

- Black-footed Cat Working Group -

Report on catching, monitoring, and censusing Black-footed cats (*Felis nigripes*) in central South Africa and Namibia in 2025

Alexander Sliwa, Martina Küsters, Michelle Swanepoel, Arne Lawrenz, Firaz Hayder & Beryl Wilson Hartmann

Introduction:



The Black-footed Cat Working Group (BFCWG) aims to conserve this rare cat species by furthering awareness and conducting multidisciplinary research on the species' biology. The BFCWG owns a research vehicle (Ford Ranger 2.6 L, with more than 300 000 km on the odometer) that is insured, and its running and maintenance costs have been covered through a dedicated Non-Profit Company since 2019. The specialised equipment required for our research is stored at the McGregor Museum, Kimberley, Northern Cape Province.

In 2025 we worked in the current long-term study area, Benfontein Farm (BFN), near Kimberley, South Africa to capture, radio-collar and monitor additional new black-footed cat (BFC) individuals in addition to the one remaining radio-collared cat from 2024 on BFN. We also captured for several nights on the game farm Marrick Safari to the west of Kimberley and continued monitoring cats over the following months on surrounding privately owned properties. We also report here, in abbreviated form, on the Black-Footed Cat Research Project Namibia, which is managed by Martina Küsters (wildlife specialist). This latter project uses a dedicated field vehicle, a Mitsubishi Triton, from funds received from the Cat Life Foundation. Further funds towards its running came from Naples Zoo at Caribbean Gardens.

Background and Study Areas

Background: This project is part of a multidisciplinary effort to study the distribution, ecology, health, and reproduction of *Felis nigripes* to collect long-term data. The aims are repeated captures of BFCs for biological sampling and radio-collaring for subsequent observation. Several methods, such as camera trapping, den monitoring, and focal animal surveys, were used to survey areas previously known to hold BFCs. From November 2005 until the present, almost annual capture operations have been conducted on BFN. From 2009 to 2018, yearly captures were also performed on two additional properties in the Upper Karoo, Northern Cape, close to the town of De Aar, before research ended on these properties in November 2018. In February 2020, we started with a new study area in southern Namibia, Grūnau Farms (GR) that was concluded in August 2023. Twenty-one reports detailing previous fieldwork are available for download as PDFs on the website <https://www.blackfootedcat.com/publications/>

1 - Benfontein Farm (BFN):

A private nature reserve owned by De Beers Consolidated Mines, located 10 km southeast of Kimberley on the border of the Northern Cape and Free State Provinces in central South Africa. Majority of the 11 400 ha consists of arid plant communities receiving an average annual precipitation of 450 mm. BFN has been the subject of the first field study on the species by A. Sliwa in the 1990s (1992-1998) (Sliwa 2004, Sliwa *et al.* 2010) and continues to be the most important site for long-term monitoring of BFCs.

2 – Marrick Safari (MS): A private game farm comprising 3.000 ha of dwarf shrub and savannah habitats, with a small central pan (~65 ha). In the past there were regular sightings of BFCs as part of night drives for tourist. It is located just 11 km to the west-southwest of Kimberley off the R357 towards Douglas. It receives a similar rainfall average of 450 mm as BFN and is stocked with typical hooved game animals and ostrich (*Struthio camelus*). We have used MS as a base for accommodation in the Kimberley area already

in 2024 and conducted one short night drive with no sightings here in 2024. In 2025, we used the accommodation again and did three night searches here.

Methods:

- (A) Spot-lamp searching:** For a total of 9 nights (7 on BFN, 3 on MS – one night including in both areas) a 4x4 vehicle (Ford Ranger 2.6 l) drove a route of 20–90 km in length along dirt roads at a speed of 15–30 km/h whilst looking for the characteristic bright eye-shine of cats. A minimum of three people (max four this trip) stood on the open back of the vehicle operating two spotlights (1 million candle power / Lightforce® SL240 mm) and landing nets, while two to four people were inside the vehicle.
- (B) Catching via searching and pursuit:** Once BFCs were located by their eye-shine in the spotlights, their species identity was swiftly confirmed. If positively identified, they were pursued quickly by vehicle for a short distance of between 100–400 m until the cat squatted low on the ground in front of the stopped vehicle ($n = 1$). Two people with landing nets then netted the cats. On other occasions, the cat found a den system (dug by aardvarks, ground squirrels, or springhares) and were captured by exposing them after brief digging ($n = 1$ this trip).

All captured cats were subsequently anaesthetised with an intramuscular injection of medetomidine, midazolam, and butorphanol and covered with a blanket to shield them from lights and sounds. During this trip, we processed the 2 captured cats in the field. All animals were given complete physical examinations, had biological samples collected for disease and genetic studies, morphometric measurements obtained and both had radio collars fitted. The anaesthetic drugs were reversed with an intramuscular injection of atipamezole, flumazenil, and naltrexone. The cats were then placed in a small plastic crate for awaiting full recovery (Eggers *et al.* 2020).

All BFCs were released back into a den close to their capture locations. A blanket was used to cover the den entrance, keeping them inside until they were fit to leave on their own accord. One or two digital camera traps were set close to the den entrance to record the cat leaving the den. There were no complications associated with these procedures and both radio-collared cats were confirmed alive and well on subsequent nights using telemetry and visual verification.

- (C) “Digging” of previously radio-collared cats:** This method was not employed this year as the radio-collar of the single remaining radio-collared cat *Ulro* was likely going to last for another 12 months.

The capture on BFN (South Africa) was staffed in April 2025 by:

Mrs. Beryl Wilson Hartmann, Research Associate: Zoology, McGregor Museum, South Africa , berylwa@gmail.com

Dr. Alexander Sliwa, zoologist, Cologne (Kölner) Zoo, Germany, sliwa@koelnerzoo.de

Dr. Arne Lawrenz, director Wuppertal Zoo, Germany, felislaw@t-online.de

Ms. Michelle Swanepoel, field technician BFCWG, Kimberley, South Africa, swanepoelmichelle896@gmail.com

Dr. Firas Hayder, zoologist, Centre for Global Change, Sol Plaatje University, Kimberley, 8300 South Africa, firasecologie@gmail.com

Dr. Laurie Aucamp, CCS veterinarian for Kimberley, Northern Cape, Depart. of Agriculture; laurie.aucamp@gmail.com

The following persons worked in Namibia in 2025:

Ms. Martina Küsters, Black-footed Cat Research Project Namibia, Swakopmund, bfootedcat@gmail.com

Results:

Spot-lamp searching and catching/exchanging of radio collars: between 21.4.-29.4.2025, we went out on 9 nights, spending a total of 35 hours, while driving for 27 hours at an average speed of 18 km/h and covering 411 km (Map 1). We conducted most of the surveying on BFN (7 nights; 21.5 hours of driving, 350 km). The number of black-backed jackal (*Lupulella mesomelas*) sightings was staggering, particularly on BFN, where we had 3 - 25 sightings in 1 – 4 hours of driving per night (we couldn't access all areas

every night), a total of 93 sightings, many of which very bold individuals, in groups of often 3-5. We saw no African wildcats (*Felis lybica cafra*) and no BFCs on BFN, not even the male *Utro*, who was present as radio-collared individual. We spent only 3 nights on MS, drove for 5.5 hours and 61 km and captured the new males *Magnum* and *Felix*. So only 2 BFC sightings in 9 nights total (22% chance of sighting a BFC/night), however, a disturbing 0% BFC/night on BFN, and 67% BFC/night on MS.). We caught 2 BFCs out of two attempts (100% capture success). In 5.5 hours driving on MS we saw only 10 jackals (2-6 jackals/night). We didn't exchange the still-functioning radio collar of the single remaining male *Utro*, on BFN, since the battery was due to last another 12 months. Thus, we had just three radio-collared BFC in the Kimberley area, one already collared on BFN and two new ones on MS, when leaving on 30 April 2025.

We were hampered by rain on two nights. We had to stop for one hour in between and were limited to 2.5 hours total searching on 21.4.2025 and to just a single hour on 23.4.,2025 before heavy rain pushed us out of the veldt. We did get seriously stuck repeatedly in the veld (Figs. 4, 5, 6) on 22.4.2025 and 23.4.2025, barely freeing ourselves with pushing and digging in the mud, due to having no functional 4x4 (CV-joints broken) and only low-profile tyres. These two problems we managed to fix in Kimberley city on 24.4.2025 by repairs and purchases.

Other nocturnal mammals seen during our spotlighting included high numbers ($n = 65$) of bat-eared fox (*Otocyon megalotis*), common genet (*Genetta genetta*) ($n = 2$), almost every night aardwolves (*Proteles cristatus*) ($n = 37$), and aardvarks (*Orycteropus afer*) (up to 5/night; $n = 17$), and Cape porcupines (*Hystrix africaeaustralis*) ($n = 10$). We sighted two caracal (*Caracal caracal*) kittens close to the 9 Tanks windmill (Map 1).

Monitoring radio-collared cats on BFN and surroundings:

Field technician Michelle Swanepoel tracked the three radio-collared BFCs in part of 2025 either in their dens during daylight or found them at night when active. The only cat with a good dataset for 7 months was male *Utro* until his death in early August, to determine their overall home ranges (HR). A total of 621 waypoints were collected up until 30 December 2025. HR size estimates incorporating all collected waypoints for the 3 individual cats tracked in 2025 are provided in Table 1, and Minimum Convex Polygon (MCP100%) outlines are shown in Maps 2, 3 and 4.

Ranging and survival of Black-footed cats in 2025:

BFN and surroundings: Altogether, three BFCs were monitored in 2025. One cat (*Utro*) certainly died, whilst another (*Felix*) disappeared after early June and was presumed dead by the end of the year, thus we had a survival rate of only 33% for adult cats (only *Magnum*), which is truly concerning, despite the admittedly small sample size.

Male *Utro*: A fully-grown, seasoned adult captured and collared on west-central BFN in early June 2024, he already had a 22 km² HR in 7 months of tracking in 2024. While he habituated more throughout the first 7 months of 2025 on BFN, he remained shy, rarely looking back at the vehicle. However, we received more good images from camera trapping at his various dens (Figs. 7, 14). Interestingly, he habituated rapidly to camera traps, yielding high-quality photographic records. However, in winter *Utro* rarely used den sites during daylight hours. Instead, he rested well-concealed in dense vegetation, while still exposed to warm sunlight. In 2025, *Utro* had a HR of 36.5 km² (100 %MCP, $n = 551$ waypoints, Map 2, Table 1), which is above average for an adult resident male (Sliwa 2004). When excluding the single waypoint north of the pan and the area of long dense grass in the south of his HR that he didn't use (~6 km²), one arrives at 24 km² that he actually used, which is essentially most of the suitable habitat on BFN. A sign that there couldn't have been many other large males present prohibiting him from this use. Thus, he was likely the dominant male and one of the few surviving BFCs on BFN in 2025.

There were no other surviving cats in 2025 to look at for overlap with *Utro*. He was found dead in a shallow den under calcrete rocks, his carcass untouched, on 4 August. The proximity to the 9 Tanks windmill with its water trough indicates that he could have died of amyloidosis, as sick cats tend to stay

close to waterpoints in their final days, for easy access to quench their thirst, while their kidneys malfunction. For the remainder of 2025 there was no radio-collared BFC on BFN, which hasn't happened since 2006 in the history of the BFCWG.

Male *Magnum*: an exceptionally large male, who couldn't run fast because he must have just consumed a very large meal (Fig.2), was collared on MS on 27 April. He remained within the property for only for 4 days, and already on 1 May, his signal was about 1 km northeast of the MS boundary. When gaining access to this neighbouring property on 2 May he was still heard, but not accessible, then vanished on 3 May. On the morning of 10 May Michelle Swanepoel and Andrew Conroy conducted a flight in a light aircraft from Jacobsdal, and they successfully picked up *Magnum*'s signal approximately 10 km north of MS, on the western outskirts of Kimberley, on the property Platfontein. A positive ground location could not be obtained due to access restrictions to his suspected whereabouts, security issues of the location (on a dangerous part of the R64). Despite two more search flights, on 17.5. and 7.6. he could not be located on these. After trouble shooting, we managed to improve the setup of the tracking antennas on the airplane, did a test flight with test collars placed on the ground on 10 August and finally on 17 August managed to find him again on the farm Kameelhoek, more than 3 months later and 27 km from the last location, which is about 17 km southwest of MS. He was then found on and off in this area, moving between the properties Kareepan, where he mostly stayed, and Holpan across the R357. He also used the properties Kameelhoek, where Michelle got access with their staff, however, he mostly spent time on 4 Aces, where she strictly was not allowed. During these weeks, a small number of camera trap images could be obtained when he was on Kareepan (Figs. 12, 13), before contact was lost with him again on 18 November. He used an area 36 km² in the three months between 17 August and 18 November. All the while, when hearing his signal it was often cumbersome to obtain permission for access from different landowners and their staff, as Michelle Swanepoel could not keep the keys to the few locked gates, and access was restricted to shortly after sunset. One landowner refused to grant access, which was very unfortunate, despite repeated kind requests to him. We are still highly grateful for having been granted access by most landowners and them making the effort to allow us access. So, *Magnum* was never habituated to the research vehicle. In 2025 *Magnum*'s very limited number of waypoints (n = 38, Map 3; Table 1) encompassed an absolute minimum home range of 132.4 km²(MCP100%). This HR estimate is certainly a coarse underestimate, as we have so few waypoint locations from him, few and far between over a longer period, him clearly being an incredible traveller, roaming over a large area west of Kimberley on many different properties with different land uses. Despite the difficulties of finding him this provides an introductory view into the travel and land-use capabilities of a large adult male BFC on mixed-used farmland.

He was only found again after 18 November 2025, during an aerial search in February 2026, with the help of the pilot LD van Essen, however, this will be covered in the 2026 reports.

Male *Felix*: a large adult male we captured on 29 April 2025 on MS, our last night of catching. He stayed for 43 days under observation, then left for good towards the North on 10 June. He only used a 11.16 Km² HR (100%MCP, n = 32 waypoints; Map 4, Tab. 1) associated with the pan on MS, which is most of the suitable habitat of the relatively small area of MS. Despite efforts to search on neighbouring properties it proved difficult to gain access to them. After this date, his signal was never heard again, despite the field technician climbing the koppies on MS on average every 2nd day to listen for his signal for the rest of 2025. While his signal was heard from the air on 7 June, subsequent flight searches proved unsuccessful. While we did hear *Magnum* from the air, the failure to do so with *Felix* over the large search area led us to the conclusion that he must be dead. His radio-collar probably stopped transmitting due to it being either located in an inaccessible spot (e.g. a deep den, blocking the signal) or it was destroyed, as the privately owned properties around MS are not under conservation status, thus not protected.

Aerial Searches: we are immensely grateful to Andrew Conroy for his generous contribution to our work, who volunteers his time and flights at no cost, as he had been flying to help us through Michelle Swanepoel to find the two male cats we captured on MS. He has conducted flights with his Sky Jeep from

Jacobsdal on 10.5, 17.5., 7.6., a test flight on 10.8, and on 17.8. The first and last flights were successful in locating *Magnum*, while the first three flights managed to locate *Felix*, when he was still on MS.

.....

Direct observations of Black-footed Cats:

Only one of the three cats that were monitored via telemetry during 2025 allowed direct observation, like the killing of various prey species. In the year 2025 *Ultero* was regularly seen spray-marking on grass tufts and termite mounds. No new prey species were recorded for the general diet list in 2025.

Camera Trapping: The field technician deployed several digital camera traps (Browning Strike Force Pro XD, Secacam Pro, SpyPoint Force-11D) to obtain regular pictorial material of the monitored cats (only *Ultero* and *Magnum* (Sliwa *et al.* 2018) at their subterranean dens (Figs. 4, 12, 13, 14).

Reproduction:

We have little data on reproduction from our study as we only had 3 males radio-collared, and only one of the eight carnivore surveys provided a sighting of an un-collared female cat with a kitten.

Carnivore surveys: The objective was to conduct systematic driving transects on BFN with a primary focus on detecting BFCs, while concurrently implementing a broader carnivore survey to monitor population dynamics, spatial distribution, and species presence across the reserve. Spotlight surveys were conducted for a total of eight nights, 5 between 11.2. - 20.3. and 3 between 7.11.25 - 4.1.2026. Surveys unusually ran between 19:00 and 23:00, 28 hours total, using the same methods as in 2024, with just one person on the loading platform of the field vehicle. In February 2025, there were sightings of BFCs on two nights. On 11.2.2025 the male *Ultero* was seen and 15 minutes later a kitten with its un-collared mother. On 18.2.2025 two BFCs about 10 m apart from each other were observed. One was lying down in short grass, the other one was walking around, but crouched down when the vehicle stopped. So, a total of three sightings on two nights of five cats. Other species seen included one caracal, many jackals (n = 81), bat-eared foxes (n = 126), aardwolves (n = 22) and aardvarks (n = 6).

IUCN Red List Assessment for *Felis nigripes*: The update to the 2016 species assessment started in 2023 has continued throughout the entire year of 2025, including multiple online meetings with Tabea Lanz, the Redlist authority of the IUCN Cats Specialist Group. We have updated and revised the document to reflect the latest relevant research and records. Sufficient verified records, yet suboptimal in number, from South Africa and Namibia combined with landscape features and habitat characteristics enabled more detailed range mapping by Michelle Schroeder and Martina Küsters to inform population demographics (Küsters *et al.* 2025). Despite known historical presence, verified records for Botswana remain scant, and whether this reflects population status or under-reporting remains an important knowledge gap. While the BFCWG has made substantial progress towards understanding the species' ecology and threats, insufficient survey and monitoring data across the species range poses challenges in meeting evidentiary thresholds to support assessment criteria.

Outreach and social media coverage of BFCs and the BFCWG: Throughout 2025, several members of the BFCWG have spread information about the species through interviews, popular press items and presentations about our joint research. Scientific tourists and interested laypersons were occasionally allowed the opportunity to join in tracking sessions of the radio-collared BFCs.

Beryl Wilson Hartmann and Alex Sliwa have regularly updated the Facebook Page "Black-footed Cat Working Group" <https://www.facebook.com/groups/blackfooted.cat/> with publicly visible posts. These are shared from the public Instagram page "blackfootedcat.life" <https://www.instagram.com/blackfootedcat.life/> by Alex Sliwa with posts every 4-7 days using pictures

of black-footed cats and other topics of the species' biology and the research endeavours taken over the past decades, with a few sentences of informative text to each post.

Michelle Swanepoel provided regular updates on the monitored cats on BFN, MS and surrounding farmland and wrote four field reports for sponsors, leading to comparatively good financial support in 2025.

Publications, reports, conference papers, and presentations by BFCWG group members and associates on *Felis nigripes* in 2025:

- Brindley, H., O'Riain, M. J., & Sliwa, A. (2025). The underground cat: burrow use by female black-footed cats (*Felis nigripes*). *African Zoology*, 60(4), 286–297.
- Küsters, M., Schroeder, M. M. & Sliwa, A. (2025) Using Landscape and Habitat Characteristics to Delineate Distribution of Black-Footed Cats (*Felis nigripes*) in Southern Africa. *African Journal of Wildlife Research* 55(sp2). <https://doi.org/10.3957/056.055.0330>.
- Swanepoel, M. 2025a. Update from the field: Black-footed Cat Working Group, South Africa. May 2025, 10 p.
- Swanepoel, M. 2025b. Update from the field: Black-footed Cat Working Group, South Africa. July 2025, 6 p.
- Swanepoel, M. 2025c. Update from the field: Black-footed Cat Working Group, South Africa. September 2025, 10 p.
- Swanepoel, M. 2025d. Update from the field: Black-footed Cat Working Group, South Africa. December 2025. 6 p.
- Sliwa, A., Küsters, M., Swanepoel, M., Schroeder, M., Lawrenz, A. & Wilson-Hartmann, B. 2025. - Black-footed Cat Working Group. Report on catching, monitoring, and censusing Black-footed cats (*Felis nigripes*) in central South Africa and Namibia in 2024. Pp.17.

Non-Profit Company (NPC) South Africa: The Working Group continues to be solvent and funding for fieldwork is still possible for the financial year 2026, however funds are ever-dwindling with the high vehicle maintenance and running costs (see below). There are no outstanding debts or stipends owed.

Vehicle Maintenance and running costs South Africa: The Ford Ranger field vehicle of the BFCWG is aging with heavy use, now at >300.000 km, and looking back on 2025 we spent 78.556 R (~4.708 US\$) on repairs, vehicle maintenance and purchases. The list of work and new parts included a set of 4 new tyres, new alternator, prop shaft, CV joints, bearings, control arms, tie rod ends, wheel alignments, repair of gear selection issues, new turbo pipe, right side shaft, and vehicle services. We spent running costs of almost 62.000 R (~3.715 US\$) for diesel fuel in 2025.

Black-footed Cat Research Project Namibia, a project by the BFCWG: This project is run by Martina Küsters. Important activities were the distribution and habitat mapping for the IUCN Red List assessment, collating additional distribution records, compiling budget and workplans and funding proposals, communication and information gathering with landowners and identifying potential new study sites for scouting trips and surveys. In January 2025, two scouting trips were made to meet landowners in the southern Kalahari in eastern Namibia and to assess habitat suitability.

1. Bloukop Farm, verified record of BFC roadkill on gravel road in 2023 (Fig. 19). Visited landowner Gina Olivier, Kalahari dunes and Bloukop Pan. Landowner convinced she sees BFC spoor; four camera traps bought from Naples Zoo funds (Fig. 18), yet no luck capturing a BFC on camera, only African wildcats. Distribution posters displayed at the towns Mariental, Gochas and Aranos.

2. Habitat [visual] assessment east of Windhoek: Omitara-Summerdown-Steinhausen-Witvlei. Smaller patches of suitable habitats for BFCs occur around Steinhausen and Witvlei, no records exist from there. Posters were displayed at the settlements Summerdown and Witvlei.

These new contacts enable conservation awareness for black-footed cats and facilitates information sharing for new potential study sites.

The Black-footed Cat Research Project Namibia received generous funds from Naples Zoo in April 2025. The funds were used for major service and repairs to the field vehicle (Fig. 16), in preparation for night surveys in 2026. The rest of the funds were used to purchase camera traps and supplies, printing of education material and fuel. We thank Naples Zoo, especially Tim Tetzlaff, Director of Conservation, for their continued dedication and support for black-footed cats.'

.....

Discussion and Conclusions:

Highly valuable data on the monitoring and behaviour of black-footed cats was collected again by the BFCWG and the Black-footed Cat Research Project Namibia in 2025. Despite putting in a good effort of 9 nights spotting in the Kimberley area we only managed to capture only two new males on Marrick Safari, we had only a 22% chance of sighting a BFC/night, however a disturbing 0% BFC/night on BFN, and 67% BFC/night on MS, again lower than in 2024 with the 33% total, and 43% on BFN then. The population density of BFC is highly likely even lower than in the previous year. Despite this low frequency during our capture period, Michelle Swanepoel managed to have a total of 3 sightings of 5 cats on 2 nights in February 2025, only 2 months earlier. So, there is stochastics involved, such as the chance of a BFC being close to a dirt road and be looking into the beam of the spotters' lamps when they go past. With only one cat surviving from 2024 and two new cats we had 1 out of 3 dying (67% survival) or when assuming that one of the new males also likely died, only 33% (1 be the end of the year) adult survival in 2025. Again, these probabilities, with such low number of monitored cats, are not very representative.

We can't say much about reproduction on BFN, however, during the carnivore survey on 11 February 2025 an un-collared female and kitten were spotted. The number of females is likely only one or maybe two, with no further sightings of females after February 2025 for the rest of the year, despite Michelle Swanepoel being on the ground for radio-tracking of the male *Utro* until early August and further carnivore surveys for the rest of the year on BFN.

Adult mortality can only be hypothesised, as the male's *Utro* carcass was found whole, not dismembered, inside a den close to the waterpoint of 9 Tanks, hinting to disease (likely AA Amyloidosis), as the last stages of disease lead to the urge of frequent drinking of water in the species (Terio et al. 2008). His organ samples have not been examined yet by pathology, to confirm. We may be witnessing the effects of high female and kitten mortality, due to the very high sighting frequency, thus densities of jackals on BFN. We have consistently recorded high numbers of jackals, both during carnivore surveys and during our 7 nights on BFN searching.

The HR size of the adult male *Utro* on BFN was large with 36 km² in 2025 compared with the average of 22 km² recorded in the late 1990ies (Sliwa 2004) for resident males, however, when excluding portions not used or just a single outlier it was again similar in size. It was remarkable that he didn't fall victim to jackals or caracal, but died probably a disease related death. (Tab. 1, Map 2). One must also consider that it was a HR for only 7 months tracking. Analysis will in future combine all 14 months he was tracked by us. We were unable to record the full extent of home range for adult male *Felix*, since he left only 6 weeks after capture from MS, never to be located again. We managed to only locate the large male *Magnum* intermittently multiple times, with several months gaps in locations. His HR size is, regardless, highly impressive, with his actual HR certainly much larger than the recorded 132 km² in 2025. This is so far the largest HR of any tracked BFC in the history of the monitoring of radio-collared BFCs, thus in 33 years. It would have been so rewarding to have daily or even multiple locations per 24hr period, as one has attained via GPS collars for larger-bodied wild cat species. The technology we have is not small enough, collar size too bulky and heavy to do such for recording locations over a whole year, which would also hamper even a very large BFC like *Magnum* to a non-acceptable degree when hunting and entering dens for shelter and resting. Also, the collection of location data via remote download (after store-on-board), even with aerial support is too uncertain, as even when flying there is no certainty that the cat will be located and that access to private farms can be organized within that same day to find the collared cat on the ground.

Systematic camera trapping at dens has been successful to gain good images of individuals, which is important for data collection on activity of these cats. It is also good for pictorial material for field technicians' reports and the compilation of annual reports, resulting in awareness and sometimes further sponsorship. Ultimately, it is important for personal gratification, to compensate for all the difficulties in the radio-tracking of these elusive individuals we had particularly in 2025.

The year 2025 has been a particularly demanding one in terms of losses, low capture success due to few BFC sightings, the difficulties of monitoring the males once they left MS and gaining access to

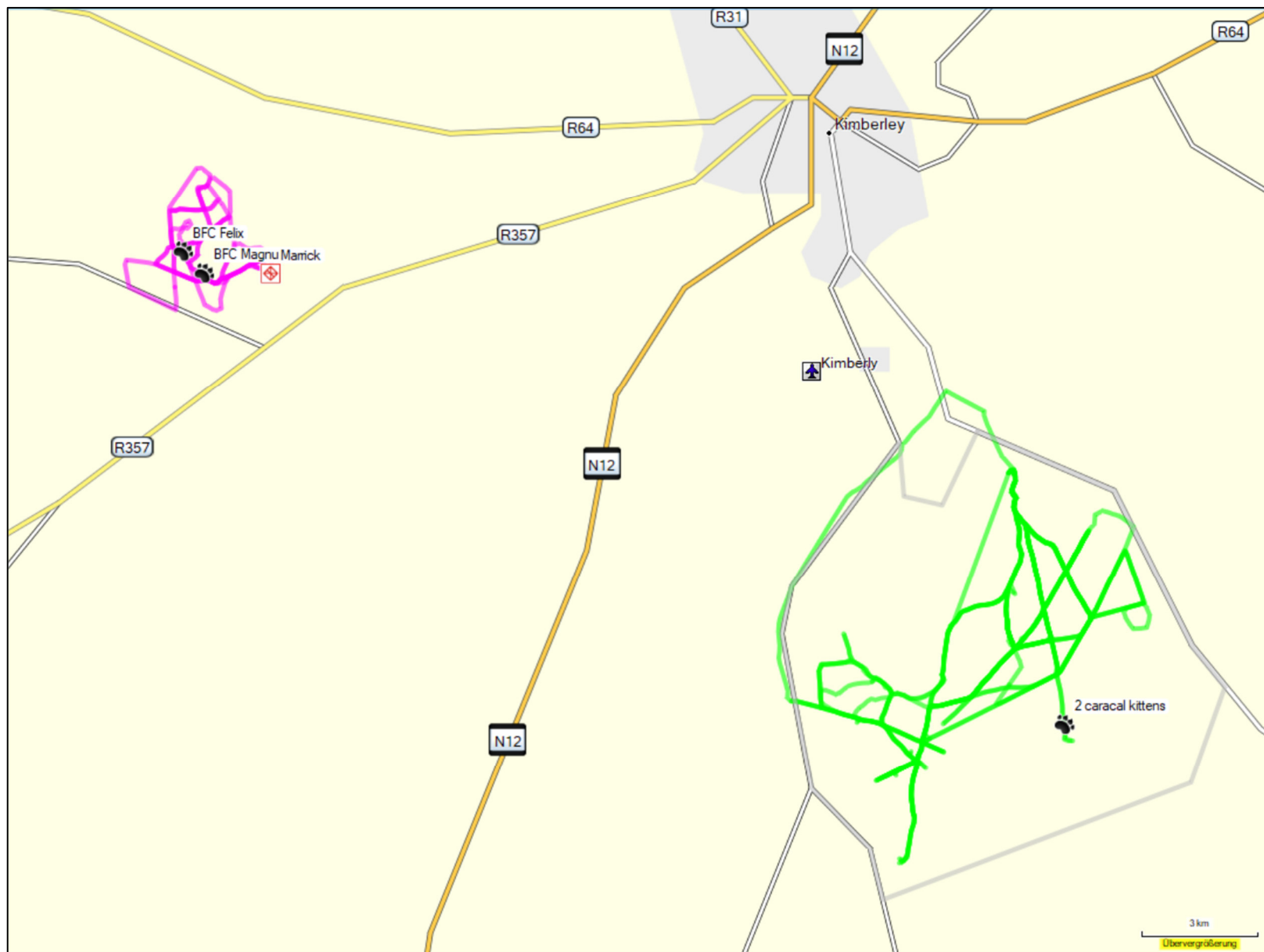
private farms after *Magnum* was located by aerial searches. We are, however, not giving up, as even this hard-gained data is highly valuable for describing the fascinating biology and behaviour, and assessing the status of the unique species *Felis nigripes*. The BFCWG will return to BFN and potentially to other study sites for capturing and sampling of wild BFCs in March 2026, to capture additional study cats, as only one male *Magnum* is remaining. We hope that the currently low population number on BFN will recover in 2026.

Acknowledgments: We thank De Beers Consolidated Mines for permission to work on Benfontein NR, South Africa, and the Northern Cape Department of Agriculture, Environmental Affairs, Rural Development and Land Reform for issuing permits. Landowners and farm managers, are thanked for their continued support and permission to enter on the properties to check for signals on our radio-collared cats. We particularly thank Trevor, Hubre and Mike Dadnow for hosting the BFCWG and us staying at Marrick Safari on the capture trip, and for permission to capture the two big male BFCs. We are very grateful to the owners of Kareepan, Kameelhoek, Holpan and Rust & Vrede for allowing us access, in some cases on many days, and spending time with our field technician, opening gates and sometimes even accompanying her on koppie climbs. We thank Dr. Axel Hartmann for his veterinary support and advice during fieldwork. Funds for fieldwork came from Cologne (Kölner) Zoo; Zoo-Verein Wuppertal e. V. (friends of Wuppertal Zoo); Ch. Ritzen, K. Stellmacher, A. Brüggemann & Koch Gang; Berufsverband der Zootierpfleger e.V. (BdZ) - all Germany; to the Center for Conservation and Research of Endangered Wildlife (CREW) of Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden, USA; The International Society of Endangered Cats (ISEC), Canada, provided funds; we are very grateful to Stichting SPOTS, Netherlands, who conducted a fund-raising campaign specifically for us in 2025. We are also very grateful for the ongoing logistical support from the McGregor Museum, Kimberley where our valuable equipment and samples are stored. We also sincerely thank our respective employers and significant others for supporting us and granting us leave from our busy work, family and schedules to conduct this fieldwork.

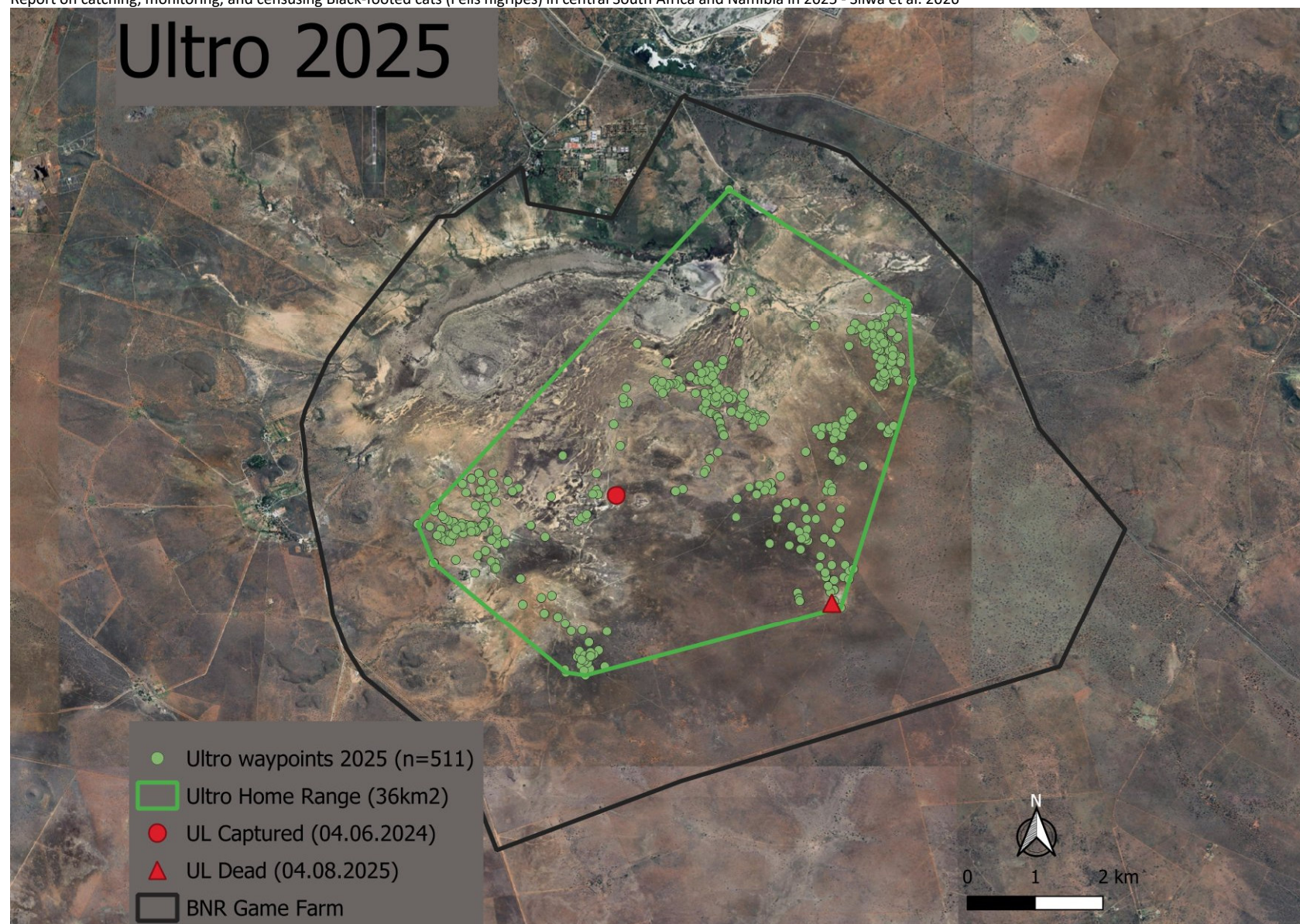
The Black-footed Cat Research Project Namibia wishes to acknowledge our generous international funders: Naples Zoo and Tim Tetzlaff for funding fieldwork, Dr Alex Sliwa through Cologne Zoo and the BFCWG for equipment and technical support. The Cat Life Foundation is sincerely thanked for the substantial funding to purchase a dedicated field vehicle for the project and fieldwork. ISEC is thanked for its financial support to the Black-footed Cat Research Project, enabling fieldwork to continue, thank you. To our dedicated local Namibian funders: A special thank you to the Namibian Chamber of Environment (NCE), which is acknowledged for funds administration and support. The Pukewitz Foundation is thanked for donation of aerial tracking equipment in 2025.

References:

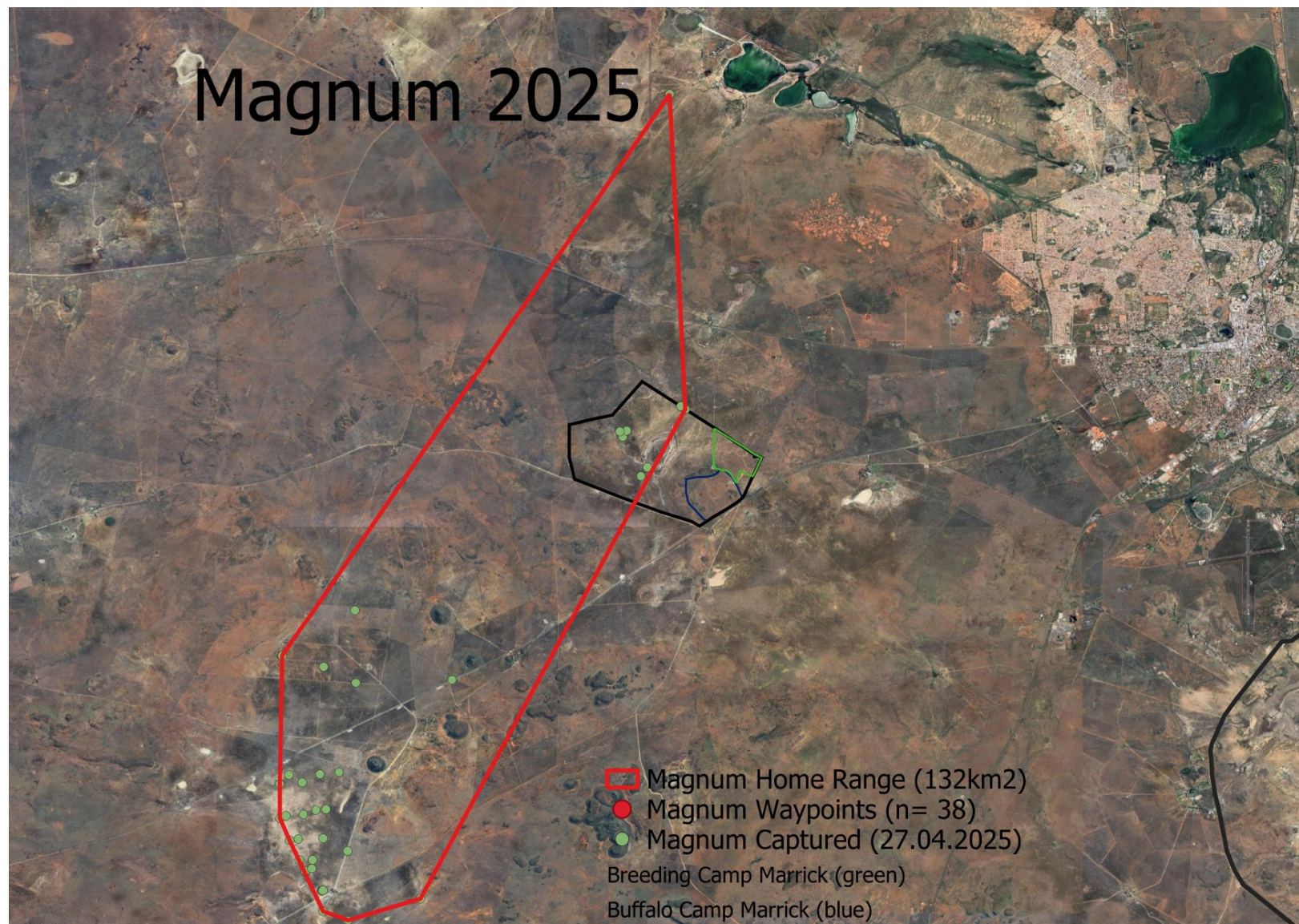
- Eggers, B., Tordiffe, A., Lamberski, N., Lawrenz, A., Sliwa, A. Wilson, B. & L. C. R. Meyer 2020. Evaluation of two doses of butorphanol-medetomidine-midazolam for the immobilization of wild versus captive black-footed cats (*Felis nigripes*). *Journal of Zoo and Wildlife Medicine* 51(3):497-506.
- Küsters, M., Schroeder, M. M. & Sliwa, A. (2025) Using Landscape and Habitat Characteristics to Delineate Distribution of Black-Footed Cats (*Felis nigripes*) in Southern Africa. *African Journal of Wildlife Research* 55(sp2). <https://doi.org/10.3957/056.055.0330>.
- Sliwa, A. 2004. Home range size and social organisation of black-footed cats (*Felis nigripes*). *Mammalian Biology* 69: 96-107.
- Sliwa, A., Wilson, B., Lawrenz, A., Lamberski, N., Herrick, J & Küsters, M. 2018. Camera trap use in the study of black-footed cats (*Felis nigripes*). *African Journal of Ecology* 56: 895–897. <https://doi.org/10.1111/aje.12564>.
- Sliwa, A., Wilson, B., Küsters, M., Schroeder, M. & Drouilly, M. 2026. *Felis nigripes*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2026: e.T8542A288685609. <https://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2026-1.RLTS.T8542A288685609.en>
- Terio, K.A., O'Brien, T., Lamberski, N., Famula, T.R., & MUNSON, L. 2008. Amyloidosis in black-footed cats (*Felis nigripes*). *Veterinary Pathology* 45(3):393-400.



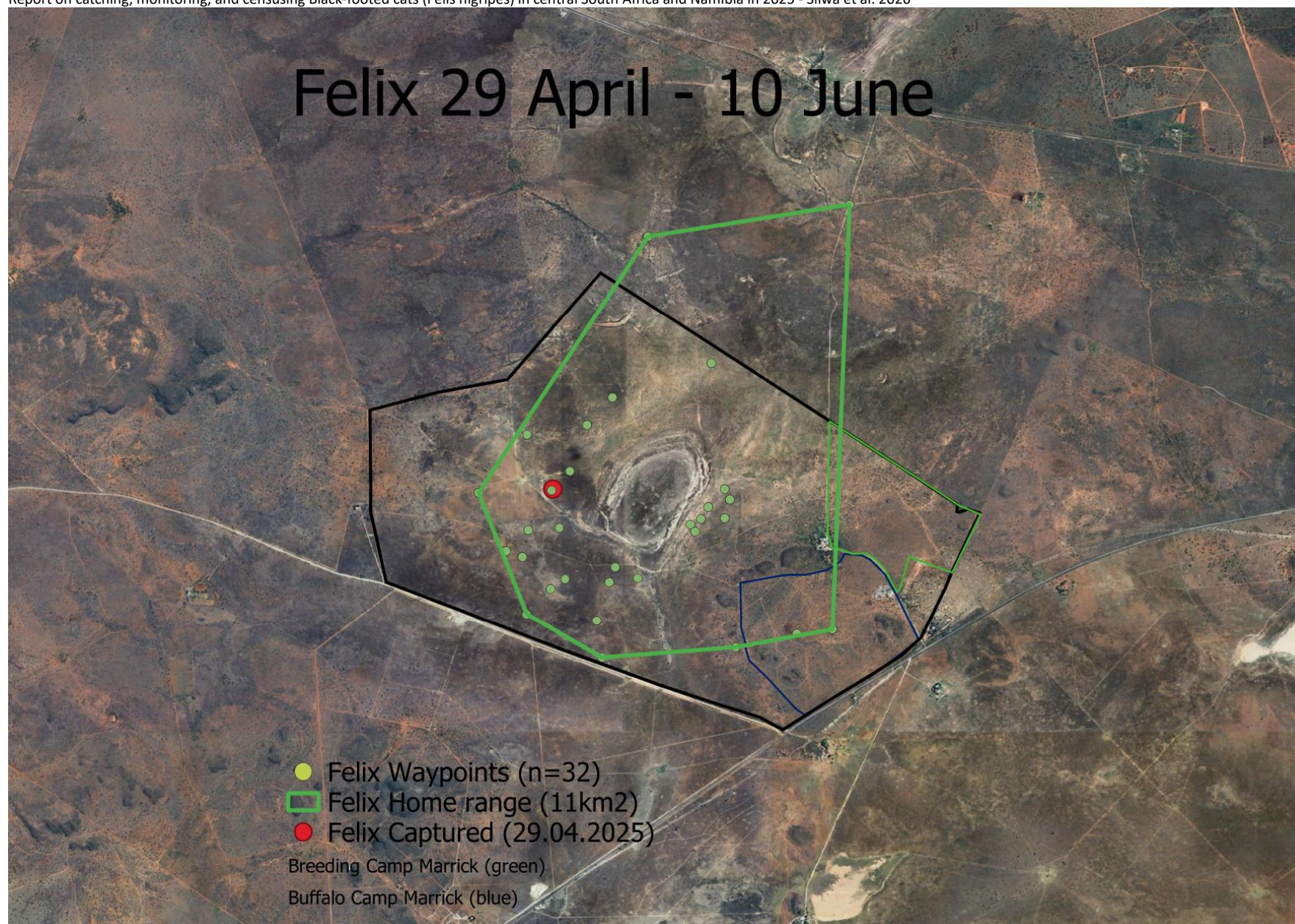
Map 1: Routes driven in the Kimberley area, on Benfontein Farm (light green tracks), Marrick Safari (magenta tracks), with capture locations of two male black-footed cats on Marrick Safari and the caracal kittens sighting, while spotlight-searching for black-footed cats in April 2025.



Map 2: Map of Benfontein (BNR; black polygon) with home range of adult male *Ultero* until his death (red triangle) on 4.8.2025, minimum convex polygons (100% MCP; 36 km²) encompassing all his locations in 2025(n = 511).



Map. 3: Map of HR (red polygon) of male *Magnum* captured on Marrick Safari (black polygon) between his capture on 27.4. 2025 until the end of the year. The minimum convex polygon (100% MCP; 132.4 km²) encompassed all his locations (n = 38) over this large area. Some of the locations were collected on aircraft search flights.



Map 4: Map of HR (green polygon) of male *Felix* on Marrick Safari (black polygon) between his capture on 29. April until 10 June 2025, when contact was lost. The minimum convex polygon (100% MCP; 11 km²) encompassed all his locations (n = 32) in this area.

Fieldwork and cats on Benfontein (BFN), Marrick Safari (MS) South Africa, in 2025 – page 1.



Fig. 1: Capture team with *Felix* (self-release) on Marrick Safari



Fig. 2: *Magnum* on 27.4.25, with massive meal in his stomach under anaesthesia (A. Sliwa)



Fig. 3: Dr. Laurie Aucamp working on *Felix* (A.Sliwa)



Fig. 4: Wet roads on Benfontein (A. Sliwa)



Fig. 5: Digging our research vehicle out of deep mud in the rain (A. Sliwa)



Fig. 6: Firas' mud leg (A. Sliwa)



Fig. 7: *Ultero* on 13.6.25 at his den (CT set by M. Swanepoel).



Fig. 8: Michelle Swanepoel day tracking *Ultero* (A.Sliwa).



Fig. 9: Themed mugs for night break (A.Sliwa).



Fig. 10: Jackal visiting *Ultero*’s den on 11.2.25 (CT set by M. Swanepoel).



Fig. 11: Koppie on Marrick Safari, with pan where we caught *Magnum* and *Felix*, the spot for listening for their signals (A.Sliwa).



Fig. 12: *Magnum* on 13.10.25 on Kareepan Farm – one of the first and few CT photos (CT by M. Swanepoel)



Fig.13: *Magnum* leaving den at sunset (CT by M. Swanepoel)



Fig. 14. *Ultero* leaves den after dark on 25.2.25 (CT set by M. Swanepoel)



Fig. 15: Andrew Conroy and Michelle flying in Sky Jeep to find missing males *Magnum* and *Felix* (self release).



Fig. 16: Namibian field vehicle repaired and with new railings (M. Küsters).



Fig. 17: A sightings record of bfc kittens on a farm in eastern Namibia (Daneel van der Walt, BFCRP).



Fig. 18: Gina Olivier, owner of Bloukop Farm with camera traps provided for monitoring by BFCRP Namibia (M. Küsters)

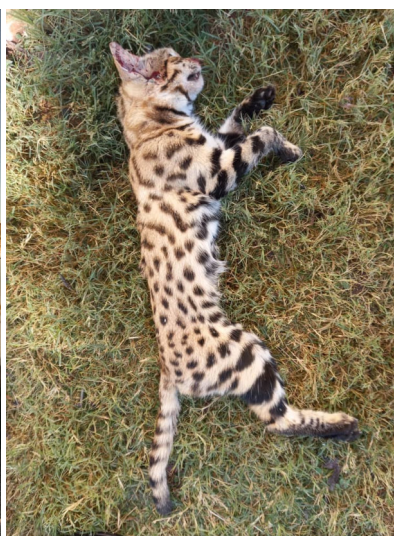


Fig. 19: Road kill BFC, Bloukop Farm in 2023 (Gina Olivier)

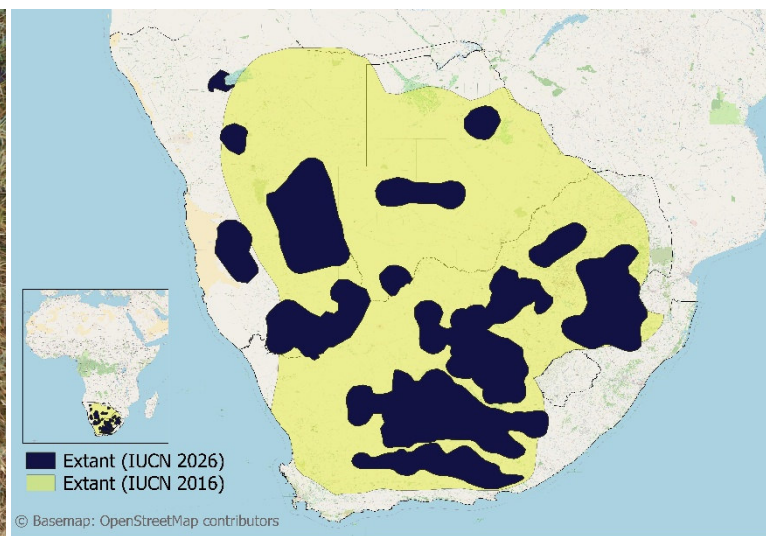


Fig. 20: The proposed extant distribution of *Felis nigripes* (blue) imposed onto the current IUCN Red List distribution map (yellow) (Sliwa et. al., 2026)

Table 1: Calculation of (all incomplete) range sizes (km²) and remarks on 3 black-footed cats, either captured in April 2025 or tracked for part of 2025 on Benfontein Game Farm (BFN), South Africa, Marrick Safari (MS) and surrounding properties, west of Kimberley. Shaded animal columns indicate the individual that died with certainty in 2025.

Capture Date	27.4.25	29.4.25	4.6.24
Name (also on Map)	<i>Magnum</i>	<i>Felix</i>	<i>Ultro</i>
No. captured (last)	Cat 1 25	Cat 2 25	Cat 4 24
Sex	Male	Male	Male
Age (judged by teeth)	Adult	Adult	Adult
Microchip #.	992003000422787	9450000018 08148	
Mass (kg)	2.71	1.94	
Ear (cm)	5.2	5.1	
Shoulder (cm)	30	28	
Total Length (cm)	67	64	
Hind foot (cm)	10.0	9.6	
Front foot (cm) (L x W)	2.3 x 2,18	2.3 x 2.1	
Tail (cm)	18	17	
Neck (cm)	13	13	
Canine UR (cm)	1.06	1.20	
Canine LR (cm)	0.93	0.97	
Canine UL (cm)	1.10	1.16	
Canine LL (cm)	0.95	1.05	
Testes (cm) / condition of nipples	1.5 x 1.3	1.0 x 1.0	
No. fixes collected in 2025	38	32	551
Range (100MCP) 2025 (km²)	> 132.4	11.16	36.48

Total fixes collected in 2025 for 3 BFCs, n = 621

Remarks:

- 1) *Magnum* (Cat 1 25): exceptionally large adult male, captured on Marrick Safari; had full belly in early evening (8 PM), ran into shallow den, extracted after 30 minutes. Left Marrick after 2 weeks and moved extensively, found north close to Western edge of Kimberley on a search flight, then south of Marrick. Probably has a much larger HR on different land-use private property than recorded, due to difficult in locating and tracking, as access was restricted by landowners.
- 2) *Felix* (Cat 2 25): large adult male, captured on Marrick Safari, stayed for 5 weeks, then left for good, was never found again, also not during flying searches, presumed **DEAD**.
- 3) *Ultro* (Cat 4 24): adult seasoned male, tracked him as single collared cat in 2025 on BFN until found dead, close to 9 Tanks windmill in a den, whole, thus probably amyloidosis on 4.8.2025. **DEAD**.