

DIARY END JULY / EARLY AUGUST 2005

After the high drama of the first two and a half weeks filming Great White Sharks in South Africa, we were land bound for a couple of days to storm force winds and driving rain. Once back out on the water it seems everything changed. From witnessing upwards of 20 attacks each morning, we were struggling to see 2 or 3. Fortunate then that we were able to record some very high-octane predatory behaviour when the going was good.



The fall off in natural predations did give us more chance to record the sharks underwater with the pole cam. The camera is set in an underwater housing and I have an eyepiece attached to a helmet allowing me to spot the sharks coming with my left eye, and to see underwater with the right. We were visited by over 10 sharks, most of which were relatively placid. One or two however were rather friskier, and that resulted in the dome port on the front of the housing receiving a battle scar from a quick test bite delivered by a 3-metre shark. She immediately let go of the camera, but the damage was done. All in all it was a wonderful trip, and I feel very lucky to have witnessed these great predators in all their glory.

Toki Revisited

From South Africa we went on to Kenya, primarily to catch up with Toki the cheetah. Toki is the surviving brother from orphaned twins that we helped to rehabilitate in Lewa Wildlife Conservancy in Northern Kenya. At the end of last year he was attacked and almost killed by a coalition of 3 adult male cheetahs, and from that point was clearly unhappy about staying on Lewa. After leaving on several occasions, he finally made a long journey to the South and West. This took him across hazardous country where he might easily have been killed by people believing he was a threat to their livestock. By immense good fortune he finally found his way to a farm owned by friends of ours who guessed that this was no ordinary cheetah and allowed him onto their ground. Since then he has been living a secure existence within a 1000-acre sanctuary. He is safe from other predators and aggressive humans, and can kill for himself here. However, he



will never meet another cheetah, specifically a female, whilst he remains here, and is making a severe dent on the population of prey animals in the sanctuary.

Re-location, re-location!

We have decided to move him to new country, a large reserve that is being given a new management plan that suits Toki very well. I will let you know all the details when we make the move, in all likelihood towards the end of this year or the beginning of next.

That's to the future. In the meantime he is safe and well, and utterly lovely. Because he has had to have human contact in his new home, we felt no qualms



about greeting him after an absence of 5 months. I can not tell if he recognises us, but his reaction once he heard and spotted us was to scent mark a tree (a big step in the right direction for a mature cheetah) and then to swagger over, purring loudly, to rub against my head and to have a wrestling match. He of course is equipped with pointy bits, which makes me a very unsatisfactory playmate. He had to settle in the end for a

cuddle.

I try to remain dispassionate about the creatures I work with, but it's impossible sometimes, especially when we've had such close contact for so long.

I'll let you know how the move goes in the near future.

Now, I'm preparing to head back to Kenya to start another series of Big Cat Week. I shall be back in the Masai Mara in Kenya from the 22nd of August and will remain there for about a month. I hope to catch up with the Lions, Leopards and cheetahs that we know so well in that part of the world. I shall once again be concentrating on the lions, and from what I hear it promises to be a vintage year. Rumour has it that the Marsh Pride is once again in the ascendant, Cheza and Sala from the ridge pride are still in good form, and that the wildebeest are moving into the territories with a vengeance. Sounds like fireworks! I'll keep you posted.

kindest regards

Simon