CHIPANGALI WILDLIFE TRUST

CARNIVORE RESEARCH INSTITUTE (CRI)

Up-date of all Research Projects

September 2005

CONTENTS

PROJECT NO 1: THE FOOD AND FEEDING HABITS OF THE LEOPARD (*Panthera pardus)* IN THE MATOBO NATIONAL PARK, ZIMBABWE

This project commenced in January 2002 and after a period of 4 years it will finally come to an end in December 2005. Up until the end of 2004 we had already collected 2630 different piles of droppings as follows:

2002 - 420 piles 2003 - 810 piles
2004 - 1400 piles **Total 2630 piles**

A much more determined effort was made during 2005 to cover a much larger area of the Matobo Hills and two completely different areas were added to the study area where another 418 piles of leopard scats were collected. One of the new areas sampled being around Mpopoma Dam and Lushongwe Platform and the second was in the Mtshelele Dam area. In both these new areas the staff of the Parks and Wildlife Management Authority have helped collect leopard scats and their participation in the project has been greatly appreciated.

The other detailed study areas where we have been working for 3 years include:

- Maleme Valley – from the Maleme Dam to Inungu Hill;
- Nswatugi Road – from the turnoff to Whitewaters (on the main gravel road) to the bottom of the concrete ramp on Nswatugi Hill;
- The Scenic Drive – from the tar road to the Circular Drive;
- Outside the Park – on the Kezi Road north of the Park boundary.

For the period now under review (January – September 2005) another 606 piles of leopard scats had been collected. This brings the grand total to date (January 2002 to September 2005) to **3236**.

With the help of two National University of Science and Technology Attachment Students we have already processed 2400 piles of scats and the detailed analysis of the remains in 1850 have already been completed.

Additional scats will be collected for another 3 months (October – December 2005) and then all fieldwork will come to an end.

In addition to the 27 carcasses which were thought to have been killed by leopards another 11 were located in 2005.

Leopard Kills Serval (Matopos National Park)

On Tuesday 14th September, 2004 at 6:30am we were on our way to Maleme Vlei to catch invertebrates as part of our biodiversity survey of the Matobo Hills World Heritage Site.

At less than 20 metres from our tented camp at Maleme Dam we came across signs of a kill that had taken place during the night. Tracks on the dirt road indicated that a leopard had killed a small cat during the night and it was clear that after being killed the leopard dragged the animal along the dirt road for about 100 metres. It then turned off the road and dragged the carcass up a steep rocky hill for another 100 metres. We followed the drag marks and discovered a dead fully adult male serval close to the entrance of a large rocky overhang. The serval had deep teeth marks in its neck and this had obviously killed it. The serval was not eaten and there was no sign that it had even been licked by the leopard.

It was difficult to understand why the leopard had killed the serval as it was obviously not hungry. Mr. Vivian Wilson was advised of the incident and he collected the carcass for dissection and recording its body measurements and mass.

Collin Khumalo, Nduduzi and
Portia Dzukuso

15th September 2004

PROJECT NO 2: THE HOME RANGE AND MOVEMENTS OF RADIO-COLLARED LEOPARDS (*Panthera pardus)* IN THE MATOBO NATIONAL PARK, ZIMBABWE

At the time of writing my last report our research team had been monitoring five radio-collared leopards.

Details of each of these animals are as follows:
No 1: "Nswatugi" - Female captured 6 May 2002
Over a period of two years we located her on 291 occasions. In June 2004 the batteries on her radio-collar expired and therefore we could no longer track her. From January 2005 to the end of August 2005 "Nswatugi" had been seen on several occasions not only by our own research staff but also by staff of the Parks and Wildlife Management Authority and always within her "known home range".

No 2: "Inungu" - Female captured 9 October 2002
As with "Nswatugi" the batteries in the radio-collar of "Inungu" have now expired. Her radio-collar was still working in December 2004 but by the end of January 2005 we could no longer find her with our receiver. The batteries in her collar therefore lasted 27 months, which I believe is very satisfactory.

Over the period of 27 months that we tracked her she very seldom left the Maleme River Valley. However, she did often leave the Park and spent days at a time on the Mineral King Farm north of the Park, which is also in the Maleme Valley.

No 3: "Whovi" – Female captured 3 June 2003
"Whovi" has over the last two years been one of our problem leopards. We have not been successful in locating this animal as often as we did "Nswatugi" and "Inungu". I believe the problem has been the area in which she moves. The habitat in which "Whovi" lives is far more broken and a large stream also passes through the center of her home range. Large hill masses of granite boulders and hundreds of caves and large trees occur in her territory. This has made finding her radio-signal very difficult and even though we spent many hours looking for her our successes have not been great.

However I believe her radio-collar is no longer working and therefore it is now going to be almost impossible to find out what has happened to her. I am positive she is still in the area, but difficult to find.

No 4: "Chintampa"– Female captured 29 Jan 2003
The batteries in this female's radio-collar have now expired and we are now unable to locate her. The staff at the gate to the Game Park have often seen a leopard with an orange collar close to the gate where they are working and have even seen her laying on a large branch of a Wild Fig tree close to the gate.

The Game Scouts on patrol in the area saw her on an impala carcass on 15th June, 2003 and in March 2005 she was seen stalking some Klipspringer close to the main tar road to Kezi.

No 5: "Pomongwe"- Adult male captured 25 Sept 2003
This leopard has been an absolute pleasure to work with and even though he covers a very large home range compared to the four females mentioned above, he has not been a difficult animal to find.

His home range overlaps those of at least two adult females –"Nswatugi" and "Inungu" and even possibly a third female that we have not been able to catch. This unknown female has a territory lying between "Inungu" and "Nswatugi" but about 50% of her home range lies outside the Park. She has been seen on several occasions by the National Park staff patrolling the area. As with the other leopards "Pomongwe's" radio-collar lasted for nearly two years – slightly less than those of the females – and by the end of July 2005 we were no longer able to find him. However positions at which he was located over a period of 22 months have given us a good idea of his home range.

No 6 : "Portia"- Female captured 17 January 2005
Just as the batteries in the radio-collars on our first five leopards had expired we were delighted to capture a very beautiful adult female leopard which we named "Portia". On Monday night, 17th January 2005, our research staff in the Matopos captured her. We had been trying to catch and radio-collar another leopard for over a week, but had a major problem getting suitable good quality bait. Bait for setting traps is a persistent problem, and very often we have to use bait which was old and "smelly", which we believed was quite unsuitable. For two days our 5 leopard traps were set with old poultry that we got from Chipangali Wildlife Orphanage – and no luck. Then for another three days we used some very "smelly" cow meat – again from Chipangali and again no luck.

It poured with rain for much of the time in the Matopos on Sunday night (16th January) and again on Monday night (17th January) and as a result we really did not expect to catch any leopards. On Tuesday morning (18th January) we very casually inspected our 5 traps and to our absolute surprise and delight we found a leopard in one of them. We were about to start work on the leopard and even before we immobilized the cat the heavens opened and it rained and rained and rained. We had no option but to continue and as none of us present had any raincoats or umbrellas we just continued to get soaked – and so did the female leopard in the trap.

Fifteen minutes later the leopard was immobilized and fitted with a radio-collar. We took her body measurements and weighed her. She weighed 45kgs and was a fully adult female with full permanent dentition and sharp canines. This female was typical of the Matopos females, which are all very small – but nevertheless very attractive animals. As it was still pouring with rain we placed the drugged leopard back into the "trap cage" and covered the cage with a large piece of canvas. In spite of being drenched (as we all were) the leopard recovered perfectly and was released.

The most interesting aspect of the whole operation was that the leopard was caught with bait that was already 5 days old and almost rotten. Leopards in the Matopos are notoriously difficult to catch and I believe in this particular instance all signs and smells of humans had been washed away by 2 days and nights of rain, in addition the cat was obviously very hungry.

Judging from her teats she had not yet had any cubs but she did appear to be pregnant. "Portia" has been a delightful animal to follow and over a period of eight months we have been able to find her every time we have gone out with our radio-receiver. Over one period of six weeks we constantly picked up her radio-signal in exactly the same place and at one time we even feared that she was dead – but the signal from the collar indicated that she was alive.

On four occasions we obtained the assistance of two armed National Parks staff to track her to a cave where we knew she lived and on two occasions actually saw her. She was extremely aggressive and we believed she had cubs in the cave. "Portia" was also often found to be associated with the Male No. 7 (which is discussed below) and on numerous occasions they had been recorded together.

No 7: "Whawha"- Adult Male captured 14 Feb 2005
A month after capturing "Portia" we caught a large male leopard in the same trap and in the same place where "Portia" was captured on 17th January, 2005. The interesting thing about this leopard was that it was also attracted to some very rotten impala meat in the trap. The bait was already very smelly and yet the leopard entered the trap to eat it.

The male had a total length of 250cm and weighed 54kgs. He was an exceptionally fine specimen.

Since fitting a radio-collar on him we have been able to find his exact whereabouts on dozens of occasions. There had not been a time when we had not been able to find him. His home range overlapped with that of "Nswatugi" and extended westwards towards the main Kezi Road while that of the male "Pomongwe" extended eastwards to Maleme Dam.

As a result of the prime habitat in which the Matopos leopards live and the fact that there is an abundance of food the species has not been easy to capture in the Matopos. I believe we have been very lucky to have caught two large adult males and five adult females.

PROJECT NO 3: CAPTURE AND TRANS-LOCATION OF PROBLEM CHEETAHS, LEOPARDS AND BROWN HYAENAS FOUND KILLING DOMESTIC LIVESTOCK AND THE MONITORING OF THEIR MOVEMENTS AFTER RELEASE BACK INTO THE WILD

1. Cheetah – Matobo National Park release: The two cheetah released into the Matobo National Park (only one was fitted with a radio-collar) in March 2002 are still surviving and in fact doing very well. Even though the batteries in the radio-collar of one of the animals has expired and therefore we are unable to track them with a receiver they are still often seen by National Parks staff, visitors to the Park and even local farmers in the area.

The two cheetah move in and out of the Game Park and even though the Park is fenced with a game fence they still move about a great deal. There are records of them on the farms surrounding the National Park and they often return to the Park where they have been recorded killing impala, warthogs, baby wildebeest and baby zebra.

A recent report of a female cheetah with three large cubs in the Game Park has been given to me by Mr. Ian Harmer, a Photographic Safari Operator who constantly visits the Park.

Cheetah – Hwange National Park releases: As mentioned in my previous Newsletter the four cheetah released into the Hwange National Park on 31st October, 2003 did exceptionally well for over 2 years and then unfortunately they strayed out of the National Parks where one animal was killed by local people, another injured its foot very badly and had to be put down while the third cheetah in the group disappeared and has not been seen again.

The fourth animal in the group of four moved into the Shumba Area where it joined up with two wild cheetah. On 22nd July, 2004 they were seen hunting a kudu cow on the Shumba Plain. Since then the three cheetah, one of which is the released one fitted with a radio-collar, has often been seen in the Robins, Shumba and Sinamatella areas of the Hwange National Park. At the time of writing this Newsletter this radio-collared cheetah is still doing well three years after being released into the wild.

The second group of cheetah to be released into the Hwange National Park consisted of two adult males. One was fitted with an orange radio-collar. This group moved into the Nyamandhlovu Pan area and then the Dopi Area by September 2004 and remained in that area for many months. By July 2005 they had moved to Sinanga Pan and then to the large open grassland at Jambili Pan. Reports reaching me indicated that in August 2005 the two animals were still in the Manga/Jambili area and as the one with the orange radio-collar was still in the group they were easily recognised.

The third group of cheetah to be released into the Hwange National Park took place on 31st October, 2004. One was fitted with a yellow radio-collar. By December the pair had moved into the Tshebema area and by January 2005 they had taken up residence in the area around Dom and Nyamandhlovu Pans. These two males remained in the area for nearly four months and then moved to Dopi and even as far south east as Makwa Pan. They returned to the Nyamandhlovu Pan area in June 2005 and are still in the area at the time of writing.

National Parks staff have advised me that on three occasions over the past 6 months these two cheetah have been seen hunting kudu and on two occasions actually killing females.

2. Leopard – Hwange National Park

On 21st March, 2003 we released a livestock killing leopard into the Hwange National Park. It was fitted with a yellow radio-collar and released at Tshebe Tshebe Pan. The animal was seen from time to time and on only 14 occasions were we lucky enough to pick up its radio-signal. By December 2004, 21 months after being released we recorded the animal in the Nyamandhlovu Pan area. By February 2005 we could no longer find the leopard with the radio-receiver and presumed that the batteries in the collar had expired. In April 2005 a visitor to Hwange reported a leopard with a yellow radio-collar in the Balla Balla Pan area and in July 2005 it was seen again at Dynamite Pan near Main Camp. The animal obviously is still alive and moves about quite a lot especially in the in the "10 mile drive area" of Main Camp.

3. Brown Hyaena – Hwange National Park

On 31st October, 2004 we released a wild caught Brown hyaena from the Gwanda area into the Hwange National Park. It was fitted with a yellow radio-collar. The animal remained in the Giraffe Springs area where it was released for several days and then moved to Danga Pan.

In February 2005 the Brown hyaena was tracked to the Nehimba area and it was a delight to find it with two other Brown hyaenas. Since then the animal has been seen by itself at Shumba Pan by the pump attendant working there. He mentioned that on four occasions while he had been attending to the pump he had seen a hyaena with a yellow collar drinking at the Pan.

PROJECT NO 4 : THE HOME RANGE AND MOVEMENTS OF A BROWN HYAENA (*Hyaena brunnea)* IN THE MATOBO HILLS WORLD HERITAGE SITE

The Brown hyaena captured in the Matobo National Park near Nswatugi Cave on 10th June, 2002 was fitted with a radio-collar and released. Over a period of two years the animal was tracked with a receiver on a number of occasions. However, the last time we were able to find it by its radio-signal was on 4th December, 2004. Since then there has been no signal from the collar. A National parks Game Scout on patrol in the fenced Game Park saw the animal on 18th May, 2005 at Chintampa Dam and there is another record of it from Lushongwe Platform on 21st June, 2005. Both these visual records are many kilometers from where the animal was originally caught. As this Brown hyaena has also been recorded from Maleme Valley and now recently at Chintampa Dam it indicates the large distances that it travels.

PROJECT NO 5 : CHECK-LIST & ATLAS OF THE CARNIVORES OF MATABELELAND

A special form was designed for visual records of Carnivores seen in the wild. The form was distributed to dozens of people throughout Matabeleland and especially to hunters, farmers, Wildlife rangers and wardens and anyone else interested in the Carnivores of Matabeleland.

While the response in general has been poor we have nevertheless still received back 51 completed forms giving localities at which a total of 11 different species of Carnivores have been seen. These include white-railed Mongooses, civets, genets etc. including one record of a caracal. Nine of the visual records have included leopard and two of Brown hyaenas.

Work on this project continues but the shortage of fuel for our vehicles has also prevented our team from traveling as much as we would have liked.

CHIPANGALI WILDLIFE TRUST
(CARNIVORE RESEARCH INSTITUTE)
- LARGE CARNIVORE and PYTHON SURVEY -

LION●LEOPARD●CHEETAH●BROWN HYAENA●SPOTTED HYAENA●WILDDOG●SERVAL●CARACAL●PYTHON

We welcome your participation in this survey. If you see any of the carnivores mentioned above please complete the form below and post it to Mr. Viv Wilson at the address below, or if you are in a National Park, hand it to the Gate Attendant when leaving the park.

SPECIES:			DATE:	TIME:
IF POSSIBLE GIVE SEX AND AGE CLASSIFICATION OF GROUP				
Total Number Together	Adults			Subadults / Babies (approx age)
	Males	Females	Unsexed	
LOCALITY (in detail)				
HABITAT :				
NOTES : (If python give details of approximate size)				
Your Name (Print):	Address: E-Mail :			

N.B . Post to Mr. Viv Wilson, P.O. Box AC1310, Ascot, Bulawayo. Phone – 09 ● 286603. E-Mail - duiker@ecoweb.co.zw

THE CARNIVORE RESEARCH INSTITUTE (CRI)

The CRI was established in January 2004 with the specific intention of studying the Carnivores of Zimbabwe with emphasis on a few selected large species such as leopard, cheetah and brown hyaena.

The staff of the Institute, assisted by volunteers and local University students are undertaking a number of field projects. We have radio-collared leopards, cheetahs, servals and brown hyaenas, which are being studied in order to determine the size of their territories, and their home range and movements in relation to different habitat types in Matabeleland.

Another project is a detailed survey of all the Carnivores of Zimbabwe in order to produce a Check-list and Atlas of all species, which will include details of distribution and status.

The CRI is also assisting the staff of the Parks and Wildlife Management Authority with the capture and translocation of problem livestock killing leopards, cheetahs and brown hyaenas. After fitting radio-collars on these problem predators they are released into the Hwange National Park where their behaviour and movements are studied.

The CRI is also involved in a field survey and Captive Breeding Programme of the Southern African Python. The project includes the distribution and status of the species in the wild and its growth, development and reproductive potential in captivity.

If you would like to know more about any of these projects, please contact Mr Viv Wilson at the E-mail address : duiker@ecoweb.co.zw or at the postal address overleaf.

VIVIAN WILSON
Chipangali Wildlife Trust

THIS FORM IS SPONSORED BY: Columbus ZOO and Aquarium (USA)

FORM USED TO RECORD DETAILS OF ALL LARGE CARNIVORES AND PYTHONS SEEN

PROJECT NO 6 : FIELD SURVEY & CAPTIVE BREEDING PROGRAMME OF THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN PYTHON

A Research Permit to study the Southern African Python in the wild and to establish a Research and Captive Breeding Project at our Research Offices in Matsheumhlope, Bulawayo has been obtained from the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority. In addition a Development Permit has also been approved by the Bulawayo Municipality.

The project had a wonderful start in January 2005 with a very large female python and her 20 newly hatched babies being given to us by Dr. Morris Mtsambiwa, Director-General of the Parks and Wildlife Management Authority. In addition another nine large pythons and seven medium sized specimens were also given to the project. At the time of writing we already have 37 pythons as founder animals.

A large python house with heated 'hide away' places has been built to house the very large specimens. In addition we have 10 large vivariums for the babies.

A rabbit breeding colony has been set up so that we can breed rabbits to feed to the large pythons and 20 special mice trays with groups of breeding mice as food for the baby pythons.

The project has been operational for less than 9 months and already unbelievably good data is being collected.

In addition, we have two small South American Boa Constrictors and a small Anaconda that we are studying to compare their rate of growth and development with that of the African python.

We are particularly keen to obtain additional large exotic constrictors for comparative purposes and would welcome any specimens that are not required or surplus to any persons own requirements.

Python – Mice - Land Rover

In January 2005 I was asked to collect a large 14 foot python from herpetologist Steve Durrant in Harare. The python had eaten someone's cat and instead of killing it, it was captured and placed in a very large and strong cardboard carton. The carton was very well sealed with masking and camera tape so there was no possibility that the python could escape.

I collected the python from Steve Durrant and as we were staying overnight with friends in Harare, we left the carton (with python) in my Land Rover. During the day I also collected 100 white mice from the Veterinary Department as I was wanting to set up a mice breeding colony and use the young to feed to the baby pythons. During the night it rained a great deal and as the hardtop of my Land Rover leaked some water got into the back of the vehicle.

At 5:00am the next morning it was still raining and still dark. On looking out of the window of our bedroom, I noticed the parking lights of my vehicle were on. That I couldn't understand as I had definitely not left the lights on. I immediately went out in the pouring rain to investigate. On opening the driver's door of the vehicle I was absolutely shocked as the large python struck at me narrowly missing my face. I slammed the door shut and in the pouring rain wondered what to do next. By this time the 14 foot python had left the front seat and slithered to the back of the vehicle.

I then had to get into the vehicle in the dark and try and catch the python. This was a most unpleasant task especially as the torch I had was rather dim and the back of the vehicle was packed with 10 mice trays holding 100 mice. During the night the python had knocked over all the mice trays and mice were crawling all over the inside of the vehicle.

To cut a long story short I scrambled around in the semi darkness in the back of the vehicle with mice and the python crawling around. After about 5 minutes I managed to grab the huge snake at the back of the neck. It immediately coiled around me but I held onto its neck very tightly and eventually got free of the snake and placed it into a large hessian sack that I had in the vehicle.

When it was light enough to see I then attempted to catch the mice that were running around and eventually only 65 were located. What had happened to the others I have no idea. Had the python eaten them!!

What I couldn't understand was how had the python managed to escape from such a strong carton during the night. It had been in the same box at Steve Durrant's house for over a week and had not managed to escape. What actually happened was that during the night the rain water leaked onto the cardboard box which absorbed all the water. This weakened it and as a result the python managed to push its way out of the box and escape into the vehicle.

PROJECT NO 7 : BIODIVERSITY OF THE MATOBO HILLS WORLD HERITAGE SITE

• Reptiles, amphibians and fish

The reptiles and amphibians of the Matobo Hills is fairly rich in species consisting of more than 70 species of reptiles and 30 species of amphibians. Both reptiles and amphibians occur at a high density when compated to the small mammals.

An interesting collection of reptiles from Western Matopos included fossorial reptiles which no doubt came from an extensive relict pocket of Kalahari sand. They included 1 *Typhlacontias rohani,* 1 *Acontias occidentalis,* 2 *Atractaspis bibronii,* 1 *Amlbyodipsas polylepis,* 1 *Amblyodispas ventrimaculatus,* 2 *Aparallactus capensis* and 1 *Lycophidion variegates.* The *Typhlacontias* represent a southern range extension of over 100 kms from Maraposa on the Victoria Falls road while the *Amblyodispas ventrimaculatus* represents a south-eastern range extension of over 100 kms from Sawmills Siding. Together with *Lycophidion variegates* the last three species are all new records for the Matobo National Park. Other interesting reptiles and amphibians from the Matobo National Park include *Nucras intertexta,* 3 species of *Lygodactylus* sympatric at Mpopoma Dam, and 2 *L. chobensis.* The striped Reed Frog (*Hyperolius taetiatus*) has been collected at the Mtsheleli Dam which is a range extension of about 45 kms from known records at Mbalabala and Gwanda.

Dr. Don Broadley and I have written up new records for the "Geographical Distribution" section of African Herp News and we are also in the process of producing an Annotated Checklist of the Herpetofauna of the Matopos Hills for publication in Arnoldia.

• Invertebrates

Scorpions recorded in the Matobo National park include the following:
Uroplectes planimarus (Flat handed striking scorpions)
Uroplectes flavoviridis (Golden green stiking scorpions)
Parabuthus raudus
Opistacanthus asper (Creeping Scorpions)
Hadogenes troglodytes (Rock scorpions)
Opistophthalmus glabrifrous (Burrowing scorpions)
*Uroplectes carinatus (*a new record for Matobo Hills)

The Matobo National Park with its vast rocky outcrops provides an ideal habitat for lithophilous scorpions and the rock scorpion (*H. troglodytes)* is the largest species found there. These scorpions are strictly nocturnal and can very often be seen at night with the aid of a spot light.

The baboon spiders (*Ceratogyrus dolichocerphalus)* is very common near the Maleme Dam and are often seen during the rains from December to February. The *Solifugae* (Sun spiders) are often referred to as "hunting spiders" but in fact are not spiders. The *Solpugidae* in the Matopos are represented by three species, namely *Zeria monteiri, Z. sericae* and *Blossia laminicornis* which, according to Dr. Moira Fitzpartick, is a new record for Zimbabwe.

Many other species of spiders, *Chilopoda* (centipedes) and *Crustacea* (crabs and shrimps) have been recorded in the Matopos. The list is endless and it would not be appropriate to list all the species in this report.

• Fish

The water levels in all of the dams are very low and Maleme Dam in particular is at a lowest level than it has been for years.

The threespot barb (*Barbus trimaculatus*) is very common in the Maleme Dam and the main catch of the local people fishing there. However very few large specimens are ever caught.

The Mozambique tilapia (*Oreochremis mossambicus)* is another common fish in the Maleme and Mtsheleli Dams as is the Sharptooth catfish, *Clarias gariepunus*. While several other species have been recorded in the dams and rivers of the Matobo Hills a lot more collecting is necessary to produce a detailed inventory of the fishes in the Hills.

• Small Mammals (Insectivores, bats and rodents)

About 115 species of mammals occur in the Matobo National Park of which 25 species are bats and 23 species are rodents. There has been a distinct reduction of rodents, especially *Muridae*, in the Park over the last two years and this is possibly due to the very dry seasons we have had and exceptionally large numbers of fires. During 2004 and again in August 2005 fires have spread over very large areas of the Park.

A small herd of 5 elephants entered the National Park in March 2005 from the west and they moved all the way to the Mtsheleli Valley. After spending a week or more in the Park they left in the same direction that they came from.

The Bushbuck population is definitely on the increase especially in the Maleme Valley and around Maleme Camp. It is now not unusual to see 6 or 7 each night with the aid of a spot light from an open vehicle. Other

species which are often seen are rockhares, white-tailed Mongooses and springhares.

After spending hundreds of hours out at night with a spot light and covering vast areas of the Hills with an open vehicle we were lucky enough to see a Bushbaby (*Otolemus crassicaudatus*) on two separate occasions at Maleme Dam. While the lesser bushbaby (*Galago senegalensis*) is extremely common the larger species is very rare indeed and the two recent visual records are the only reliable ones from the Hills.

In February 2005 a pair of Antbears were also seen near Whitewaters Dam. This species is not often seen in the Hills.

Work on "live trapping" and releasing small mammals will continue for another 6 months until 31st March 2006 and by that time we would have enough data for the final report on small mammals.

- **Birds**

Baboons raid Black Eagle Nest
On Wednesday 2nd June, 2005 at 9:20am I was driving along the dirt road to Nswatugi Cave radio-tracking our radio-collared leopards that occur in the area. On passing a large monolith of granite close to the road I noticed a group of baboons on the outcrop of rock.

I knew that a pair of black eagles were nesting on the south side of the monolith as I had been watching them for several days. I left my vehicle and walked the few hundred metres to the south of the rocks where the eagles were nesting and with my binoculars I watched two adult male baboons climbing towards the eagles nest.

On approaching the nest the bird that was incubating the eggs stood up and opened its wings in an effort to scare one of the baboons that had reached the nest, but this had no effect whatsoever. The baboon climbed into the nest and drove the eagle off and immediately grabbed one of the eggs and commenced eating the contents. In the meantime the second black eagle arrived and both of them commenced "diving" at the baboon, but all the baboon did was "duck" its head and body and in this way avoided being hit by the eagle.

A couple of minutes later the second baboon, which was slightly smaller than the one on the nest, reached the nest and attempted to remove the second eagles egg. The large dominant male already on the nest barked loudly at the smaller one, dropped the egg shell that he was eating, and after picking up the second egg still in the nest moved away from the nest.

By this time several minutes had passed and the two black eagles were still flying around below the nest. The baboons eventually climbed down from the nest, the balance of the troop followed, and they all disappeared into the broken country.

The eagles continued flying around for another few minutes and they too then flew off in the direction of Maleme Dam.

Red-winged Starlings and Klipspringers.
On no less than 10 occasions have I seen a red-winged starling climbing over a klipspringer at Maleme Dam. This behaviour of the starlings was similar to that of oxpeckers and the klipspringers appeared to be fully accustomed to what is going on.

On one occasion I watched a starling pecking at the hindquarters of the klipspringer for half an hour and the klipspringer did not appear to be annoyed by the bird. It was not possible to determine what the starling was eating but it may well have been ticks. Both red-winged starlings and klipspringers are common in the Matobo Hills.

Additional details concerning these observations will be written up at a later date.

Our research team have continued to record details of all species of birds seen in the Hills and a new Check-list of the birds of the Matobo National Park will be produced in the near future.

- **Dassie Census in the Matobo Hills – 1 – 22 May 2005**

Our Carnivore Research Institute team of Mr. Colin Khumalo and NUST Attachment student Portia Dunkuso assisted BirdLife Zimbabwe for two weeks with the Dassie Census in the Matobo Hills.

As a result of a lack of fuel and a vehicle Mr. Ngoni Chiweshe (BLZ Conservation Field officer) could not undertake his animal census of dassies in the Hills. We provided BirdLife Zimbabwe with a driver and land rover together with 100 litres of diesel.

The dassie counts were done at 20 sampling sites within the National Park. Each count was done from dawn onwards by two persons working together. The counting at the 20 sampling sites took over 42 hours. An overall total figure of 615 dassies showed a slight

increase of 2.3% from the previous year (2004). Dassie pups accounted for 20% of the 2005 overall population – while that for 2004 was 19.1%.

Poaching activities both in the Park and outside has continues and a total of 16 wire snares and 8 fibre snares (set for both large mammals and dassies) were found and removed. Two rotten dassies were found in snares.

Thirteen black eagle pairs were already incubating within the Matobo Hills by 22 May 2005. None had laid any eggs by the end of May 2004. Normally egg laying by black eagle starts from the end of April/beginning of May. It therefore remains to be seen if this seasons dassie population will have a positive or negative effect on the breeding success of black eagles and other raptors.

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