

Lyon captures 'cats' on film

By Nancy Powell

Associate Editor

With a long mane and an apt surname, Sharon Van Sinderen Lyon seems a perfect fit to be a big cat photographer, but her attraction to lions and leopards and cheetahs and other animals of the Serengeti is difficult to put into words.

"I can't really explain what keeps driving me back," Lyon said. "I have this passion within me. Something just happens within me when I'm there with animals."

Lyon spent a month at Serena Properties in Tanzania's Serengeti this winter because "that's where the largest concentration of big cats is."

Each day at 6 a.m., she and a guide would go into the bush in search of those big cats, her favorite of which is the leopard.

"It's the most difficult to find, the most elusive."

They found, and she photographed, those elusive leopards as well as lions, cheetahs, wildebeests, hippopotamuses, hyenas, zebras, elephants, giraffes and other animals. During the evenings, she presented slide shows of previous trips to guests at the Serena Serengeti, a safari lodge.

Shooting 101 rolls of 36-picture film, she ended up with more than 3,000 slides and photographs. She ended her month-long stay in Africa on Feb. 8 and, as of last week, she was still sorting through the images, deciding which ones to enlarge for sale and which to include in slide shows.

She has presented slide shows in Seattle and Denver, as well as several in the Ocean City area, and she would like to do more, all over the country. She can do presentations of specific animals or on safaris in general. Her reason for staging slide shows and art exhibits is not just to sell her work, but to educate and now, to get donations of books, videos and other items for a library she is establishing in the Serengeti.

This is her Sue Alba/Serena Serengeti Employee Library Project, named after her sister who died last year of cancer. Because Alba taught reading for 25 years, and because she taught the homeless for the last 10



Wildlife photographer Sharon Lyon of Ocean City will go to Africa again in July.

years, Lyon is dedicating the library to her.

The books and videos will be used primarily by the workers in the Serengeti, who have little to do other than work. The donations will both entertain and educate them.

The Sue Alba/Serena Serengeti Library Project is part of Planting SEEDs of Opportunities. Lyon founded SEEDs, which stands for Services, Education, Employment and Economic Development, as an international exchange program to Tanzania and other third world countries.

As part of the exchange program, doctors, dentists, educators and others could provide their services to the people of the Serengeti in exchange for room and board and safari game drives.

The program would also allow people from Tanzania to work in Ocean City in the culinary and hospitality industry and Ocean City workers could travel to the Serengeti to work.

While working here, the Tanzanians could attend a college or university, Lyon said.

"I've gotten several letters from peo-

ple there who want to finish the education they started in Kenya or Tanzania," she said.

One man from Tanzania, who wanted to continue his accounting education, wrote, "I love knowledge. I feel very bad when I see our government or companies collapsing due to poor management of money allocated to them."

Lyon's program would enable him to work in Ocean City to earn money to pay for classes in Salisbury.

Dr. Leonard Berger, owner of the Sheraton Fontainebleau at 101st Street, has offered to foot the bill for airfare and provide jobs for some of the Serengeti workers.

The Sheraton, where Lyon is the director of advertising and promotion, remodeling and renovations when she's not off on a photo shoot in Africa, is the site of an exhibit of Lyon's photographs, which are for sale.

Lyon plans to return to the Serengeti in July for a three-month stay and again next January for another three-month visit.

Her future, she said, would be divided between Ocean City and the Serengeti.