



NEWSLETTER
May - August 2007



Dear Volunteers,

Once again, it seems that time has been flying and you are over due a newsletter but we are happy now to be able to update you on the latest news. It has been quite an eventful few months for the reserve, as you will read in the following updates.

Staff news is that Kirsty Bell departed LEO as she fulfilled her 6-month internship. Kirsty returned to England but will be back to South Africa in early 2008 to complete her masters degree in Zoology. We wish her lots of luck. Her replacement is Sally Gould, another English lady, who has just completed 6 months at Bushwise Field Guides School, gaining FGASA level 1, Advanced weapons handling, SASSETA and Trails Guide theory. She is here to improve her depth of knowledge on lions and their behaviour, also encompassing all aspects of the bush.

It has been a great time for volunteers; for the first time this year LEO ran at full capacity in July which is a busy time for recruitment overseas. This allowed us to have 2 vehicles out on the reserve which made a huge difference on our capacity and it was a lot of fun to have so many helping hands and enthusiastic bodies around camp.

AN UPDATE ON THE LIONS....

Mopani:

Mopani, even after intense efforts, was last seen at the end of April on a wildebeest kill. Since this time he was very elusive providing no signals until the latter part of June. We then discovered via some weak signals we managed to gain that he had escaped and was actually outside the reserve. We continued to monitor him by regularly receiving signals at the BVB fence line and knew that he was still in the area, occasionally venturing back to us quite closely. At the beginning of August we received the good news that Mopani had been captured on a neighbouring reserve and has since been kept in a holding facility there. As we write this newsletter we know that at some point in the next couple of days he will be brought back on to Selati and held in the Elephant Boma until his future is decided. We will update you in next month's newsletter.

Inkanya & Shaka:

Over the past few months Shaka and Inkanya have been alternating their dominance of the pride, both of them have been seen attempting to mate with Selati on various

occasions. Shaka has been dominating the kills as seen recently, with Inkanya eating the remains. They have spent about 90% of their time as a coalition patrolling their territory, we have had some wonderful visuals of them spraying, scraping and scent marking bushes. Nightly activity has found them mainly moving through the following areas: Paw Paw Clearing, Galon Dam, BVB ranches, Mahoed, Mabottle, Salajan and Lillie 1 and 2.



Shaka's freshly killed warthog



Inkanya tucking into the remains

Male sub-adult (suggested name Rooibos):

In light of our concerns, brought up in the annual general meeting, that the sub-adult males were being chased from the pride and monitoring their movement and behaviours would be impossible once independent, it was decided we should attempt to collar one when possible. In the beginning of August on the way to find the lions on our morning drive we bumped into the 3 sub-adults (2 males and 1 female), sitting on the road near Elephant Boma. We took this opportunity, with the help of Ian and Dr. Paul Meyer to collar one of the sub-adult males. They didn't make it easy for us however, and we had to do a call up and leave baits out but eventually we managed to entice them to a suitable position near Galon Dam. Early in the evening Paul darted Rooibos and set about vasectomising the lion and a collar was fitted. During the final stages of the operation 2 visitors, namely Shaka and Inkanya, decided to come for a drink and check up on the surgery! This served to put Paul under a small amount of pressure to say the least but this didn't stop him from successfully completing the operation.



Post operation, Rooibos was a little groggy for a while and unfortunately for him came around to the presence of Shaka and Inkanya hot on his heels. LEO attempted to keep the big males away from the patient and after some gripping night time off roading we managed to deter them, although not without Rooibos suffering a few small scratches and grazes. We are happy to say that we have had great signals from the new collar and some good visuals so we can confirm Rooibos is fit and healthy.

This had been a second attempt at darting Rooibos, the first time (in late June) he managed to successfully elude us. Interestingly later that same day he and the other 2 sub-adults, Mica and Selati came to visit the LEO camp! There were clear visuals of them sitting by our vehicles at about 11-12pm, and then by our water hole. They then disappeared but the evidence in the morning showed that they did in fact come back and chew on our diesel and water drums, again just next to where the vehicles are parked. They must not have liked the taste too much however as they have not returned since to see what other plastic delicacies are on offer!

Selati & female sub-adult (suggested name Amarula):

Selati and Amarula have forged a strong bond over the past few months and have been seen sharing numerous kills together. The only time they haven't been seen together is when Selati has been mating with the Shaka and Inkanya. These 2 females have been spending much of their time in the BVB ranches. Selati often likes to make us work for our sightings but despite this we have had some great visuals. One fantastic one of her and Amarula with an impala kill, Selati feeding first, then allowing Amarula to feed, and then Selati returning to finish off.



Shaka & Selati mating

Mica's group:

Mica has broken away from Selati and has formed a new group consisting of the 2 male sub-adults and interestingly a new female sub-adult (suggested name Tinga) that has broke into the reserve recently. We are not sure where Tinga has come from but we do

know that she is a similar age to Selati's sub-adults. Our first sighting of her was on the morning drive when we stumbled upon the sub-adults and then proceeded to dart Rooibos later in the day. She is absolutely beautiful and we have had a few good visuals of her now, she is seemingly fairly habituated to the vehicles already. This newly formed group appears to avoid Shaka and Inkanya at all costs. The sightings of the 2 sub-adult males have been very brief as they appear to be skittish, possibly a repercussion of the darting. Given time they will settle down and become more habituated to the vehicles. All the visuals of this group have been recorded on the Southern section of Selati.



Our newest member at Selati - Tinga

GENERAL NEWS:

Elephant collaring:

The first week of August was an exciting week on Selati. The very next day after collaring Rooibos the LEO team was kindly invited to watch and help with an elephant collaring. So after just a few hours sleep, the LEO team were back on the road and all tired eyes were instantly lost at the sight of the helicopter swooping around and up and down, with Dr. Paul Meyer hanging off precariously in preparation to dart. He successfully darted a female from a second herd and we all quickly set about helping him get the collar on her. Upon Paul administering the reversal drug our beautiful freshly-collared elephant was back on her feet in no time and racing off back into the bush to find her herd. Since the darting we

have had regular signals and visuals of both the collared herds. They are spending the majority of their time between Selati River, Mahoed and Salajan.



Collaring of the female elephant

Leopard collaring:

Also in August we heard the thrilling news that a leopard had been collared on Selati. The LEO team arrived at the release point just after the collaring. After a few hours wait while she came to the stunning young leopard walked out of the transport crate towards the koppie close to the Eco-training camp. The LEO team spent the night monitoring her initial movements. For the first couple of days she stayed in the vicinity of the release sight, after which she was located at Galon Dam, the Suspension Bridge and then Elephant Boma, where 2 visuals of her have since been recorded. On a daily basis the LEO team are monitoring her movements, and slowly habituating her to the vehicles which she is responding to well.



Newly collared leopard

FUTURE ACTIVITIES:

In the next couple of weeks we are working closely with Dr. Paul Meyer and Ian Bester to replace Inkanya's collar (the current collar's battery has died), collar Mica and the other sub-adult male. Selati's current collar is a regular telemetry collar and we will be replacing this with a combined GPS and telemetry collar.

LEO would like to finalise the naming of the 3 sub-adults, the new sub-adult female and the leopard. The current suggestions made by LEO are as follows, but we welcome your suggestions:

- Collared sub-adult male – **Rooibos**
- Un-collared sub-adult male –**No name as yet**
- Sub-adult female – **Amarula**
- New sub-adult female – **Tinga**
- Leopard - **Cleo**

If you have any suggestions for the naming of the above please let us know by the 17th September so we can finalise the names.

We would like to thank all the volunteers for their hard work and enthusiasm over the past few months, until next time...

The LEO Team – Steve, Sean & Sally

Contacting LEO and lines of communication

If you wish to contact us via email please use the following address infoleo@polka.co.za

Please note that our new telephone number is: +2779 877 2717.

