



One den is enough to spark excitement and foster a sense of awe. Six known sets of cubs are the most MalaMala Game Reserve has recorded in recent history. Here are the details of the mother leopards who have collectively transformed MalaMala into a wild creche:

The first of the den sites was that of the Kapen female. On the 8th of December, a ranger was led by the cries of young cubs. Lo and behold, the rocks on Baby Elephant Walk were home to the then-two-week-old cubs. Nowadays, both cubs can be seen within the Kapen female's territory, playing with one another or feeding from carcasses as their mother begins to wean them.

The next cubs to be found were the Piccadilly female's brood. In late February, this female introduced rangers to her bouncy offspring that she kept in the rocky outcrop south of Stwise. Unfortunately, one of the cubs has perished but the mother and her surviving cub can be seen in Marthly, most often on the boulders that litter the Manyeleti River.

In mid-March, rangers were thrilled to observe suckle marks on our most viewed female leopard, the Nkoveni female. Time passed and by the end of the month, we were convinced of where she was hiding her small cubs but they had not yet been seen. Then, on the 22nd of April, she flaunted her tiny offspring as she carried them, one by one, from Sand Pit Crossing to the rocky ridge east of the Airstrip.

The first week of May brought three consecutive days of den discovery. On the 3rd, the River Rocks female cubs were seen for the first time in the Rock Drift Donga. The next day, the den site of the Sibuye female was discovered at Tlebe Rocks. Then finally, on the 5th, the Three Rivers female strolled into Rattray's Camp, began to contact call and disappeared into the thicket between suites three and four. Her cubs have not been seen but shrill calls from the thicket confirm that she has given birth again.

In an unsubdued system, such as MalaMala Game Reserve, it is unlikely that all six of these females will raise this cohort of cubs to independence. In spite of this, we look to the winter of 2023 with great anticipation, knowing that nothing warms the nature lover's heart, quite like leopard cubs do.

