

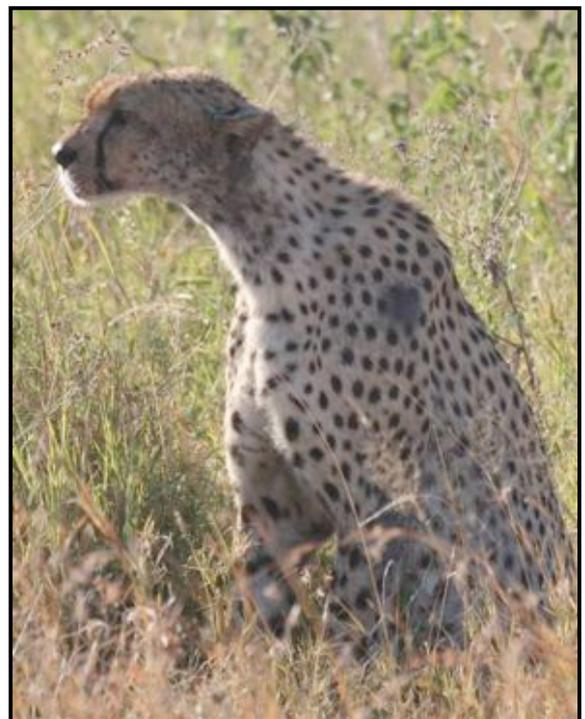
Serengeti Cheetah Project

September 2010

Somehow it's September already which means that it's time for the latest news from the Cheetah Project! It's been very dry and dusty over the past few weeks out on the plains. The cheetahs don't seem to mind at all but for those of us that aren't so keen, there have been lots of exciting developments in the cheetah world to make up for all the dirt!

Look Who's Back!

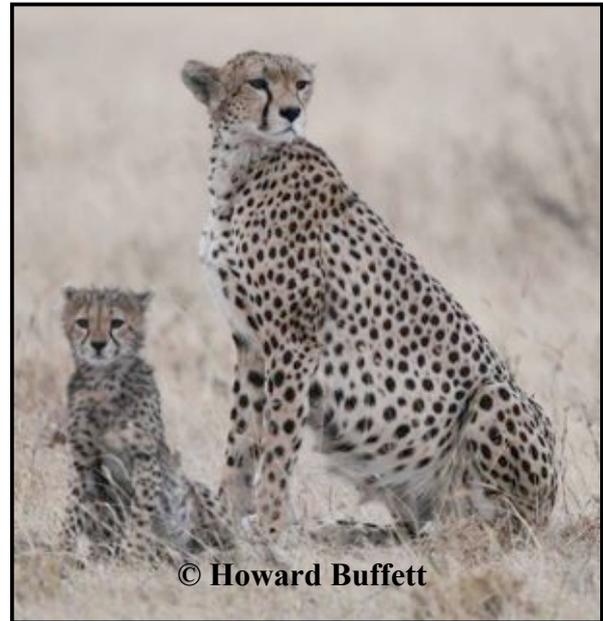
In the last newsletter we gave you exciting news about the reappearance of Korosho after an absence of two and a half years. Well this time I have more news of reappearing cheetahs, this time it is a male cheetah called Nils who has come back to us, after a gap of almost exactly two years! Nils was first seen when he was about 5 months old in November 2006. He was with his mum, Madeline, and his brother Aart. Once the boys had grown up and become independent they formed a coalition. For the next year they were seen regularly around Ndotu and the southern plains of the Serengeti, that was until July 2008. After this the boys completely dropped off our radar and weren't seen until Nils popped up again in the Loiyangalani area of the park, it was just 8 days short of being a full two years that he'd been away! Unfortunately his brother Aart was no longer with him which suggests that he has died – usually when males, particularly brothers, form a coalition they stay together for life. We'll almost certainly never know what happened to Aart but hopefully Nils will stick with us for a bit longer yet! When he was seen in July he was a bit mangy, as you can see from his photo, but he seemed to have recently had a decent meal and was otherwise looking good! Mange is a skin condition that is caused by a mite and is usually associated with stress, so it could be that Nils had only recently lost Aart – losing a brother and coalition partner is obviously a stressful time for any cheetah. Hopefully he'll start to recover from this nasty little skin mite soon so that he's back to being the handsome young man we used to know so well!





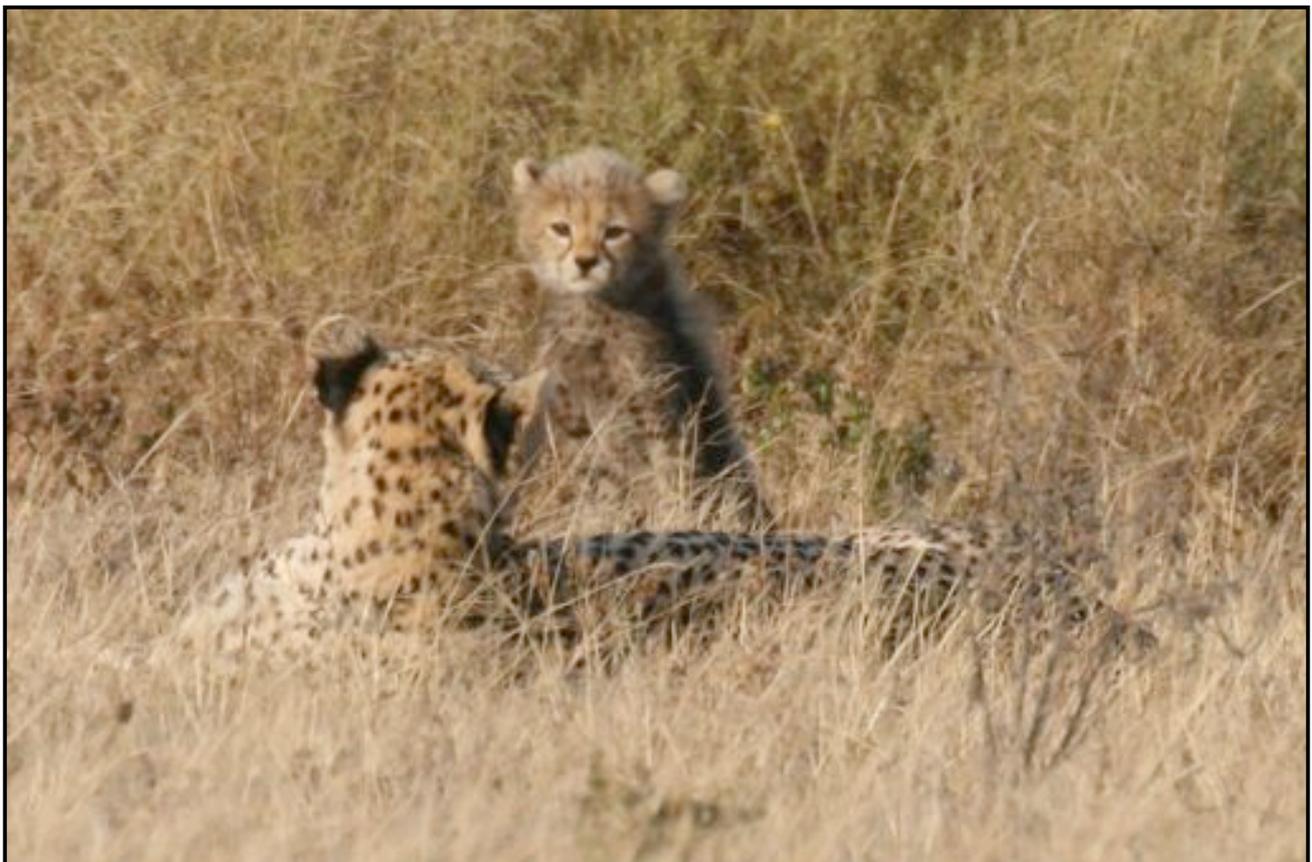
Rosalind

Continuing on the theme of following up from last issue, I thought I'd give an update on Rosalind. Last time Laura and I reported on the thrilling experience of watching Rosalind moving her cubs from their old den to a new one in the Big Marsh at Ndotu. It was something that neither of us had ever seen before so you can imagine how excited we were, especially for me as it was within a couple of weeks of my arrival on the project! Considering Laura had been on the project for three years by then, I was definitely very lucky to see it so soon! Only a few weeks after this exciting moment we saw Rosalind again, but this time walking away from the marsh... with a tiny bundle of fluff following in her footsteps! As you can see from the photo below, the little cub must have been freshly out of the den within just a few days of us seeing them. At that age it's very difficult to tell if



© Howard Buffett

a cub is male or female but luckily we have since seen mum and cub again and at just a few weeks older we could tell he was a boy! Despite his extreme youth at his first sighting he was nevertheless full of energy, bouncing happily along trying to keep up with his mum! Unfortunately there was only the one cub with Rosalind by this point, we know that she originally had at least two or three cubs in the litter. However, we also know that there were some lions hanging around the marsh





whilst she was denning there and this could explain what happened to the other cubs. Anyway, it seems that when we saw her Rosalind was moving her little family over to the Kusini area as she and he have been seen several times around there since and so far they appear to be thriving.



R.E.S.P.E.C.T.

It looks like there is going to be a lot of cub based news this issue! At the same time that Rosalind was denning in the Big Marsh at Ndotu, we had reports that there was a second female with cubs in the marsh as well. Laura and I never actually saw this female so it was a bit of a mystery who this cheetah was; that was until we found Aretha walking away from the marsh with four little cubs following her (above)! This is a particularly exciting development for the project because, as some of our long term readers may remember, Aretha is actually one of the five cubs that the legendary cheetah mother Eleanor raised to adulthood. For those of you not in the know, Eleanor became the most famous cheetah in the Ndotu / Kusini area as everyone watched her raise five of her six cubs to independence – this is an impressive feat for any cheetah mother but as that was Eleanor’s first litter it was even more amazing! Eleanor’s five are all still with us more than a year after reaching independence – she obviously taught them well! (There is an update on the rest of Eleanor’s cubs – the Jazz singers – later on in the newsletter) We’re hoping that she has passed on her excellent

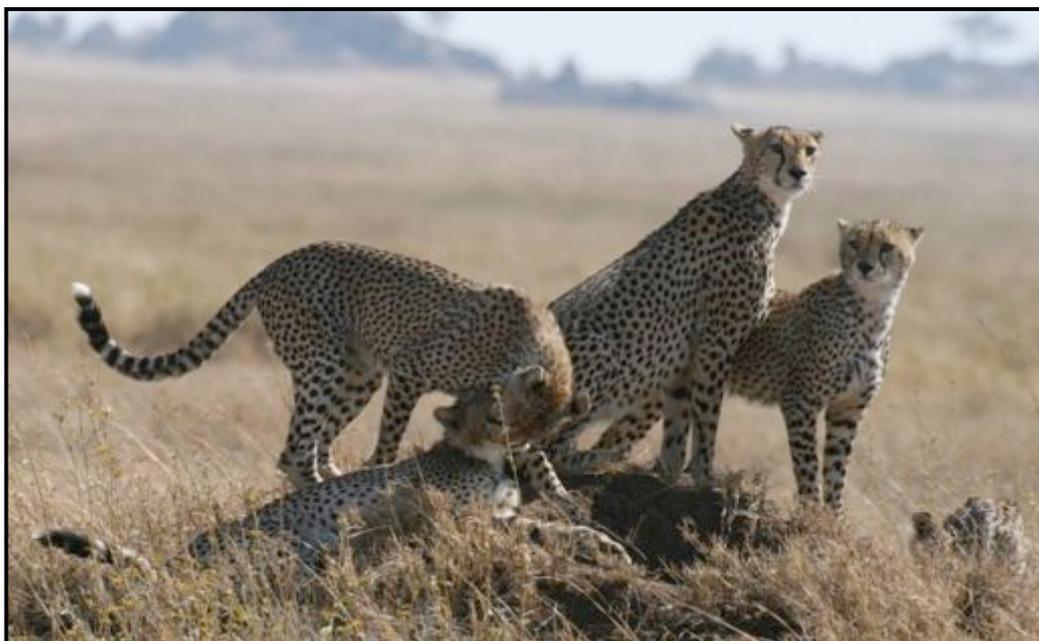


maternal instincts to her daughters. We have found in the past on the project that daughters of good mothers tend to turn into good mothers themselves. Fingers crossed for Aretha’s cubs that this turns out to be the case! Aretha and her cubs were last seen at the end of August, although by this time one of the little ones had unfortunately disappeared, but, as you can see below, the other three were happily tucking into a lovely meal of freshly caught gazelle!



Amaretto and Her Not-So-Little Family

Back in December 2009 Laura introduced you to Amaretto and her first litter of four cubs – two boys and two girls. The group were seen regularly around Simba Kopjes and the Five Hill track, right in the centre of the Serengeti plains. The last time they were seen in May they had ventured up to Kibumbu Kopjes, which is on the north eastern edge of the Cheetah Project’s study area. They then disappeared for several months, gone we know not where, until they reappeared by the Girtasho River just a few days ago! Amaretto was looking very well if a little on the thin side – she was certainly eyeing up some gazelles as a potential meal! The cubs were all full of beans and were obviously determined to climb on the Cheetah Project car! Despite my best efforts to dissuade them by briefly switching the engine on, one of the female cubs decided she couldn’t resist the opportunity to jump up and enjoy the view! This left me completely stuck until she deigned to come down again. Luckily the rest of her family were walking away and she didn’t want to be left too far behind so she did eventually descend from my roof. However, she decided to do so by jumping down onto the side of the driver’s door, meaning she was only about a foot away from my face – luckily I wasn’t leaning out or taking a photo at the time! I don’t know who was more surprised, she looked a bit shocked when she turned around and saw me! Still, it obviously didn’t worry her too much because she couldn’t resist trying again a few minutes later! When I left them a few minutes later the young trouble-maker had returned to her mother and siblings and the family were relaxing on top of a termite mound, keeping an eye out for any unsuspecting gazelles that might stray too close...

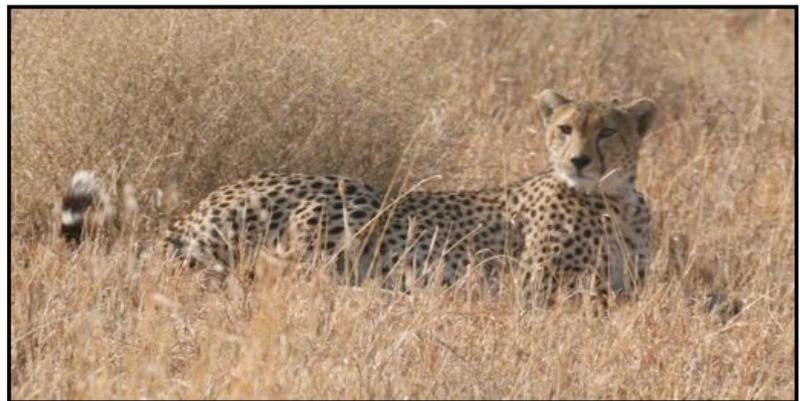




Mysterious Girl

On 3rd September, Sarah Durant – the project coordinator for the Cheetah Project (and my boss!) was out and about and looking for cheetahs. Not only did she find one, the one she found was previously unknown to the project! The cheetah is a young female who seems to be extremely tame. What is particularly extraordinary is after appearing out of the blue, she was then seen on another four occasions within a week! To show how tame this particular cheetah is, I saw her on a kill on one occasion when she was surrounded by four cars. Despite the cars being only 10 to 20 metres away and moving almost constantly she didn't seem very bothered at all. In fact there were between 6 and 25 tour cars there during the hour and a half that I was watching her and it didn't seem to worry her. She had killed an adult male Thomson's gazelle and was providing lots of entertainment for the people in the cars by getting up, having a nibble then dragging the carcass around then having a bit more to eat then lying down for a while before repeating the whole exercise over again. She eventually moved off and went for a nap in a patch of long grass, again only metres from the edge of the road and all the cars that had followed her.

Later that day I went out again, not a normal occurrence in the life of a cheetah researcher – there's normally too much to do in the office but that day I decided to have an extra little drive around and guess who I found?! That's right it was the same young female, once again on a kill and once again surrounded by tourists – she's definitely a bit of a show off this one! On both kills she only ate the



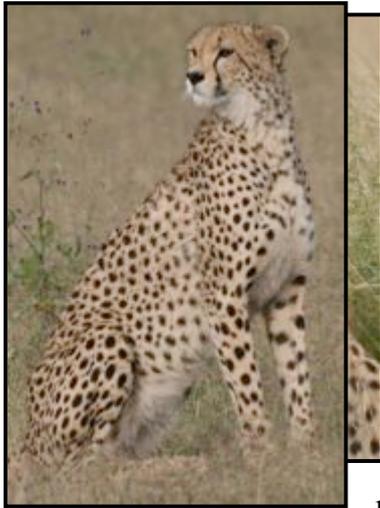
back legs of the gazelles, leading us to speculate whether this might be a particular delicacy in the cheetah world?! Her love of food has earned her the nickname Canapé, although this won't become



her official name just yet. First we are going to trawl through our database just in case she is a cub of one of our known females who just happens to not have a photo yet. It is unusual for a new cheetah to move into the area and be quite so incredibly tame already, I'll keep you posted on developments!

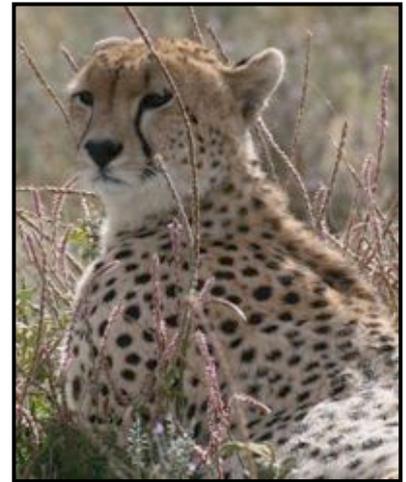
So, How's Everyone Doing?

I thought I'd include a short update on some of the young cheetahs that you have been introduced to over the past few newsletters.



Mr Bond and the Bond Girls

The Bond family are cubs of Squeak who reached independence around this time last year. Since then the youngsters have not been very helpful as far as letting us keep track of their progress goes! Mr Bond (left) was not seen for almost 9 months between November 2009 and June this year when he cropped up in Cub Valley. This was actually the first time he'd been seen without his sisters and we were very pleased to see him! He was looking appropriately suave and sophisticated and was happily relaxing in a nice comfortable bit of



long grass! His sisters have also been quite elusive, Honey Ryder hasn't actually been seen since December last year, although hopefully she'll turn up soon. Octopussy and Xenia Onatopp (right) have been slightly better at staying in touch, they were also seen in June and July but before that neither had been seen for six months! It's nice to have three of the four back and with a bit of luck Honey Ryder will reappear soon!

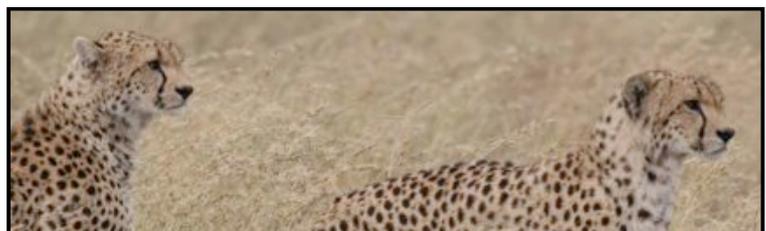
The Jazz Singers

As I've already given an update on Aretha and her first litter of cubs I thought it would be nice to have an update on her brothers and sisters! Nina (right) and Etta have both been seen quite recently, in May and July respectively, and they were both still in the Ndotu / Kusini area, just like Aretha, although unlike their sister neither of these two have had cubs yet. Females will often stay in a similar area to where mothers live and where they grew up, males on the other hand tend to move away from where they were cubs and sometimes they move a considerable distance. Howling and Wolff (left) have lived up to this generalisation and when they were last seen in July had moved up to Cub Valley, half way up the Serengeti plains and a fairly considerable distance from Ndotu and Kusini! They had both developed a bit of mange, suggesting they were finding living on their own a little bit stressful!



The Woods

The woods are the cubs of Loopy Lou and Kate, although the cubs are from different mothers they were given the same theme for their names because Loopy Lou actually adopted one of





Kate's cubs, Mahogany. Loopy Lou's own cubs were called Cedar, Cyprus and Ebony. The two boys (above) were last seen in July 2009 when they were both looking a bit skinny and a bit mangy, hopefully they'll be looking a bit better next time we see them! Ebony has recently had a cub of her own, which is exciting news, her previous forays into motherhood have not been very successful, but with a bit of luck she'll do better this time! Mahogany has not been seen for quite a long time, not since February 2009 and unfortunately we don't know what's happened to her. Kate's other cubs, Mtanga and Camphor (left) have both had cubs of their own also. Camphor was seen with 10 month old cubs in April but they had gone when she was next seen in July, this would make them a bit young to have become independent although it is possible that this is what has happened, fingers crossed they turn up soon! Mtanga currently has three cubs that are about a year old (below), they were seen at the end of August trying out their tree climbing skills near Kusini!



Next time I'll bring you updates on the progress of the young Nuts (Butternut and Coconut), Desserts (Strudel and Crumble) and Wines (Grenache and Sauternes)!



First Impressions of a Newbie Cheetah Researcher

It's been a tough but good first few weeks on the project for me. I've certainly enjoyed it all although I've already had a few mishaps! I had my first puncture whilst following the mysterious young female the other day, which was a little nerve wracking as I was trying to collect data at the same time as not doing any damage to the car! Luckily for me, soon after she decided to settle down and so I didn't have to drive very far on my flat tyre. My next piece of luck was that whilst I was changing to my spare wheel a kindly group of tourists took pity on me and stopped to help! This made my life a lot easier, I don't know if any of you have had to lift an off-road Landrover wheel but they are very heavy and difficult to manage on your own! Between us we managed to get changed very quickly and efficiently, although I felt a little bad that all I was able to offer by way of thanks were a few cheetah facts, a hobnob biscuit and a cheetah watch leaflet – the Cheetah Project car is not set up for entertaining!

Other than that it's been great fun to get out and start finding cheetahs for myself. There have been a few unlucky days when I haven't seen any but hopefully once I get a bit more practice those types of days will become few and far between. They have also been more than made up for by the times I have found cheetahs, I'm still getting a big rush every time I see one, so you can imagine how exciting it is to see a big group like Amaretto with her four cubs. Admittedly its not great having them climbing all over the car but its fun to see the situations bubbly young cubs get themselves into!

There have also been the first few rain showers over the past couple of weeks or so, giving me my first taster what driving in wet season might be like. Lots of the roads became quite slippery and water logged and some of the river crossings that were fine the week before suddenly looked a lot less appealing to cross! The rains seemed to have subsided again for now, but who knows what could happen over the next few weeks, either way its back to dusty roads, a dusty car and a dusty cheetah researcher for now!

I think that's it for now, I'll give you another update on how our cheetahs are doing in at the end of the year. Wish me luck with my cheetah spotting until then!

Helen.

