

Ingwe Research Program

2024 Annual report



Rhulani, killed on the road. Photo credit: Elwenn Le Magoarou

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Photo credit: Hancho Olivier

Message from the Executive Director

Reflecting on Ingwe Research Program's journey from a fledgling project to an independent South African non-profit organization, I am reminded of a pivotal moment in my own journey. In high school, my math teacher, perhaps sensing my early struggles with science, declared, 'You will never have a career in biology, ecology, or conservation.' This seemingly discouraging pronouncement, however, inadvertently fueled my determination to prove them wrong.

My passion for wildlife remained unwavering, and I eventually pursued a degree in Biology. Eighteen years later, this led me to Ingwe, where I initially served as Project Manager under the guidance of the On Track Foundation, a UK-based charity founded by Will & Carol Fox.

Registering Ingwe as a Non-Profit Company was a significant milestone, filled with both excitement and apprehension. I am deeply grateful to Will & Carol for their unwavering support and mentorship throughout this journey.

As now Executive Director, my responsibilities have expanded significantly. Leading a non-profit is a multifaceted endeavour, and I am fortunate to have a board of directors who provide invaluable guidance and support in areas such as administration, fundraising, and strategic planning.

While I operate as a one-person team, Ingwe's success is a testament to the collective effort of our growing network of over 50 reserves, lodges, and partners. Witnessing this network flourish is incredibly rewarding, demonstrating the profound impact of collaborative conservation efforts.

2024 has been a year of remarkable growth and achievement for Ingwe. We are now recognized as an emerging conservation organization poised to make a lasting impact on leopard conservation and broader biodiversity efforts. This is just the beginning.

I want to express my sincere gratitude to all who have joined us on this journey, especially our pioneering partners: Kevin Leo-Smith (Rietspruit Game Reserve), Adine Roode (Jabulani Lodge, Kapama Game Reserve), Owen Gröbler (former resident of the Hoedspruit Wildlife Estate), and Jaime Levin (Nzumba Klaserie Camps). Their early support and belief in our mission have been instrumental to our success.

We encourage all reserves, lodges, and individuals passionate about leopard conservation to join the Ingwe network. By collaborating and sharing knowledge, we can collectively strengthen our efforts to protect leopards and ensure a thriving future for them in South Africa.

Marine Servonnat

Photo credit: Owen Gröbler

Our mission & our purpose

Our Mission

Through innovative science programs, we engage citizen scientists in wildlife monitoring, transforming data into meaningful actions for leopard conservation. This empowers communities, fosters coexistence with wildlife, and ultimately secures a future where leopards, and other wildlife they share their habitat with can thrive in South Africa.

Our Purpose

To ignite a passion for conservation by empowering people in South Africa to become stewards of African wildlife and their ecosystems, with the leopard as a flagship species, through empirical research.

Our team



Marine Servonnat
Executive Director



Tom Lautenbach
Chairman



Dr Tara Pirie
Treasurer



Paul Allin
Vice Chair

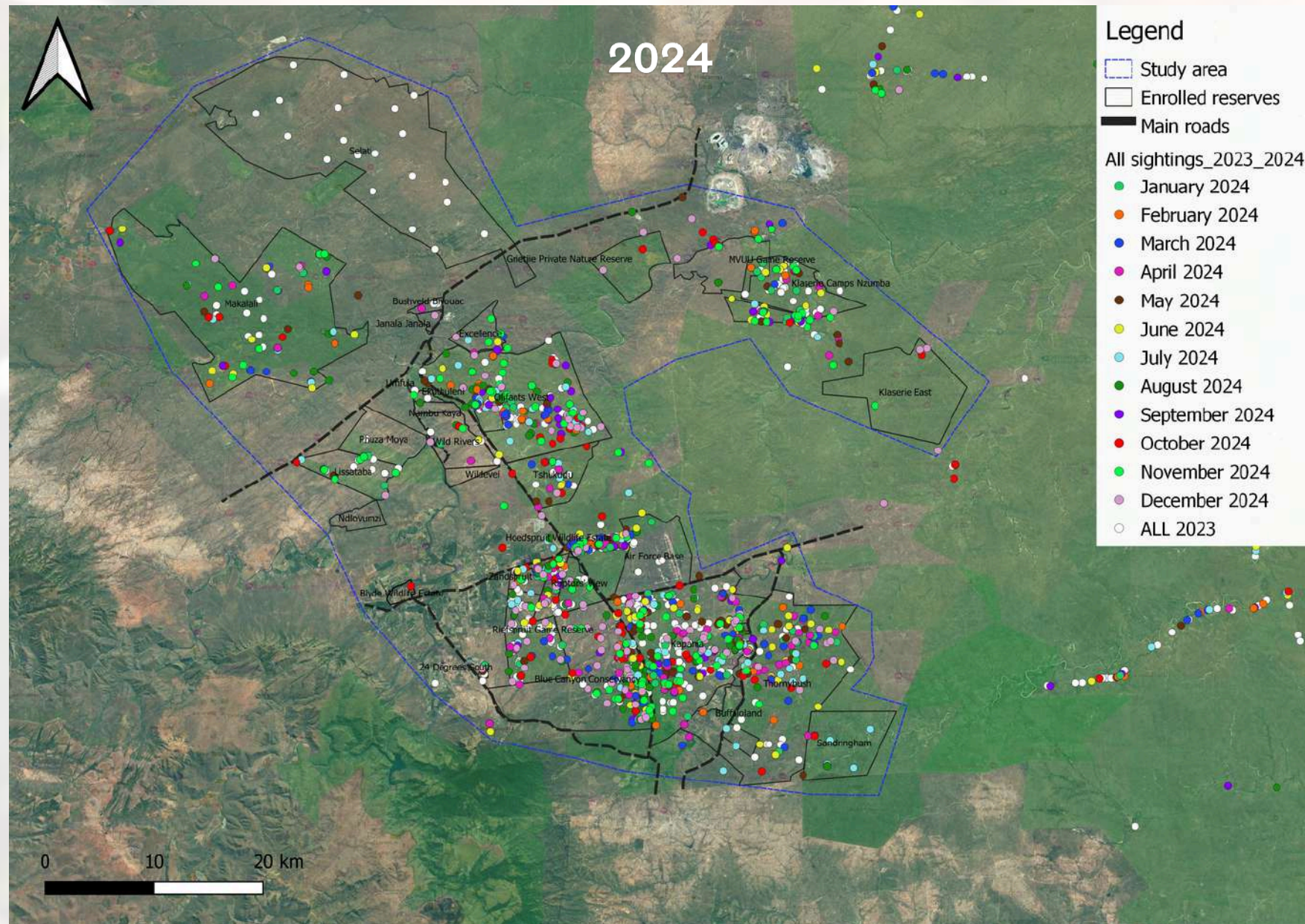


Elwenn Le Magoarou
Secretary

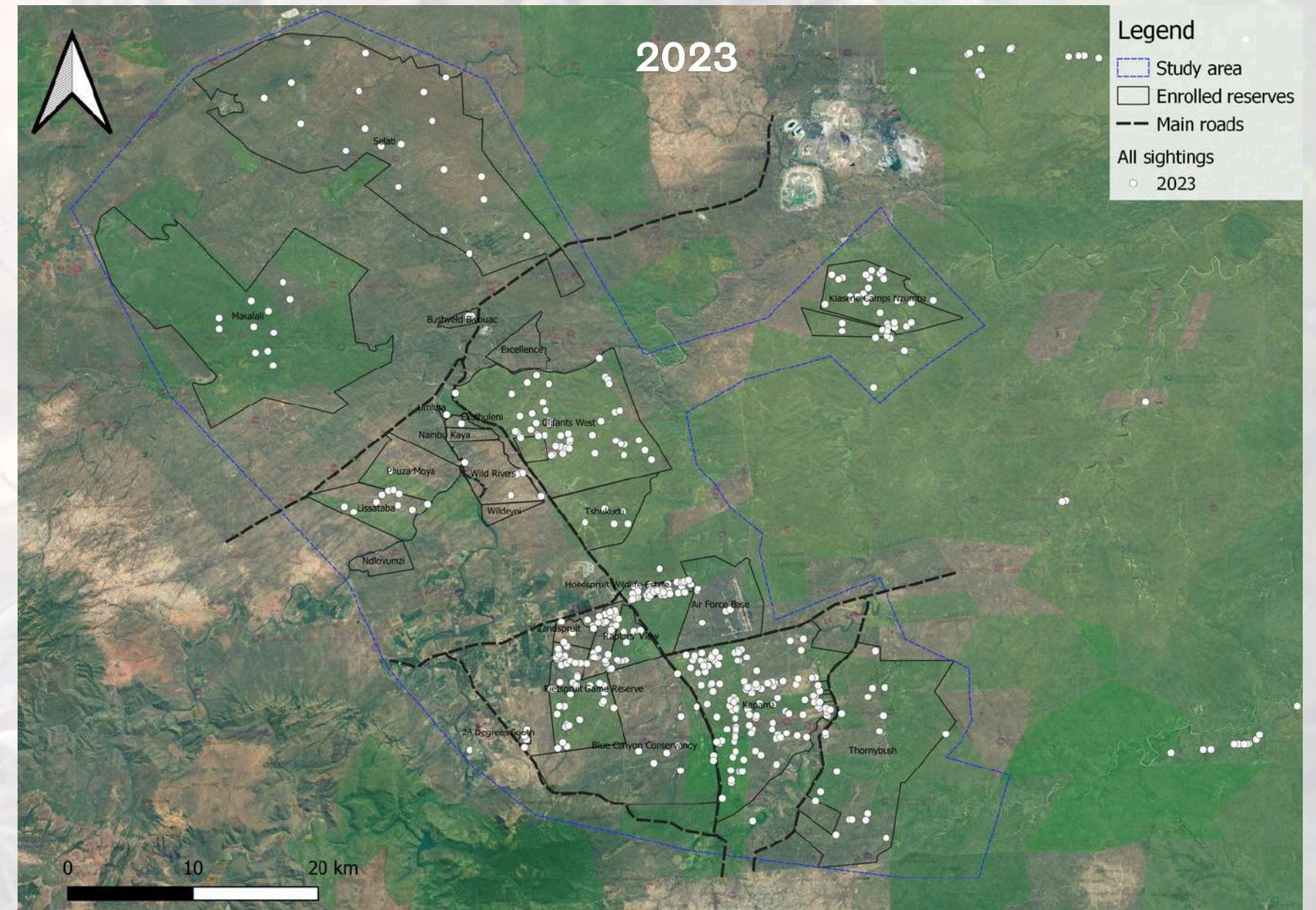
Photo credit: Johan Kaethoven

Where we work

Hoedspruit, Greater Kruger, Limpopo, South Africa



35 reserves and 26 lodges enrolled
1,547 Km² covered (total reserves)
3,250 Km² covered (total area)



24 reserves and 12 lodges enrolled
1,344 Km² covered (total reserves)
2,876 Km² covered (total area)

Photo credit: Hancho Olivier

Accomplishments

11291

images submitted

175

identified leopards
(not incl. 100+ partially identified)

7251

unique encounters

300+

citizen scientists



Photo credit: Lance Van de Vyver

Research projects started in 2024

Socio-ecological survey

This research will contribute significantly to promoting and improving human-wildlife coexistence within South African wildlife estates. It has the potential to shape management practices and create a safer and more harmonious environment for both humans and leopards.

Eleanor Salisbury, MSc student from Nottingham Trent University in the UK

Supervised by Paul Allin (research coordinator, Transfrontier Africa) and Dr Andrea Marais-Potgieter (Conservation psychologist at University of Witwatersand)

Occupancy modelling

This research aims to study leopard distribution in the Hoedspruit area. We are assessing the spatial distribution of leopards in relation to environmental characteristics and anthropogenic factors to understand how they influence leopards' habitat use and movements.

Laura Beales, MSc student from Lincoln University in New Zealand

Supervised by Christoffel de Lange (research assistant, TransfrontierAfrica) and Dr James Ross (Lincoln University)

Road ecology

We aim to conduct a comprehensive survey to identify high-risk areas where wildlife, particularly leopards, frequently cross roads and are most vulnerable to accidents. By pinpointing these hotspots, we can develop targeted, effective strategies to mitigate collisions and protect both animals and people.

Students TBC

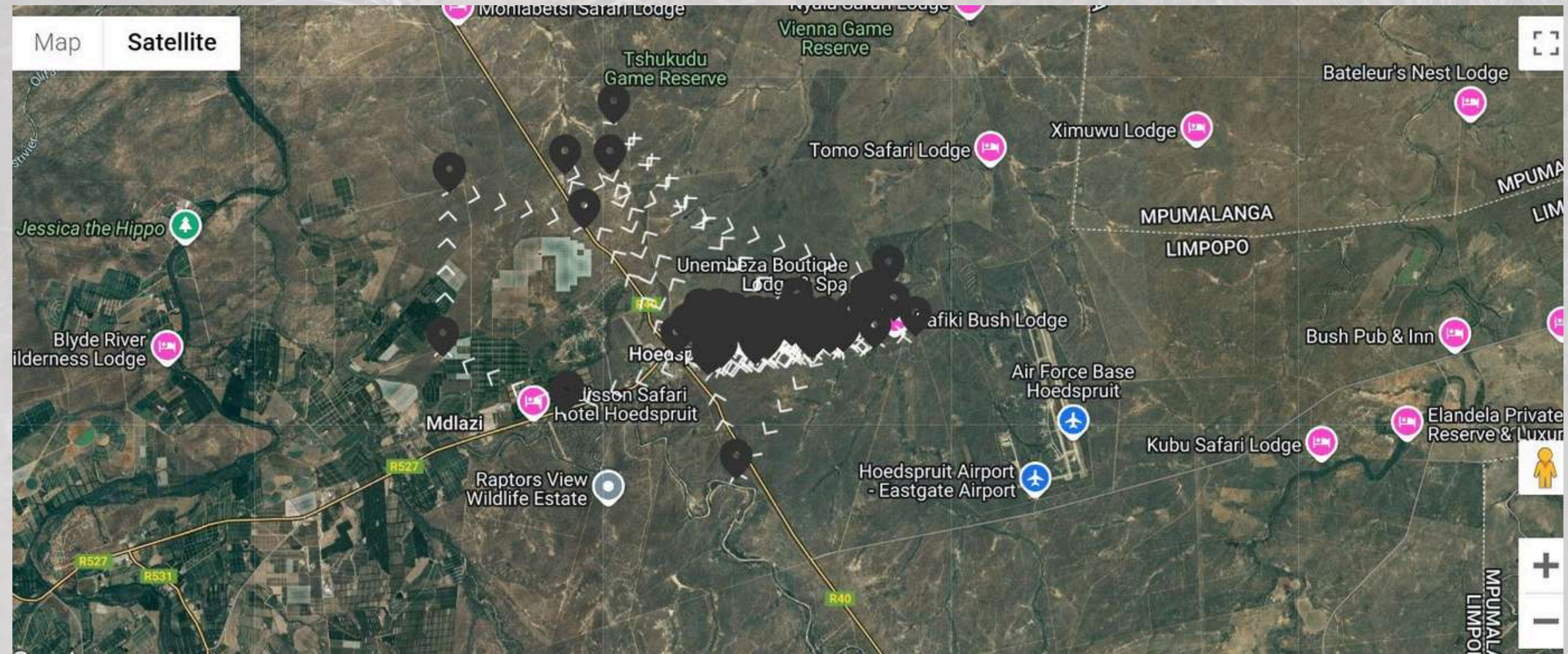
Interesting leopard stories

The Wild Dog dam male is a leopard first spotted by Nzumba Klaserie Camps in the Klaserie Private Nature Reserve in September 2022 and regularly seen until June 2024. This male dispersed and travelled 30km West, where he was sighted by the team from Rukiya Safari Lodge in Excellence Game Reserve at 6h30 in the morning. The same day, at 8h15 the team from Makumu Game Lodge reported his sighting, meaning he had travelled back 25km East in less than 2 hours. A month later, the team from Pondoro Game Lodge found him in Olifants West Nature Reserve, again 25km South West from Makumu. If this information was not compiled under one project and the data were not shared, one could think there are three different male leopards, although it is actually only one individual. This is very important to help streamlining the real number of individuals in the area and understand how the leopards move. It is incredible to think that so much knowledge can be extracted just thank to citizen scientists sharing their sightings with Ingwe Research Program.



Interesting leopard stories

Ntsakelo was also born in the Hoedspruit Wildlife Estate in November 2021. Ntsakelo could be Ingwe's leopard ambassador as his behaviour gave the ideas for two different research projects. The first one aims at understanding the perception of risks of living in four of the non-big 5 wildlife estates, especially amongst carnivores. Ntsakelo is a very relax leopard who could be spotted as much during the night than during the day. Legitimately, his constant presence on the estate brought concerns to the residents. This trigger the beginning of a socio-ecological survey, which aims at improving human-wildlife coexistence in these estates, for the benefits of all beings. Ntsakelo finally dispersed from his natal territory in April 2024. He was subsequently sighted at four different locations but for four months, he disappeared after being last seen on a main road at night. This was very concerning as seven leopards were killed on the roads in 2024. For four months, one could only wonder if Ntsakelo had also been a victim of a collision with a vehicle. A collision that might not have been fatal instantly, but rather injured him enough to allow him to stumble away from the road and die out of sight. Ntsakelo was lucky and thankfully sighted in a citrus farm first, bigger and healthy and subsequently in other areas.



A word from our ambassadors

“Being part of the Ingwe Leopard Research project as an ambassador is an incredible experience, combining cutting-edge technology with insights from residents and field guides. I love that I get to contribute to the research of protecting one of nature’s most majestic animals.”

Robin van Stenis, Blue Canyon Conservancy

“As an Africam leopard ambassador to Ingwe Research Program, my love for the magnificent leopards sighted on our cams now helps essential research and conservation. In the time I have been involved, I have seen Ingwe Research Program literally 'break new ground' in monitoring and mapping leopards and the threats to their survival. It feels a privilege to be part of a wider community of contributing citizen scientists, and to see how Ingwe Research Program turns thousands of sightings into findings that promote awareness, inform community engagement, and support innovative solutions.”

Dr Kelly Morris, AfriCam

“Collaborating with Ingwe Research Program has allowed for a seamless monitoring of leopards on our landscape. It is also a pleasure knowing that our data contributes to the impactful work that Ingwe is doing for leopard conservation across the entire Hoedspruit area. I look forward to seeing the program grow and develop!”

Christoffel De Lange, Research Assistant, Transfrontier Africa, Olifants West Nature Reserve

“It has been a great privilege and very interesting to participate in capturing the leopard sightings for our estate and to meaningfully contribute to leopard conservation. It is wonderful to see the benefit of using AI to identify leopards, especially from camera trap footage in our case, and to learn about their territories and how this can help the understanding of leopard populations and their movements and consequently help prevent road deaths. This has also created awareness for the residents of the estate and has encouraged more contributions and collaboration. Thanks Ingwe Research Program!”

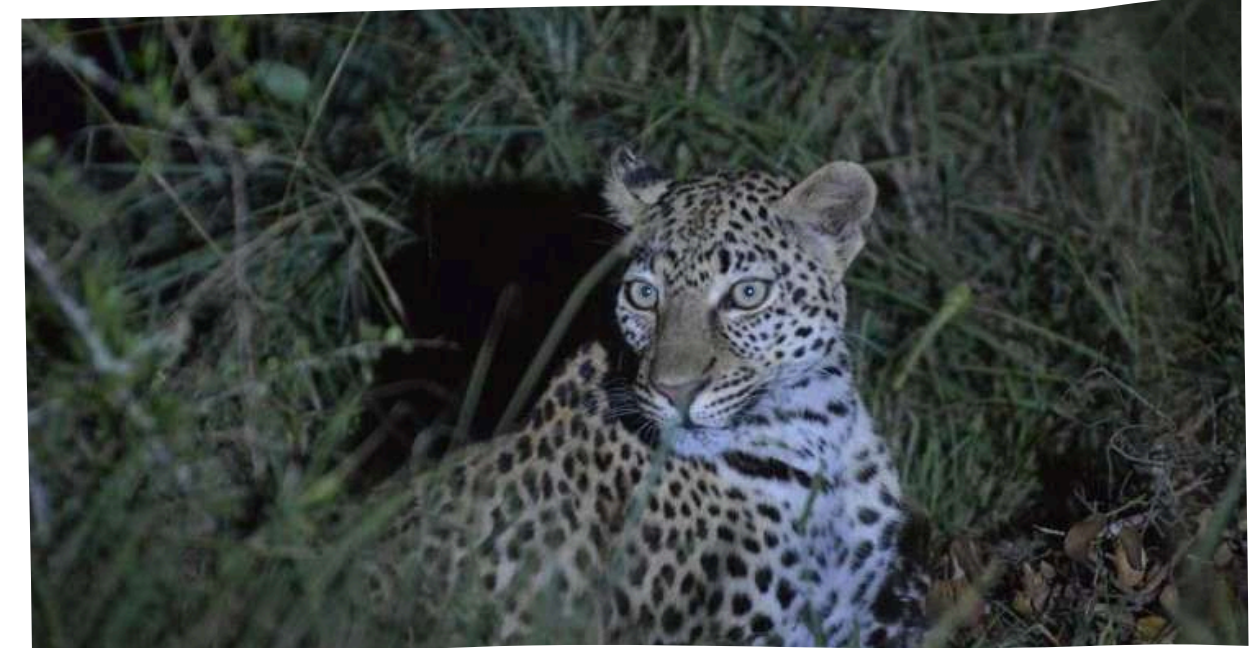
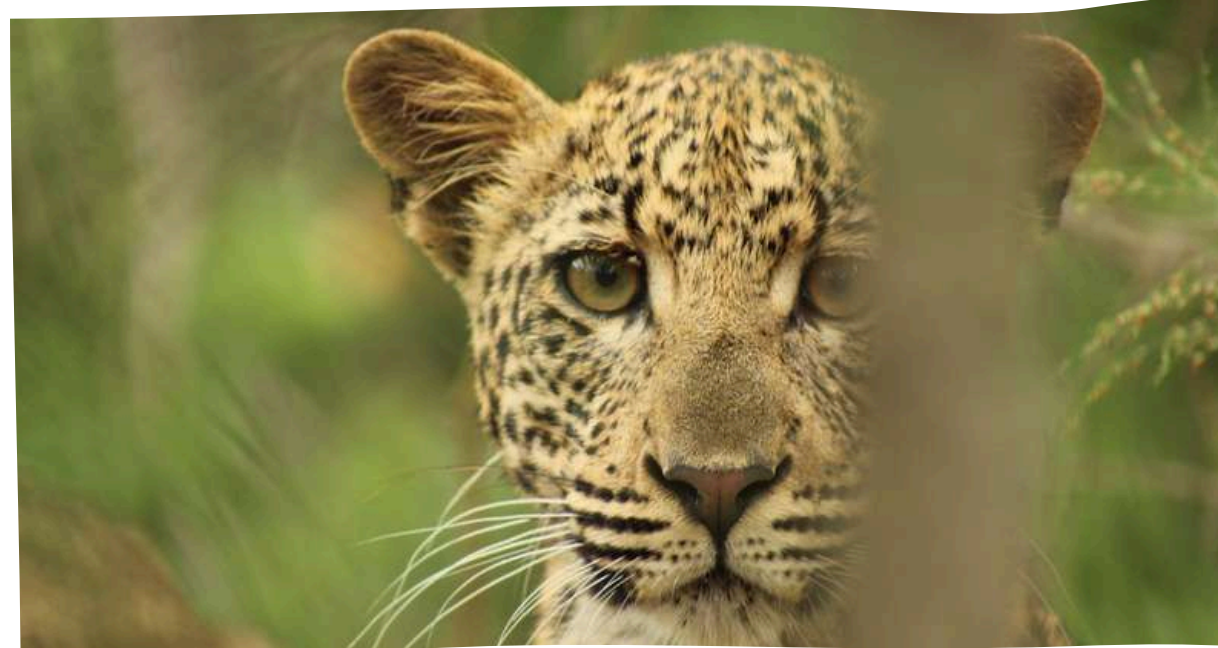
Lynne Hopkins, Raptors’ View Wildlife Estate

“Being part of the Ingwe Research Program community is a true privilege. Witnessing the majestic movements of these elusive creatures not only deepens our connection with nature but also unites our community in a shared passion for conservation. Together, we thrive.”

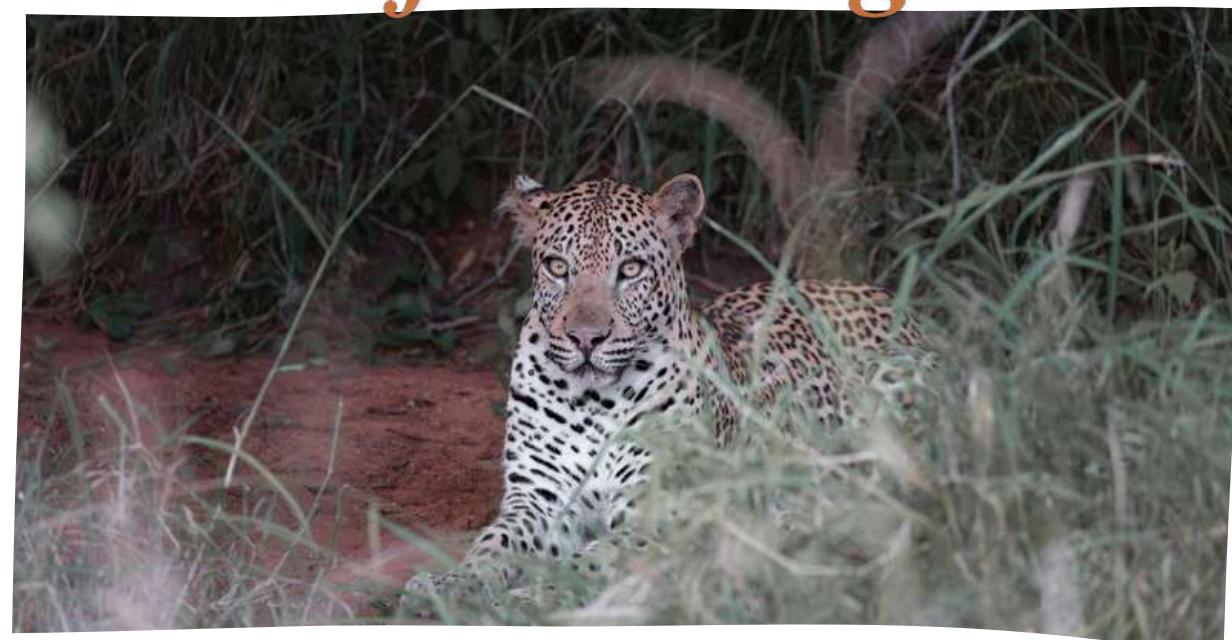
Marion van Staden, Blue Canyon Conservancy

We thank all the ambassadors who are helping gathering and/or formatting data from their own reserves (Max, Pieter, Lynne, Christoffel, Marion, Robin, Matt, Andi, Elisha, Mark, Carole). Reach out if you would like to become an ambassador as well.

Photo credit: Michael Clark

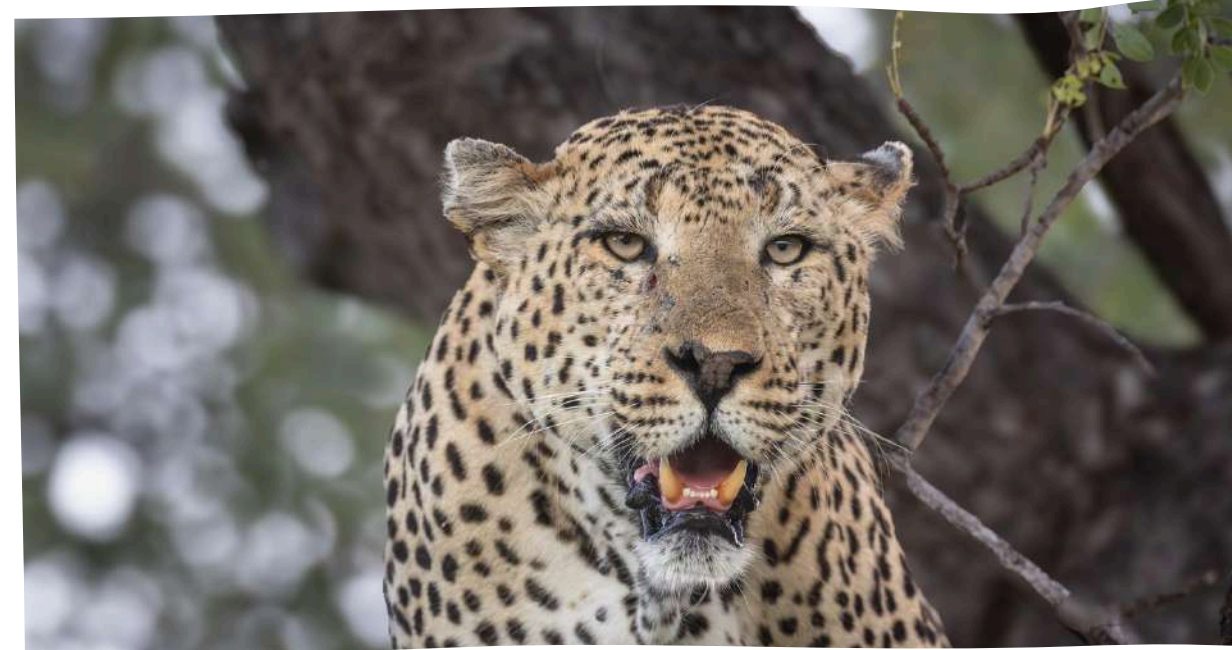


Some of the images submitted in 2024

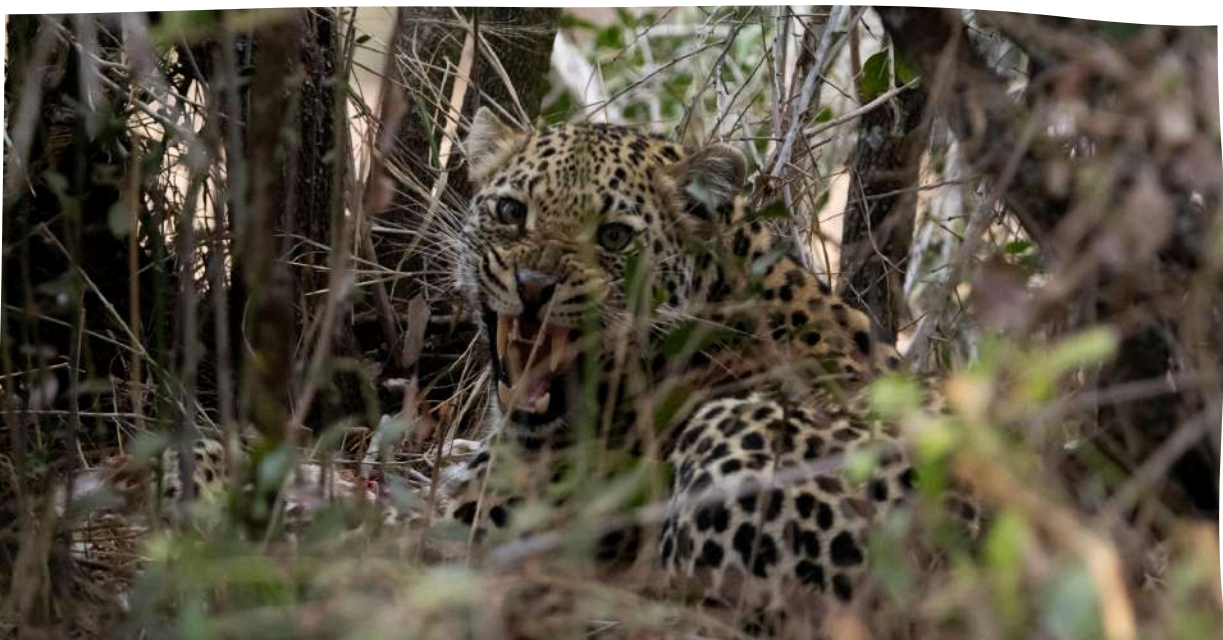
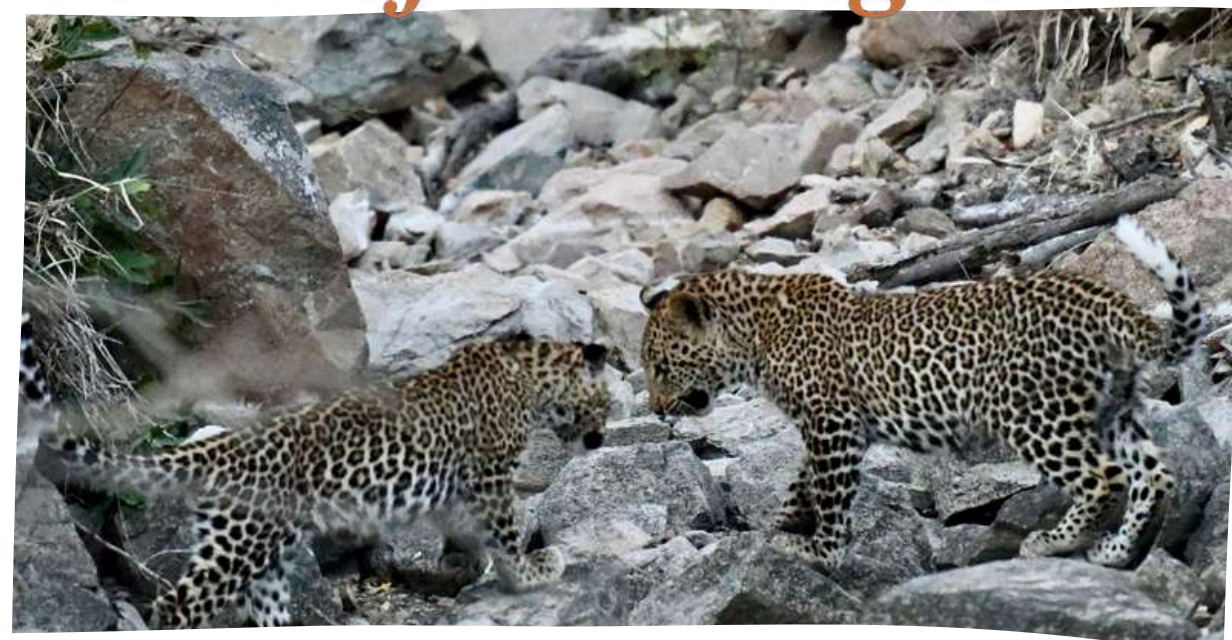


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Some of the images submitted in 2024

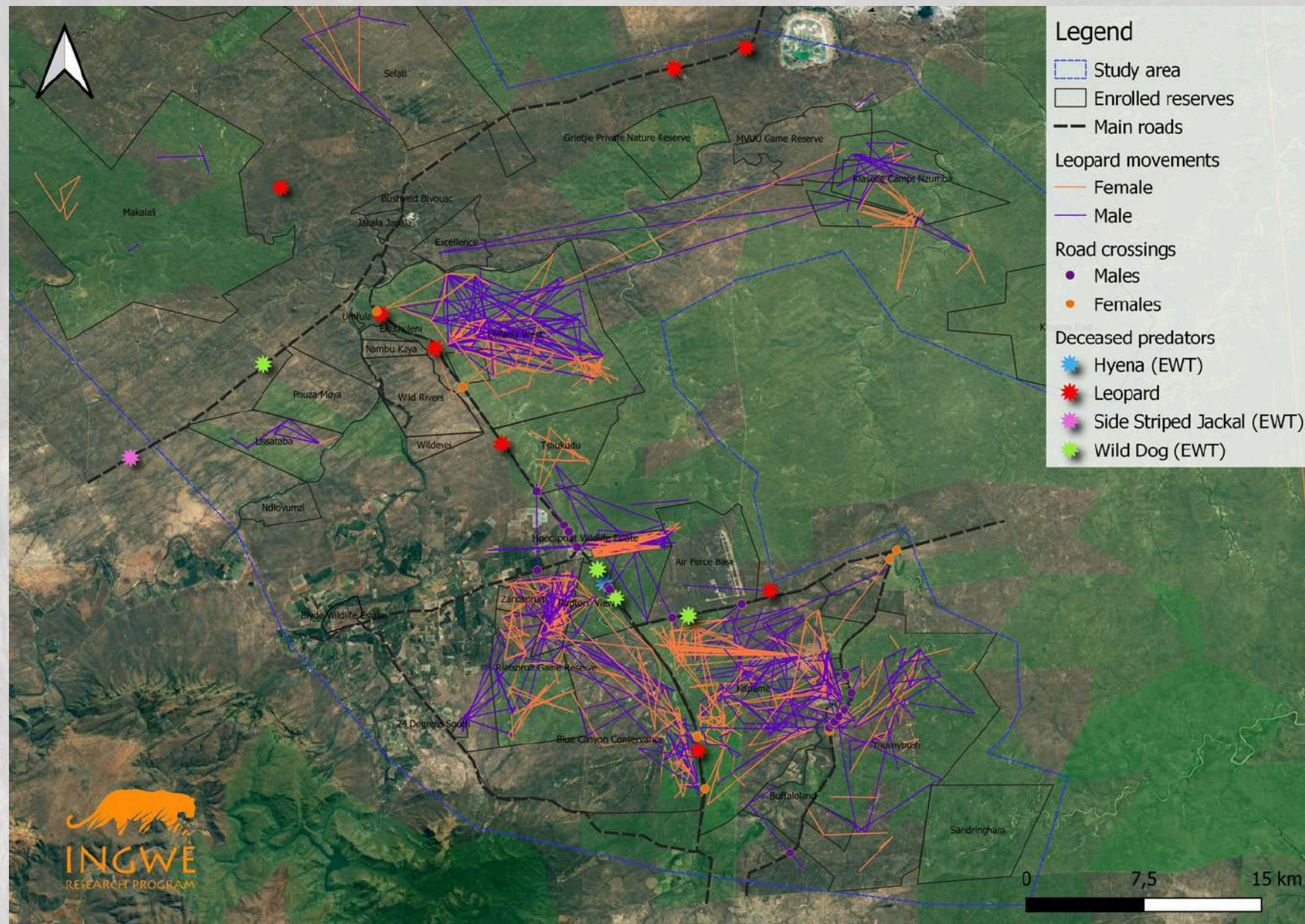




Some of the images submitted in 2024



Our plan for 2025



Between May and October 2024, six leopards were killed on the roads, one on the train tracks and one was found further away from the road, which perhaps died from an injury after a collision. Other species were killed throughout the years. This might just be the tip of the iceberg and this stark reality underscored the urgent need for effective solutions to prevent these senseless losses.

The road ecology project will be conducted in two phases:

Baseline Survey:

- Identify hotspots of wildlife-vehicle collisions.
- Determine the effectiveness of existing culverts as wildlife underpasses.
- Locate key wildlife crossing points.

Based on the collected data and in collaboration with key stakeholders, we will implement effective mitigation measures to reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions.

We encourage the community of Hoedspruit to actively participate in this project by reporting wildlife sightings on the roads, road kills and assisting with data collection.

A project sponsored by
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Our volunteer program

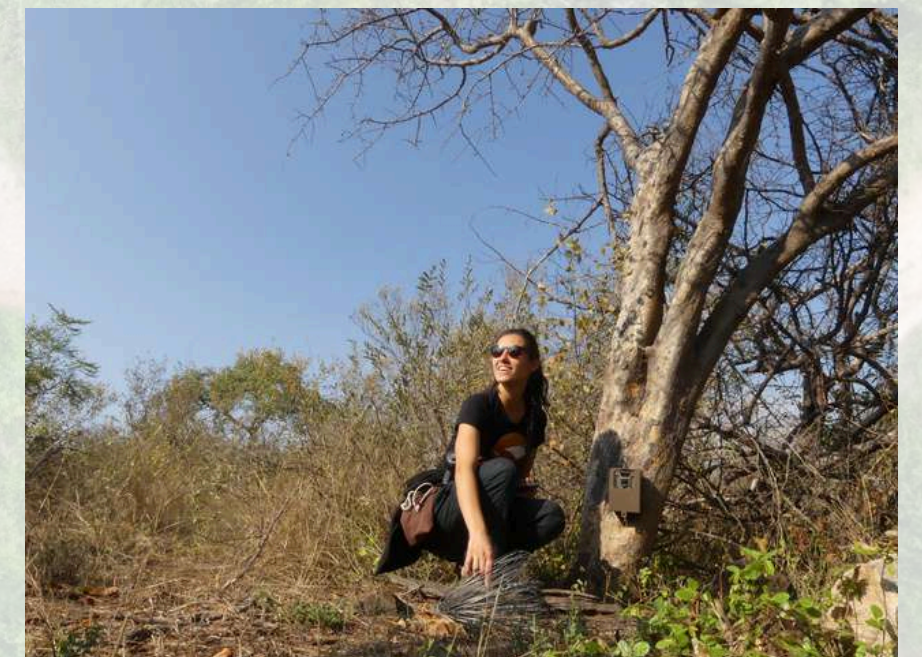
Assist with:

- 🐾 Field work
- 🧬 Research
- 🌳 Reserve management
- 📖 Environmental education program
- 🦊 Anti-poaching

Skills gained:

- 🔍 Survey methods
- 🦏 Wildlife monitoring
- 📷 Service & process camera traps
- 👤 Tracking skills
- 🤖 Use of AI for conservation
- 🌵 Alien vegetation control
- 🌳 Reserve management
- 💻 Data capture, ID kits creation, GIS mapping

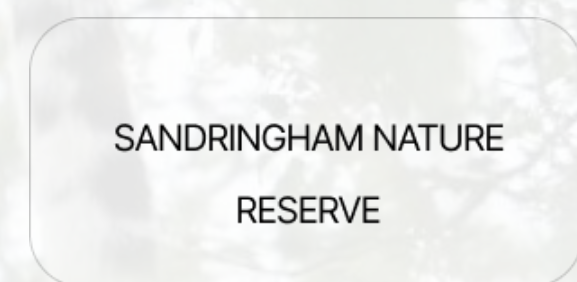
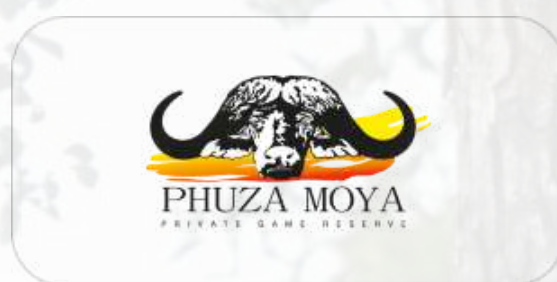
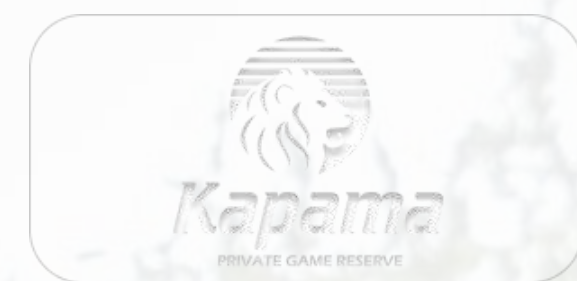
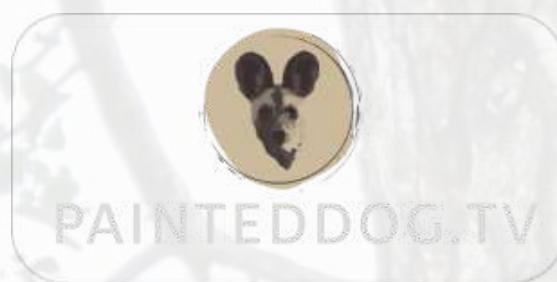
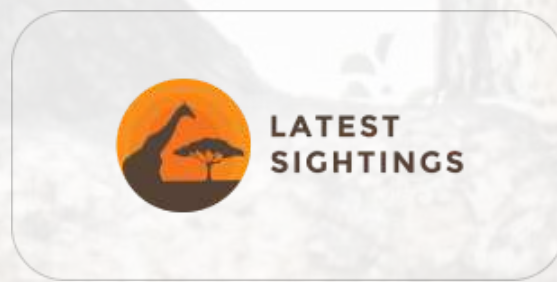
“I think more than any program, it is a true insight into what it’s really like working in conservation” Kerri, UK.



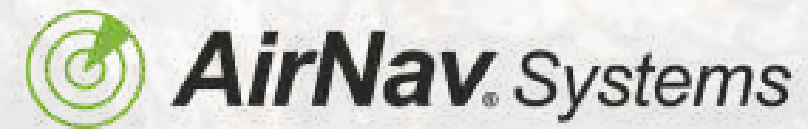
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For more information,
www.ingweresearchprogram.org

Photo credit: Owen Gröbler