

# CHIPANGALI WILDLIFE TRUST – RESEARCH BRANCH CHEETAH AND LEOPARD PROGRAMME

NEWSLETTER NO. 1

May, 2003

This is our first Newsletter since the inception of our web site, and we hope to now publish a regular one every few months to keep you updated as to what we are doing in Zimbabwe.

Our work at Chipangali continues with the capture, release and monitoring of radio-collared leopard and cheetah in Western Zimbabwe, as well as the rescue and rehabilitation of snared, injured and sick wild animals.

## **CHEETAH**

A number of problem cheetah which were captured on private commercial farming land in Matabeleland were kept at Chipangali before being released back into the wild. All of the animals were responsible for killing domestic livestock and most came from the Shangani area. Three groups of cheetah were released back into the wild in 2002.

### **Sentinel Ranch**

In January 2002 six of the problem cheetah were loaded into travelling cages and transported to the 32,000 hectare Sentinel Ranch on the Limpopo River where they were to be released.

Digby Bristow, owner of Sentinel was pleased to have these animals on his game ranch and built a large shady holding enclosure into which the animals were released. This group of cheetah comprised five males and one female. They were well fed on freshly killed impala and a week later set free on the vast game ranch where an abundance of wildlife existed on which they could feed. These released cheetah have been seen on numerous occasions and even in the company of other wild cheetah. They have survived very well and have adapted to the much harsher environment in comparison to the much wetter area of Shangani where they were captured. However, because of the Zimbabwe Government's new fast-track land resettlement programme the Bristow family may have to vacate the ranch, and the future of the cheetah and vast herds of wildlife are now uncertain.

### **Matobo National Park**

A further two adult male cheetah were released into the wildlife Game Park section of the Matobo National Park, near to Bulawayo, in March 2002. They were not held in an enclosure as was the case with the cheetah released onto Sentinel Ranch. Within seconds of being released the two spotted a troop of baboons about 300 metres away and without hesitation they sprinted across the open plain in an attempt to catch a baboon. Needless to say they did not succeed. The following day Mr. Chris Pfefferkorn from the Oregon Zoo,

United States, who was with us at the time, assisting with the programme, witnessed the cheetah trying to catch a baby zebra. They same day they actually caught and killed a young

Wildebeest and two days later a warthog. Over a period of ten months we have records of them killing, impala, baby zebra, wildebeest calves, warthogs and reedbuck. For the first three months the cheetah remained in the fenced in section (Game Park) in the Matobo National Park but as time passed so they moved out of the Park and have been

recorded at 12 different localities. They have met up with two wild cheetah and the four of them have been sighted on a regular basis. Because of the vast area covered by the cheetah, and without the use of an aircraft, they were very difficult to find. Their range has already covered no less than 7 commercial farms. However the results of the release are most encouraging and even though we did not hold the animals in an enclosure the operation has been most successful.

## 1.

### **Hwange National Park**

On 20<sup>th</sup> October 2002 four adult male cheetah from Chipangali were loaded into travelling cages and taken to Hwange National Park on our 7 ton truck, together with many rolls of diamond mesh fencing and a whole team of casual labourers. We were lucky enough to have the full use of Giraffe Springs Safari Camp some 50km west of Main Camp. The safari camp is owned by Wilderness Safaris but as a result of a lack of visitors to the Park the owners kindly allowed our Research team and workers to use their facilities. What a wonderful pleasure it was to have the use of such a luxury camp especially as it was at an extremely hot time of the year. It took a day to build a holding enclosure and on 21<sup>st</sup> October the four cheetah were released into their temporary home. We held the cheetah in the enclosure for 10 days and on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2002 we fed the animals on two large impala and released them with full bellies. During the 10 days they were held in the enclosure they were fed on 4 occasions on dead impala kindly provided by the Management staff of National Parks at Main Camp. Once the cheetah were released they split into two groups – one radio collared male went off by himself, and the second group consisted of 3 adult males, one of which was radio-collared. A month later, on 28<sup>th</sup> November, I returned to Hwange and located the group of 3 cheetah some 20 km from the release site and the single male was still operating in the area around Giraffe Springs. While it is still too early to say if the third cheetah release was a success or not at least we do know that they all survived for one month in the wild and in an area where lions and spotted Hyaena are common. They obviously must be killing for themselves as they would not have survived a month without food.

### **LEOPARD**

It has been an unbelievable problem trying to capture leopards for the purpose of fitting radio collars on them in the Matobo Hills. In spite of the fact that we used five traps and hundreds of hours were spent setting traps with a large variety of baits, in many different localities, our success rates were very low. There is no doubt that leopards were visiting the traps and this had been confirmed by the presence of spoor (tracks) on the ground but they refused to go into them. We made every effort to remove all traces of human scent and activity around the traps, and used a variety of baits including goats, duiker, impala and wildebeest. We used very fresh bait and even old dried bait but with very little success. However we did succeed in capturing two female leopards during the year. One adult female which we named “Nswatugi” was captured on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2002 and another female on 9<sup>th</sup> October which we named “Inungu”. Nswatugi was definitely pregnant when we caught her and by palpating I could feel the heads of two babies. I believe she eventually gave birth to her cubs in mid June 2002, and she was recorded on no less than 15 occasions in a very small area. A great deal of information on the movement of this female is now available and precise details of her home range have been worked out from a total of 231 records. On one occasion in June she was seen with her previous litter of two large cubs very close to where she was caught.

As “Inungu” was only captured and fitted with a radio collar in early October 2002 we only have a few records of her movements and home range. One interesting thing that has come out of Inungu’s movements is that she passes through the game fence on the northern boundary of the Park and spends some of her time on Mineral King farm.

While we have battled to catch leopards in the Park we have had no difficulty catching other species quite unexpectedly. For example we caught 2 bushpigs, 1 brown hyaena, 1 warthog and two honey badgers in the traps set for the leopards. In the case of the brown hyaena we fitted a radio collar on him and we have since located him on several occasions including

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twice outside the Park on private land. The capture of the brown hyaena is the first positive record of the species in the Matobo National Park as it was not known that the species occurred in the area.

### **CHIPANGALI WILDLIFE RESCUE UNIT**

Land ownership in Zimbabwe is now changing rapidly and with the new “fast-track” resettlement programme many cheetah and other wildlife species are being hunted, snared and killed illegally. In many instances snare lines are not checked regularly by poachers and as a result large numbers of unfortunate animals are left to suffer and die with tight wire snares imbedded around their necks, bodies or legs. This unfortunate decimation of Zimbabwean wildlife is taking place throughout the country not only on recently resettled farms and ranches but in urban areas as well.

For example even in the suburbs of Bulawayo animals are being snared. One recent incident took place only a few kilometres from the centre of Bulawayo where two kudu cows were removed from wire snares. One animal had already choked to death, while the second one was released after we immobilized it and the wire snare cut loose. In another incident a cheetah with a broken off wire snare still around its neck was found in one of the suburbs of Bulawayo. Other instances are far too numerous to mention. Examples of just a few of the animals rescued by Chipangali during the year are mentioned below:

#### **Rescue of Dangerous Leopard caught in Gin Trap ???**

On the afternoon of the 20<sup>th</sup> July, I had a very urgent call from National Parks to please help

immediately with the removal of a leopard that was caught in a gin trap in the Sun Yet Sen area of southern Zimbabwe some 200 km away. The police at Sun Yet Sen Police Station reported to National Parks that the animal was dangerous and the villagers were afraid that someone could be killed by it. However it took us some time to sort out drugs and drugging equipment, get diesel into our vehicle, load a large travelling crate onto the vehicle and get the staff ready for the rescue operation. At 3.50 pm Kevin (my son) and I together with four Chipangali Workers set off on the long journey of over 200 km to rescue the trapped leopard.

We were advised by National Parks to call in at the Sun Yet Sen Police Station to collect a policeman who would be able to direct us to the village where the leopard was trapped. This we did and an hour later we arrived at the village. After the policeman questioned a number of people about the trapped leopard it appeared as if no one knew anything about it. Another half hour passed and we finally ascertained that an “animal” had been caught in a trap and we were directed to the place by one of the locals.

When I received the original message from National Parks they assured me that we could drive right up to the trapped leopard and this was conveyed to them by the Police. This was very important as it would have been very dangerous to approach a trapped leopard on foot.

Anyway as it turned out we could not get to within 500 metres of where the animal was trapped so we had to approach the spot very carefully especially as we did not want anyone to be injured if the leopard broke out of the trap. Quite unexpectedly we came across three local villagers standing under a large sausage tree and on the ground was a dead civet. We enquired where the trapped leopard was and they informed us that it was not a leopard that had been caught but the civet they were now looking at.

To cut a long story short I was not in the least bit amused at the total lack of consideration on the part of the police who made no effort to ascertain the true facts before passing the information on to National Parks!!

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#### **Rescue of orphaned leopard - (Story by Priscilla Eva)**

A phone call from Rosslyn Farm to the Chipangali Wildlife Research Unit set into motion a capture team to rescue a leopard said to be caught in a cage by the local farm workers. The leopard it was alleged had killed 52 ostriches at Rosslyn. On the morning of 31<sup>st</sup> September 2002, we set off with the necessary equipment to dart and collect the animal. On arrival at the farm we were informed that the ostriches that were killed were only chicks and that the leopard was not too far away in a temporary cage.

A terrified baby leopard weighing no more than 12 kg, was found in the cage, trying hard to look as dangerous as possible and it was then decided to transfer her into another cage, without darting her and transport her back to Chipangali Wildlife Orphanage.

Before leaving we needed to establish why this baby was on its own, as it should still have been suckling from its mother. It transpired that a female leopard had been shot on the farm at the end of May, 2002, that had been suckling young cubs.

This helpless cub had managed to survive on its own, by eating and sucking on the carcass of a dead waterbuck in a nearby river bed. Frank and Misheke, two local farm workers, came upon the cub feeding on the rotten carcass and this was how it managed to survive up to that point. Frank and Misheke took it upon themselves to start feeding the cub by putting out water and some meat. However it must have still been ravenous and decided to try baby ostriches, or it was trying out some hunting skills. We are grateful for people like Frank and Misheke to have rescued this young leopard from certain death by calling in someone to help with the situation. She is doing well at the Orphanage.

#### **RARE AND ENDANGERED (RAE) DUIKERS ACTION GROUP**

In 2002 I completed and published my book on the “Duikers of Africa” (Masters of the African Forest Floor) and in my book I highlighted how very important the rare and endangered (RAE) duikers were and gave some ideas of how we could possibly try and control the bushmeat trade, but not stop the bushmeat trade altogether. I am very interested in getting a highly motivated team of people together to help develop a “rare and endangered duikers action group” who would help produce ideas and proposals to get started. As you know there are a large number of people and international Wildlife Organisations who are well aware of the plight of the charismatic large mammals such as black rhino, elephant, mountain gorillas, chimpanzees etc. These animals certainly do grab headlines and vast sums of money are allocated to their survival. This is as it should be but what about our RAE duikers which are many times rarer than the spectacular large species.

The species which are of most concern are the Zebra, Jentink's and Ogilby's duikers in West Africa, and Ader's and Abbott's duikers in East Africa. If something is not done to stop the overexploitation of these and other duikers we would certainly loose many species in the not too distant future. If you are interested in joining this group you can contact me as follows:

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