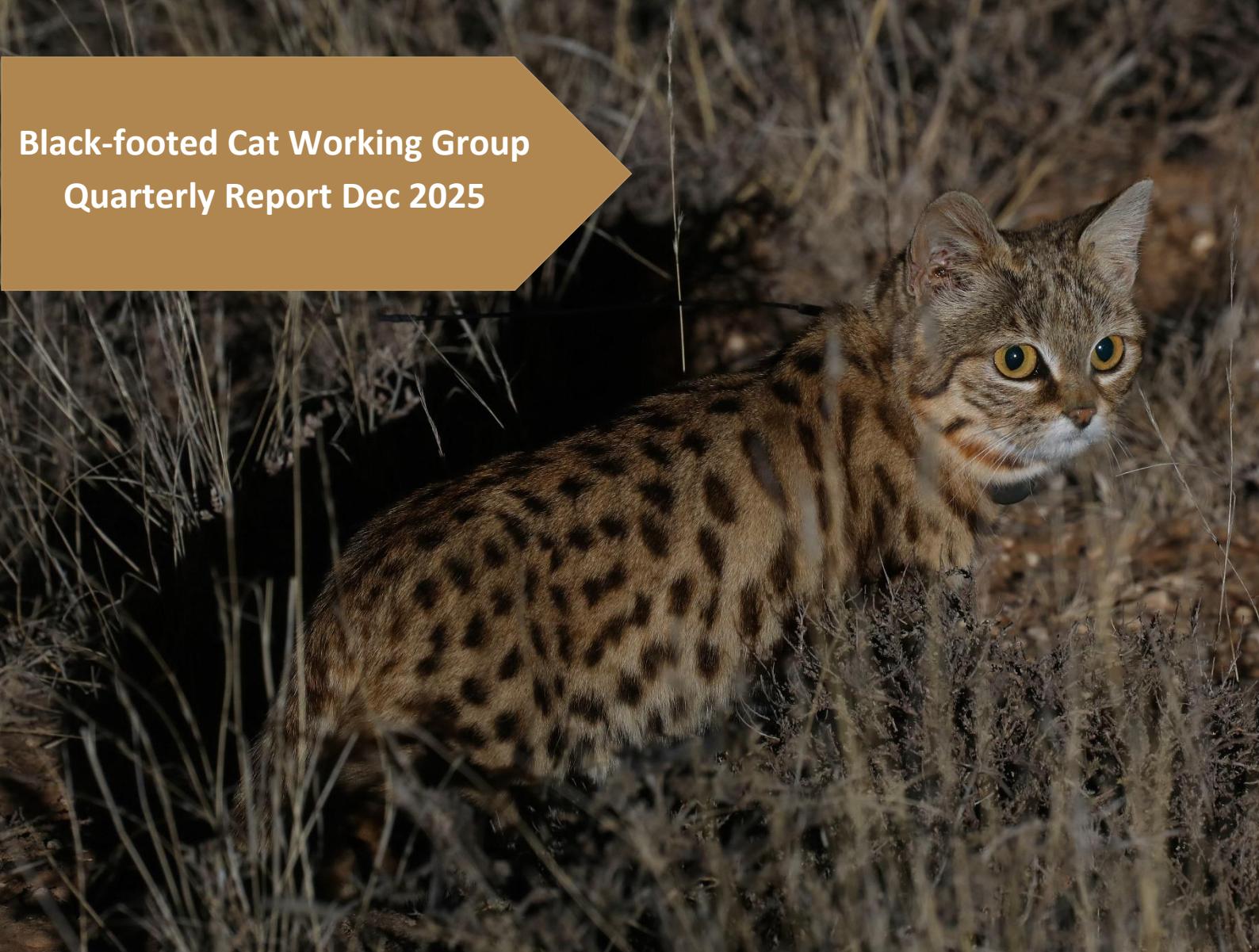


Black-footed Cat Working Group  
Quarterly Report Dec 2025



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



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

We would like to thank you for your continued support through a year of many obstacles. Conservation is rarely predictable, and this year reminded us just much resilience the journey requires.

We began the year with a single radio-collared black-footed cat, Ultro, who led the way into our annual capture season in April. Unfortunately, during seven consecutive survey nights on Benfontein, no black-footed cats (*Felis nigripes*) were sighted. This was likely influenced by the unusually high density of black-backed jackals (*Lupulella mesomelas*) on the property, a known predator and competitor of these small wild cats.



Figure 1 : left: Ultro basking in the sun. Right: Ultro inspecting his surroundings after emerging from his den.

Despite this, the team remained hopeful, persistent, and adaptable.

We are grateful to Marrick Safari for allowing us to conduct captures on their property, which resulted in the successful radio-collaring of two males. This marked the beginning of work in a new area and opened an exciting new chapter of research on black-footed cats.

Operating in a new environment brought fresh challenges and valuable learning opportunities, from unfamiliar terrain to new land-use dynamics. We would especially like to thank our pilot Andrew Conroy, who volunteers his time and flights at no cost, the Bateleurs for arranging the pilot, and the landowners in the area who generously allowed us access to their properties. Without this support, this research would not be possible.

While we achieved only a few detections, the year contributed meaningfully to experience gained, relationships established, and lessons learned that will guide future monitoring efforts.



Figure 2: (left to right) Beryl Wilson, Firas Hayder, Laurie Aucamp, Arne Lawrenz & Alex Sliwa



Figure 3: A. Conroy & M. Swanepoel post flight.



Figure 4: Sky Jeep used during aerial surveys.

# Remembering Ultro

Ultro demonstrated remarkable adaptability and intelligence, surviving in an area with an unusually high density of black-backed jackals. Although he maintained a large home range, he showed a clear pattern of movement, spending several weeks in one area before shifting to another. His ability to persist under challenging conditions made him truly exceptional.

Ultro was, in every sense, the ultimate cat, and he sadly died in early August 2025.



Figure 5: Ultro looking right at the camera trap placed near his den, mid grooming.

## Magnum

Magnum has kept us on our toes from the very beginning. Since our last update, we have remained in close contact with the landowners who kindly granted us access to their properties, while kindly requesting access to other properties who unfortunately didn't grant us access.



Figure 6: left: Magnum emerging from his den at dusk.



Right: Magnum emerging from his den just after 16:00.

As noted in our previous update, we lost his signal on 19 August. Due to the inability to conduct a flight during this period, tracking efforts focused on climbing koppies and driving all accessible roads in the area to attempt to relocate him. On 8 October, Andrew Conroy and I flew again and successfully located

Magnum on a private farm. After contacting the landowner, we were granted access, and this property has since become a frequently visited area for Magnum.



*Figure 7: Magnum emerging from his den at dusk.*

As he moves between several farms, tracking him since has required arranging access, and quite a bit of koppie-climbing to regain signal direction. So far, his estimated home range size is approximately 132 km<sup>2</sup> and attempting with conventional techniques to locate him is ongoing.



*Figure 8: Magnum returning to the den site later the evening, before venturing off again.*

# Felix - Ongoing search efforts

Unfortunately, since the last update we have not been able to regain a signal from Felix. Despite flying once on 8 October and climbing several koppies in the area, we were unable to locate him. We remain hopeful that future efforts may provide answers.

## Looking Ahead

We are grateful to announce that we will be receiving new antennas for aerial tracking, generously sponsored by Steve Stearns in memory of Okko and Kazi, two of Benfontein's longest-lived black-footed cats. This support will significantly improve our ability to monitor cats over larger areas.

## Vehicle expenses:

Vehicle maintenance remains an essential part of keeping the project operational. Below is the cost for the period 1 January 2025 until 20 December 2025.

Cost ZAR	Cost \$	Repair
R 62 000	\$ 3715	Fuel
R 7500	\$ 450	Replaced Alternator
R 6532	\$ 390	Replaced Propshaft, cv joint, bearings & 3 U joints
R 21 490	\$ 12490	4 Gripmax inception tyres
R 9455	\$ 566	Lower control arm (left & right), tie rod ends, front shocks & wheel alignment
R 7473,28	\$447	Repair gear selection issue on gear linkage, remove and replace left driveshaft to address faulty inner CV joint and differential oil seals, refit upon completion, Remove and refit front brake pads
R 4295	\$ 258	Diagnostics test, Repair R & R Clutch accumulator, grommets, brake fluid, consumables and labour
R 3750	\$ 225	Vehicle Service includes consumables, labor, Delo Gold 15W40 (500ml), H4 bulb replacement, wiper renewal, and filter kit installation (oil, air, fuel, cabin).
R 18 061	\$ 1082	renew turbo pipe, right sideshaft, spiral cable, left rear speed sensor,
<b>Total:</b>	<b>Total:</b>	
R 140 556	\$8422.95	

# Sailing on waves of gratitude:

Thank you for your unwavering support, through a year of challenges and discoveries.

With gratitude from the field, and from the black-footed cats who remain at the heart of this work, we wish you a joyful festive season and a very Merry Christmas.



Best regards from the veld,

**Michelle Swanepoel**