



GRANT ATKINSON (2)

# quality time

**WHILE DRIVING THROUGH THE WOODLAND THAT FRINGES** the Savute channel in northern Botswana – an area that is home to a healthy leopard population – a small group of photographers and I encountered a female on the move. Following her through some fairly dense vegetation, we realised that she was heading to a more open area and drove ahead to get into a good position for photography. As the cat came into view we heard her making contact calls, as female leopards do when trying to locate their cubs, and then she stopped at a log-covered opening at the base of an old termite mound.

A moment later, first one and then a second tiny cub wobbled out of the hole. After a couple of minutes they came right out into the open and one began to play with its mother. Then, as the light faded, the female became restless and moved back towards the den, ushering the cubs inside. Looking around as she left, she noticed that one of them was following her. She picked it up very gently and, walking right past us, carried it to a large stump. As it passed, the cub gazed curiously at us, its still-blue eyes wide open. *Grant Atkinson*

