

## DIARY SEPTEMBER 2004

It's been a while since I've had the chance to update the site, so apologies to all who may have visited and found the whole thing static since May. The period since then has been enormously full.

The series Britain Goes Wild took up the best part of my time during June, when I was lucky enough to visit places as diverse as the gannet colony on the Bass Rock off the East coast of Scotland; a peregrine nesting site in the middle of England and the London Wetland Centre. The three weeks we were on air were hugely busy (live broadcasts always have a froth of unseen activity in the form of preparation and the team effort of many people) but really rewarding. It was so good to be able to report on some very positive shifts in the state of British wildlife, when so often all we hear is doom and gloom.

### "TUTTI-FRUTTI ICE CREAM"

Despite being fully immersed in the project, there were lighter moments, in the first week provided by the incredibly accurate "bombing" activities of the nesting herring gulls. One managed to convert the rather fetching green waterproof of the floor manager Marco, into something resembling a tutti-frutti ice cream with a single deposit! I didn't go unscathed, receiving a couple of direct hits during transmission; quite tricky to keep talking with a mouthful!



The gannet colony on the rock is truly one of the wildlife spectacles of the world, and it is getting bigger, with about 40000 nesting pairs whose plumage turns the top of the rock snow white in bright sunshine. The sound and smells are overwhelming but wonderful. It's worth paying the Scottish Seabird Centre in North Berwick a visit, and looking at their

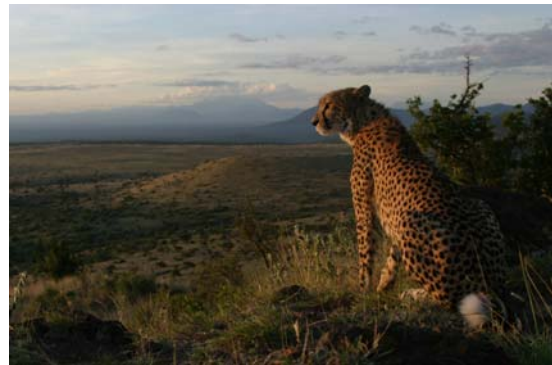
website where you can see live updated pictures from the colony.

The peregrine nest that we watched during the second week of transmission has continued to do well. The single female chick has survived and fledged, and a report a couple of days ago noted that she was being shown the ropes by her very attentive parents in the hunting arena. It takes young peregrines a while to perfect the art of steaming out of the sky at 200mph to catch birds, so the parents help out for a while by dropping prey for them in mid air and sometimes bringing live prey back to the nest site and releasing it so that their chick can deliver the coup de gras.

## **“SMACK IN THE CITY CENTRE!”**

The London wetland Centre was quite a discovery for me. I was aware of its existence but rather embarrassingly had not visited the spot before working there for Britain Goes Wild (despite living around the corner for part of the year!) And what a great place, so rich and varied, bang smack in the city centre! It is a real credit to the inspiration of the late Sir Peter Scott, the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust and all who currently work so hard to ensure it remains a haven for wildlife and people alike. I now feel cheated if I don't manage to visit when I am in London.

Since June my time has been completely occupied by the post production (editing, sound etc) of the Cheetah film I have been making over the past couple of years. It has not been easy. The story, as you may know from previous diary entries, has a rather sad twist towards the end, and re-living this moment time and again has been a bit of an emotional drain. Now that the film is finished, I do feel that it gives an honest and fresh look at the lives of these beautiful cats, and that, though an emotional roller coaster, is overall very positive. In short, I am happy to be able to share the extraordinary experiences I have had with the cheetahs over the past 2 years with a wider audience. It is due to transmit on BBC2 in October 2004. I hope you enjoy it if you manage to see it.



## **“NEVER RECORDED ON FILM BEFORE”**

I am now back in the Masai Mara in Kenya, filming another series of Big Cat Week, due for transmission in January of next year on BBC1. We've been here less than a week, and already we have witnessed events never recorded on film before. I am concentrating on the Lions once more, and yesterday morning a group of 4 adolescents discovered a spitting cobra. Older, more experienced lions would have kept their distance, but this gang pushed their luck and paid the price. One young female received a direct hit to the eyes from the cobras well aimed venom. It was obviously very sore to say the least. Cobra venom causes extreme discomfort, and sometimes blindness. We have seen the lioness again this morning and she looks OK, though one of her sisters is limping badly. It could be that she received a bite from the snake in the confusion of the encounter. We shall keep a close eye on her and the others.

## **“LIFE WILL BE TOUGH FOR LITTLE SALA”**

Also in the pride is a couple of charming little characters. 2 cubs, one 5 months old, one just 2 months old which we have named Cheza and Sala.

Though they are not brothers (the age gap is too great), Sala, the younger of the two is inseparable from his older cousin. The whole scene is very sweet, with the tiddler trying to keep up with the big kid's games. In truth, life will be tough for little Sala. As a lone cub in a litter, he will face a great many more hardships than if he were one in a larger litter, but he does enjoy the protection of at least 7 adult females and 2 adult males.

Others in the team are watching the Cheetahs and Leopards, and they too have already witnessed some fabulous events. It looks like the next few weeks will be action packed.