

## Project Update: December 2010

We devoted the first two months of the project (August-September 2010) to site mapping and preliminary surveys. We generated habitat maps for the entire study site, as well as familiarising ourselves with the layout of the area and the ID number of each cane field. The preliminary surveys, composed of day, dawn, and evening transects in different parts of the hacienda helped us determine where best to place the live traps and the hair snares, and how best to plan the establishments of permanent transects for the occupancy study.

Live trapping for the leopard cat started in September 2010 when the radio telemetry equipment arrived on site. Traps were placed where leopard cat spoor were detected during the preliminary surveys, and where kittens have been uncovered in previous years. After more than two months of trapping, we still have not caught a cat. We have deployed additional traps.

The transect walks continue to yield spoor, confirming the presence of leopard cats in the area. We have also collected scats. With the harvest currently ongoing, spoor were no longer detected in areas being harvested, or has already been harvested and undergoing land preparation or planting.

While education and awareness were not part of my RSG proposal, I am pleased to report that we have started to conduct awareness campaigns, where we try novel activities to gather attention, stimulate interest and spread awareness amongst the local people. Our first school was Araal Elementary, a local public school located just outside the hacienda. Grades 1 and 2 were a story-telling activity. Grades 3 to 6 were modified 20 Questions. We have also sponsored a local basketball team, who carries the name Maral (the local name for the leopard cat) on their jerseys. The game is being watched and followed by the local community, which makes for a good, albeit unconventional awareness campaign for the leopard cats.

