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**Adopt-A-Spot Sponsors'**

**Exclusive update on 'Spot'**

**August 2011**

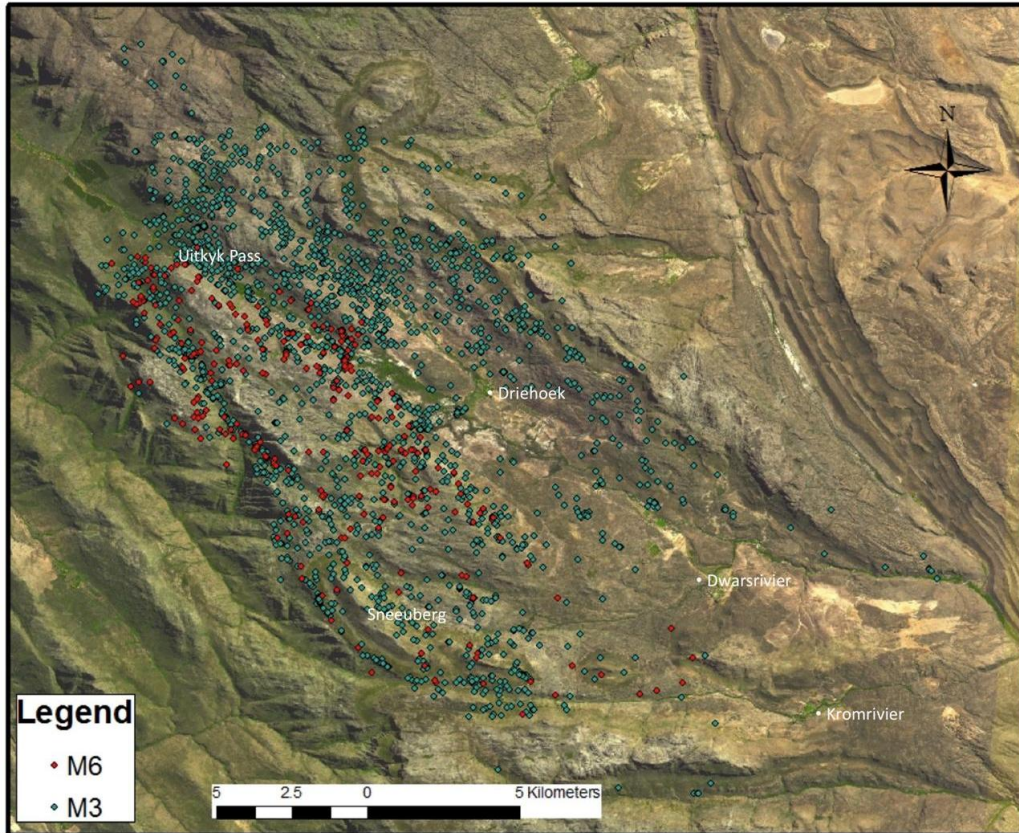
Dear Adopt-A-Spot Sponsor

Despite all our efforts to re-collar Spot, she continues to elude us! The only time that she happened to come into contact with one of our traps was when we were in Cape Town and it was not set. She enjoyed the bait scot-free, as recorded by the remote camera left out to keep an eye on any activity while we were away. The attached photograph was interesting as one can clearly see how suspicious and careful Spot was as she approached the bait (Fig.1):



We have had far more luck with Max (M6) as we have had several downloads from his collar as well as two further sightings!

It is fascinating to see what Max's home range is and where he is spending most of his time. His borders correspond perfectly to previous males in the area, however his range is considerably smaller than both M3 ("Houdini") and M11 ("Apache") (fig 2).



This means that Spot is in an interesting situation, her territory being divided down the middle between two males, Max, and 'Sneaky Pete' (M16). The latter was so named after twice evading our traps, once sneaking off with the bait without setting off the trap and the other time springing the trap but with super-quick reflexes pulling his foot back before getting caught. We wonder whose genes Spot's cubs will have this time?

We have done our fair share of tracking Max on foot since collaring him. Due to his range extending beyond the higher mountains, such as Sneeuberg, we do not always get a radio signal for him, without which we are unable to communicate with his collar and download GPS data. However, we have managed a couple of sightings when he was in range. Our first sighting was only for a split second, and only for one person in our party of six. He had just made a kill shortly before we got there – we went to the GPS point we had got for him and found the fresh stomach content of a dassie he had just killed. Dassies are a big part of a Cederberg leopard's diet, making up about 35%. The dassies, sunning themselves on rocky ledges, are excellent indicators of a leopard's presence as they are very vigilant and cry their distinctive alarm calls at the sight of them. If you are hiking and hear their alarm calls, try to look in the direction they are staring in and you may just be lucky enough to spot a leopard. If you are hiking in the Driehoek area you may even spot Spot.

Our second sighting of Max was very special and the best leopard sighting we've ever had here in the Cederberg. What made it so special is that Peter Norton, the original Cape leopard researcher who did his studies in the 1980s was visiting us. He was back in the Cederberg after many years away, and during his leopard studies he had only ever had two Cape leopard sightings. We could sympathize! He had just arrived at Driehoek when we got a signal from Max's collar and were able to download the GPS data (Peter was amazed by the advancements in technology since his days battling with VHF radio collars) and force a fix, telling us where he was right then. We raced off as it seemed he was only a few hundred metres from the main Cederberg road. By the time we got there however, he had moved, so Quinton tracked him with the radio telemetry and we picked up a strong signal further over. We scrambled up to a look-out point and peaked over the edge. We scanned the slope in front of us for ages and then suddenly caught a glimpse of movement – it was him, about 300m away and moving across the slope and towards us. Breathless with wonder, we watched him for about ten minutes, as he moved like liquid over rocks and through bushes, totally relaxed and unaware of our presence until he disappeared behind a rocky outcrop. What an incredible creature and what a privilege for us to be able to watch him like that. In the excitement, we struggled with the camera focus, but did manage to get a couple of OK shots and a short video clip. They don't do the leopard justice, but one can get an idea of what it was like.



Finally, we will continue trying to capture Spot to change her collar, while also trying to capture and collar Sneaky Pete. The following 3 months are crucial for us to accomplishing this. We hope we can provide you with positive feedback in our next update.

All our best,

The Cape Leopard Trust Team