

## Philip Perry's Leopard Notes: April 2007

### From Sabi Sands' Western Sector

#### Wallys

As usual Wallys has been most characterful. His latest exploit was to steal a young waterbuck from a python, though I am not sure whether he also killed and ate the snake. He has been dominant in the far west for around 8 years now – an amazing achievement. At around 13 years old he is still in his prime. Of course he is a very fortunate leopard as he has fences on three sides of his territory so he really only has to defend his eastern flank from the Othawa male.

#### Makwela

Makwela's female cub, from her 8<sup>th</sup> litter, again sired by Wallys, is now 11 months old. She was actually born outside the Park, along with a sibling. Makwela then



Makwela's cub

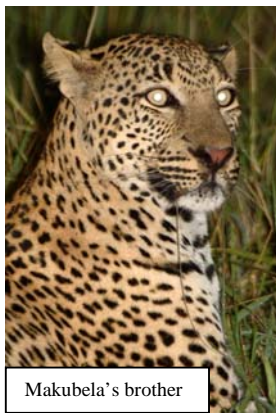
brought the two cubs across the fenceline into Sabi Sands in July last year. Sadly within a month she had lost one of the cubs. Leopard cubs are vulnerable to all sorts of dangers, especially when small – disease, injury and predation by lions, hyaenas and even honey badgers. My recent sighting of the cub showed how similar leopards can be to domestic cats. She was sitting on a rock at the edge of a pond but did not look too happy. After

a while she started to make the characteristic movements that indicated she was about to be sick. Sure enough she crouched down, leant forward, opened her mouth, put her tongue out, drew her lips back in a grimace with her whiskers pointed back, and then vomited. It was evident, just like your pet cat, that she had been eating grass as an emetic. Afterwards she looked much more comfortable. (A full photo sequence is on the website now). If a pet owner can detect that a cat is about to be sick and this can be repeated with a wild leopard, then the subtle changes in body language of an animal obviously do match up with certain emotions or states of wellbeing.

Makwela continues to be an excellent hunter, well able to provide for herself and her cub. Recently she apparently managed to rescue some of her kill from hyaenas who had stolen it.

#### Shangwa

Shangwa's two female cubs are now 15 months old and more or less independent from Shangwa. The interesting question is where will these two females set up territory as there are not so many spaces available at the present time. It is reported that Shangwa is again pregnant and due to give birth to her 5<sup>th</sup> litter sometime in the next few months. On my last visit Shangwa was seen interacting with her male offspring of the previous litter, Makubela's brother. He should have left the area long ago as males normally go far away from their mother and father's territories. However he is, for the moment, back in his mother's territory but it is hoped he will move away soon. He is looking magnificent and so far has avoided the face scars his sister now bears. The encounter with Shangwa on the northern bank of the Sand River was likely brought about by a fight over a kill. In any case there was a lot of tension between the two



Makubela's brother

cats. It was a dramatic sight to see Shangwa running full pelt directly towards our vehicle, snarling. As we knew that the aggression was focused on her son, from whom she was running away, there was no thought of any danger. That is the wonderful thing about Sabi Sands, the rangers are always quick to put the animals first so the animals behave naturally.

### **Makubela**

At 39 months old Makubela is likely to produce cubs quite soon, certainly this year. She is still living in part of her mother's old territory. On my last visit she had an encounter with her father, Othawa male. Once she sensed him approaching she got up and moved off. He came up to where she had been lying and smelled the ground closely. He then followed her, but she kept moving away. Hopefully she will find one of the itinerant males to mate with. She now sports several scars on her face, most probably due to encounters with other leopards – perhaps her mother, Shangwa.



### **Mambhirri**

Mambhirri gave birth to her first litter, of two cubs, in October 2006. It is likely that Kinky-tail was the father. One cub was lost after about three months. It was thought that a honey badger was the culprit. Happily the other cub is doing well and looking great. On my last visit he was busy tackling a somewhat gargantuan meal – an elephant ! The elephant was a carcass they came across – but eventually they had to abandon it to one of the Mapogo lions. Mambhirri has done extremely well to keep one cub for 5 months. Most leopards lose all their first few litters. Shangwa for example lost both her first two litters. Learning to be a successful mother obviously takes time. This fact also helps to reduce the likelihood of inbreeding.



By the time a dominant male's daughters, who often set up territory within his territory, are able to successfully raise cubs the dominant male is likely to be replaced by a younger male.



### **Othawa Male**

The Othawa Male is still dominant in the eastern part of the western sector. Though as his territory extends out of the western sector's traversing area he is often not viewable. He still keeps an eye on Wallys – but most of the time they both stay in their core areas and keep away from each other.

### **Other Leopards**

Tai Dam Female: Still not seen very often as she lives north of the Sand river where fewer vehicles drive. She is still not as relaxed as the other female leopards.

Kinky Tail (aka Schwenga Dam Male): Not seen very frequently and still somewhat skittish, especially in daylight.

Hippo Dam Female: Still extremely shy and cannot really be viewed properly.