



Serengeti Cheetah Project

September 2011

There's lots of exciting news this issue – there have been several new arrivals as well as quite a few cubs reaching independence and having to start making their own way in the world and a few hi-jinks in between!

New Arrivals



Vitalis and her cubs

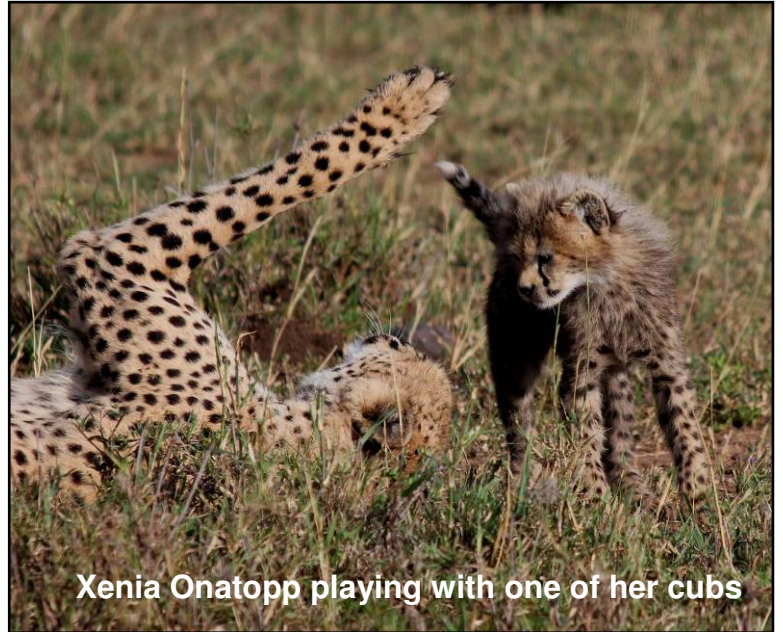
As I said, there have been quite a few new additions to our study population over recent months, the first of which were Vitalis's two cubs. The pair were born at around the beginning of February and are now turning into two strapping young boys. This is probably not Vitalis's first litter of cubs; she has been seen lactating in the past suggesting that she has had some previous, unsuccessful attempts at motherhood. However, this is the first time she's managed to get her cubs to more than just a few weeks old which is an exciting development. I first saw the little family when the cubs were probably not quite six weeks old. I'd spotted Vitalis peering through some long grass so went over to collect my data, by the time I got close to where I had seen her she had disappeared. What I didn't realise until a couple of hours later was that she was down in the very long grass with her very young cubs! She eventually emerged with the little ones in tow and she slowly led them over to a nearby termite mound so she could have a look around. At this point she seemed to lose one of the cubs, I think it might have fallen into one of the holes in the mound, and there followed a few minutes of confusion with Vitalis frantically calling for her lost cub and having the other cub keep trotting over as if to say "I'm over here Mum". As I didn't want to risk interfering with the reunion I left the three of them to it and I

was incredibly relieved to see Vitalis again a few weeks later with both cubs! That was a few months ago, the boys are now about seven months old and are continuing to do well and get up to mischief!

Another female having a go at motherhood is Sauternes. She also has two youngsters at the moment, although both her cubs are female. They are about the same age as Vitalis's cubs and are also full of beans. The last time I saw them they were having a good look at the Cheetah Project car and one even tried to jump up onto the bonnet, although it turned out that was a bit ambitious so she contented herself with challenging the wheels to a fight instead!



Having her first attempt at motherhood is Xenia Onatopp. Xenia is only just three years old, so she's still quite young herself, which her cubs seem to enjoy as she is always very keen to have a play with them! Her cubs were born probably around the beginning of March and she has one female cub and one male. The cubs are already developing their mother's relaxed attitude to cars, having used the Cheetah car as a mobile tree on more than one occasion already! Recently one of the youngsters was using a gazelle that Xenia had caught for hunting practice – trying out his strangle-hold with his mother looking on. Xenia is the only one of her sisters to have stayed around the study area so as far as we know these are the only members of the second generation of the Bond family so far. Although we don't actually name the cubs until they reach independence it has been quite difficult not to start thinking of names for them as there are so many good ones to choose from!



Xenia Onatopp playing with one of her cubs

The most recent arrivals are two very young cubs belonging to Rose. I saw them for the first time at the beginning of the month when they were just six weeks old, having only recently left their den for the first time! They were still too young to tell whether they were male or female but things should develop enough over the next few weeks to make it possible to tell. The pair were so new out of the den that they were still quite unsteady on their feet. It was very enjoyable watching the two of them interact with each other, it was already possible to see that they really wanted to play with each other but weren't quite sure what to do about it. Their few attempts at jumping at each other always ended with one of them falling over, luckily they are still small enough that they are very close to the ground so they don't have far to fall! This is Rose's first litter of cubs so she is on a bit of a learning curve so we'll just have to keep our fingers crossed that she continues to do a good job with the little ones!



Rose's cubs



The Next Generation of Liqueurs

As new faces arrive, others grow up and that is exactly what has happened with Amaretto and Bailey's cubs. Amaretto and Bailey are sisters and were members of Amarula's last litter; Amarula was a successful mother, raising several cubs to adulthood during her lifetime and it seems her daughters are following in her footsteps. Bailey's litter was of two male cubs who reached independence a few months ago, in the spirit (no pun intended) of continuing the family's liqueur naming theme they have since been called Drambuie and Cointreau. The pair have been seen all over our study area since they split from Bailey, seemingly revisiting old haunts and deciding where they think are the best places to be! Amaretto had a litter of four cubs which she managed to raise to independence. Her litter was of two male and two females, the four split away from Amaretto in late February or early March this year and then stayed together as an adolescent group until the end of May. After this the two females moved off and became solitary but the two brothers have stayed together and formed a coalition. We wanted to continue the naming theme with these youngsters as well so the females are now known as Sheridan and Tia Maria and the boys are Ouzo and Sambuca! Sheridan and Tia Maria have both been wondering all over the study area but their brothers have decided to settle down in the area around Seronera and Mukoma. In fact, despite being barely two years old, the pair have been seen scent-marking over the past few weeks suggesting that they are trying to hold a territory in that area! This is a prime piece of cheetah real estate, with a lot of females in the area at the moment which is also therefore attracting a lot of non-territorial males as well. It will be interesting to see if Ouzo and Sambuca can hold onto their new home or if they are being a little over-ambitious!



Sheridan



Emily's Cubs and the Bat Eared Fox



While its nice to meet new arrivals and to see cubs grow up and start to look after themselves its also fun sometimes to take a few minutes out to watch other getting up to youthful hi-jinks! Emily is one of our Ndotu cheetahs and has been quite a good mother over the years. She is currently raising her second litter of cubs, one male and one female, and they were getting up to some mischief when I last saw them! Emily was leading the two across the Ndotu meadow, keeping her eye open for any hunting opportunity that might present itself. The cubs were obediently following their mother, idly looking around for anything interesting that might be happening. This picture of familial bliss and good behaviour soon broke down however when a bat eared fox suddenly darted out of the undergrowth where it had been hiding. This was far too much temptation for the cubs who immediately gave chase. The poor little fox ran for its life and managed to keep



going for a couple of hundred metres before the cubs caught up with it. One of the cubs then stuck out a paw and tripped the fox sending it tumbling head over heels before coming to a stop. The cubs then weren't quite sure what to do with their prey, especially when it turned around and started snarling at them! They kept taunting the fox for a few seconds, with Emily looking on and virtually sighing from a distance, but got very spooked when the fox started lunging towards them and trying to bite them! This bizarre little dance carried on for a couple of minutes

before the cubs stopped paying attention for long enough for the fox to dart into the nearest hole and therefore out of reach. The cubs then sauntered back over to Emily looking very pleased with themselves!





Canapé

Last year I reported on a mysterious new cheetah that had appeared in our study area. She was a young female who was apparently already very well habituated to cars, but we had no idea who she was, where she came from or who her mother was. She became known as Canapé due to her love of food after having been seen on two separate kills on the same day. Interestingly she had only eaten the back legs of both the gazelles she had killed, leading us to wonder whether they were some sort of delicacy in the cheetah world! Canapé stuck around for a couple of months after her first sighting but then disappeared back, presumably, to where ever she had come from.



Canapé was actually the second cheetah I ever found after I started to go out into the field on my own after joining the Cheetah Project last year so I have a bit of a soft spot for her, so you can imagine how pleased I was to see her when she turned up again early this month! Even more excitingly she wasn't alone; she is currently looking after two cubs of her own! The cubs are both males and are about ten months old. The family was all sat along the road to Maasai Kopjes when I saw them and the cubs were having lots of fun running around after each other with Canapé looking on.

