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The Cape Leopard Trust Newsletter
May 2006

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

News Flash! 50/50 documentary 4 June – SABC 2

Bart Smithers (**Big Film and Television Productions**) and his trusty assistant, Muffin has produced, what we hope will be a fabulous representation of the work we are conducting. He has really gone the whole hog in terms of coming out to the Cederberg, documenting all exciting events and has tried to communicate to the viewer the unbelievably difficult nature of such a project. No sitting in game viewing vehicles and viewing relaxed “pussycats” for us! Here it is boot destroying, ankle breaking, unforgiving and stressful work trying to study and at the same time, conserve the low densities of leopards wandering these vast distances in our beautiful Cape mountains. We sincerely hope you all get to see the program and that it gives back something of which all of you have put into this project to make it the success it is! ENJOY and may we continue to make a difference. Your support has been remarkable!

Willem Titus – a story to good to be true

I have never come across a more enthusiastic field assistant in my life. Willem has thrown everything he has into this project (and more!). Sponsored by **Rand Merchant Bank (RMB)** and **The Greater Cederberg Biodiversity Corridor (GCBC)**, he has opened himself up to ever facet of the work we are doing. He has also gone beyond what is required, by communicating with the local communities and exposing them to the conservation ethics of the project. As mentioned in our previous newsletter, Willem has little formal education behind his name. Notwithstanding, his fieldwork skills have developed rapidly, and what is really amazing is the progress in data capturing and the computer skills he has picked up. In just over 3 months, he is using Excel and Word documents as if he had been doing it all his life (never having touched a computer before!). He is meticulous with his note taking and transcribes all these notes into the relevant data bases he has created – from mammals to reptiles – GPS co-ordinates, activities, behaviour – all of it is recorded and then typed up at the end of each day. He has almost 1000 data entries to his name since he started!

Willem will be taking his drivers test on the 20th June, which will free him up a lot more to get around alone in Frikkadel. We are also aiming to have him register to do his Matric through correspondence and to send him on as many useful courses as possible. **Capestorm** have offered to sponsor suitable outdoor clothing for Willem.



Above:
Willem tracking “Johan” with Quinton & “Komkommer” behind.

“Komkommer” takes to the starting grid

Initially we were going to name our new research vehicle “Koeksister”, but what came about was the purchasing of a green Land Rover Defender double cab, which needed to be renamed due to the colour more than anything else.

Vehicle sponsors **RMB** and **Leopards Leap Wines**, sponsoring R100 000 and R70 000 respectively, enabled us to purchase this late model off-road beast. **Land Rover Cape Town’s** KenTarr facilitated the sale, which was an amazing deal with loads of extras thrown in. Ken & his lovely wife, Sue, came up to the Cederberg to deliver the vehicle. He was a little shocked at the terrain it had to work in and left saying several prayers to the Land Rover Gods...

Needless to say, it has been working like mad, and any glitches have been sorted out by Land Rover Cape Town with the assurance that they will look after it like gold. Maybe we can finally convince **Land Rover SA** to take an interest in the project in future.

Meanwhile, the **Leopards Leap** marketing guys have been plotting away in their wine cellars and have come up with some fabulous artwork/logo’s for “Komkommer”. So, don’t be shocked when you see this vehicle chewing up the roads on its monthly excursions into the city.

Does the news ever end??? Never! **Peter Turnbull of EcoAire** has just called to say that he has a diesel card already for collection for the CLT & the green machine. This after providing all the petrol for Frikkadel since the inception of the project!!! Amazing!

News on our collared leopards: “Johan”

What makes leopards in the Cape so mysterious? Is it that they are so small, have black noses or are so rarely seen? I would say that the latter is really one of the things that tickle you the most. Having captured and collared two leopards, I was firmly under the impression that finding them for data downloads from their GPS collars would be easy, especially since the Bateleurs sponsored flights to track them. Evidently, this is not the case.

Gerrie Camacho (Mpumalanga Parks Board) was out in April visiting the project when we tracked “Johan” and got to see him with a female leopard. “Johan” had killed one of Johan van der Westhuizen’s springbuck and was feeding on it with the female when we saw them late on the night of the 6th April. This was a stroke of luck brought about by the presence of one of the most awesome predator specialists in SA. Thanks, Gerrie!! However, tracking leopards here is not always this easy...

On the 9th May, a month after I last took to the sky to download data from “Johan’s” GPS collar, Johan Ferreira and I launched another search for this leopard who we believed to be covering about 400km². It took us 1.5hrs to locate a radio signal. Elated, I began trying to download the data using our UHF receiver. Time and time again we would circle the area, and I would lose the signal before being able to gather this priceless information. After 3 ½ hrs hours of agonizing, painstaking attempts, Johan informed me that we were low on fuel. Somber and depressed we cruised back over the majestic Cederberg mountains to his private airstrip – our first failure to track one of the collared leopards and get a download. Being a very determined person by nature, Johan suggested we give it another bash early the following morning. I was overwhelmed by this generosity! Of course, I would be there.

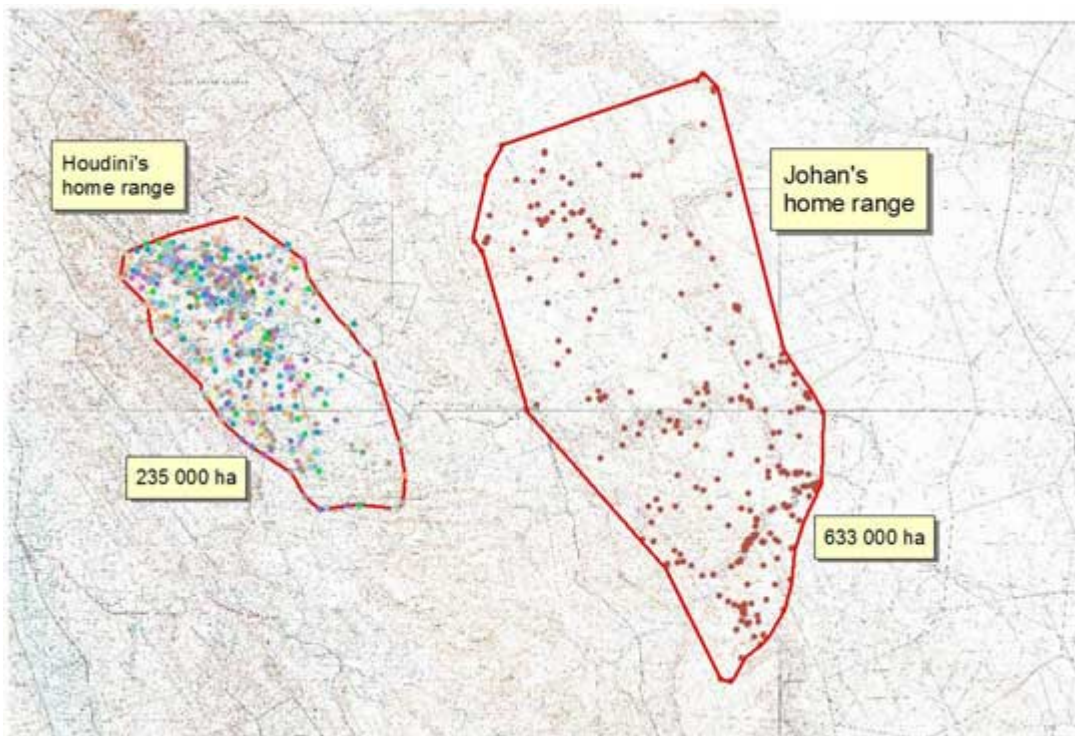
Once again, we located him but could not get a download. He was somehow obscured in a very steep gorge making it impossible to communicate with the collar. Exasperated, I suggested that we head back & that I race back by vehicle and then by foot to get closer. The collar is programmed to shut down at 12.30 pm to save battery power. I had 2 ½ hrs to track him with 75km of dirt road and 20km of 4x4 rocky terrain to cover before getting close. I then ran, stumbling over rocks for 20min over some ankle breaking terrain to the first kloof – no signal. It was 12.05pm. I staggered along the edge of the rocky ridge to another vantage point – weak signal, no download – 12.24pm. One rocky ledge right on the edge of the kloof left to try. I dropped my backpack & ran with the tracking equipment reaching it at 12.29pm. Switched the receiver on & closed my eyes. “COLLAR 2024. RECEIVING GPS DATA” – I could not believe it! He was far below me in a deep crevice – unaware of all the drama taking place to locate him. I called Johan Ferreira – We GOT HIM!! The following day was my birthday – what a present!!!

Now for the really amazing news... “Johan” is cruising over an even larger area than previously expected. We have now downloaded several hundred GPS fixes which show that he is regularly utilizing an area of well over 600km². This news, though exciting and awe inspiring, is also very daunting. What happens if by some chance he gets killed by someone – an unsuspecting victim of a ‘typical’ problem animal situation? Luckily, we have a brilliant understanding with all the farmers in the Cederberg, who are doing their utmost to support the project and find new means to protect their livestock – but with such a massive home range, he is moving over many landowners properties. We have begun to communicate with these landowners, hoping that the holistic approach to problem animal management Cape Nature & the CLT are promoting will convince them not to indiscriminately set gin traps or poison to “take out” a possible stock thief.

Jaco van Deventer and Johan Burger (Cape Nature) have been the backbone in dealing with problem animals here in the western Cape. It is incredible to work with these guys who fit the description of Nature Conservation so well with their passion and dedication to their work. Keep it up!!

Very special thanks must go to Rika du Plessis (Cederberg/Matjiesriver manager – Cape Nature) for all her time and effort in assisting with the project. She has been amazing! We are in the process of helping Rika get her Master's project running on the diet of leopards in the Cederberg. This is a real 'scat' job...

Below are rough estimates of the home ranges of Houdini & Johan



“Houdini”

Flat battery! The bugger! After all the effort and now he has a flat battery – well, actually the GPS component has run flat, which means we can still track him with VHF, but cannot download any more GPS fixes. There was a slight hitch in our testing the collar which resulted in more battery power being used up than expected. This is a set back, but we have set cage traps for him again with the aim to put a new collar on him soon. EcoAires Peter Turnbull, who “adopted” him at our last fundraising event, is quite excited to have an opportunity of seeing ‘his’ cat when we capture him – and that is “when” and not “if”.

GPS Collars

Our following shipment of collars should be arriving soon, which would include collars for the females – 300g collars small enough for our little ladies.

PROGRESS OF OTHER CLT WORK AND LATEST DEVELOPMENTS

Nicole's Genetic work

The clock is ticking away, and it is just over 2 weeks before Nicole returns from Norway. Need I say more...!!!!!!

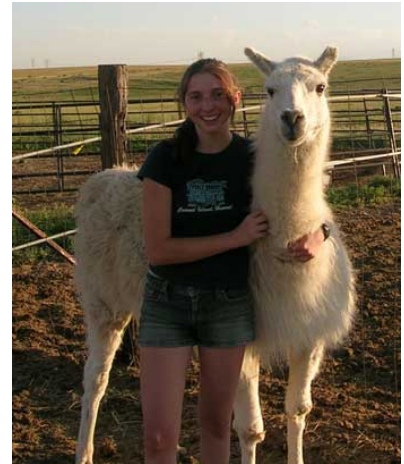
Dr Martins I presume...??

Yes, it's true. I have accepted an offer to undertake a PhD through the University of Bristol, U.K. Fours years of hell (having me as a student) for my brilliant supervisor, Prof. Steve Harris, and 4 years of bliss for me working with these cats. Steve and his dear wife Alex spent a week on the project and seemed to fall in love with this incredible wilderness. Added to that, the prospects of trying to unravel the mysteries of the ecology of such an elusive felid in this harsh mountainous terrain sold Steve on the project.

Bristol University have sponsored me 6000 pounds a year, over half of what subsidies are required to graduate at this prestigious institution.

Dassie study

Our Colorado student, Sarah Smith, has arrived to conduct a pilot study on the health of our Dassie (Rock Hyrax) populations here in the Cederberg. Bill Horsnell, an expert immunologist from the University of Cape Town, as well Sonya Matthee (Stellenbosch University) will assist Sarah in this project. Rika du Plessis & Jaco van Deventer (both Cape Nature) as well as Dr Andre van der Merwe (Piketberg vet) will help us with the practical elements of capturing these guys in cage traps so as not to do any destructive sampling. **Photo: Sarah with something somewhat larger than a dassie**



Tankwa camera trap survey

Black leopards in the Tankwa...maybe...but we have not captured any of them during the course of our 6-week camera trap survey in this spectacular national park. No leopards, not even caracal. However, we got some good pics of some other hardy creatures living out there. African wildcat, black backed jackal, honey badger, aardwolf, kudu, grey duiker and grey rhebuck were just some of the animals photographed.

On a special note – FUJI Film/Teltron has delivered yet another package of sponsored fresh, new 400 ASA Fuji print film for our camera trapping survey. We would, at the end of the year, like to do a display some of the best pics from these camera traps using their film. There are some absolutely brilliant shots of animals in the Cederberg. Thanks for all your support!!

PRESENTATIONS AND LEOPARD FORUMS

Presentations

I have recently had the opportunity to conduct a presentation at the **EWT/Cape Nature** workshop on the holistic approach to problem animal control. This 3-day workshop held in April was brilliant!!! Nationwide – farmers, conservationists, researchers, representatives from the wool and meat industries – all gathered to hammer out the problems we face in dealing with so-called problem animals. The presentations were fascinating, and we were riveted to our chairs as farmers showed how they could become proactive and go as far as to design their own means to protect their livestock as well as

protect predators. Innovative designs, careful observations and understanding of the circumstances of predation have led to a number of individuals making a difference in their environment. I am pleased to say that we can boast about how much effort is being put into this on our doorstep here in the Cederberg. Compliments to all for a very successful beginning to change the extraordinarily poor way in which we manage our natural resources.

BATELEURS - Flying for Conservation (www.bateleurs.org)

Once again, we must thank the Bateleurs and their amazing pilots, **Johan Ferreira** (the Red T company) and **Jock Kannemeyer** for their dedication to the project. Johan has, as mentioned above been incredible! Thank you for everything!! Jock will be doing a flight to track “Johan” in his helicopter in a couple of week’s time.

NEW SPONSORS AND DONATIONS

Bushmans Kloof Wilderness Reserve

Not only are we treated to some exquisite cuisine, but Bushmans Kloof continue to put their money where their mouth is. They have just contributed another whopping R60 000 towards the project. Is this true “eco-tourism” or what?

In addition to receiving funds, we have made an effort to create as much awareness on the reserve as well as educate the rangers in leopard ecology and monitoring projects. Two young ladies, Samantha (resident ecologist and reserve manager) and Aneri (Head ranger) have cracked the whip and have all the rangers scurrying to collect leopard scats, signs of leopard spoor and now also the monitoring of a leopard cage trap the CLT has set on the property to capture and collar a leopard with the 3rd of their sponsored GPS collars. Keep up the good work!

Polaris Capital

The CLT have been fortunate enough to receive another incredible donation from this investment group – R55 000 towards the leopard coffers. As our support base increases, so does the productivity and results of the project. Thank you for this wonderful contribution!!!!

Leopard Adoptions

“Max” – adopted by The Oeltz family:

Naughty Max, captured on the 22nd of August 2005 for killing a sheep in the Cederberg, is alive and well. He seems to have grown quite a bit and looks very healthy indeed. We have yet to find signs of an adult male in the area – so he had better keep his eyes open, as “Houdini” is not far from his hunting grounds.



The "Pantereus" foundation in the Netherlands (www.pantereus.com) who recently adopted F6 is in for more than what they might have bargained for. Two weeks ago I found tracks of this female together with tracks of a cub! This cub would most likely have been born in mid-January. Collaring females will give us an ideal opportunity to find out more about female den sites, birth rates and cub mortality/survival rates.

Cage traps

Mike Snethlage of FlexiPave in the Cape Town area has been working like mad to make up more leopard cage traps for our project. The CLT in turn has managed to sponsor several of these traps to Cape Nature for their use in capturing leopard in a suitable and humane way. Jaco van Deventer, the problem animal guru, has already put these traps to good use. Mike has now even made up a few dassie cage traps for the project we have set up to look at one of the leopards favourite prey animals. FlexiPave also plays an integral role in the design and production of the anti-baboon rubbish-bins seen around the Western Cape.

“Frikkadel”, Premier Auto Rondebosch and the Cederberg Mechanics

On the day delivery of our second research vehicle was made in the Cederberg, Frikkadel blew her top, i.e. her head gasket. The most plausible reason given to us by our trusty friends at Premier Auto were – Jealousy. A Land Rover noggal!! Anyhow, having no way to get the little jeep into Cape Town, Gerrie Camacho & I set about dismantling the engine (which only took us 2 hours) and carted it to

Rondebosch to be fixed by Harty Korsch and the boys. Of course, Harty would not let us pay for anything but the parts to put the engine back together again, as well as a picture of us fitting the engine in the cederberg. Well here it is, seconds after we got “Frikkie” started.

Myself, Willem, Gert-Jan (a Dutch visitor) and Gerrit Karsten of Cederberg Oasis had the engine in within 3 hours. I won't go into the gory details about eventually getting the timing set etc etc, but Gerrit was amazing at delegation of tasks and creating not only a fantastic tourist facility, but a great workshop too.



Camtrap Sponsorships

Tim Holmes is a proud new camera trap sponsor just when all our surveys have kicked back into gear. Peggy Whitson has once again renewed her camera trap sponsorship. She loves all the pics we send her! We have only recently put our cameras back out in the field, so results should start pouring in soon.

Donations

Thanks, must go the Three Investigators Production Company who filmed up in the Cederberg – your donation of R5000 to the CLT is fantastic. You are welcome to come and film here anytime with such an awesome attitude. Thanks also to Dr Neil du Toit of Kontrei Tours for his generous donations to the CLT.

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 & Nicole Martins
Project Managers

Project Sponsors:

Sponsors (R250 000 plus):

Rand Merchant Bank

Sponsors (R100 000 – R250 000):

Bergen University
Bushmans Kloof
Eco Aire - Peter Turnbull
Leopards Leap – Historic Wines
Polaris Capital

Sponsors (R50 000 - R100 000):

Africa Geographic
Capestorm
Engel & Volkers
Rufford Small Grant
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Sponsors ((R10 000 - R50 000)

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Leopard Adoptions:

"Johan" - Leopards Leap Wines/Africa Geographic
"Lisa" - Leopards Leap Wines/Africa Geographic
"Ouma Maaitjie" - 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.

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); Louis Kienle; Photo Connection; Picto; MunYaWana Leopard Project; Neil Jowell; RCS; Sandown Motor Holdings; Sean Caulfield; Steve Tugwell; !Khwa