

Dinees vir jagluiperds

Wat het 'n swierige dinee in New York en wildbewing in Suid-Afrika met mekaar gemeen? Corlet Grobler vertel meer.

Heidi en Allen Roberts, stigterslede van die Vriende van die Hoedspruit-sentrum vir bedreigde spesies (HESC) in Amerika, se eerste besoek aan Suid-Afrika was 20 jaar gelede.

Heidi onthou dit soos gister: Maart 1994, net voor die verkiesing, om preses te wees.

Hul eerste wildbesigtigingsrit was betowerend en Heidi was baie opgewonde toe sy vir die eerste keer 'n olifant sien.

In 2004 het die Robertse besluit om die Jabulani-kamp en die HESC op die gewilde Kapama-privatwildreservaat in Limpopo te besoek. Die olifante van die Jabulani-kamp was 'n groot trekpleister en met hul besoek aan die HESC was Lente Roode (HESC-stigter en etenaar van die Jabulani-kamp) toevallig besig om 'n praatjie te lewer.

Heidi het meer uitgepra oor die swartpootkatjies waarvan sy geles het en was baie opgewonde toe Lente haar vra of sy een wil sien.

Dit was die begin van 'n lang vriendskap tussen die twee vroue wat in 2007 gelei het tot Heidi en Allen se besluit om geld in die VSA vir die HESC in te samel deur spoggerige dinee-partytjies te hou in hul luukse woonstel in New York.

Vir die diere

Die Robertse is gewoonlik daaraan om een keer per week vriende en familie uit te nooi

vir aandete, maar in September elke jaar word 24 betalende gaste na 'n deftige dinee genooi. Tydens die aandete word 'n stille veiling van kunswerke en ander items gehou en alle opbrengste van die veiling en dinee word aan die HESC geskenk. Gaste kry ook die geleentheid om meer te leer oor jagluiperds en ander bedreigde spesies en só word meer mense oor die sentrum se werk ingelig.

Ek ontmoet Heidi, 'n statige, deftig geklede vrou met lang blonde hare en 'n fyn sin vir humor, in Pretoria met haar onlangse besoek.

Heidi vertel met trots dat hulle, as die vriende van die HESC, tot op hede meer as 'n miljoen dollar ingesamel het vir die sentrum.

"Ek maak baie seker die geld word reg aangewend, juis omdat so baie mense vir my geld gee. Ek voel dit is my plig om toe te sien dat die geld reg bestee word en om terugvoering in New York te gee aan almal wat donasies gee."

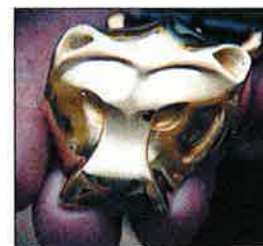
Heidi dink nie daar word genoeg vir bewaring in Suid-Afrika gedoen nie. Van haar vriende wonder hoekom sy geld vir diere insamel as daar soveel behoefte mense is.

Hierop is haar antwoord trefkend: "Wat dink julle, ons vat die geld, gooi dit oor die heining en laat die jagluiperds agter dit aanhardloop?"

Sy glimlag en vertel hoe sy aan hulle moet verduidelik dat



Heidi en Allen Roberts van New York, stigterslede van die Vriende van die Hoedspruit-sentrum vir bedreigde spesies, praat oor hul jaarlikse geldinsamelingsprojek vir dié sentrum. Foto: LISA HNATOWICZ



Allen Roberts is so gaande oor jagluiperds, hy dra selfs 'n gordel met die gesig van 'n jagluiperd in goud daarop.

die HESC mense in diens neem om na die diere om te sien.

Dié werknemers moet betaal word om hulself en hul gesinne



Wat dink julle, ons vat die geld, gooi dit oor die heining en laat die jagluiperds agter dit aanhardloop?



Allen en Heidi Roberts maak van nader met 'n lulperd kennis by die Hoedspruit-sentrum vir bedreigde spesies.

te kan onderhou.

Heidi lig haar regterarm op en sit dit op die gemaklike rusbank se armlening neer, dan vertel sy

vorder: "As die sentrum dus bankrot raak, beteken dit werkverlies – om nie eens te praat wat van die jagluiperds en an-

der diere gaan word nie."

Heidi haal Lente aan wat gesê het: "Ons sorg vir die diere en die diere sorg vir mense."

Heidi sê sy besef daar is baie probleme en baie arm mense. "Maar jy weet, ons is hier as toeriste en ons wil die diere in hul natuurlike omgewing sien."

Sy sal nooit die eerste keer dat sy aan 'n jagluiperd gevat het, vergeet nie, sê Heidi. Sy voel vandag nog die vibrasie en die effense grofheid van die hare onder haar vingers, hoewel sy interaksie met dié diere nie aanmoedig nie.

Sedertdien is jagluiperds haar gunsteling-dier, selfs meer as honde en katte.

Buiten die dinees en jagluiperds, sê Heidi, het sy nie veel ander stokperdjies nie, maar sy lees wel graag as sy die tyd kry.

Die egaar se besoek aan Suid-Afrika vanjaar is besonder in dié opsig dat hulle 'n "leer" saamgebring het. Die leer is 'n toestel wat aangedryf word deur 'n kabel wat 'n lokmiddel vinnig oor die grond sleep.

Die lokmiddel stimuleer die jagluiperd se instink om iets wat beweeg agterna te sit.

Dié soort leer word in Amerika gebruik vir windhondresies.

Volgens Heidi weeg die leer ongeveer 29 kg.

Dit gaan saam met die huidige leer by die sentrum ingespan word om die jagluiperds in topkondisie te hou deur hulle daarmee te laat oefen.

Heidi en Allen is nog lank nie klaar met hul donasies en geskenke aan die HESC nie.

Hulle is baie trots op hul betrokkenheid by die sentrum en sien uit na nog vele besoeke aan Suid-Afrika en hul geliefde HESC.

What does an elegant dinner party in New York and nature conservation in South Africa have in common? Corlet Grobler tells us more.

Heidi and Allen Roberts are the founding members of the U.S. Friends of the Hoedspruit Endangered Species Centre (H.E.S.C) and visited South Africa for the first time twenty years ago. Heidi remembers it as if it was yesterday: March 1994, just before the election, to be precise. Their first game drive was magical and Heidi was very excited to see her first elephant.

The Roberts' decided to visit Camp Jabulani and the HESC on Kapama Nature Reserve in 2004. The elephants at Camp Jabulani were a huge attraction for them and with their visit to HESC they met Lente Roode while she was giving a talk. Heidi was very interested in the Black-Footed cats as she had read about them. Heidi was very excited when Lente asked her if she would like to see one of these special cats. This was in fact the beginning of a very long friendship which led to the Roberts' decision in 2007 to raise funds for HESC.

For the animals

The Roberts' are used to inviting friends over once a week for dinner, but in September every year, 24 paying guests are invited for each of several evenings to a spectacular dinner. Silent auctions of art pieces and other items are held during the course of each evening. All funds generated from this auction and the dinner parties are donated to HESC. These guests also get the opportunity to learn more about cheetahs, other endangered species, as well as the work done by HESC.

I met with Heidi Roberts during their most recent visit to South Africa. She is a classy, well dressed woman with long blonde hair and a fine sense of humour. Heidi is very proud to inform me that they, as the US Friends of HESC, have raised more than one million dollars for the centre. "I make absolutely sure that the money is properly managed for the reason that so many people give me money. I feel that it is my duty to see to it that the money is spent wisely and to give feedback to everyone in New York that is contributing towards the centre."

Heidi's opinion is that not enough is done for conservation in South Africa. Some of their friends wonder why they are raising funds for animals

when there are so many people in need. Here is Heidi's striking response: "What do you think? We take the money, throw it over the enclosures' fences and let the cheetahs chase it?" She then smiles and tells how she then should explain to the people that the HESC employs people to take care of the animals. A salary must be paid to every employee in order to take care of themselves and their families.

Heidi picks up her right arm and positions it on the armrest of the comfortable couch, then she continues to speak: "If the centre became bankrupt, it would mean that people will lose their jobs –not even to think about what would happen with the cheetahs and other animals."

Heidi quotes what Lente said: "We take care of the animals and the animals take care of the people." Heidi states that she realises that there are many problems and many people in need. "But you know, we are here as tourists and we would like to see the animals in their natural environment." Heidi says she will never forget the first time that she touched a cheetah. She still feels the vibrations and coarseness of their hair, even though she doesn't encourage interaction with these animals. Ever since she touched one, cheetahs have been her favourite animal. She even likes them more than cats and dogs.

Heidi says that she doesn't have many other hobbies apart from cheetahs and the dinner parties, but she likes to read if she has the time. The couple's visit to South Africa this year is very special as they brought a lure system with them. This lure system is an appliance that is driven with a cable that pulls a decoy very fast on the ground. This decoy stimulates the instinct of the cheetah to chase the object. This type of lure system is used in America for dog races. Heidi says that this lure system weigh about 29 kg.

The lure system will be used at the centre for the cheetahs to practise and keep their health in top condition.

Heidi and Allen's donations and presents to the HESC are far from over. They are very proud to be involved with the centre and are looking forward to many more visits to South Africa and their beloved HESC.