

My Pica grant sent me to Cradock, South Africa where I met Mircea Pfliederer and Marion Holmes. After my 32 hours of flying and layovers, I finally arrived in Port Elizabeth, South Africa. I took a taxi to the bus stop where it was another four hours to Cradock. Once I arrived in Cradock it was still an hour drive to the farm where they were researching small African felids.

The landscape didn't shock me. I was in Africa but it didn't feel any different to me. What really shocked me, was the people. It was easy to strike up a conversation. Everyone could immediately tell I was a foreigner. When I was getting on the bus, one lady threw her empty orbit gum packet onto the ground. There was a trash bin 20 ft away. I couldn't help myself, I had to pick it up and throw it away. That was just the start.

On the bus we drove through suburbs and all the buildings either had fences or walls with barb wire or what looked like broken glass cemented into the wall. We continued on the highway and all along the ditches there was trash. I was told that it is someone's job to pick up the trash and that is why people see no problem in throwing trash out their window on the highway.

When I finally arrived in Cradock it was 2 am. We drove to the farm and I slept for a couple hours. Life on the farm was great. We would get up at 6 am care for all the animals. At 10 am we were done with the morning feeding and had our breakfast. We would get in the land rover and drive all over the farm looking for signs of wild African cats. To explain how big this farm is every day we took a different road and were out for 2 to 3 hours at a time. We never took the same path and every day we visited new areas. The number one rule when going away from the farm whether driving into town to driving around the farm was; water, water, water. That was the first thing we always grabbed before heading out.

After lunch, the Pfliederer's would take a nap. Here life revolved around the cats. I never could take naps in the afternoon, I would go off exploring around the farm always with my water and the farm in visual site, which is easy when the shrubs are only one to two feet tall. On my adventures, I got to see many different wildlife. A family of bat-ear foxes ran away from the shade of an acacia tree, in both their and my surprise, meerkats, yellow mongooses, water monitors, and tortoises. I found a new surprise every day. Every night I would walk outside in the dark and find Orion. That was my reminder of home. The stars were absolutely amazing. I would lay on my back and stare at the sky.

While I was there I studied the training and release program for small African felids of both Karoo Cat Research and Cat Conservation Trust. Through looking at each program I found that there is no one key item needed to have in order to create a successful release program. It is a combination of enclosures, selection, and training. The essence behind these two institutions are very similar, although their methods are different. They aimed to keep the enclosure as close as possible to the native environment, use common themes of hunting, avoiding danger, and a variety of encounters with native wildlife aid the success of this program. The training programs are not a strict set of interactions but any interaction that allows the animal to learn vital survival skills.

My time in South Africa will always be one of my most cherished memories. The food was amazing I had a different antelope every night and everything was homemade even the mustard. I still keep in contact with the Pfliederer's. They are lifetime friends and colleagues.