



LOCAL NEWS | PLAASLIKE NUUS

Adaptable plans can manage predator adaptability



Predation has already dealt a severe blow to small-stock farming in several countries, and South Africa is facing similar pressures. Rising predator numbers and changing ecological dynamics pose complex management challenges for producers. The question is not whether control is necessary, but how it can be applied sustainably and effectively. Well-known predation specialist Niël Viljoen offers guidance on this difficult issue.

Small-stock farming in large parts of the United States and Australia is believed to have declined by up to 80% due to predation. But what about South Africa? Viljoen explains that the overpopulation of certain species, including predators, can create ecological imbalances that place direct pressure on agricultural production systems. In such cases, higher predator densities increase livestock losses and threaten the long-term viability of small-stock production.

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The 'Place of big cats': Reflecting on the leopard scare near Bloemfontein



Early this year, reports of a leopard roaming near Bloemfontein captured public attention and sparked understandable concern across the Mangaung region. Sightings near Glen Agricultural College and the N1/R30 interchange (16km north of Bloemfontein) led to warnings from authorities urging residents to remain cautious and avoid approaching the animal.

The leopard was later confirmed to be a one-year-old female that had escaped from a big cat facility near Reddersburg (70km south of Bloemfontein). According to the farm owner, severe weather conditions caused significant damage to the property, including fallen trees damaging the electric fencing system, allowing the leopard to break. Following an extensive 12-day search involving drones, thermal imaging cameras, environmental authorities, and law enforcement agencies, the animal was found dead in mountainous terrain near the farm from which it had escaped. The leopard was identified by its microchip as the escaped individual.

While the incident was unusual, it also prompted reflection on the region's deeper ecological history. Today, leopards are not naturally associated with the open grasslands surrounding Bloemfontein, and verified wild leopard records in the immediate area are exceptionally rare. Yet the name Mangaung itself, commonly translated as 'place of big cats', especially referring to cheetahs, hints at a landscape that once supported large predators more widely than it does today. Historical records suggest that species such as cheetahs, leopards, lions, and other carnivores once moved more freely across the central regions of South Africa before habitat transformation, hunting, and expanding human settlement reduced their range.

The recent leopard scare also highlighted the importance of responsible public communication during wildlife incidents. Authorities cautioned against spreading unverified information on social media after one earlier 'leopard sighting' near Glen was ultimately identified as a serval – a much smaller and generally harmless wild cat. Servals and cheetahs are commonly mistaken for leopards.

Encounters with free-roaming large carnivores are rare, but they remind us that conservation is not only about protecting wildlife in distant reserves. It also involves understanding our landscapes, acknowledging the species that once occurred there, and ensuring that human-wildlife interactions are managed safely, responsibly, and with respect for both people and animals. – *Dr Beanelri Janecke, Predation Management Centre, University of the Free State*

Predation expert receives silver ram award



Niël Viljoen is a predation expert who needs no introduction. He has been instrumental in training producers and their workers in predation management. He has conducted extensive research and has been a driving force behind the establishment of organised predation management structures in the country.

During the recent National Wool Growers' Association congress, he was awarded a coveted silver ram for his dedication to predation management in South Africa.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS | INTERNASIONALE NUUS

UK sheep producer 'devastated' by repeated dog attacks



A sheep producer says repeated attacks on his flock have been "devastating", more than two months after the law was revised in an attempt to tackle the problem.

On the same morning the BBC arrived at his farm, Will Rogers discovered one of his sheep lying dead in a field between Herefordshire and Powys.

The injuries suggested an attack, but as is often the case, there was no clear answer as to what had caused it.

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