

CapeNature's Cliff-hanger (continues from page 1)

It was obvious that approaching the leopard on foot on the same ledge would be suicidal. So Quinton and Jaco tried to get above the leopard in order to dart it. The vet set up all the darting equipment, and the two set off – Jaco with the tranquilising rifle and Quinton with a shotgun in the event of being attacked. They were led to an ideal spot on top of the mountain by one of the farm workers who knew the area very well

Out of breath and very nervous, the two climbed onto a 1.5m ledge 32m directly above the leopard who had the trap firmly caught on his left front paw. As the trap anchor had been dislodged, and the leopard was free to move at will, it was obvious there were only two ways of dealing with the situation – either to shoot the leopard and put it out of its misery, or to dart it from above, hoping he wouldn't fall off the cliff ledge he was on once drugged.

At 11am, almost 8 hours after setting out on this mission, and two darts later from Jaco, an expert marksman, the drug took effect. "To their horror, the leopard rolled over and slipped off the edge of the cliff into a crack. By pure good luck, the gin-trap anchor got stuck in the crack and held him from falling further down the cliff. They quickly pulled him back up and were able to see a male leopard in absolutely prime condition with a massive stomach full of mutton and a glowing golden coat. A concerted effort is currently underway to persuade farmers in the region to adopt more environmentally friendly methods of dealing with predators".



Keeping baboons at bay

The Algeria campsite at one of CapeNature's most popular tourist hotspots, the Cederberg Wilderness - is kept baboon free thanks to the dedication and commitment of baboon monitors Jan Burrows, Samuel Ockhuis, Nolan Samuels, Thos Arangie, Morne Koopman en Clinton Williams.

Says Jan: "Many regular visitors to Algeria, some fitted with "ketties" and even "kieries" were pleasantly surprised to see no sign of Kees and his mates over the last year." The baboons who live just further up in the mountains have in the past come into conflict with their human neighbours (including international tourists) – but now that has all come to an end. The monitors move around with the baboons all day long, at a safe distance of 500 metres, also giving the baboons a chance to look for food in peace.

To help us place as many stories as possible, we appeal that you keep submissions to a maximum of 300 words. Photos must be submitted in jpeg format, where possible.

Garden Route team expands protected areas



FLTR: Keith Spencer (cM: Goukamma Nature and Marine Protected Area), Allisdair MacDonald (CN BUM: Garden Route), Chris Gow (Belvidere), Susan Campbell (Chairperson: Western-Heads-Goukamma), Justine Sharples (Garden Route cs) and Guy Thesen (Goukamma River).

Allisdair MacDonald, BUM in the Garden Route and his dedicated team – have recently successfully sealed two conservancy registrations - inter alia the Western Heads-Goukamma and the Knysna Coastal Conservancies.

Says Allisdair: "We were really delighted to see how much support there is from private landowners for this initiative." He explained that the Knysna Coastal Conservancy, situated on the Eastern Head at Knysna, alongside Noetzie and the Sinclair Nature reserve (managed by SANParks) extends to 880 hectares while the WHG Conservancy comes to 4400 hectares.

Over the last year CapeNature has exceeded its own targets by 50 percent under the auspices of the Stewardship Programme. These agreements effectively expand the protected area estate in the Western Cape on priority threatened habitats by 36026 hectares.

Para-ecologists an asset in the Knersvlakte



FLTR. Wynand Pieters, Dr. Ute Schmiedel from the University of Hamburg and Elbe Cloete

Jaco Rheeder and Elbe Cloete, has recently engaged with BIOTA SA to appoint Para-ecologists for the Knersvlakte region. "With the experience in data collection, monitoring, community involvement and so on para-ecologist can easily be absorbed into CapeNature as Field Rangers." Jaco said.

BIOTA SA has thus appointed Wynand Pieters, a Para-Ecologist to assist CapeNature in the Knersvlakte – based in Vanrhynsdorp under the supervision of Elbe Cloete.

Elbe explained: In 2004, BIOTA Southern Africa, in interdisciplinary biodiversity research project, employed members of local land user communities as para-ecologists ("ecologists" without academic background but training on the job) as facilitators for the exchange between researchers and land users. The project is running now for the fourth year with great success

The candidates that have been employed as para-ecologists often did not receive any tertiary education - The only requirement for their employment and training is their interest in nature and field work. BIOTA trains the para-ecologists on the job and during special training courses in the field of: biodiversity assessment and vegetation monitoring, the use of technical equipment (GPS, computers, cameras, etc.) as well as communication skills.

Send stories to lbrink@capenature.co.za before the 20th of every month.