



extinction of large vertebrates occurred on several continents. The result was cheetahs inbred and the same genes have been transferred from one generation to the next. Today the results of this limited gene pool are sometimes revealed in physical defects. For example, more than 35% of males are sterile.

Potential breeding pairs

With such odds stacked against them, the Le Sueur Cheetah Project hopes to give these endangered cats a fighting chance. At present the project has two females and one male adult cheetah.

The females are named Shadow and Savannah, and the male is Mikka.

The adult cheetahs are currently kept in a 200sqm enclosure just outside the main reserve. An adjacent 1500ha reserve is being prepared for the cheetahs' release, and hopefully successful breeding. The cheetahs have to be kept in isolation. As rescued orphans they haven't acquired the instincts to deal with natural enemies such as lions and hyenas.

Shadow and Savannah are three-year old twins. Their mother, a Nambiti reserve resident gave birth to them just outside the park. With the stress of relocation the mother abandoned the cubs. De Wildt Cheetah Rehabilitation Center, together with the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT), raised the cubs.

Before being returned to Nambiti, the cubs were sent to Monate Cheetah Re-wilding Lodge, where they learnt hunting skills and how to survive on their own. Mikka is from the Kalahari and a few months older than the females. Destined for the black market the EWT intervened and rescued him.

The introduction of Mikka to the project allows for potential breeding pairs. The Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) checks the genetic profiles to ensure pairs are not too similar. Once the cubs at Woodlands lodge reach maturity they will also join the adult cheetahs in the 1500ha reserve. The project's cheetahs will be free-roaming cats, hunting on their own but protected from lion and hyena. The added advantage is that people have an opportunity to interact with these extraordinary creatures.

Storm and Sky

The sun breaking through clouds becomes the perfect backdrop to Wildside's final experience at Woodlands. The two cheetah cubs Storm and Sky gambol around Kirsten Dukes, as she walks back to the lodge. They have stolen all our hearts and found champions in their cause. As our 'Miss Earth' ambassador says, "The whole project truly sparked a fire within my soul." It confirms Kirsten's passion for the environment and conservation.

Woodlands is not the typical safari lodge. It is better. As Elizke succinctly sums up guests' experience of Woodlands: "People leave here as friends". **W**

Woodlands Private Safari Lodge

Where: situated in the Nambiti Private Game Reserve 25 km east of Ladysmith and is 3.5 hrs from Jhb, 2.5 hrs from Dbn and 40 mins from Drakensberg.

Rates: 5 Large double bedrooms and 1 family room, all en-suite. Fully catered - R1495 ppps.

Contact: Tel: +27 (0) 83 377 9340 or 27 (0)83 630 7073 email: woodlands@nambiti.com Website: www.woodlands-lodge.co.za

Miss Earth South Africa is a programme that aims to provide young South African women the platform for making a sustainable difference in combatting the destruction of our natural heritage.

The event helps create awareness of our environment, wildlife and the conservation of our natural legacy in South Africa, and ultimately the preservation of Mother Earth.

Visit www.missearthsa.co.za