



Serengeti Cheetah Project

March 2011



This has been quite a dry rainy season so far, but luckily all the cheetahs seem to be doing well, despite the lack of rain. Once again there have been quite a few new faces turning up but there have also been plenty of the old ones too which means I have plenty of cheetah news to get you caught up on!

The Boys are Back!



Last issue I brought you news that the Coffee Boys, Espresso, Latte and Mocha, had left Ndutu. This had surprised us somewhat because the boys had become such regular features around their territory for such a long time that they had almost become part of the fabric of the place, to the extent it was difficult to imagine Ndutu without them! The boys had been seen up near the Loiyangalani River, right in the heart of the Serengeti and a long way from home. I am happy to be able to report that the boys are now back where they belong, lounging around under the trees on the plains around Ndutu! They returned sometime in December or January, it's difficult to be sure exactly when, but they have gone straight back to their old territory on the plain between the Big Marsh and Two Trees. They have been seen very regularly since their return and are often almost completely surrounded by tour cars. Again this brings me back to an issue I mentioned last time, of

cars sometimes getting too close to the cheetahs they are watching. Because some individuals, like the Coffee Boys, are very habituated, people often don't realise that they might be getting too close and crowding them. This disturbs the cheetahs, even if they on the surface look quite relaxed and makes them less likely to hunt. In fact, while I was watching the Coffee Boys relaxing in some long grass one afternoon they were nearly run over not just once but twice and had to leap out of the way at the last moment! Still, the boys seem to be doing well, despite the constant attention, and are happily reinstated back in their rightful home!





The Return of a Legend!



There is lots of good news from Ndutu this issue! I'm sure that many of you will be very happy to hear that after an absence of more than ten months Eleanor has finally returned to Ndutu! Eleanor rose to fame back in 2008 when she produced her first litter of cubs, a grand total of six bundles of fluff! Incredibly, especially considering it was her first litter, Eleanor managed to raise five of the original six cubs to independence. So that you can appreciate what a feat this was, cheetah cub mortality stands at an average 95%, i.e. out of every 20 cubs born, only 1 will make it to maturity, when you take that into account a success rate of 5 out of 6 seems pretty amazing!

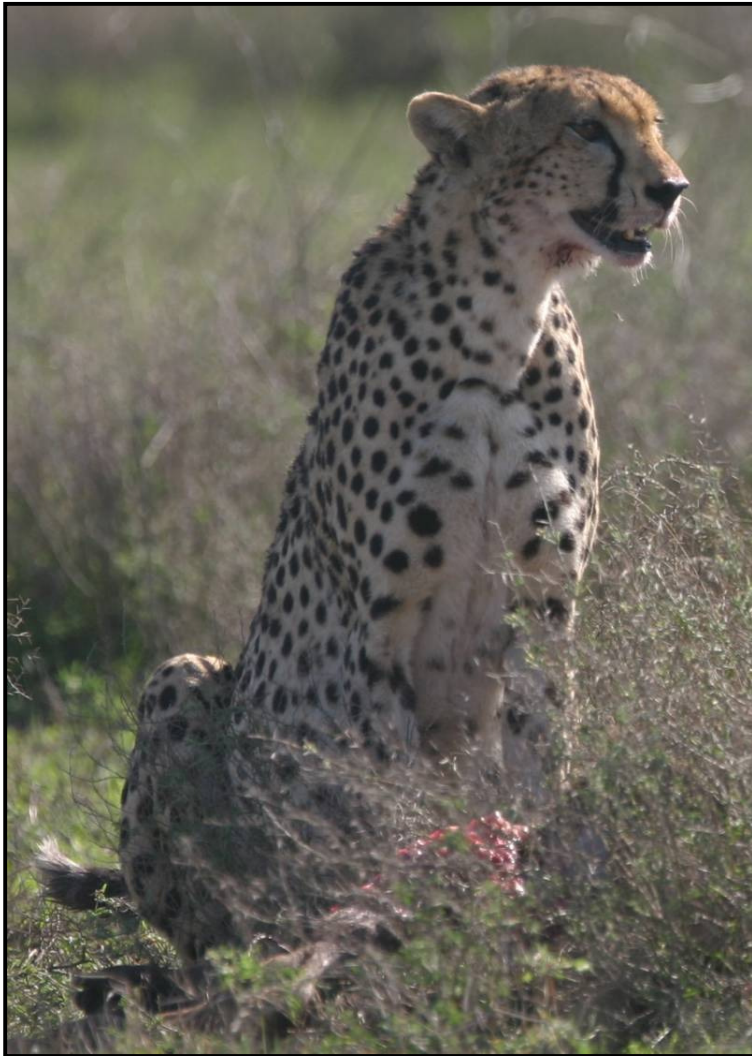
Not only has Eleanor returned to us she has also introduced us to her latest litter of cubs. This is her third litter, the four cubs are now about eight months old and are thriving. It seems that Eleanor was making just a passing visit to the area back in January as we haven't seen her since then, but hopefully she'll bring

her little family back again soon. I'm sure that they will become as much of an attraction as her five cubs were a couple of years ago!





AH140 gets a name



Over the past few issues I have been bringing you news of AH140 and her increasingly large adoptive family. She had two male cubs of her own but then adopted another two young males, doubling her workload! Well, recently AH140 has been seen on her own again, meaning that the four boys are now independent. As celebration of this fact we felt that it was about time that she and her cubs were given proper names. Previous to this litter AH140 had another litter of two males, so we had to come up with a name theme that would stretch to six male names as well as one for AH140 herself. With so many boys in the family I decided that it was time that Cheetah Project had a family named after types of sports cars! So AH140 will now be known as Lotus and her two cubs from a previous litter are now Aston and Martin. Lotus's two cubs from her most recent litter are now called Rolls and Royce and her two adoptive cubs are Bentley and Morgan! Hopefully these new names will meet with general approval! Rolls, Royce, Bentley and Morgan haven't been seen since just after they became independent, which isn't surprising as adolescents often cover very large distances whilst deciding which areas will become their regular haunts. If the four of them stay together then they will not only be a very impressive sight but also a force to be reckoned with if they become territorial. With a bit of luck they will decide to stay within the Project's study area so that we can continue to keep you all updated on their progress!

Hello Mr Bond

Mr Bond has been a good example of adolescents moving around a lot after becoming independent. In fact since becoming independent of his sisters, the Bond girls, Honey Ryder, Octopussy and Xenia Onatopp, he has only been seen twice, once in June 2010 and again just a couple of weeks ago in March 2011. It's always nice to see a cheetah when they've dropped off the radar for a while so I was very pleased to find Mr Bond relaxing near the Loiyangalani River. It turned out to be a slightly unusual sighting however, quite often you'll see a cheetah's head poking over the top of a termite mound because



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they are having a lie down and the rest of their body is hidden by the rest of the mound. I spotted through the heat haze what seemed to be a cheetah's head on top of a mound so I went to have a closer look. As I got a bit closer I could see that it definitely was a cheetah (which is always good news to a cheetah researcher!) so I kept going and as I got near I started to drive around the termite mound so I could see the cheetah's body (sometimes cheetahs lie in positions where we can take ID photos without having to wait for them to stand up or at least in such a way that we can see if they are male or female) well I kept on driving around and no body appeared – Mr Bond was actually sat inside the termite mound! This is the first and so far only time I've seen a cheetah do this and quite how he managed to get himself in there I do not know, I can only assume that another animal must have come and dug the mound out a bit before he got there! Either way Mr Bond was looking very pleased with his seating arrangements until it came to trying to leave, cheetahs do not have the most impressive upper body strength so hauling himself out proved to be a bit of a challenge and I was worried for a couple of seconds that he might be stuck! Luckily he managed to get himself out in the end and had a quick sit down to have a look around (at which point he nearly fell back in again!) before wandering off on his merry way!





A Bit of Peace and Quiet

Lotus isn't the only female who has left her cubs behind in exchange for the solitary life recently. Amaretto is now on her own again after raising four cubs to independence, this was her first litter so she has done very well to raise such an impressive brood! Before splitting from the cubs to go her own way the group made a pretty spectacular sight on the plains, its not often that you see a group of five fully grown cheetahs together (although of course coincidentally Lotus had her litter of four cubs at the same time down at Ndutu) and on quite a few occasions I've have excited tourists telling me of their encounter with the family. I have seen Amaretto a few times over the past few weeks and she certainly seems to be making the most of being on her own again, in fact I think she's only just readjusting to not having to hunt at least once a day because every time I've seen her recently she has either been on a kill or she has had a very full belly! I haven't seen the cubs since Amaretto left them yet but I have been told of a group of four cheetahs that were seen in the area that they spent a lot of time when they were still with her. It's possible that it was another group of cheetahs but I hoping that it was Amaretto's four and I'm going to be keeping a sharp eye out in that area so hopefully I'll have some definite news of them soon. The only thing that remains once that happens is to try and think of names for the lot of them! The liqueur family is quite a successful one so we're starting to run out of ideas!



Tiramisu - Still Going Strong



Although as scientists we're not really supposed to have favourite cheetahs I think everyone who has worked on the Cheetah Project has a bit of a soft spot for Tiramisu. She has been around for a very long time now; she will be thirteen this year which is an impressive age for a cheetah! It's not just her longevity that makes her so popular however. The research assistant on the Cheetah Project has a target to reach each month of getting 20 unique sightings, a sighting is classed as unique if that cheetah, or group of cheetahs, hasn't been seen yet that month. This is a very achievable target but every month there's always a point when you can't help but start to worry about whether you're going to reach it and usually at the point when this

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becomes a full on stressful situation is when Tiramisu pops up and helps you on your way to your target! It was for this reason that she was my predecessor, Laura's favourite cheetah and why she's pretty high on my list too! Tiramisu has successfully raised four cubs to adulthood during her lifetime, two of whom are still regularly seen by the project and are called Strudel and Crumble. Crumble is territorial around the Serengeti's five hill track and seems to be taking over from Tiramisu in helping the researchers meet their targets, in fact he is the only cheetah that since I first arrived in the Serengeti in June last year I have seen every month!

Aries and Virgo

A few weeks ago I was on my way home after a long day in the field. As it's a nice route I'd decided to go down the road which follows the Seronera River. Despite being quite keen to get home (it was by now nearly 3pm and I hadn't had lunch yet!) I couldn't help but scan around me to see if there were any cheetahs nearby, it's a habit that's very hard to break and of course an extra sighting is always welcome. I was happily driving along, quietly humming along to my iPod when suddenly a cheetah shape caught my eye and I stopped. I turned for a closer look at this cat up a tree having a moment of doubt as this individual was quite a long way up in the tree, which was not a particularly easy climb, but it definitely was a cheetah. I drove over and saw another individual in the long grass and took some pictures, it turned out that it was Aries who had been practising his tree climbing and his brother Virgo who, very sensibly, had kept his feet firmly on the ground! Males in particular will sometimes climb trees, partly for scent marking but also for a good look out position. Aries was happily looking around and keeping an eye out, I'm not sure if he'd necessarily thought about how easy it would be to get back down to earth again though!

