

# Peak Ridge Forest Corridor Project

## Update Report V/VI

June & Dec 2020



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## Peak Ridge Forest Corridor Project

### Summary

This report updates the current status of leopards on what is to be the **Peak Ridge Forest Corridor Conservation Area**. It also addresses the unfortunate increase in snaring incidents across the landscape that occurred during mid-2020. These wire trap snares proliferated in the Central Highlands of Sri Lanka during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown. Many tea estates had this issue and the need to address this specific problem of wire-trap snares being used to catch wild animals (typically wild boar) was highlighted with the repeated incidental trapping and death of leopards, including that of a rare black leopard. We are happy to note, however that such incidents did not occur along the Peak Ridge itself although one leopard was shot on an estate in close proximity to the Peak Ridge Forest Corridor; circumstances of this are under investigation by the Department of Wildlife Conservation.

The ridge that this ongoing work has targeted for specific conservation action – **Peak Ridge Forest Corridor** – now more than ever needs collaborative protection. If you are a plantation company then you are most likely already one of the signatories to the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that affords this Ridge the protection needed for this area to be an effective leopard and wildlife corridor.

As the last report highlighted, the current population of approximately ~15+ leopards that live on this Ridge and utilize it, is a resident population and if they are to continue to reside here then the integrity of this Ridge is paramount. The setting of snares in the recent months and the leopard deaths and incidents that resulted from these actions shows that in this heavily compromised mixed habitat, having such conservation corridors would aid greatly in ensuring safe passage for leopards and other wildlife.

Where possible, improvement of the Ridge habitat must also be attempted. To this effect a 7-acre block is being replanted on Dunkeld estate with Kelani-Breama estate also pledging land for reforestation. It is our understanding that other PLCs such as Bogawanthalawa are also looking at re-foresting areas and we hope this will together create a better habitat within and adjacent to the **Peak Ridge Forest Corridor**.



Resident female 'Nina' walking with her male cub (some seconds behind) in the north east section of 'Peak Ridge Forest Corridor'.

## Leopards along the Ridge 2020 (Peak Ridge Forest Corridor)

### As @ June 31<sup>st</sup> 2020:

A stable population of 10-15 leopards are still being documented along this ridge and surrounding tea estate areas. Currently 4 males and 5 females with 2 cubs are actively using this area (Table 1).

Two permanent remote camera stations have been set up and 3-5 other such stations are in process. These will continue to monitor the long-term activity of these leopards.

Leopard ID/Name	Sex/Age	Status	Comments
OC	Female Adult	Resident	Long-term resident
Nala	Female Adult	Moved out	Assumed sister of Nina. We detected her only in Jan of 2020.
Nina	Female Adult	Resident	Now resident with cub (as imaged above)
KB New (to be named)	Female Adult	Recent	A new female we recently picked up, maybe replacing the original Kelani-Breema female.
Norwood TT (to be named)	Female Adult	Recent female who appeared in Feb.	Recent female to appear in this section of the ridge area
Ola	Female Adult	Was Resident	Probably still present but as no cameras in her area due to Forest Department extraction of eucalyptus trees cannot confirm
Arnold	Adult Male	Current Resident	Been here since study began
Ozzy	Adult Male	Current Resident	Long term resident.
Whitley	Adult Male	New Resident	He has established himself on this Ridge between two other males ranges
Odin	Adult Male	Was Resident	Probably still present but due to lack of cameras in his area, removed due to Forest Department harvesting we do not have detection.
Oswald	Male cub now young adult (born ~ Aug 2018)	Last seen Dec 2019	This is one of OCs earlier cubs that we were happy to have detected once again as an ~ 1.5 yr old. But not detected since as he would have dispersed to a new area.
OCs cub	New cubs /unknown	Born end 2019	One cub first monitored in June 2020
Nino (Nina's Cub)	Male	Born ~ Feb 2019	Monitored till July 2020 at which time at age ~ 1.6 yrs. we suspect he dispersed to a new area.

**As @ Dec 31<sup>st</sup> 2020:**

Unfortunately, due to the ongoing Covid-19 situation and the increased presence of humans on the landscape within the estates and need for food security, combined with our inability to be in the field during lockdown/travel restrictions, four of our remote camera stations succumbed to theft. This included a permanent station that was damaged and the cameras stolen. This meant that we lost equipment and data and had to now deal with this new situation of human theft of project equipment, something that had not been such a problem in the past. As such our leopard monitoring data had been compromised. We report in the below table (Table 2) the leopard data we have been able to obtain from the remaining cameras.

Leopard Name/ID	Age/Sex	Status	Comments
OC	Adult Female	Present on the Ridge	Very much a resident living here with frequent detections. We have monitored 4 sets of her cubs to date!
Nala	Adult Female	Not monitored	She has most likely moved out of the monitored Ridge area.
Nina	Adult Female	Present and resident on the Ridge	with cubs since March 2020.
KB New (to be named)	Adult Female	Not present	Not seen since Jan 2020.
Norwood TT (to be named) - NTT1	Adult Female	Has not been monitored again.	
Ola	Adult Female	Unknown	No Cameras in her area
KewTeaF	Adult Female	Seen in Aug/Sept 2020	Not seen again after what was a brief visit to the east edge of Peak Ridge area. Possible resident of Peak Wilderness Sanctuary.
Arnold	Adult Male	Present on the Ridge	Still very much active on the Ridge
Ozzy	Adult Male	Present on the Ridge	No data since August 2020 due to stolen cameras
Whitley	Adult Male	Present on the Ridge	Still active on the Ridge
Odin	Adult Male	Present	No data since August 2020 due to stolen cameras
Oswald	Male	Not detected since Dec 2019	Dispersed to a new area
Balugi	Male	Monitored in July 2020	Cameras stolen so no data since
OC's Cub	1 cub (possibly female)	Monitored for 3 months	No data since Sept 2020
Nina's Cubs	Born ~ March 2020 3 cubs	Monitored through mid-2020 in Sept still 3 cubs	Still present -but only 2 cubs, monitored in Dec 2020

**Annex 1 shows images of some of the Resident leopards of the Peak Ridge Forest Corridor.**



## Signage to address theft and laying of snares:



Figure 1: Signage stating this project is a biodiversity monitoring project aiming to protect our shared forest.

We have started putting up larger signs near the remote cameras stations which highlight that this is a Biodiversity project aimed at protecting our shared forests. This is to inform people that we are not monitoring them, with the hope that this will prevent people from stealing the cameras (Figure 1).

Continued awareness work is on-going on a needs basis. This will need to be continued on these estates to ensure the communities living in the vicinity of the Ridge refrain from undertaking illegal activities that harm the forest and its wildlife.

We are happy to continue to do these programmes and kindly request that the relevant estates continue to reach out to WWCT as needed.

In order to specifically address the issue of snares, a tri-lingual SAY NO TO SNARES pamphlet was a focus of our awareness outreach (Figure 2) and widely disseminated.

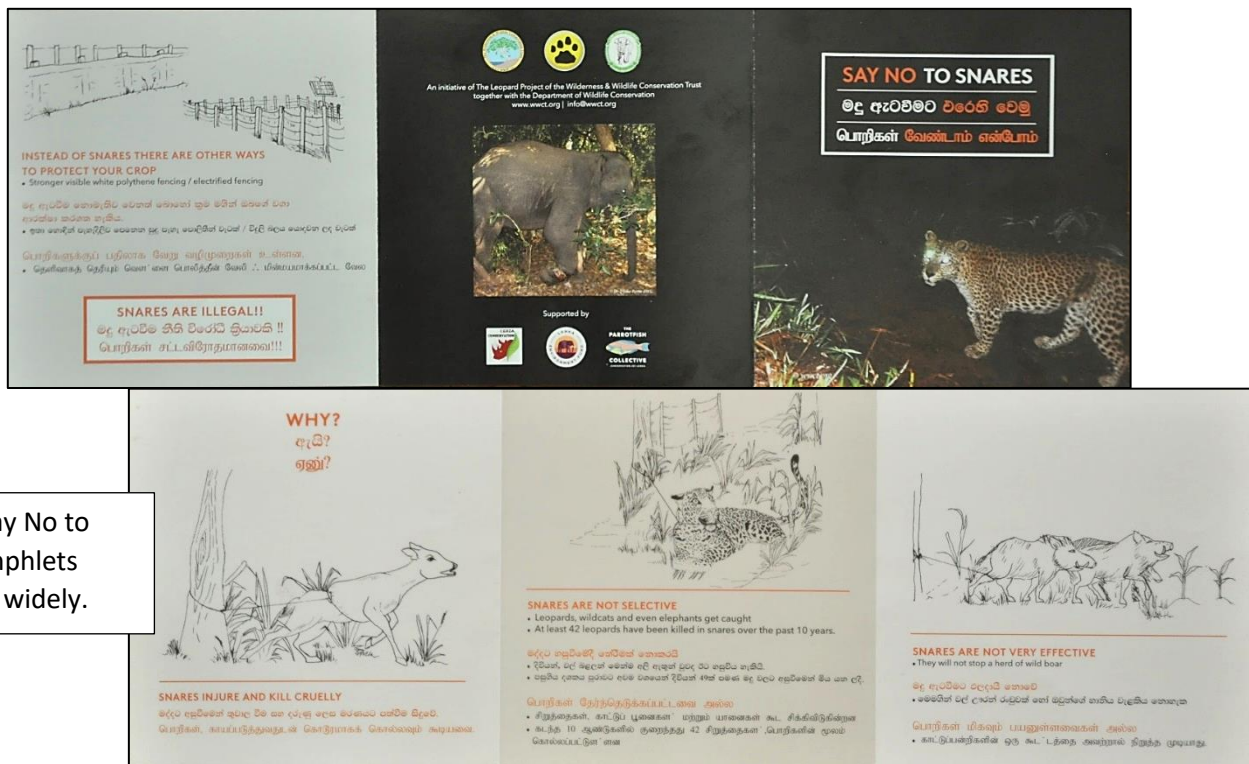


Figure 2: Say No to Snares pamphlets distributed widely.

Additionally, a poster with a legal directive in collaboration with the Department of Wildlife Conservation is being displayed prominently in estate muster sheds and tea factories (Figure 3).

Kindly let us know should you want more of these posters and pamphlets to be disseminated on your estates.

Figure 3a: Snares Directive displayed at a tea factory entrance.



Figure 3b: Snares Directive put up at Estate muster sheds and Tea factories.

### Land protection:

The visual demarcation of this Ridge area via sign boards that highlight illegal activities such as the setting of snares and fires, will aid in its continued preservation. We are trusting that all involved estates will be amenable to having these boards placed along the edge of their upper divisions that border the ridge area as stated in the MoU. This signage will, we hope, establish this area as a conservation area and ensure that the surrounding communities are party to the protection of this Ridge.

**We highlight once again the primary Estates and owning companies that back onto the identified Peak Ridge Forest Corridor:**

1. Osborne Estate (Bogawanthalawa Plantations PLC)
2. Dunkeld Estate (MJF Tea gardens Pvt Ltd)
3. Hapugastenne Estate (Maskeliya Plantations PLC)
4. Moussekelle Estate (Maskeliya Plantations PLC)
5. Kelani-Breama Estate (Private)
6. Glentilt Estate (Maskeliya Plantations PLC)
7. Norwood Estate (Bogawanthalawa Plantations PLC)
8. Rockwood Estate (Bogawanthalawa Plantations PLC)



9. Stockholm Estate (Horana Plantations PLC)
10. Mahanilu Estate (Horana Plantations PLC)
11. Venture Estate (Madulsima Plantations PLC)
12. Kew Estate (Madulsima Plantations PLC)
13. Alton Estate (Horana Plantations PLC)



Satellite view of the Ridge with estates that back onto it NUMBERED accordingly and parent company in brackets.

## Land Restoration:

A key component of this initiative in addition to establishing, maintaining and protecting the



Figure 4a: WWCTs dedicated forest plant nursery for habitat restoration.



Figure 4b: WWCTs gardener preparing forest species saplings in

Peak Ridge Corridor, is also to re-plant areas of released tea and degraded existing forest in order to improve habitat quality and encourage a more effective buffer zone. Planting of forest species has begun on a 7-acre area on Dunkeld estate identified for this need. A plant nursery dedicated to the establishment of these plants houses several forest species (Figure 4ab). When adequate numbers of plants have reached suitable size, they are planted within the selected area.

A 1-acre section of the area is initially being planted. We hope that other estates that back onto this Ridge will, where needed, plant forest trees in similar patches, so as to improve the forest adjacent to Peak Ridge Forest Corridor.

### **Memorandum of Understanding Signing**

We thank the estate companies that have already signed the MoU that establishes the Peak Ridge Forest Corridor Conservation Area and we hope that together we will be able to successfully maintain its integrity and improve its habitat.

The plan is to collaboratively have an official event to celebrate and announce the signing of this landmark partnership in early 2021.

### **Acknowledgments**

We thank the Department of Wildlife Conservation (DWC), Sri Lanka for continued permission to carry out this research for conservation work. To all the involved estates and management companies a big thank you for cooperation and support to permit us to work within your lands and to partner in this vital research and conservation initiative. We specifically thank the relevant estate superintendents and estate management companies – Dilmah's Dunkeld Estate, Mr. Balendran of Kelani-Breama estate, Bogawanthalawa Plantations PLC's estates, Mudalsima Plantations PLC's estates, Horana Plantations and Maskeliya Plantations PLC's estates for their cooperation and support at various times during this ongoing initiative. We sincerely hope that together we can finally establish and ensure the continued protection of this **Peak Ridge Forest Corridor** Conservation Area in 2021 and beyond.

This Ridge project is made possible via the support of Resplendent Ceylon and Dilmah Conservation, Alliance Finance PLC and the Whitley Fund for Nature and our long-term partner Cerza Conservation together with Zoo De La Barben. Our sincere thanks for this assistance, as it allows the WWCT to continue with this important research and conservation work in the Central Highlands of Sri Lanka.

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