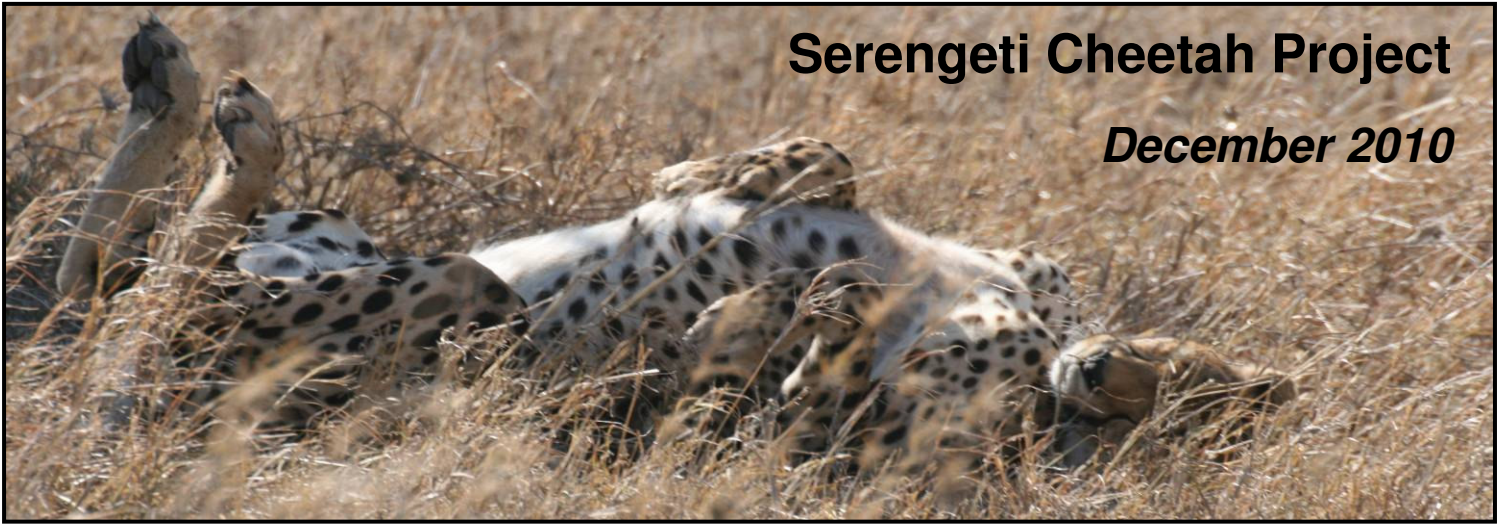




## Serengeti Cheetah Project

*December 2010*

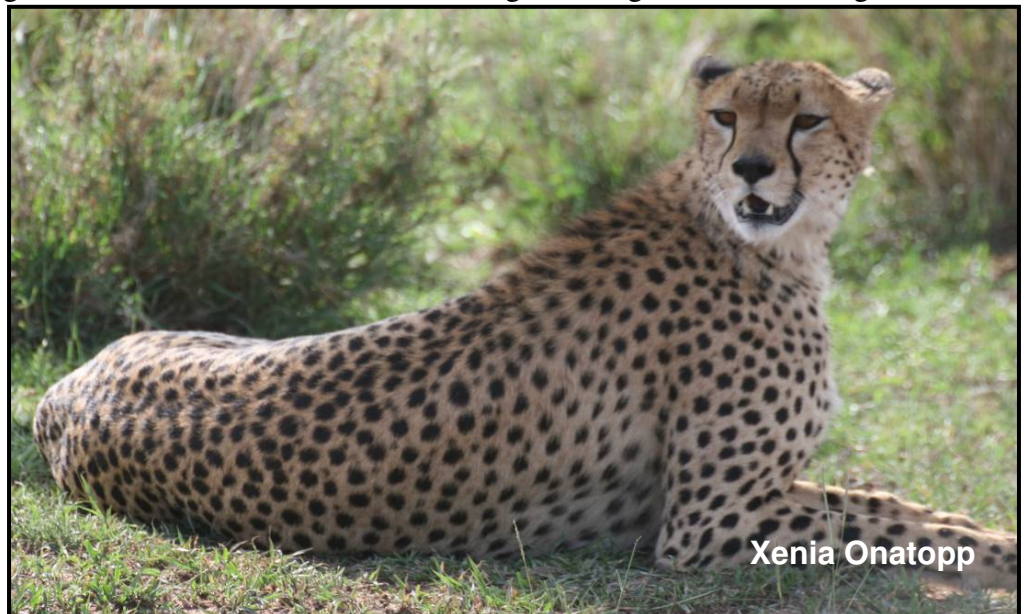


It's been busy out on the plains over the past few months. To the delight of visiting tourists to the park there have been lots of cheetahs around, especially back in October when it seemed almost impossible go to anywhere without bumping into one! Of course this is always good news for us at the Cheetah Project and it also means that there's lots of news for us to give you!

### Little Miss Show-Off

In the last newsletter I brought you news on how Squeak's cubs – Mr Bond and the Bond girls - were doing. Well it appears that for one of these young cheetahs a brief mention was not enough! Xenia Onatopp, one of the three sisters from the Bond family seems to have turned into a real attention seeker! It is important for the Project to see a variety of cheetahs each month, this means we survey lots of different areas and try not to revisit the same cheetah too many times. Usually we see a few of the cheetahs a couple of times each month but this has not been enough for Xenia! In November she was seen by the project no less than six times, a new record! Not only did she make sure we saw her a lot, she made sure she also got maximum attention from passing tour cars by sitting right next to the road every time! For about a week it seemed that no matter which route I took home there she would be, happily sat underneath a tree drinking in the attention. Of course it's not a good thing for tour cars to get too close and unfortunately her relaxed attitude does nothing to warn people they might be getting too near. It can be a difficult balance between people getting a memorable cheetah watching experience without disturbing the cheetahs too much.

Still, it is at least good news that she is looking so happy and healthy and is doing very well. She is nearly three years old now so hopefully sometime soon she will have some cubs, we'll just have to wait and see!

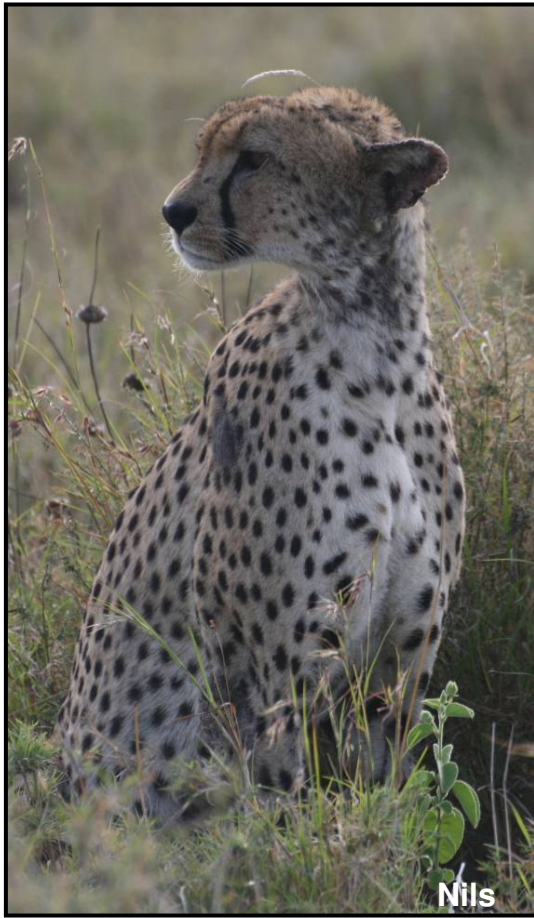


Xenia Onatopp





### Tragic News



Unfortunately I now have some really sad news to give you all. Last issue I brought you news of the return of Nils. Nils was born in mid 2006 to his mother, Madeline, along with his brother Aart. Nils and Aart formed a coalition upon reaching adulthood and then left the study area, neither were seen until almost exactly two years later when Nils returned to us, although without Aart. We were delighted to see him again especially as it looked like he was going to stick around in the study area. However, tragically, he was found one Sunday morning, a few weeks ago lying dead near the main road after being struck by a car. Everyone at the Project was obviously devastated by this news, particularly as he was seen only two days beforehand looking good and even as though he might be starting to recover from the mange he had developed as a result of Aart's death. He still was not the most handsome of cheetahs but nevertheless his loss is not only sad for us but it is not good news for the cheetah population. Currently there are only estimated to be between 70 and 80 cheetahs living within the Project's study area, so losing even one in such a way has a big impact, especially as there are fewer males than females. Almost certainly Nils would have been hit by a car exceeding the 50kph speed limit. The park speed limits are really important to safeguard the animals in the Serengeti. Luckily it is probably quite rare for cheetahs to be killed on the road, although as such accidents are very rarely reported it is difficult to know the true number. With the threat of a new, fast road being constructed through the north of the Serengeti we are obviously extremely worried that accidents like Nils would become much more frequent, which may have potentially devastating effects on not only the

cheetah population of the Serengeti but also of all the other animals in the ecosystem.

### New Faces

The study's cheetahs seem to have been behaving slightly strangely over the past couple of weeks. For some unknown reason all our familiar faces seem to have hidden themselves away somewhere and a whole load of new cheetahs have appeared! For example, during the whole of October and November we had only three previously unrecorded cheetahs, and in December we had two new cheetahs in the first two days! Unfortunately we don't know where most of these individuals have come from, although we do know that one has had an interesting history. A young male, now known as HON044M, had been seen once before by a Cheetah Watch contributor... in the Maasai Mara! He was seen as a cub with his mother Ani D in September 2009 but he has made his way all the way down to Seronera on his own. So far he has only been seen once, we'll have to wait and see whether he decides to stick around or continue his epic journey!







### AH140 Does It Again



AH140

Back in June Laura reported on the exciting news that one of Ndotu's cheetahs, AH140, had adopted a cub. She already had a litter of two strapping young males but was then seen by one of our Cheetah Watch contributors with another, slightly smaller and younger male in tow. Well, it now seems she has made a repeat performance! There had been reports of a group of five cheetahs being seen around Lake Ndotu and the surrounding woodlands, as we had no pictures we originally assumed it was AH140 and her three boys plus another male who may have been trying to consort with her. Imagine our surprise when we finally did get some photos of the group and discovered it was another adolescent male who had joined the group! Unlike the first cub she adopted we do actually know who this new cub is and where he came from. He is actually the cub of another female named Saffron who also hangs out in the Ndotu area. We don't know exactly why he is now with AH140 and not Saffron – it could be that something has happened to her, but we're hoping that actually Saffron decided it was time for him to fend for himself but he wasn't so keen and attached himself to AH140 for a few easy meals! Either way, as the young males are all now virtually full grown, the family makes a very impressive sight as they stroll through the woodlands

around Ndotu. Normally brothers within a litter will stay together for life and form a coalition – as two of the cubs are adopted we don't know for sure if they will do this but it seems likely that they will. If they do then the four of them will become a force to be reckoned with! Hopefully they will stick around in the study area so we can see what happens!



AH140 and her ever-expanding family!

© Megan Strauss





### Coffee Boys Leave Ndutu

More Ndutu related news next! As many of you will know, the territories around Ndutu are hotly contested by the males found there. In the past few years there have been several different coalitions fighting over who gets each of the two main areas. To begin with there were Hamisi and Marando then Howard and Buffett and most recently the



**Mocha on the look out for some food**

Tea Boys, Tetley and Twinings, have moved into the Twin Hills territory, but none has done so well as the Coffee Boys. Espresso, Latte and Mocha were born in mid 2005 and were the cubs of Lady Godiva. They were first seen on their own without their mother in May 2007 and by December they had become territorial and started scent-marking. They started off in the territory around the Makao road and Twin Hills but more recently had moved into the Two Trees area. Because they had been around for so long and had been so successful at retaining their territory the boys had become a bit of an institution and were regularly seen by visitors to the area. I was therefore very shocked to be surveying near the Loiyangalani River, in the heart of the Serengeti plains, and find the three of them! When I first saw them they were all looking a little bit skinny but after a short while they spotted some

reedbuck down near the river and managed to catch one. They then spent the next five hours trying to eat every last scrap of meat from the carcass, just as it looked like they had all finished another one would get up and wander casually over for another little chew, much to the disgust of the waiting group of vultures! We don't know why they left Ndutu, as they were looking quite thin it could be that they weren't finding enough food down there, or it could be that another coalition has challenged them and taken over their territory – Mocha had a healing wound on one of his hind legs which could have been from a fight. It will be interesting to see over the next few months whether a new coalition moves into their old territory or even if they return now that the gazelle are coming back.



**The boys tucking in to their reedbuck**

### Cubs, Cubs Everywhere!

Since the last newsletter it seems that almost all of our females who have cubs have been cropping up so that we can see how they're getting along! This is obviously great for us – it's nice to see how they all are and it's always fun to see the youngsters playing around. Sometimes its not so much fun for their long-suffering mothers, there's not only the constant pleas for attention to contend with, but it must be especially trying when after a long and careful stalk one of the cubs gets over excited and jumps out, chasing away all the gazelle that their mother has been trying to hunt for their lunch!!! Sometimes it works the other way though, Phoenix had a nice surprise the other day when, after her hunt failed, her two cubs accidentally flushed a family of warthog from their hole and then each caught one! She quickly confiscated the one her male cub had caught and had a good munch whilst he





Phoenix's female cub with her lunch

sat there looking slightly forlorn! He caught himself another one soon after though so he got a bit of food too, he and his sister looked very pleased with themselves for having caught them and paraded around with them in their mouths for a while before finally settling down to eat their catches. It's good to see that the cubs are starting to be successful hunters, they are both full grown now and will be leaving the comfort and security of Phoenix's presence sometime in the next few months. Once that happens they'll have to provide for themselves so this is definitely a good start!

We've also seen a lot of the liqueur sisters, Bailey and Amaretto, and their cubs recently. The two families are doing very well, Last issue I gave you an update on Amaretto and her four youngsters and they continue to look very healthy and they are still very much full of beans. The four can be a little troublesome as they still haven't grown out of their car jumping

phase which has meant on several occasions I have been stuck waiting for them to descend from the car roof! Amaretto doesn't always help and sometimes sets a bad example; she is quite partial to using the Project car as a mobile tree and relaxing in the shade, as you can see from the picture below. We try to discourage this sort of activity from the cheetahs in the Serengeti, but sometimes they sneak up on us before we have time to move out of the way. Once they are there, then we have to wait until they decide to move, because we try not to influence their behaviour and we have a strict policy to always avoid scaring or disturbing the cheetahs.



Amaretto and two of her four cubs relaxing in the shade of the Cheetah Project car

Bailey's cubs on the other hand are a little better behaved. She has unfortunately lost two of her original four cubs but she still has two handsome young boys with her. They're just over a year old now so they'll be with her for another six months or so. They also are partial to a bit of shade, but they seem to prefer real trees!

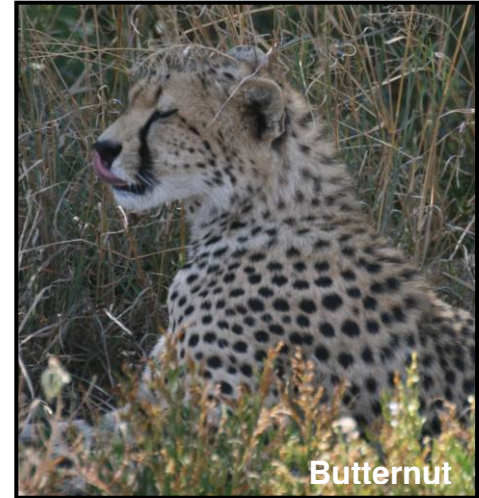




### How's Everyone Doing?

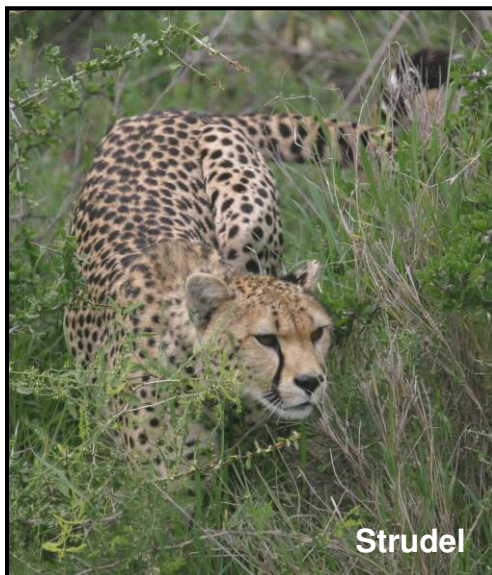
As promised last issue I have news about how all the other young cheetahs you've been introduced to over the last year and a half are doing!

#### The Nuts



Butternut and Coconut were cubs of Almond born at the end of 2007. They reached independence in mid 2009. They are now about three years old and both seem to be doing well for themselves. Butternut hasn't been seen with any cubs yet, although Coconut did have a litter at the end of 2009. Unfortunately they didn't survive, probably because Coconut was still very young at the time, hopefully she'll have better luck next time! Both the sisters are usually seen towards the south of the Serengeti plains around Gol and south Cub Valley. Butternut was last seen in October although Coconut hasn't been around since May. Hopefully with wet season on the way she'll turn up again soon!

#### The Desserts

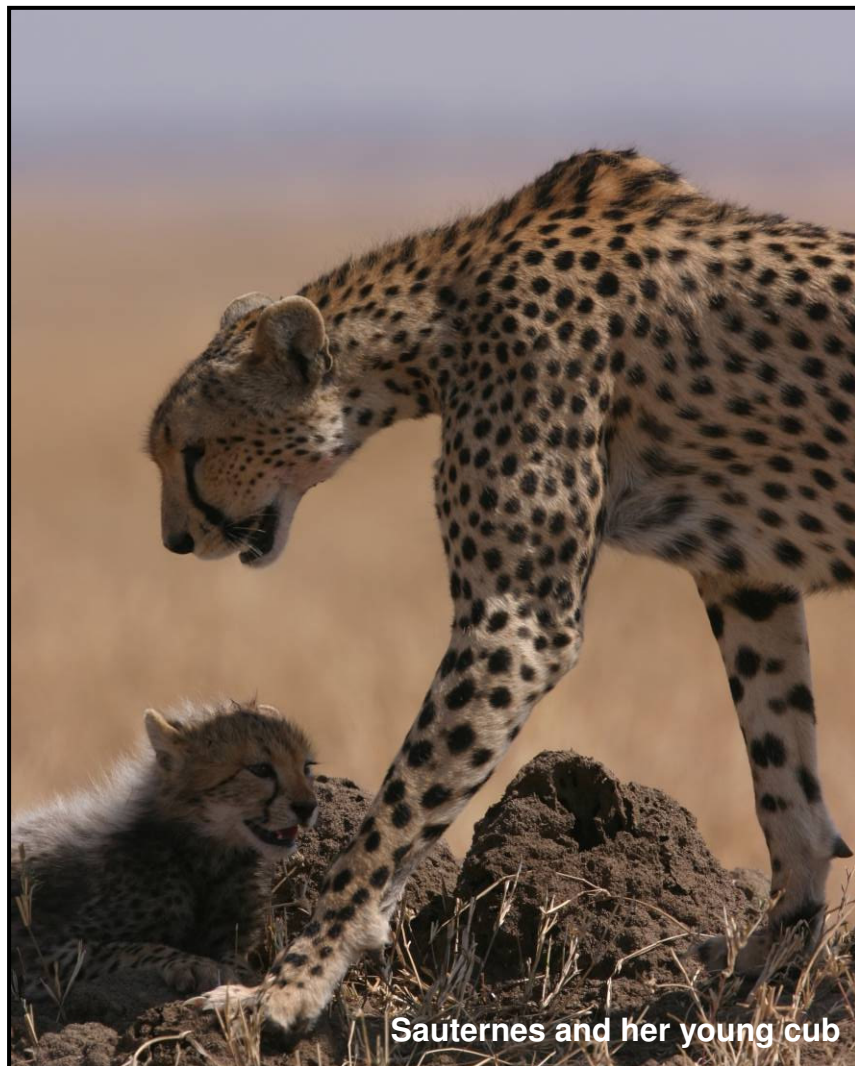




The dessert family is one of the project's long running dynasties and Crumble and Strudel are the most recent additions. Their mother was Tiramisu, one of the oldest cheetahs currently living on the plains at a grand old age of 12! Strudel has only been seen with one litter of cubs, none of whom survived unfortunately. Since the loss of her cubs she has developed a bit of mange, which is usually associated with stress. She is only about four years old so she has plenty of time to try again and improve on her cub rearing skills, especially as she seems to be from a long-lived family! Her brother Crumble has turned into a very handsome young male. He has recently taken over the territory around the Five Hill track, just south of Seronera in the heart of the Serengeti Plains. He certainly seems to be a successful hunter as he is often seen with a very full belly!

### The Wines

Muscat's cubs, Grenache and Sauternes are the youngest members of the Wine family at around three and a half years old. Grenache was seen as a young male scent-marking near the Naabi gate, although usually this is an area held by Maurus and Jerome a coalition of brothers who have held their territory for several years. Grenache hasn't been seen since January, we're hoping that he will return to us now that wet season is on the way. Sauternes was last seen in September when she had a very young cub with her. When they were seen the pair had just finished eating and were looking fat and happy!



Sauternes and her young cub