks, did some birding and saw some amazing fossils along the coast. Experiencing the “pub life” with the locals was quite an experience too! I must really thank them for the fantastic hospitality & being carted all around, including a lift to the airport.

Anatolian dog sponsorship

We must also thank **Pip & Rinda Niewoudt** (Kromrivier) for keeping one of the 6 Anatolian puppies they bred in the Cederberg for the CLT. This enabled us to sponsor this dog to farmer Joubert van der Merwe in the Biedouw, bordering on the Cederberg. At 7 weeks old this pup already weighed 10kg – he has the most massive paws & is destined to be a JUMBO!

This dog will be working in “Kooitjies” area, as well as being close to “Johan’s” northern range.

Talks – Ceres/ SA Museum/Graafwater

I have been fortunate enough to do a number of talks over the past few months – some of which have been in farming areas surrounding the Cederberg. A talk at one of the junior schools in Ceres was well attended by kids as well as parents & farmers in the region. There is obvious enthusiasm about the work we are doing, and I was kept back for quite a while after the talk to answer questions. Fantastic!

The SA Museum talk on the 25th July was very well attended, with people having to sit on the floor as all seats were taken. It was well organised, and I must commend the Friends of the Museum for the great advertising of the talk.

Albert Smit – Jakkalsvlei

During a recent talk given to farmers and members of the Graafwater community near ClanWilliam, a young boy, Albert (about 6yrs old) was asked what he would do if his dad (a well-respected farmer in the community) caught and killed a leopard. Without a moment's hesitation, he answered " Ek sal sy nek omdraai!!!".

("I will wring his neck"). Judging from his keen interest in the environment, I would say that Albert has begun to display the kind of mettle one needs in the conservation field.

I would also like to thank Rika du Plessis (Cape Nature) and Jannie Niewoudt for their amazing support. The two of them were riding shotgun on this trip to Graafwater, each doing a talk on the Cederberg and the environment. Now when it comes to leopards, livestock farmers in the area tend to get quite worked up. Luckily there are few people who would dare mess with my two companions. One farmer voiced some objection to leopards in general, but was immediately stopped in his tracks by Jannie, who manages to make arguments to other farmers more convincing seeing as he is a well respected farmer in an area where our work is well supported and positive results are evident!

WHAT'S UP?

Kalahari

On the 29th July, Sarah, Willem & Rika (CN), headed up to the Kalahari for a 1-week educational trip. Some might substitute a couple of letters in that word making it "vacational". This may be construed as such - for those of us who love being out in the wilderness sees any trip like this as a holiday. This was the first time Willem or Sarah (a.k.a Kalahari Jane or Dassie Girl) had ever travelled into a wilderness area outside of the Cederberg. Not only that, we were provided an opportunity to spend time with African wildcat researcher, Marna Herbst. As vehicle space was an issue - Willem & Rika got to head into the field with her and actually track a couple of her collared kitties. The "big and hairy's" were also seen on this trip (excepting leopard). Lion and cheetah were spotted by the eagle eyes of the CLT team. New birds, antelope, ground squirrels and a very different habitat made for an exceptionally rewarding experience for all. The Landy with its logo's managed to turn a couple of heads even there in the Kalahari – O.K., so a couple of red-hartebeest stood up & took note as we drove past.

Jennie van Malsen's Birthday Wish

"What", I was told by Jennie who was about to turn 60yrs old, "would I want as a present at this stage of my life?" The answer was about to be revealed to me very soon. Jennie made arrangements to have a massive birthday bash at Jakkalsfontein, near Darling. She then proceeded to inform her guests that any gifts should be made in the form of a monetary donation to the CLT. I could honestly not believe what an ingenious and outrageously generous idea this was. I, for one, have always been "anti-birthday gifts" – now I think is the time to change that. Wait until I have my next B-day bash!

The outcome of the festivities revealed a contribution of **R10 000.00** to the CLT. Jennie, my dear – "Happy Birthday!!!"

Johan van der Westhuizen – accident

Our founding Trust member, Johan van der Westhuizen was involved in a horrific accident on the N1 highway just outside of Cape Town in late June. He was very fortunate to escape with his life and has been bed ridden for several months. This has been quite a set-back for him, though I think one of the most severe of these was missing the beautiful flowers and wonderful transformation of his Cederberg farm, Bakkrans, after all the rain we had this year. I took some video footage of this for him – not knowing if this would cheer him up or depress him – I believe the former was the case. Johan is firmly on the mend & we look forward to him spending more time in the Cederberg again.

Webite

Andrea Plos (UCT) must be thanked for EVERYTHING she has done to assist the CLT. If there is any technical problem, Andrea is forever assisting us – any time, day or night. She also has a nasty habit of “forgetting” to prepare the invoices for equipment she has purchased, or work done for the trust...Thanks Andrea!! I will bring our cheque book along to Cape Town again – in the event that this has jogged your memory...

Darren Green, a student from the University of Natal has offered to assist the CLT with our website. As many of you probably know – I tend to fall behind in updating this confounded thing. My apologies, but when it comes to having a choice between capturing or tracking a leopard and working on our website. MMmmm. No competition I am afraid.

Intratec data recovery – www.intratec.co.za

I am sure many of you are familiar with that sinking feeling when your computer just dies on you. The “blue screen of death” or something similar. Well, I had this happen to me & lose some data I had not backed up yet, as well as all my e-mails/ messages etc. Intratec managed to recover it all & gave us a good discount on top of it.

Donations

We would like to thank the following people (other than who have been mentioned above) for the generous donations made to the trust:

The Claremont Rotary Club; Ian Michler for donating the fees he receives for talks done all over the country to the CLT – He even does some serious haggling for his fee in order to get more money for us; Peggy Whitson for a renewal of her camera trap sponsorship. Another camera trap sponsorship all the way from Australia has come from Louise Littlewood – many thanks!

We would like to also thank Bart Smithers, who filmed and produced the 50/50 programme for making 100 DVD copies of this available to us for distribution to our sponsors.

A Special Thanks must go to **ALL** of our supporters for having the faith in our ability to make a difference with this project. We will continue to do our very best and put all our effort into work that is crucial to our precious environment. If we have neglected to thank any person who should have been included in this newsletter – PLEASE let us know so we can include you in our next newsletter.

Kindest regards and best wishes
Quinton Martins
Project Manager

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Leopard Adoptions:

"Johan" - Leopards Leap Wines/Africa Geographic

"Lisa" - Leopards Leap Wines/Africa Geographic

"Ouma Maaaitjie" - Leopards Leap Wines/Africa Geographic

"Houdini" - Eco Aire/Peter Turnbull

"Max" - Oelz Family

"Oom Arrie" - Engel & Volkers

F6 - "Pantereus" foundation

Anatolian Shepherd Dog sponsorship

Margaret Baran - sponsored "Tabs" working at Driehoek (Cederberg

Peter Braat - sponsored Sheba to Ampie Albertyn in Botriver.

Margaret Baran – sponsored “Jumbo” to Joubert van der merwe at Biedouw farm (Biedouw Valley).

Donors

Avalon Springs; Melissa Baird; Cederberg Conservancy; Cederberg Wines; Cheetah Outreach; Clara Anna Fontein; Gate-7; Gerald Hinde; Guy Hayward; Harley Davidson (Cape Town); Haw & Inglis (Pty); Ian Michler; Louis Kienle; Photo Connection; Picto; MunYaWana Leopard Project; Neil Jowell; RCS; Rotary Club – Clarement; Sandown Motor Holdings; Sean Caulfield; Steve Tugwell;!Khwa