



Nils Kure is one of the most experienced rangers at Mala Mala and has literally been living with leopards for the past 10 years. He has been able to take a long-term look at the leopard, the most beautiful member of the cat family, and, as a result of skill, patience, and sometimes just being in the right place at the right time, has taken the most intimate and stunning pictures of leopards throughout all stages of life.

The accompanying text is a fascinating mix of anecdotal experience and factual detail, which really brings this wonderful animal to life.

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### Ranger/writer charmingly unravels secret life of leopards

“Living With Leopards” by Nils Kure  
Review: Diane de Beer - Pretoria News

When your first book is launched in one of the most beautiful spots in one of South Africa's finest game lodges - a koppie with a spectacular view at sunrise - you have done something right. Author/photographer/game ranger/zoologist Nils Kure (now in charge of ranger training) has joined hands with publisher Dick Wilkins of Sunbird and together they have come up with something special.

It took the experienced publisher, for example, to persuade novice writer Kure that he should cut down on the technical detail and keep the text more informal so that both specialists and novices could

learn from the information. He was also persuaded to shorten the text which is already much weightier than these coffee table-type books usually are. But that's the thing; Living with Leopards hopes to do just that - inform both the novice and the scientist about these amazing animals.

Kure knew from his early days as game ranger at the luxurious Mala Mala that he would be gathering information on his daily drives with guests. This would be mainly for the logbooks, but perhaps also for something more detailed in the future, he thought.

It was when he started taking pictures that he developed quite an interest and started going in a particular direction. "Life throws opportunities at you and you must be ready to grab them," is his explanation. Just a few minutes in Kure's company shows that he is a methodical and innovative man. His eye is always on the bigger picture and the gains are not necessarily for himself. He is quick to point out, for example, that it would be a crime not to publish data on the leopards.

"It doesn't help if you're the local expert on something but it hasn't been recorded for others to use," he says. "We have an obligation," he stresses. How can others act on something that has been discovered about these secretive animals if it hasn't been put out there for public consumption?

Initially, Kure, who is also a trained zoologist, was a keen birdwatcher but even here, he started collecting parasites, putting them in jars to collect information. These were all passed on to the designated scientists. At Mala Mala, they keep notes on the different animals, where they were seen, what they were eating, when they were mating - and all the data will eventually be analysed.

In an attempt to expand and illuminate all this data, Nils takes the reader through the sequence of a leopard's life. He notes that leopards are shy, secretive animals. But because they have made Mala Mala their habitat, it is one of the best areas for leopard spotting. "We have about 27 leopards that we know of that are seen on regular basis," says Kure. This also has to do with the fact that the property is a large one - more so than the surrounding game farms. Naturally, it helps that they border the Kruger National Park which in a sense even expands their property further. Another advantage is the accessibility of the Mala Mala terrain to vehicles. "If we're not the best, we're close," says Kure.

And after witnessing a kill by a leopard mom and her cub, and the pulling of the carcass into a tree a day later, something I have never seen before, I have to agree.

Kure believes that the foresight of Mala Mala's owner, Michael Rattray, is why they have such a successful reserve. It was one of the first game farms - even before they became fashionable - and, while the accommodation is attractive, it's not one of those designer lodges. "Here it is all about watching game," says Kure. He thinks the fact that smaller farms need to offer customers more has fuelled the designer war.

But this is not Mala Mala's priority. If, however, you want to talk comfort, each cottage, sleeping two, has two bathrooms. Luxury and detail has not been spared. "The camps have to work, and that is the important thing," explains Kure.

But back to the book: it traces the course of a leopard's life from its mating habits to the way it stakes out its territory, its diet, spot patterns, which is how the rangers identify the individual leopard, leopard kills and the way its young are raised. The pictures are exquisite, which is probably what one would expect from someone who had the time to shoot the best. The surprise is the quality of the writing. Kure explains that he had the choice as a youngster of going either the writing or wild life route. One of his teachers had early on pointed out that he would probably use his language skills in some way in the future. He was right.

It is this ability, as well as Kure's insight, that adds to the charm of the book and distinguishes it from so many others on the market.

While many of those sell purely because of the pictures, Kure has tried to add value with his text - and for many South Africans this is what will make the book a welcome addition to their enjoyment of game viewing.