Black-Footed Cat Working Group
Quarterly Report September 2026



Figure 1: Tutu crawling out of a tiny den.

Benfontein Nature Reserve

I am pleased to share an update on our monitoring work at Benfontein. Our efforts have been focused on two radio-collared black-footed cats, both young dispersing males currently in the process of establishing their territories. I must admit that fieldwork has been quite a challenge – the weather has been anything but usual. The soil has become so saturated from rain that vehicle access has been limited, significantly restricting our ability to track and observe cats.

Tutu - The Shy One

Tutu is becoming more habituated as time goes on, and he is getting used to being followed by the vehicle and the lights. On the 2nd of July 2026, I managed to track him to a den on the neighbouring farm for the first time and was able to get an actual waypoint. He spent some time on the farm and did not move around much as there was plenty of food, so he had no reason to. He returned to Benfontein on the 27th of July but spent some of August on the neighbouring farm again. By early September he was back on Benfontein, and I found him in a den on the 2nd of September. I was only able to pick up a signal again on the 14th of September.

I could not access Benfontein itself, due to wet conditions, but I did manage to get a signal from the Magersfontein Road, which confirmed that Tutu was still alive and on Benfontein on the 23rd and 25th of September. On the 26th I got a good signal, but unfortunately no visuals. I found a signal again on the 28th, located him in a den on the 29th, and managed to track him that evening. It is very rewarding to be able to see these cats do what they do best.



Figure 2: Tutu basking in the sun at 12h44 on 16 September 2026. Very well camouflaged.



Figure 3: Tutu just crawled out of the den and becoming aware of his surroundings before moving.

Ryan - The Runner

Ryan remains as elusive as ever, covering vast distances that make him a real challenge to keep tabs on. After losing track of him for some time, I was relieved to find him again on Benfontein on 24 July.

He slipped away once more, and it was not until our aerial survey on 5 August that we picked up his signal - though unfortunately I could not get a follow-up signal from the ground.

September brought better news. Ryan was back on Benfontein on the 2nd and Jolien Grafe (I'll introduce her later), and I found him again on the 23rd - this time on another farm, about 9 km south of Benfontein. On the 25th we picked up a signal from Magersfontein Road, and this indicated he had returned to Benfontein. We located him in his den on the 28th and 29th, tracked him, and were rewarded with some good visuals and camera trap footage. Being able to track Ryan far more frequently in September was a huge relief, as keeping track of him over the past few months has been a real struggle.



Figure 4: Ryan emerging from his den with a stretch and a yawn.



Figure 5: Ryan taking a moment to wake up and become aware of his surroundings.

Marrick Safari's

Magnum - The Roamer

We searched hard for Magnum during our aerial survey but unfortunately could not pick up any signal - never a good sign. Still, we keep our hopes up and will try again during the next aerial survey.

Khoisan Karoo Conservancy

Brutus – The Relentless One

Tracking Brutus came with its own set of challenges. Ricky Ellis and PC Ferreria only managed to find him five times, with only a single visual in July, Unfortunately, no tracking could be done in August due to challenging weather conditions,

I visited Khoisan Karoo from the 7th to the 11th of September to assist Ricky with tracking Brutus and to pass on a few new tricks. It was difficult to find Brutus, but we managed to track him to his dens during the day - and on two occasions we even found him at night, getting some good visuals of him. He seemed fairly relaxed around the vehicle and lights, which is encouraging. The resident team managed three visuals of Brutus during September, though he remains highly elusive and frequently visiting the neighbour's farm.



Figure 6: This is the very first camera trap photo that PC managed to get of Brutus, apparently, he is camera shy.



Figure 7: Ricky searching for Brutus.

Aerial Survey

Lourens van Essen (LD) and I took to the sky again on the 4-5 August continuing with our aerial surveys every two to three months to keep tabs on these cats.

Flight Operations Summary

Preparations: On the 3rd of August 2026, LD conducted a flight from Pretoria to Jacobsdal in a Foxbat airplane. Upon arrival, the Telonics aerial tracking antennas were mounted, and the aircraft refueled.

First flight: Survey operations commenced at 06h00 the next morning with the objective of locating collared individuals, Magnum, Ryan and Tutu. Unfortunately, no signals were detected during this flight. All flight planning and necessary coordination with Air Traffic Control were undertaken, as Benfontein Nature Reserve is situated within controlled airspace.



Figure 8: In flight during the aerial survey searching for the three black-footed cats.



Figure 9: LD and I after another successful completion of an aerial survey.

Second flight: On the morning of 5th of August 2026, the team initiated the second survey mission with the objective of locating Tutu and Ryan, both of whom had been collared at Benfontein Nature Reserve in March 2026. The aircraft was airborne by 06h00. Both individuals were successfully located from the air, enabling subsequent ground-based tracking operations. Strong signals from both animals were confirmed that evening. We also went to search for Magnum but unfortunately could not get a signal for him. With the aerial surveys successfully completed, I will continue with ground-based monitoring of the collared cats.

Visitors

We were honored to receive Dr. Axel Moehrenschlager, Director of the Small Cats Program and Conservation Translocations for Panthera, who paid us a brief visit from Canada from 16-18 July. He came to gain more insight into what we do and how challenging it can be to track black-footed cats.

We were also delighted to host Ms. Jolien Grafe, a B.Sc. Geography student, currently completing her master's degree internship in ''Remote Sensing and Geodata Analysis", who visited the project all the way from Germany from 14 September to 7 October. Her visit gave her a better sense of what Benfontein looks like, how the cats behave, and how data collection is done. She also assisted with analysing the data on black-footed cats that were collected over the past 34 years. We worked together on cleaning up the data further and making sense of it and made some improvements to our data collection methods and updated the GPS setup to improve its use going forward.

I learnt a great deal from her about the use and implementation of QGIS during her visit. In return, I introduced her to Benfontein and to our two collared black-footed cats, Ryan and Tutu, as well as the challenges of tracking these elusive animals.

Thank you for your visit and your insights.



Figure 10: Axel and I searching for Tutu.



Figure 11: Jolien and I searching for signal from the koppie.



Figure 12: Our work horse.

Vehicle Maintenance

Our research vehicle is the backbone of our field operations - without it, none of this work would be possible. It has been very reliable over the past few months, though it now has 315 000km on the odometer, the majority of which has been under demanding off-road conditions. These tough field conditions have led to some mechanical issues, and significant expenditure has been incurred on essential maintenance over recent months.

Maintenance	**Cost**
Replace starter	R4 439.00
Seat Covers	R3 500.00
Replace fan belt, fan belt tensioner and wheel balancing	R2 760.00
Total Cost:	**R10 699.00**

Challenges

The last few months have thrown a few challenges our way. The BFCWG laptop decided to stop working and had to be replaced - a real setback, as a laptop is essential for capturing the data we collect and for writing reports like this one to keep our supporters up to date about our cats. We also lost one of our camera traps to rain damage while it was out in the field and that had to be replaced. This was very unfortunate, as camera traps are critical to our work since they are our eyes in the field, allowing us to collect data and gain valuable insight into the behaviour of black-footed cats without being present and in a non-invasive manner.

A note of gratitude

As we close another quarter, we want to pause and say thank you.

Every sighting logged, every donation made, every hour volunteered, and every word shared about the black-footed cat moves this tiny, remarkable species closer to hopefully a more secure future. Your support is not abstract to us - it translates directly into fieldwork, research, camera traps and the everyday work of conservation on the ground in southern Africa.

At present we have a particular need for additional financial support to sustain aerial telemetry searches for the three collared males. These flights are important for monitoring the radio-collared cats; however, it entails

significant unbudgeted costs. We require approximately R2 500/US$153 per flight, as well as additional diesel required for commuting to and from Jacobsdal where our sponsored private landing strip is located. Your continued support will ensure that this critical work proceeds without interruption.

Warm regards from the field

Nanti Strydom

Research / Narvorsing
Black-footed Cat
Working Group
(Miershooptier Werkgroep)

Visit our website

for more information:

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

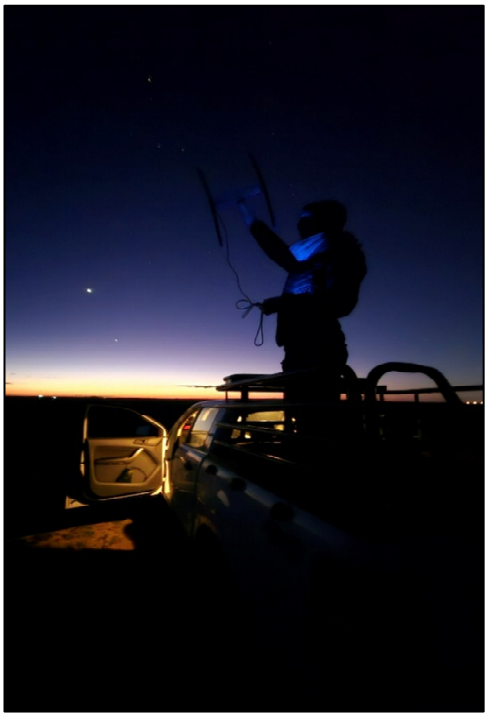


Figure 13: Night tracking.



Figure 14: Heidi Fölscher, Jolien and I tracking