

**SERENGETI CHEETAH PROJECT NEWSLETTER****June 2010**

The wildebeest have left the southern Serengeti, and with their departure there is a whole different feel to the short grass plains. Its quiet, the dry season winds have picked up, the grass has gone from bright green to a dry yellow, and once again I am reminded that my Landrover is not dust proof! With a change in season comes a change in cheetahs being spotted. Cheetahs that haven't been seen for a couple of months (or in one case for 2 and a half years!!!) are back again making for great reunions.

**The return of Korosho!**

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May I was in the Barafu area with Squeak whom I hadn't seen since January! I was quite surprised to see her so far south as she is usually sighted around the seronera river and makoma hill. Despite suffering from a little bit of mange she was doing well. Whilst sitting with squeak – off in the distance something yellow caught my eye. It doesn't often happen that when you're with one cheetah you spot another one, but I was hopeful, and determined to go and check out this mysterious yellow blob. After a long series of scanning – moving closer – scanning again – keeping my fingers crossed – scanning some more – inching further I was chuffed to see that I had indeed spotted another cheetah. He was chilling out in a bush and reluctant to get up, and looking a little weak. Moments later he carefully got up and I understood why he had been so hesitant. On his left back leg he had a gaping wound! After having made ID shots I was very curious to find out who this male was. I tried all the males that I usually come across at Barafu but none of them were a match. This sighting was clearly a case for the matching program! Before going home I followed him for a little bit, he had a bit of a limp and was looking rather thin, so I left him to it and kept my fingers crossed that he'd be ok. Once at home I put him straight through the matching program – that claimed I had seen Korosho!!! I hadn't seen Korosho since the 29<sup>th</sup> of October 2007 with his brother Chestnut. They were sighted at Kusini which is about 60km away as the crow flies! Chestnut and Korosho are the male cubs of Peanut. They were first seen



*Korosho is back with us after not being sighted for 2 and a half years!!*

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as 6 week old cubs in September 2005. Between 2005 and 2007 they were sighted 30 times by the project, but that all changed after the 29<sup>th</sup> of October 2007. Where had they been all this time? How long had Korosho been without the company of his brother? All these questions will remain unanswered but what's important is that he's still around. I sighted him again on the 10<sup>th</sup> of June and am happy to report that his wound had healed nicely and he was looking fat and happy!

Barafu seemed to be the place to be reunited with cheetahs not seen for a while. On the 19<sup>th</sup> of April I was driving around Barafu valley and saw two males, who were so relaxed around me, I knew I must have seen them before. Despite suffering from a bit of mange, which is not uncommon for male cheetahs, they too were looking well fed and happy! Once again I went through all the ID cards of brother who are found in this area. None of them matched, so I went through all the ID cards of brothers who aren't in this area, and did find a match! It was Howling & Wolf, who are Eleanor's male cubs! The last time I saw these boys was at Kusini on the 5<sup>th</sup> of June 2009, whereby one of them decided to jump up on my car and chill out on my roof tent leaving me stranded in the same place for about 2 hours!! Although we don't encourage this sort of behavior – it does occasionally happen from time to time, and when it does there isn't much you can do about it but stay very still!

Its always great to be reunited with cheetahs that you haven't seen in a while, especially the young adolescents that have to make it on their own without the help of their mother or siblings. I'm happy to report that two of Squeaks cubs, Mr. Bond and Octopussy have been sighted in June and are doing very well, fingers crossed that the other two are seen soon!!

### **Cheetah watch reports an adoption at Ndotu!!**

On the 27<sup>th</sup> of March 2010 on the causeway between Lake Ndotu and Lake Masek Cheetah mother AH140 was roaming around with her two male cubs. But they were not alone! They were being followed by another cub (see picture below), a couple of months younger looking a little unsure of himself, and acting a little uncomfortable. Reason being he was not related to the others! Where did he come from? How did he loose his mother? These are questions we can only speculate on, however what matters now is that he is being looked after. AH140 is a female cheetah that was first seen in November 2002 by tourists who sent in their pictures to the cheetah watch campaign, she wasn't seen by the project until 3 years later on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of January 2005! Since then she has only been seen a handful of times. From the couple of times that we have seen her we know that she has already raised 2 males to independence at the end of 2008. Those boy have been seen roaming between Kusini and the Ndotu area but as far as we know are not territorial anywhere. We were introduced to her second known litter in November 2009. She was seen on the Ndotu meadow with two 6 month old male cubs. However in March this year there were reports of a cheetah mother being seen with 3 cubs, and it was noted that one was smaller than the other two. On the 27<sup>th</sup> of March, this was confirmed by a sighting sent in to the cheetah watch campaign. At the time the Ndotu area had three cheetah mothers each with two male cubs so it was very exciting to find out who it was. Was it Camphor, a first time





mother? Was it Eleanor, the legend of Ndotu having previously raised 5 cubs to adulthood? Or was it AH140 the mysterious female that hangs around in the dark corners of Lake Masek, and is only seen on rare occasions. The pictures confirmed it was AH140.



*AH140 (left) with her two male cubs (right)*

Cheetah mothers will adopt abandoned cubs for good reason. Cubs are left by their mothers when they are about 18 months old, after which the siblings will stay together for another half year. The more siblings present the higher their chances of surviving the first 6 months of their lives without their mothers. It means there are more of them to catch prey, more eyes to look out for danger, so although it is another mouth to feed and another little soul to look after, it is in a mother's best interest for the survival of her own cubs to adopt abandoned/lost cheetah cubs.

Since this event was reported the project has sighted AH140 with her cubs and adopted cub only once! I was very intrigued to find out if we had seen this adopted cub before, meaning that we could figure out who his biological mother was. In 2008 we were able to ID Loopy Lou's adopted cub as being Kate's original cub, however we were not so lucky this time round. It will be most important to try and collect a DNA sample from this little adopted fellow to try and find out where he came from!

### **More news on the territorial males of Ndotu**

In the three years I have been on the project there has been a very high turn over rate of territorial males in the Ndotu area. When I first arrived the Coffee boys; Espresso, Latte and Mocha, had the twin hills territory and Hamisi & Marando were around two trees. Within a very short time, the Coffee boys kicked Hamisi & Marando out and took over the two trees area, leaving the twin hills territory available, which was then taken over by Howard and Buffett within days. With the exceptionally dry season of 2009 the Masai pushed their cattle into the twin hills area – thus forcing Howard and Buffett out. It is my prediction that the duo met the Coffee boy trio in their territory resulting in a fight. Today the Coffee boys are still territorial in the two trees area, and there is a new coalition of males at twin hills. It has been suggested that these boys should be named after tea brands thus giving us the coffee kings vs. the Tea.... Ladies?

We'll have to think of something more suitable... The new coalition was first seen as cubs at Kusini on the 21<sup>st</sup> of June 2008. They were with their sister and mother and were very shy! As soon as they saw me they bolted for the woodlands. I never did end up getting an ID shot of their mother. Thankfully the



cubs were curious enough to come out in the open every now and then to get a better look at me, enabling me to get the ID shots I needed. The first time the boys were seen scent marking at twin hills was in December 2009, and they were still very shy. These days, having been exposed to cars, the boys are a lot more habituated making it easier for us to get ID shots and collect the needed data! Good luck to them in holding down their twin hills territory!



*New kids on the block at twin hills*

As far as Espresso, Latte and Mocha go, although they are still territorial around the two trees area they looked a little weak towards the end of April. I had received a message that they boys were sighted close to the big marsh but that they weren't looking to well, so I went out to look for them. When I found them the three were parked under a tree. Eventually, one by one they sat up and I noticed that Latte, and to a lesser extent Espresso, looked very swollen in the face! I made notes on all of them and decided to keep an eye on them. On the 19<sup>th</sup> of May I saw them again, this time they all looked fine. My guess is that they got bitten by something, a snake maybe? Out of the three of them I think Latte is the unlucky one. He suffers the worst mange, gets a puffy face and had a limp for a while. He is definitely not as sexy as his brothers which explains why when there is a consort pair, espresso & Mocha are sighted with the lady whilst Latte is usually sighted close by having lunch. All jokes aside these boys are about 5 years old and still doing very well!

### **Rosalind moving her babies**

In the beginning of June I saw something that I had never seen before! There were reports of a cheetah in the Ndutu Big marsh. A cheetah in the marsh often means that a female is denning. I set off one morning to see if I could see any signs of her. I stopped at the Big marsh view point for a scan but saw nothing cheetah like so I decided to around the marsh instead, hoping that if there was a cheetah residing in the dense green vegetation that I would be able to spot her. All of sudden, amidst the dark dense



green I saw something yellow! Looking through the binoculars confirmed that it was indeed a cheetah! I went back up the side of the marsh, to gain a little height in the hope to get a better view. There she was! Sitting on top of the reeds, looking very alert. After having carefully scoped out the entire area, she popped down into the reeds and when she came back up it was clear that she was carrying something – it was a tiny tiny cub!! The little blob looked completely helpless in her mouth as she carefully moved it from the den to another den, located just a couple of meters away! I couldn't believe my luck, I had never seen this before.

After having moved one cub, she sat back on top of the reeds and once again carefully scanned the area around her. Soon she was up again, moved into the first den and carried out another little cub!! As far as I could tell she moved two cubs. She was located quite far away and although I took as many pictures as I possibly could none of them were good enough to confidently ID her with. However a couple of days later she was back! This time she was making her way out of the marsh. Once she was out of all the reeds her spots were well and truly visible and I was able to ID her as Rosalind! Rosalind is the female cub of Paprika, she was first seen with her mother and three siblings in May 2006. By September 2006 she was the only cub left! She has been on her own since April 2008 and is often spotted around the Ndutu area. As far as we know this is her first litter! Fingers crossed her cute little cubs all survive to adulthood!



*Rosalind making her way out of the reeds to show us her lovely spots (left) before having moved her cubs to a safe den (right)*

### **Out with the old, In with the new**

The seasons have changed from wet season to dry, the plains have changed from being full of wildebeest to being empty of the noisy herbivores, there is a change in cheetahs being spotted and finally, there is a change in cheetah researcher!

I've had the privilege of working for the Serengeti Cheetah project for 3 years now and its been truly fantastic!! June has been spent showing Helen, the new cheetah chick, all about life as a cheetah



researcher. This will be my last news letter for the Africa dream safari Alumni, I can think of no better way than to end it by reflecting on the past, and introducing you to the future.

Things I'll miss.... (Laura)

- My Landrover! I have used three different landrovers over the past three years. There was Harrison who taught me a bit about car mechanics as he was always breaking down. There was the green car with the FZS (Frankfurt zoological society) sticker that had lots of people speak to me in German, and there is Ethyl who has been with me since January 2009, and never let me down!!! I have worked from the car, slept in the car, had lots of meals in the car, had sundowners on the car bonnet. It has been the closest colleague I have ever had, and never gave me stick for anything!! I will truly miss it!
- I'll miss that moment when you have first spotted a cheetah. The moment only ever lasts about a second, when your eye has just caught something yellow, either while driving or while looking through the binoculars. When you realize "that's one!". That moment was always the best part of a sighting!
- I'll miss Tiramisu. Although one should probably not have a favorite, Tiramisu always showed up when I was desperate. Either I was desperate for my 20<sup>th</sup> sighting of the month, or I was under pressure from donors to find them a cheetah – she would always pop up, and pose for the camera!
- I'll miss being introduced to new little cubs! Its always special when you see a mother and all of a sudden you see little bundles of fluff towering into things and causing havoc.
- I will miss the cheetah house and all the people who used to come by for dinner, a cup of tea, or a sundowner.

## Helens first impressions...

My first month on the project has been a hectic one! Laura and I haven't spent more than a few days in one place ever since I got here; there have been lots of trips to different bits of the study area as well as trips to and from Arusha. Still, so far it's been great, it feels like there's a huge amount to learn but I'd like to think I'm getting there! Although they've been busy my first few weeks have been absolutely amazing, seeing my first wild cheetah after arriving was very special.

We had been staying down at Ndutu overnight and went out towards twin hills to go on my first cheetah search. We were just driving away from the tree line when suddenly Laura stopped the car and grabbed her binoculars, I followed suit and immediately what had just looked like a log in the grass was shown to be two cheetah having a lie down! It turned out to be the two territorial males of that area, the tea boys



as I think they will be known! It was a good first sighting as they performed beautifully for us, showing us both sides so Laura could demonstrate the kind of ID shots we need, before one of them went and scent marked and the other provided us with a faecal sample, showing me the less glamorous side of my new job on my first morning! Since then we've seen quite a few cheetah and I spotted my first as well, from just under 1.8km away which I was very pleased with! It turned out to be a small male who Laura has nick-named Weedy as a result of his hanging around with mothers who already have cubs and who he therefore has absolutely no chance of mating with! Hopefully the sightings will keep coming thick and fast so I can keep up the good work that Laura has been doing for the past few years!

