
The Cape Leopard Trust Newsletter

www.capeleopard.org.za

Dear Cape Leopard Trust supporters,

It is our pleasure to once again fill you in on all the latest news and developments on our project. We hope you enjoy reading it. Please remember to contact us if you have any questions concerning the project or these stunning felids.

We would also like to wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. If you are travelling by car, please drive safe, be patient and don't get too bugged with the impatient drivers out there. Enjoy the wonderful landscapes we have instead...

Kind regards
Quinton Martins
Project Manager

We can hardly believe that it is almost the end of another successful year with the Cape Leopard Trust. There has been steady progress with the project and all facets of our mandate are being fulfilled, namely **conservation, research and education**. We have begun with the expansion of the project, moving into the Swartberg/Gamkaberg Corridor as well as a strong possibility of working in Namaqualand. The Trust has also appointed a new assistant project manager for the Swartberg Project, Leigh Potter, who started at the beginning of October.

Much of the success of our project is based on the solid research foundation we have created. This and the fact that information gleaned from our arduous tromping up and down these rugged mountains is conveyed to the public on a regular basis through our newsletters, newspaper articles and regular coverage in the Africa Geographic magazine (www.africageographic.com).

South Africans can also be proud of their commitment to conservation judging by the phenomenal local support we have had this year (and since the inception of the project). This year has seen several new sponsors come on board, including Deutsche Bank who have contributed a generous R100 000. Thank you to those at Deutsche Bank for your involvement and support. Of course, how could we thank all our other sponsors enough for their continued support of our work.

What's All The Fuss?

Just to recap on what The Cape Leopard Trust is all about and why we need your support.

We exist at a time where over the past 100 years dramatic changes have occurred in our precious environment. Human population growth and the consequent habitat encroachment has become a major threat to our natural heritage.

The Cape Leopard Trust was borne when a realisation that the Cape's apex predator, the leopard, may be in danger of extinction, due largely to loss of habitat and persecution by humans. Bona fide research projects were immediately registered with the statutory conservation body, Cape Nature, in association with tertiary academic institutions, to investigate the status of our remnant large predator population. Over 4 years of intensive research has resulted in a clear indication that leopards in the Western Cape occur in very low densities, are highly inbred and appear genetically different from their northern counterparts. Continual persecution and loss of habitat is a serious threat to this population. We are demonstrating that leopards and farmers can co-exist in this environment and mean to make this a norm, whereby farmers are aware of the benefits of not killing predators or any other natural fauna on their land.

Leopards are, however, not the be-all and end-all of animal life in the Cape Folded Mountains. The intricate links that exist between each organism in an environment means that leopards do not stand alone. All facets need to be

understood and conserved in order for life to go on. This balance we strive for is more difficult to attain as a result of human intervention. Thus, our involvement is especially geared to generating information which can be used to lessen the impact people have on their environment, increase tolerance of so-called “problem animals” and expose the public to the importance of conserving what natural assets we are still fortunate to possess.

Our passion lies in the research we do, providing information which makes the reasons behind predator conservation self-explanatory. For instance, killing or relocating a leopard is a futile exercise only resulting in the perpetuation of the problems at hand. We know this, because the ecology of leopards or other predators in our system determines this, and data obtained over the past 4 years has confirmed it.

So, what have we been up to? In a nutshell...

We have completed a 2 year leopard density survey using remote infra-red cameras; captured 21 leopards of which 10 have been collared with GPS collars contributing considerably to the understanding of leopard ecology; we are working to inform and assist farmers such as sponsoring of Anatolian Shepherd dogs to protect their livestock; we have created strong bonds with farmers in the Cederberg ensuring the banning of all gin traps in the Cederberg Conservancy (the first move of this kind in SA); we have published 2 scientific papers in international scientific journals, one Masters thesis, two internship reports, and have formalised a PhD project on the leopards in the Western Cape (Quinton – University of Bristol); we are employing and training community members; we have set up studies on the health of rock hyrax (dassie) populations; we are in the process of determining prey abundance; investigating other non-invasive means to assess the status of leopard populations using new genetic techniques; we have provided a bursary to a Masters student at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University to determine leopard diet; and ...the list goes on...

Leopard News

With leopard cage traps designed by Cape Nature’s **Jaco van Deventer** and built (& sponsored) by **FlexiPave**, we have targeted a number of leopards to collar in the Cederberg in order to fulfil the requirement of a statistically significant sample size - a minimum of six adult males and six adult females within the study area. We have had 9 leopard captures this year alone. Two females and three males were collared and one male (Johan) was re-collared. Most recently, we captured an adult male (M11) in Houdini’s area.

We last had signs of this charismatic cat (adopted by **EcoAire**’s Peter Turnbull) on the 28th May. He was fortunate enough to have his territory located in the Cederberg Conservancy for the two years we tracked him and where there were no chances of him being killed by any farmers. However, M11, after reviewing recent GPS data, looks to have taken over the whole of Houdini’s range, making it almost a certainty that Houdini is either dead, or has been kicked out of his area where we have no contact with his collar.

Quinton has over the past couple of months done a considerable amount of leopard tracking on foot, some of which has been filmed for various television documentaries. Tracking leopard in the Cederberg is exceptionally difficult, and this was the case when he tracked the collared female leopard “Amber” (adopted by Ian & Elizabeth Graham) at [Bushmanskloof Wilderness Reserve](#). A French film production company had come to film this. Just as they got within range of possibly having a glimpse of this stunning cat, she crawled into the deep, dark recess of a cave. A scorching sun, and little chance of her peeping out, meant the team packed up and were treated to a well-deserved beer at the lodge.

To ‘Hel’ and Back

October started out with the entire CLT team taking the long drive to Gamkaberg Nature Reserve, a Cape Nature reserve located 35km outside of Oudtshoorn, to investigate expanding the project to this area. The reserve manager, Tom Barry, and his field rangers were very friendly and enthusiastic and seemed more than willing to put in the overtime required from our work. Suitable sites were found for infra-red cameras in order to investigate leopard densities in this fabulous mountain region of the Little Karoo.

Cameras were set up in Gamkaberg Nature Reserve as well as Gamkaskloof / Die Hel. The drive to Die Hel from the Swartberg Pass is only 50km long but takes two hours. The main reason for this is not that the roads are

dangerously poor but that the scenery is so beautiful one wouldn't want to drive fast in case you miss something. We stayed in the Lenie Marais cottage, one of the original houses in Die Hel, restored to its former glory. Stunning! This is something everyone should be able to experience at some stage.

We have since been informed that our cameras have captured photographs of four individual leopards – two in Gamkaberg and two leopards (one male, and one female) in Die Hel. Thanks to Tom, Tony, Martin and the field rangers for making us feel so welcome and for your support of the project! This was an e-mail from a very excited Tom to Quinton after another leopard was identified:

This is what Nature Conservation is about – thrilling stuff! The passion is so obvious and infectious. Quinton will be heading out that way again this month to survey the area on foot more comprehensively for about 3 weeks – he is happily not expecting to be in phone contact for most of this time.

Leigh Potter will be based at Gamkaberg Nature Reserve from early January and will be hoping to secure further sponsorship for this new and exciting project. Please do not hesitate to contact us in this regard:
capeleopard@hixnet.co.za

Leigh and a couple of CLT volunteers will be present at an outdoor exhibition in George for 3 days beginning on the 10th of January. If you are in the area, stop by and meet the team.

Meerkats, meerkats and more meerkats!

While visiting the Swartberg/Gamkaberg Corridor, the CLT team were fortunate enough to get a chance to experience some “**Meerkat Magic**”!

Grant McIlrath aka the Meerkat Man, has been researching meerkats in the wild since 1993 and has started a meerkat conservation initiative called Meerkat Magic, just outside Oudtshoorn. This initiative gives you the opportunity to observe wild meerkats as they continue with their daily routine – like a personal live documentary!

At 6am on the morning of the 16th of October, Grant directed us to where we would be watching the meerkats and gave us strict instructions on how to behave when they emerge from the burrow system. We all sat on scent-marked chairs awaiting the arrival of what Grant has nicknamed “the forecaster”. This individual is the first to emerge from the burrow and will look around and then disappear back into the burrow where it will feed back information to the group, which then decides whether or not they are going to emerge that day. Luckily for us, the news was good! Slowly the rest of the group emerged and started sunning themselves. Grant reassures them that we are harmless through a series of sounds, with which he used to habituate them. He has habituated several groups of meerkats, each with their own unique sounds.

Soon after the last member has arrived, we start following the group as they begin foraging. It is a truly amazing experience to be able to observe and follow these wild animals. None of the animals has ever been fed, captured or handled in any way and all proceeds from the tours go to conserving their habitat, training of local community members for help with the work and towards subsidies for farmers to conserve rather than farm.

This is truly a unique conservation initiative, with a very strong conservation message generated by Grant, who is unbelievably passionate about this conservation struggle. We would recommend this trip to anyone visiting the area.

Thanks to Tom for organising the outing and to Grant for a truly memorable experience. For more information on Grant's work or to book a tour, visit their website www.meerkatmagic.com or contact Grant directly on +27 82-413-6895 / +27 44-272-3077 or email him at gmmcllrath@mwb.co.za

Felid Biology & Conservation Conference – Oxford University, U.K

Quinton was one of 300 world wild cat specialists invited to present at this extraordinary felid conference in September. This is what he had to say about it:

“It was Awesome! What an amazing experience listening to and meeting some of the world’s guru’s in wild cat research and conservation. Part of the conference was held in the magnificent Oxford University Museum of Natural History, with dinosaur fossils and Charles Darwin’s “Beagle” expedition collection at hand, I was totally overwhelmed. The building alone with its neo-Gothic architecture was enough to take one’s breath away. To top it all was being able to listen to speakers such as the legendary George Schaller – a humble person who has contributed in the most phenomenal way to conserving wild animals, as well as being taken by the eloquence of speakers such as David Macdonald. So, it was no surprise that I was a tad nervous when it was my turn to give a talk. My presentation was well received, and I felt especially pleased that the chairman of this session was one of Africa’s great conservationists – Laurie Marker of Cheetah Conservation Fund in Namibia. Among some of the great South African cat researchers and predator specialists attending were Gus Mills and Paul Funston.

While in the UK, I also managed to catch up with my PhD supervisor at Bristol University, Prof Steve Harris. With his guidance and lots of help from fellow researchers in the Bristol Mammal Research Unit (Graciella, Carl & Janosch especially) – I left feeling that my PhD is well on track and that the resulting thesis which I hope to have completed in just under 2 years from now, will provide the most comprehensive understanding of the ecology of leopards in the Cape mountains.”

Polaris Capital Sponsor’s Weekend at Bakkrans

The weekend of the 24-26 August was spent with one of our major sponsors - Polaris Capital. We spent the weekend at Bakkrans Private Nature Reserve, owned by Johan van der Westhuizen. The weather was great and on the Saturday, we took the opportunity to walk around the reserve and see some of the camera-trapping sites. On Sunday, we all piled into a game drive vehicle and went exploring. The area is truly beautiful, and one feels privileged to live in such a diverse country. Ian McCallum and Quinton hosted the group and knowledge was imparted on all things ecological, from tracking to stargazing. We even had the opportunity of seeing Anthony and Caroline Sedgwick crawling around like leopards in front of the camera trap as well as listening to many entertaining stories around the campfire.

The Adventures of Willem Titus (CLT field assistant)

About the Gamkaberg Nature Reserve field rangers - by Willem:

“In the first place I have to say that it was very good for me to meet the field rangers from the Gamkaberg. They are very nice people and it was good to see the field ranger’s work together as a team, as I enjoy teamwork.

Our Leopard Trust team and the field rangers worked together well, and it was easy for me to make friends with these guys. Some of the rangers are so funny. I like Connie, the zebra man, Oom Jan, Johnny “Depp” and all the other guys. All the field rangers got a chance to go out with the Leopard team. Every morning our team would go tracking and check all the camera traps and leopard cage traps.

When we caught something in the cage Oom Jan said that “Neef”, meaning a baboon, was sitting in the cage. The first 2 days Quinton, Leigh and I showed the field rangers how to set camera traps. We set up 10 camera traps in 2 days in Gamkaberg Nature Reserve. I then taught the guys how to use the Cybertracker. On our last day, Quinton showed the field rangers what the Cybertracker data looked like and gave them each a CLT T-shirt. I think, from my side, that the field rangers enjoyed working with the Cape Leopard Trust as much as we enjoyed working with them. Thanks”

Schools

Two school groups were exposed to the Cape Leopard Trust’s work over the past couple of months. Firstly, the Stellenbosch Waldorf grade 6 class was brought on a week field trip in the Cederberg. Quinton and schoolteacher Elizabeth Bond took the group on an overnight hike teaching the boys and girls about leopards and everything else in the veld. That night, full of trepidation, the class slept out in the mountain, each one having to stand watch for 45 minutes on their own.

All the dread from the previous day was at last forgotten when the sun finally peeped over the mountain peak early the next morning. All survived! The group were then taken on an afternoon game drive to Bakkrans Nature Reserve (www.redcederberg.co.za) in Johan van der Westhuizen's game drive vehicle which he lent us. We ended the night searching for scorpions under ultraviolet light which illuminates these wonderful creatures. The boys and girls were thrilled when Quinton managed to locate and handle two large scorpions for them to get a close-up view. Next was the Bishops Epic. "Epic" is indeed the best way to describe this massive event spanning 3 weeks where over 120 grade10 students come hiking in the Cederberg. The Cape Leopard Trust was on hand to do presentations to the boys, opening their eyes about leopards and other fauna found in the Cederberg. Two specific events were highlights for us: the first when Quinton tracked the male leopard "Trompie" on Uityk pass. He was located about 600m off the road and while Quinton watched from a distance, 12 Bishops boys came hiking down the mountain less than 100m from where the leopard lay watching. Who knows what he was thinking while watching this procession, but one thing is for sure, the boys had no idea he was there, and they were in no danger either? This seems all too common a scenario in these mountains, as people so seldom see or even know of a leopard's presence here, but they often get a good look at us, but are thankfully too shy to pose a threat unless provoked.

The other event was an opportunity for four boys and their Science teacher, Graeme, to track M11 on foot with Quinton. All 24 boys in the group wanted to go, but four had the opportunity after drawing straws. They had quite a hike, but the excitement made it all worthwhile. The leopard, having become aware of their presence, decided he was in no mood for a crowd, so lithely crossed over a steep ridge and disappeared before they even got a glimpse.

Special mention for our Sponsors

Fuji

Fuji Film/Teltron has once again come to assist us with film sponsorship. It is amazing to think that all our camera trap photographs over the past 3 years have been taken on one film only – Fuji 400 ASA print film – the results of which have always been superb. We will be setting up a new website in the New Year displaying many of these amazing pics.

Capestorm

Working in the roughest conditions imaginable requires serious outdoor gear. Thanks to Capestorm's involvement in our project and sponsorship of all our clothing, CLT staff are kitted out to the T. What has been great is that many of our sponsors are now using Capestorm for their clothing requirements. Synergies such as these make assisting conservation easier. Note, Capestorm have just opened a new store in Kloof Street, Cape Town. Check it out!

Leopards Leaping into 2008

We have finally got all the vehicle branding done on Witblits. Our main vehicle sponsor [Leopard's Leap](#) will be clear for all to see as well as our fuel sponsor, [EcoAire](#), Market Toyota and [Toyota SA](#) who have come on board with the vehicle sponsorship. Rand Merchant Bank Fund, our other main sponsor of this vehicle, has chosen not to advertise on our vehicle as this may result in it being a hijack target with criminals thinking we are transporting cash. It is sad that crime in SA has become so bad. Perhaps we need to keep a leopard in the vehicle to keep it safe...

The Wine of the Month club of SA and Leopard's Leap Wines have also come up with another wonderful idea to support our work. Not only does Leopard's Leap already contribute enormously to our work, but they will match the Wine of the Month Club's pledge to donate R1.00 per bottle of Leopard's Leap wine sold over the following 7 months. So, by being as responsible as you can, go out there and try some of winemaker Eugene van Zyl's delicious wines. The leopards would join you if they could.

University of Stellenbosch

The Electrical and Engineering Department at the University of Stellenbosch has once again come to the aid of the Cape Leopard Trust. As we are constantly trying to improve our capture techniques, ideas are shared with brilliant people such as those found in engineering departments – let me tell you, the mind boggles. They will always find a solution to one's technical problems. Anyhow – they have designed and manufactured a cage trap release

mechanism that will assist us in remote releases of leopards after they have recovered from their drug dose. It is unsafe to release a drugged leopard as it may injure itself, so we keep the animal in the cage until it is *compos mentis*. If the cage is not located near a jeep track, we have to release the animal by hand – not a wise thing seeing that it is a leopard (no matter how diminutive our cape leopards are). So, this remote-controlled device winds the door up with the push of a remote-control button. Amazing!

Cederberg Conservancy

The Cederberg Conservancy celebrated its 10th anniversary last weekend. Quinton recalls: “I attended my first conservancy meeting on the 13th March 2004, where I gave a short talk on what my leopard project was about (prior to the formation of the CLT). Some excitement and some scepticism had me in for a long journey. Since then I have been made to feel exceptionally welcome and have been given carte blanche on private and state land in the Cederberg. Huge thanks must go to all the members who have been so good to us here. Good relationships and communication have made all the difference to our efforts to conserve leopards in this beautiful wilderness. For more info on the Cederberg Conservancy: www.cederberg.co.za

Bateleurs

Bateleurs pilot Johan Ferreira and I recently had an awesome flight. We managed to track and download information from both female leopards, F6 & Amber, as well as get a download from Trompie. The latter marks the first leopard which has more than one year’s GPS information gathered from 1 collar. Up until now, collar battery life had never been longer than 10 months. The weather was superb and the flight typically breath-taking, with a stunning sunrise over the Tankwa Karoo as we headed east to track F6. “Oom Arrie” was located way down south in the Koue Bokkeveld, but was in a very difficult kloof where obtaining a download was not possible.

Items for Sale

Cape Leopard Trust Tyre Covers

For those of you who drive a 4x4 and have a tyre mounted on the back of your vehicle – this is a must! Depending on how many are on order at any one time, we expect the cost to be roughly R1000 (or even somewhat less). If you are interested, please mail us with your details and tyre size. We will place an order and post you your CLT tyre cover as soon as it has been made up.

T-Shirts for sale

Cape Leopard Trust t-shirts made by the amazing **Capestorm** outdoor clothing company are now available by order from us, or from Capestorm, Wynberg branch (45 Lester rd, Wynberg); tel: 021 761 2021 or www.capestorm.co.za.

The cost is R160.

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.

Kind regards
Quinton Martins
Project Manager

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"Lisa" - Leopards Leap Wines/Africa Geographic

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"Houdini" - Eco Aire/Peter Turnbull

"Max" - Oelz Family

"Oom Arrie" - Engel & Volkers

F6 - "Pantereus" foundation

Anatolian Shepherd Dog sponsorship

- 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).

Deb Jugan - sponsored “ dog to Josua Visser at Oudam.

Donors

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