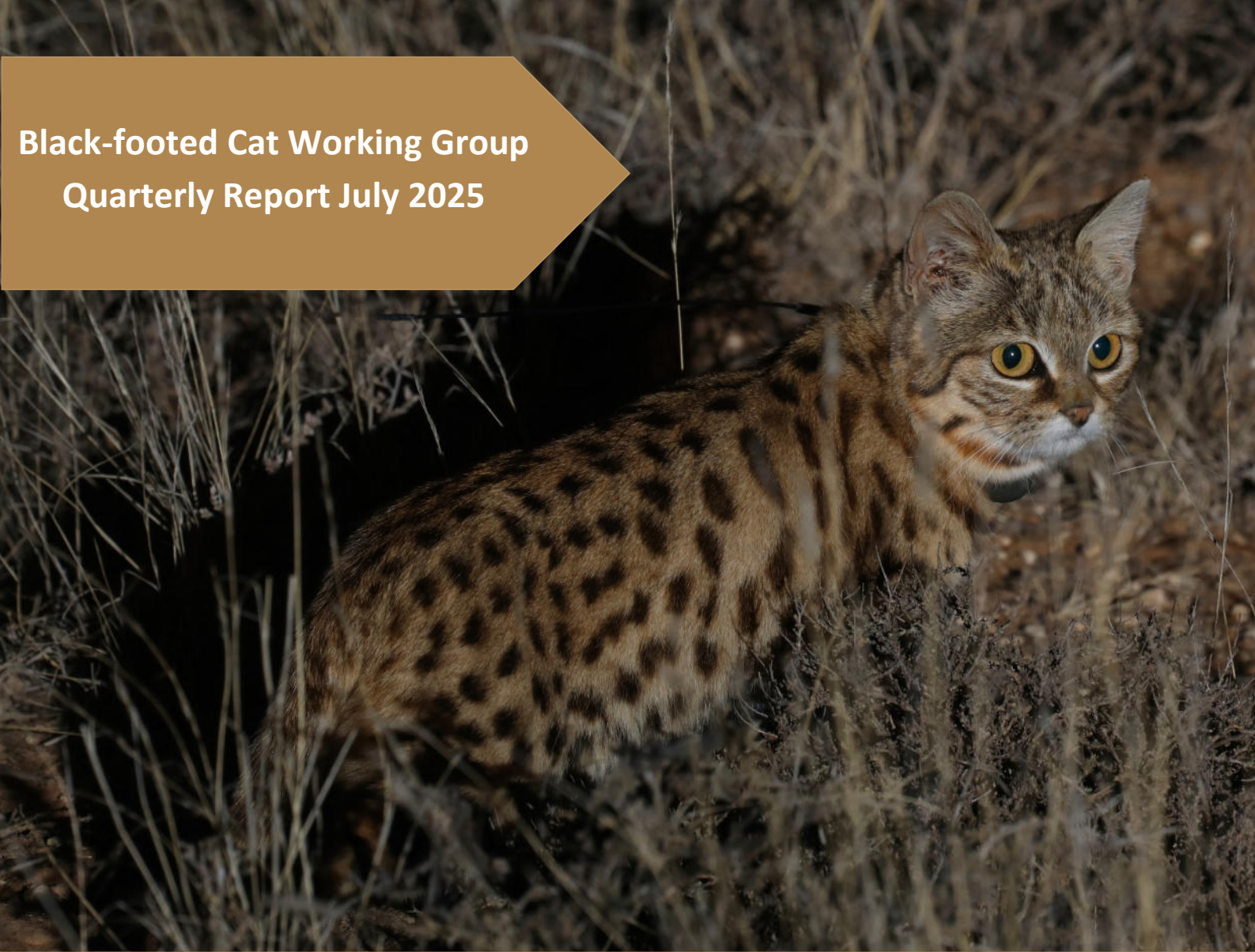


Black-footed Cat Working Group
Quarterly Report July 2025



Website link: <https://www.blackfootedcat.com/>



Cover image: Black-footed cat 'Ember' on Benfontein.
Photo: Alex Sliwa

Ultro – “The Ultimate Cat”



Figure 1 – Ultro resting outside his den, basking in the sun

As we move into winter, Ultro has not been using dens during the day. Instead, he prefers to rest concealed in long grass and dense vegetation, where he remains hidden yet exposed to the warm sunlight.



Figure 2 – Ultro, well concealed in the long dense vegetation, while still basking in the winter sun.

Photo: Michelle Swanepoel

Night observations indicate that Ultro has been scent-marking frequently, which is encouraging as it shows active territory maintenance. However, I have recently noticed that he has started making use of areas that provide more cover, presumably due to the high black-backed jackal (*Lupulella mesomelas*) density.

Benfontein supports a very high population of jackals, which are known predators and competitors of black-footed cats. This presents an ongoing challenge for his safety and survival.

On 10 June, while observing Ultro after he had caught a rodent, I scanned the surroundings and spotted a jackal approximately 150 meters away. The jackal began moving directly toward us, nose to the ground. Ultro only noticed the jackal when it was about five meters away. He immediately fled, and as the jackal prepared to pursue him, I intervened and chased the jackal away. The area was mostly short grass and sparse scrub, offering little cover for Ultro, so my intervention was necessary to avoid a potential confrontation.

On my way back to Ultro, I encountered a second jackal approximately 60–70 meters from his position. These jackals show little fear of vehicles and readily approach, demonstrating their boldness and confidence. To prevent drawing further attention to Ultro, I decided to leave the area rather than risk exposing him to additional threats with multiple jackals nearby.



Figure 3 -Ultro heading towards the camera trap set up outside his den. Figure 4 – Ultro inspecting the camera trap.

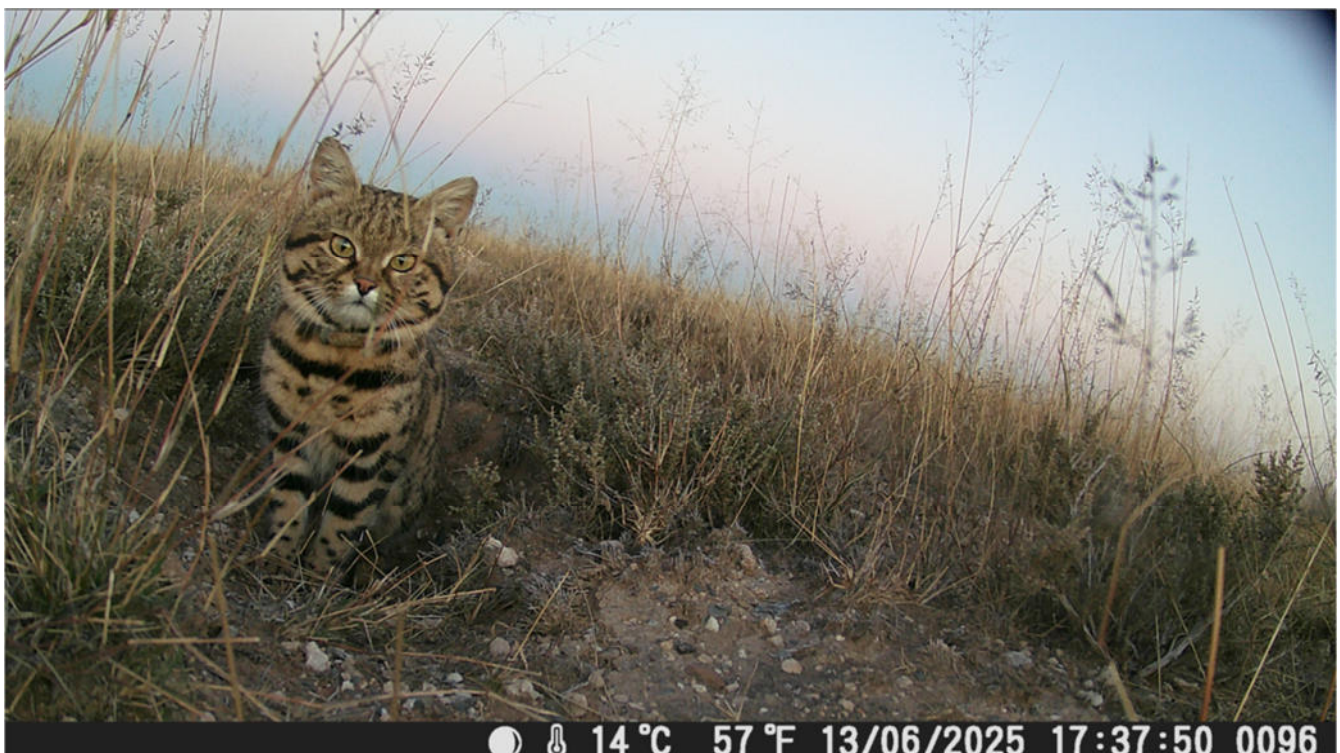


Figure 5 – Ultro right after emerging from his den.

Magnum – Ongoing search efforts

After last detecting Magnum's signal approximately 10 km north of Marrick Safari on the 10th of May, extensive ground and aerial searches have unfortunately not produced any further signals.

I attempted to drive an arc around Platfontein, but a newly installed gate on the dirt road prevented access to the position. I then climbed the hill behind Wildebeestkuil to scan for his signal, but without success.

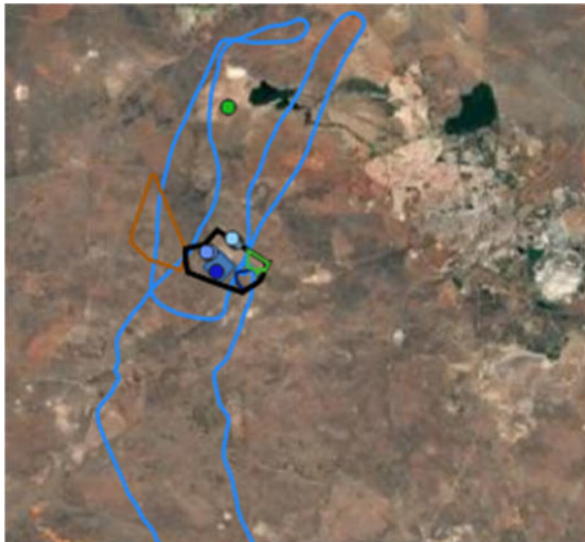


Figure 6 – 2nd Aerial search for Magnum on the 17th of May.

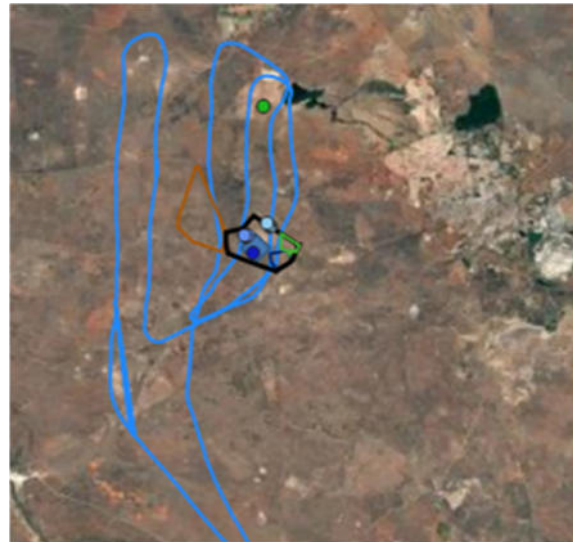


Figure 7 – 3rd Aerial search for Magnum on the 7th of June.

Together with Andrew Conroy, we conducted a second aerial search one week after our first flight to try and locate Magnum from the air, covering the area for approximately 1 hour and 40 minutes — but again, we were unsuccessful. On 7 June, we flew for a third time, covering the area for about two hours, but still did not pick up any signal.

Since then, I have continued efforts on foot and by vehicle, climbing koppies at night to improve signal range, in the hope, with the cats being outside their dens, a signal might be obtained. I have driven the Langberg Road and Schmidtsdrift Road at night and climbed koppies on Rust en Vrede during the day, as well as koppies on Benfontein at night — all without success so far.



Figure 8 – Image indicates the borders of Marrick Safari along with the Langberg and Schmidtsdrift Road used during the search.

We continue to monitor the area and will report any further detections or signs of his movements.

Felix

Felix was captured and collared on 29 April 2025. He still spends most of his time concealed in long grass as he is not habituated to the vehicle, and so far has not made use of any dens.

Marrick Safari includes several distinct areas: the pan where Felix was originally captured, as well as the hunting camp, breeding camp, and buffalo camp. Felix has moved into the buffalo camp on several occasions. Tracking him there is particularly challenging due to the combination of long grass, rocky terrain (which makes driving hazardous), and the presence of buffalo (which makes walking risky).

During the day, I am usually able to drive in to pinpoint his location. However, if he is in the buffalo camp at night, I can only obtain an approximate location to avoid damaging the vehicle. Felix has also moved onto the neighbouring farm, Rust & Vrede, which expands his range but adds complexity to monitoring efforts. He remained on Rust & Vrede for two days before returning to Marrick Safari, where I continued monitoring him until 10 June when I located his approximate location in the buffalo camp. When I returned a day later, I could no longer pick up his signal. I climbed all the koppies, drove along the Langberg Road, but I could still not pick up a signal from that time to now.

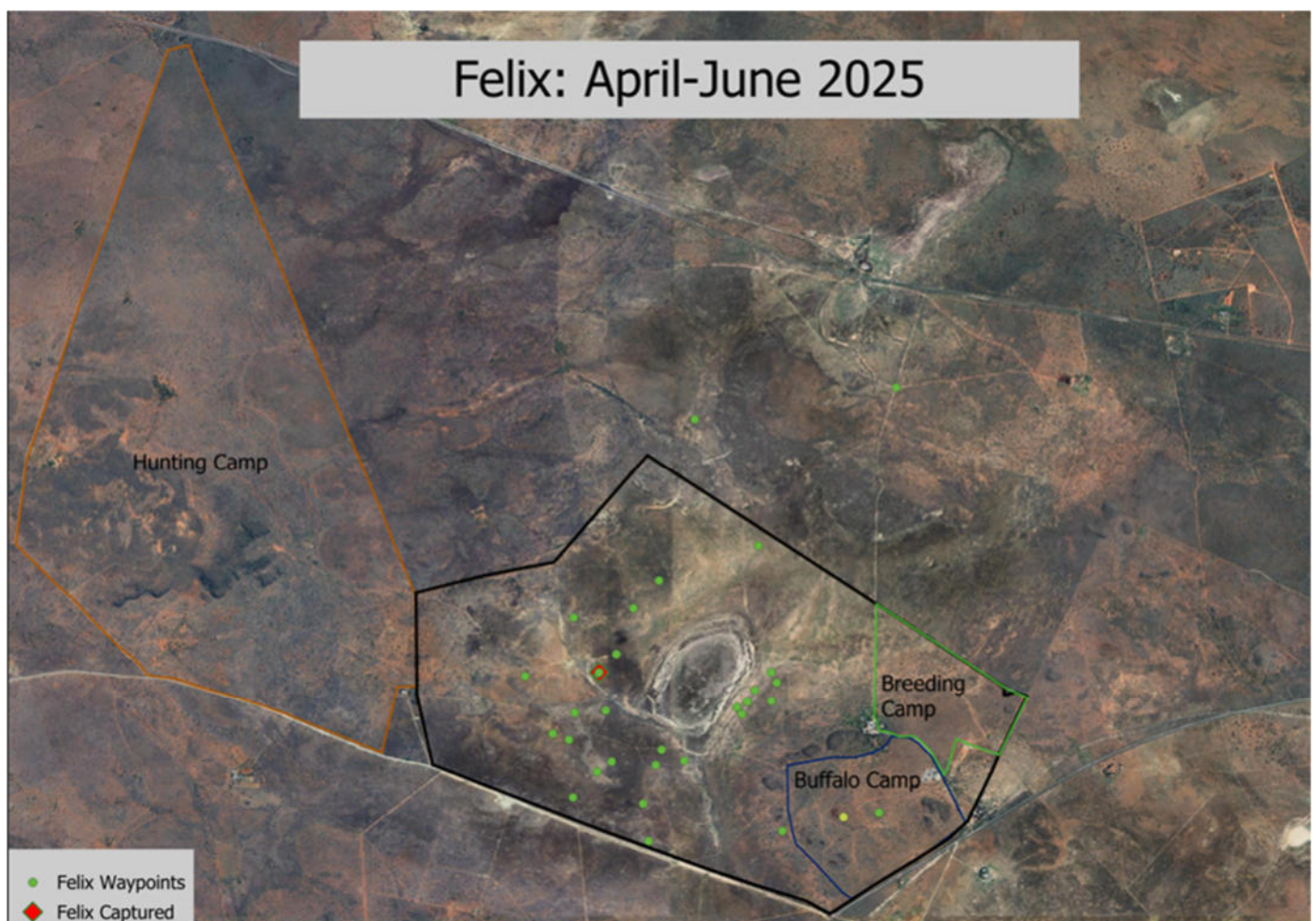


Figure 9 – Felix's movements on Marrick Safari.

We remain committed to finding Magnum & Felix and will expand our search area.

Vehicle expenses:

Since the last quarterly report (no. 1-2025) we have spent approximately R 10 000 (US \$570) on diesel fuel and R 13 000 (US \$740) on vehicle repairs.

These repairs included repairing the gear selection issue on the gear linkage, removing and replacing the left driveshaft to address the faulty inner CV joint and differential oil seals, refit upon completion, removing and refitting the front brake pads, diagnostics testing, removing and replacing the clutch accumulator, repairing the clutch accumulator, installing new grommets (which protects wires and cables), replacing brake fluid and most expensive of all the labour of all the above mentioned.

Sailing on waves of gratitude:

As we embark on our quest for new discoveries, your support and sponsorship have been the wind in our sails. We are thankful for your continued support that assists to make significant breakthroughs.

Currently, we are in particular need of additional financial support to continue aerial searches for the signals of the two newly collared males. These search flights are critical to locate and monitor them effectively, but they come with significant additional costs we never budgeted for. Whilst our pilot has generously offered to fly free of charge, we still need to cover the fuel for these flights (approximately R2000/ \$114 per flight), as well as the extra diesel required for extensive ground searches. With your help, we can ensure that this important work continues uninterrupted.



Best regards from the veld,

Michelle Swanepoel