

Response to "Open Questions to the Landmark Foundation"

We welcome the opportunity to respond, in the context these questions belong in: more than 20 years of leopard conservation across the Western, Eastern and Northern Cape, of which the Baviaanskloof, Swartberg, Little Karoo, Outeniquas, Tsitsikammas and Uniondale have been part throughout. Landmark Foundation focuses on advocacy work, and Landmark Rewilding Trust does research, education and direct action interventions.

Mr Barnardt's letter tests Landmark's record against one district since one incident in 2020, closing with a demand for a local body count. That is not how conservation of a wide-ranging apex predator works. Leopards move across farm, district and provincial lines, and our programme is built at that scale: Uniondale to Keurboomstrand, Uniondale to Kammanasie, and the Swartberg are among Landmark's active project areas today, alongside the wider region and neighbouring provinces.

This past year Landmark has responded to multiple leopard conflict incidents across three provinces, captured, collared and released two leopards, and rescued our 78th leopard from a conflict situation since our work began — the same Bredasdorp leopard whose death was confirmed only last week. Ten days ago, another female was rescued from an unlawful gin-trap in Uniondale. Our conflict-mitigation footprint spans more than 40 localities, from the Eastern Cape through the Baviaanskloof and Uniondale to the West Coast and north to Augrabies and Springbok. We run ongoing camera-trap monitoring in the Outeniquas, Kammanasie, De Hoop, West Coast, Langeberg and Garden Route, and have completed the first whole-genome sequencing analysis of southern African leopard populations on the continent.

Compensation. Since 2008 we have run a structured mechanism, not a general fund: one of very few such schemes anywhere in the world. A farmer must sign a contract, forgo lethal control, and have verifiable non-lethal mitigation in place. Where a leopard is GPS-collared, livestock losses are paid only once verified against the collar's location data, at current market slaughter value. Over R1 million has been paid out to date. No payment is made where a leopard is killed or removed. As a participating farmer, Daniel Truter, wrote after losing calves to predation: *"I wish to thank the Landmark Foundation for helping me... the support to better understand and respect the leopard was a wonderful learning experience for me."*

The pattern behind this. In 2025 alone: a leopard cub died in an illegal gin-trap near Heidelberg, with prosecution still under way; an adult male died the same way near Calvinia, with no prosecution instituted; a pregnant female was captured near Piketberg without our involvement being sought and without investigation, let alone prosecution; and a leopard was shot on Kasteelberg with no one prosecuted. This is the gap the Uniondale matter sits within. It is not a local failure, but a province/nation-wide gap between the law protecting leopards and its enforcement, and it reflects the same impunity with landowner have acted that historically drove the species toward local extinction. We will fight to prevent that happening again.

Our record. 24 peer-reviewed scientific publications with multiple universities and international partners, and postgraduate research completed with distinction. This is the evidence base the letter's questions imply does not exist.

The 2020 case. The leopard was captured by Andre Barnard on the farm Toorwater in the Uniondale district, in an unpermitted cage trap, and died of dehydration after being left in the trap for several days. Barnard was convicted on six charges: four of animal cruelty, two of conservation offences and is due for sentencing at Themba lethu Regional Magistrate's Court on 7 October. Our position is that the law protecting a threatened species should be applied when broken. That is separate from whether we do coexistence work in the district.

Uniondale specifically. We have engaged many landowners in this district, including 30 in detailed leopard conservation work over the past two years alone. But attitudes remain hardened among some landowners still committed to lethal predator control rather than the non-lethal methods now scientifically shown to protect livestock and biodiversity together. Five leopards, and one serval (a species otherwise considered locally extinct in the Western Cape) have died in conflict incidents in this district during our years of involvement there. The Barnard case was the first to reach prosecution. Over the same period, we have rescued four other leopards there. That tally shows how much work remains; not how little has been done.

We will not reduce a 25-year, landscape-scale programme to one district's ledger since one incident. Uniondale farmers wanting to engage through the compensation, monitoring programme, non-lethal support and advice, or our current assessments will find a willing partner in our efforts. The measure that matters is whether this landscape still holds viable, breeding leopard populations in 20 years, and what farmers, government, science and conservation NGOs are doing now, together, to make sure it does. Given our resources, we are proud of what we have achieved here and across the region.