

# Landmark Foundation Leopard and Predator Programme

Newsletter: 12 July 2008



Dead black-backed jackals, Great Karoo. Persecuted????!!

Photo: Nama Karoo Foundation

## Predator Persecutions Continue...but some Battles Won

The Landmark Foundation has in the last week rescued the 17<sup>th</sup> leopard in the last 4 years in and around the areas surrounding the Tsitsikamma Mountains, the Baviaanskloof Mega Reserve and Addo Elephant National Park in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. In fact, it was the 14<sup>th</sup> rescue in the last 18 months! We have been able to do this with the help of local farmers who have been willing to embark on and partner with us on our non-lethal,

ecologically and ethically acceptable predator management efforts. We are proud of these efforts, although daunted by the task at hand.

Since late 2002, 24 leopards have been killed in this area (80% of them as a result of gin traps on farms!), but the real number may be substantially more than that, perhaps even double. Just in the last few weeks we have had unconfirmed reports of two leopards that have been killed illegally near Uitenhage since the beginning of the year. **Who knows the extent of this problem??!!**

Our latest success is a continuation of the inroads we have been able to make in the region in supporting farmers to change to non-lethal and ethical predator management. The Baviaanskloof Valley has in many ways led the way in this work. The entire farming community in this valley have banded together with us to tackle predator management in a holistic, area-wide manner with ecologically and ethically acceptable means. This has enabled us to help rescue 7 of the 17 leopards in this particular valley of some 45 000 ha.

Since 2004, the Landmark Foundation and its partners have been able to rescue 17 of the last 26 leopards in the region – a 63% success rate. The success rate of our methods of rescue and management continue to improve. Prior to 2004, 15 of the first 15 cases we were involved with died – 0% success. Initial data and early indications of our research indicate that the breeding population in the Baviaanskloof Mega Reserve area is perhaps 50! This is not an ecologically and genetically sustainable population. Thus the saving of the last 17 individuals is a significant turnaround of the persecution of these animals.



**Leopard rescued by Willie van Rensburg, Baviaanskloof. The leopard is sedated.**

The latest rescue was a 30 kg male leopard on the farm Vleikloof in the Baviaanskloof Valley near Willowmore in one of our live traps. The farmer, Mr Willie van Rensburg, has together with his colleagues of the Baviaanskloof Valley collectively embarked on a project with the Landmark Foundation whereby all lethal controls have been stopped. All gin traps have been removed from livestock production in the Baviaanskloof Valley and no poisons or hunting dog packs are being used. Protective sheep collars have been fitted to all the livestock (12 000) and 5 Anatolian shepherd dogs have been introduced. We recently had the privilege of a field visit by world renowned livestock guarding dog expert Prof Ray Coppinger from the USA to some of our participating farmers.

Commercial farms in the wider region, covering about 120 000 hectares, are part of our regional programme supporting holistic, non-lethal, ecologically acceptable and ethical predator management practices. In total we have collared about 13 000 livestock with protective wire mesh collars, and some with bell and scent collars. We have run two alpacas as herders in a trial, sponsored and introduced 12 Anatolian shepherd dogs in total, and have a research programme with Rhodes University, and also soon commencing one with Pretoria University.

A dramatic reduction in predator losses has been reported in the Baviaanskloof over the last year as a result of these efforts, which are reported to be an improvement in excess of a 90% at present. We are running a trial with this valley in an area-wide effort to test our mitigation methods. We suspect that the improvement has been the result of both the mitigation measures and the stabilization of the predator populations and top predators. NON-LETHAL, ECOLOGICALLY ACCEPTABLE AND ETHICAL METHODS ARE NOT ONLY PROVING EFFECTIVE, BUT FAR SUPERIOR THAN LETHAL CONTROLS, AND ARE MORE PROFITABLE FOR THE FARMER!

The Landmark Foundation runs a limited compensation system whereby farmers are remunerated if any of our GPS collared leopards are proven to have caused losses, as we correlate the site and times of the losses with the movements of the leopards. We see this as an integral part of payment for ecosystem services – a topic that some environmental activists love talking about in trying to get industry and government to apply resources to conservation efforts and (their lifestyles), but yet we are vilified by some conservation agencies for our payments when we try to save leopards by it through compensating the damage they might cause. These efforts have been a resounding success and have resulted in a new and eager willingness by some farmers to participate as they genuinely see their interest being supported. We have seen hardened attitudes change, and more importantly a culture of persecution of these animals convert to a culture of enthusiastic conservation.

Many of the rescued leopards were unharmed in the live traps we have sponsored and introduced to counter the barbaric use of gin traps, poisons and hunting dog packs that are used so ubiquitously in the region and countrywide. The increased sighting of leopards in the Baviaanskloof is testimony that our efforts have been successful.

While these successes do keep us going we are constantly reminded of the vast extent of the problem of predator persecutions. Some farmers remain unwilling and resistant to change their practices. While we have succeeded in a small area in the central Baviaanskloof the slaughter of predators persists countrywide.



**Mr Reg Thompson's Gin Trap – April 2008, near Glenconner, Uitenhage District**

In another contrasting case in the last months we had another barbaric injury to a leopard caused by the setting of a gin trap by Mr Reg Thompson, of the Glenconner area in the Uitenhage district. This animal was saved by our team and successfully relocated to Addo National Park – the 7<sup>th</sup> successful local translocation of leopards to Addo in our programme. These animals would have been destroyed in the past had it not been for their successful introduction to Addo Elephant National Park in conjunction with the Eastern Cape Department of Economic Development and Environmental Affairs and the South African National Parks. We are further proving conventional folklore wrong in that these cats have been successfully introduced and remained in the areas of their introduction. These animals are monitored after their translocations in order to better understand this as a management intervention.

We have tirelessly called for the outlawing of all forms of leg-hold traps (gin traps), indiscriminate use of poison usage and hunting dogs packs. These efforts received a huge amount of resistance from the agricultural sector, opposition from some in the conservation sector and near silence from the retail sector.

Let us say it again: ***Gin traps (in all its forms), indiscriminate poison traps and hunting dog packs are barbaric practices.***

These practices should be outlawed immediately. Environmental legislation outlaws these methods against protected species, but not against non-protected species. They are indiscriminate, never mind barbaric and there is no control over which animals are trapped/killed (protected species or not) by them. Currently the legislation legally allows their use. I cynically believe the implementation of legislation is designed to be useless and/or impossible, as the intent by the trap setter would need to be proven, which is legally near impossible. Many conservation agencies, certainly agricultural entities, and some academics still object to banning these methods. It is beyond us to understand why?! If these practices were outlawed, retailers would also be far more willing to enforce its ban as a production practice, as they would not want take part in any illegal production activities. Between 55 and 70% of all South African meat supplies are sold through the tills of the major 4 retailers in this country. It is thus within their collective power to stop these practices. Put pressure on your supermarket to stop profiting from this barbarism!



**Gin trap injury**

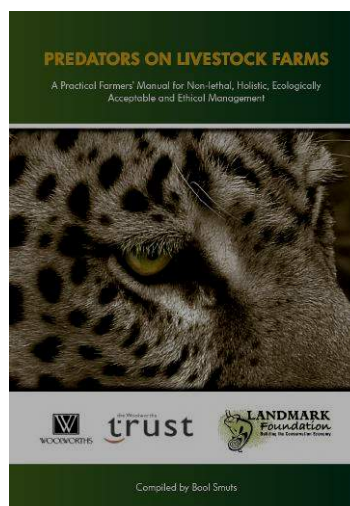
It is therefore no real surprise that we have come up against resistance. There is no place for such legislative barbarism in this country. Please send your objections to Minister Van Schalkwyk of the National Department of Environmental Affairs for legally allowing such

barbarism in the form of leg-hold traps, indiscriminate poison traps and hunting dog packs in his department's legislative tools. Call for these methods to be expressly outlawed as methods of control. His email address is [ministry@deat.gov.za](mailto:ministry@deat.gov.za) and his secretary's email is [mwillemse@deat.gov.za](mailto:mwillemse@deat.gov.za)

We have a bizarre situation in the environmental sector where a “never on a Sunday” approach seems to be followed by conservation sectors on this issue. Some apply rather bizarre logic by saying that because enforcement capacity is poor, there is reason not to outlaw this barbarism, something akin to saying that just because of the poor enforcement of the unlawfulness of crimes like rape and murder there is no point in outlawing it. What kind of logic do we operate in?!

Even more worrying is the fact that some conservation organizations and research institutions are using leg-hold traps for their research work! Perhaps another reason why our appeals to work together seem to have fallen on deaf ears in these sectors.

And then we have the retail sector. All our supermarkets are currently profiting from these barbaric production practices. There is not a single retail outlet in this country you can support with the assurance that livestock products (meats and animal fibres – wool and mohair) have not been produced using these barbaric practices. Please consider this when you purchase these products, and make the correct (ethical and conservation) decision, as your support of such products is contributing to this persecution and allowing people to profit from it. We have appealed to these retail groups for 4 years now, and still not a single retailer has predator-friendly produce in their stores. This is a disgrace! These companies knowingly buy from farmers and producers that utilize leg-hold traps (gin traps), indiscriminate poisons and hunting dog packs. Thus, their profits derive from such production practices. How can this be tolerated any longer? **Those farmers that are responsible and ethical producers should be rewarded and differentiated from those that are not through certified, accredited and labeled products!**



The Landmark Foundation has compiled and drafted a manual acting as a production standard for holistic, non-lethal, ecologically and ethically acceptable management of predators on rangelands. Woolworths has kindly paid for the printing and production of 2000 of these manuals. Any parties who would like a copy should get in contact with us. We will also distribute it through Woolworths, Cheetah Outreach, De Wildt and our partner organizations: CapeNature and the NSPCA. Woolworths is rumored to be about to launch a

limited pilot predator-friendly meat product. Do go out and support it when it does emerge, as this is something we have been working towards with the retail sector.

Pick 'n Pay is currently carrying our logo on some of the meat products in support of our efforts. While this is clearly of great value to us, this label does not indicate that such produce is free of predator persecution practices.



In the absence of legislation or concerted retail sector action, we believe that the market mechanisms will need to address this issue. While our mitigations measures are profiting farmers in better productivity, we aim to add value to participating farmers' products at the till through a branded and value-added product. This will bring the farmer a premium for supporting biodiversity conservation and give you, the consumer, the power to choose ethical produce that conserves these magnificent creatures.

To this end the Landmark Foundation is about to launch a wildlife-friendly brand that will be independently audited and verified to be such. The first of the products to be launched will be a meat brand that will be predator-friendly and certified free of the use of leg-hold traps, indiscriminate poisons and hunting dog packs. The production of these products will be guided by the production manual that has just been published and its code of conduct.

Please watch the media for the announcement and launch, and do support the product when it hits the shelves. We hope that all the retail groups will come forward and support the brand. Farmers are the custodians of the predators we believe they should conserve. The wildlife-friendly brand will be the ultimate tool in benefitting those farmers supporting the initiative. Other wildlife-friendly products will follow that will be guided by their own production standards. Help us build this brand!



**Photo: Anonymous**

This story was recently passed on to me (see the photos above). It is particularly poignant, but I bet it is repeated a hundred times a day in our country. This occurred in the Western Cape.

*"On our most recent visit to ----- we encountered a beautiful Kolgans trapped in a gin trap. His leg was broken in half, skin ripped off and the bone exposed. My husband is a doctor and after examining the poor bird realised that he would not recover from his wounds, as exposed bone usually contracts an infection, and it was obvious that this bird has already been trapped for a while.*

*We decided to release it and place it back in the water, hoping it would die in peace soon.*

*He made his way with difficulty to the centre of the dam opposite the stone houses on the farm. We could hear him calling and within seconds his partner (and as we all know they mate for life) came flying towards him to join him in the water. Leading the way, they swam to the closest reeds. Slowly in our boat we followed. We spotted him hiding in the reeds while she was standing on a near by rock keeping guard and hissing at anything that moves... protecting him.*

*I doubt if our friend the Kolgans made it, but what was most disturbing was the fact that this gin trap was planted on a beach in the sand where not just any animal could have been injured or killed, but a child could have stepped into."*

I am afraid that this is done in the name of profits. Despite appealing to government to change legislation, this has had no effect. In fact some government and conservation agencies have vilified us for raising the issue – bizarrely so. Appealing to retailers to enforce it from their side has been ineffectual or tardy to say the least, thus we will have to resort to consumer insistence and actions.

What has been even more disturbing is that the person who passed it on to me asked that their identity be withheld out of fear of victimization. What has become of us if we fear speaking out against barbarism? However I understand this, as we have been equally victimized for our uncompromising stance against this scourge, and have even been threatened with legal action by none other than the communications manager/coordinator of WWF for including her on this mailing list. A request to get clarity why this warranted a threat from her and her organization failed to deliver any clarity.

**It is our indifference that makes us inhumane.**

***Issued by:***

***Dr Bool Smuts***

***Director***

***Landmark Foundation***

**[bool@landmarkfoundation.org.za](mailto:bool@landmarkfoundation.org.za)**

**[www.landmarkfoundation.org.za](http://www.landmarkfoundation.org.za)**

**083 324 3344**