



NEWSLETTER
September 2007



Dear Volunteers,

It has been a very eventful month with some incredible sightings of the lions and some fortuitous visuals of the other animals on the reserve thrown in for good measure too! Camp has been rather quiet with a small dip in the number of volunteers as many countries overseas have seen the Summer holiday period come to an end and people have been heading back to university and work. Nevertheless, all the volunteers have got stuck in and have been working extra hard and pleasantly rewarded with the lions keeping us busy and on our toes!

We are happy to announce the launch of our new website, www.leoafrica.org Have a look, let us know what you think and tell your friends!!

AN UPDATE ON THE LIONS....

Mopani:

Mopani was brought back to Selati at the very end of August to be kept in Elephant Boma until further notice. We had our first visual after about 4 days and he is still as handsome as ever but a lot more skittish, no doubt a result of what he's been through in the past few weeks. We had a minor scare after a week when we could not locate him and his warthog feast had not been touched, our only conclusion that the master escape artist had done it again. Steve and Sean took a walk into the boma to have a closer inspection and were relieved to find him simply just hiding, lying flat in the grass. He obviously wants to keep a very low profile at the moment. We will let you know as soon as we find out Mopani's fate.

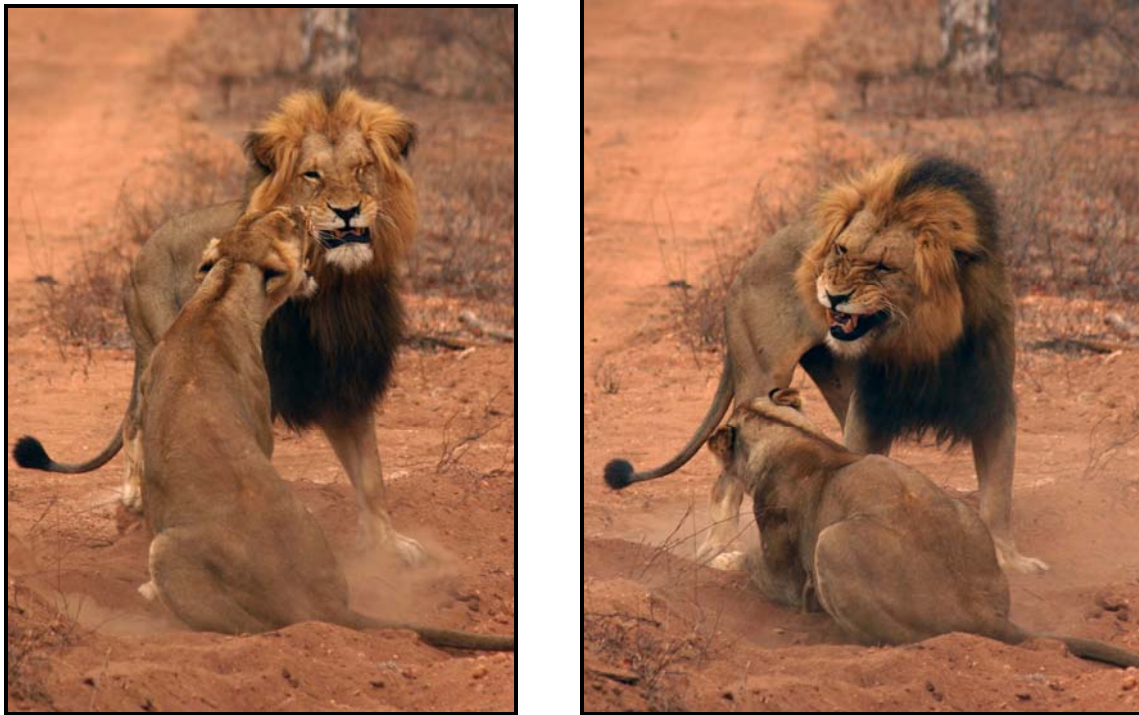


Mopani

Inkanya & Shaka:

The boys have been inseparable again this month apart from when they have been observed mating; Shaka with Mica, Inkanya with Selati. In the middle of September Shaka and Mica were found lying close to the road and as the vehicle drew up beside them Shaka mounted Mica and mated with her. They were interrupted by roaring from neighbouring lions and they both got up and walked away together.

The following day LEO caught up with them again mating, however, Shaka has been vasectomised so we are quite certain this will not result in the teeny tiny patter of paws! Towards the end of the month Shaka was again found mating with Mica on the fence line.



Shaka and Mica mating

A day after we first observed Shaka and Mica mating Inkanya was located attempting to mate with Selati but she probably wasn't in full oestrus as she was not particularly responsive to his advances.

After the 2 males had left their respective females they were seen back together, rubbing heads, scent marking and displaying typical hunting behaviour, one walking on the road and the other fanning out into the bush to one side, both rolling in rhino dung to disguise their own scents to potential prey. LEO found them later with a warthog,

Shaka with a full belly and blood on his mane, with Inkanya lying directly next to the carcass having already eaten too, most probably second, after Shaka.

A small time later Shaka was located with Selati and Mica and was a little grumpy with the ladies to say the least, he was quite aggressive and tried to attack Selati. She gave as good as she got however and survived Shaka's assaults unscathed.

Towards the end of the month we had the surprising news that one of our male collared lions had escaped onto a neighbouring farm. He turned out to be Shaka but in no time at all he was back on Selati, with a brand new collar (channel 90, fine tuning of plus 1).

Rooibos:

We had grave fears at the start of the month that Rooibos' collar wasn't working. We hadn't managed to gain any signal despite repeatedly covering the entire reserve, including all the high points, his usual spots and even all the nooks and crannies. It wasn't until we were nearing the middle of September when these suspicions were confirmed, at our first sighting of Rooibos in 3 weeks, on trying the telemetry there was no signal. This is a real shame as Rooibos certainly went through the mill having this collar put on him and it would be unfair to him, and we would never see him again, if we attempted to dart him again until at least 12 months have passed.



Rooibos

Selati:

For the start of September Selati preferred being on her own and quite out of character for her she provided us with some extremely relaxed visuals very close to the vehicle. One of which was at Mahoed Clearing where she came for a long drink at the concrete

dam and then walked around our vehicle to sit 15m away from us, snoozing with one eye open! Selati re-joined the group temporarily, then left to be with Inkanya for a brief period and then went her own way again as she was later located alone near Garden Road with a freshly killed juvenile giraffe carcass. She appears to be splitting her time equally on her own and with the rest of the pride.

Mica's group:

An incredible and long awaited group sighting occurred nearing the middle of the month. On a morning drive pursuing Selati's signal the LEO team came across Mica, Rooibos, Tambotie and Amarula along with Selati. This was very exciting and great to see them all together, looking a little hungry but nevertheless fit and healthy. They were observed for about 4 hours as the aim was to see if they would settle in an open area suitable for darting and collaring. As mentioned in the last newsletter, Selati's collar needs to be replaced with a GPS collar, Mica needs to be collared and Inkanya's collar needs to be replaced. Unfortunately the opportunity did not arise however; the group did display some fantastic social bonding activities, namely head rubbing and constant contact calling. All the lions were relaxed apart from Rooibos, who was very wary of the vehicle and kept a comfortable distance away. There was also some unusual behaviour as Amarula was seen to be mock mounting Mica, which can only be a sign of Amarula replicating behaviour she has previously seen and possibly just strengthening the bonds with her Aunt.



Amarula

On the same day LEO set out again in the afternoon, once more in the hope to find them on more darting friendly terrain. Unfortunately this wasn't the case but the drive did locate the 5 lions (Selati, Mica and 3 sub-adults) walking up the BVB fence line, very much looking and behaving like they were ready to hunt. LEO followed them stealthily for about an hour and to our disbelief and the lions shock and horror Inkanya and Shaka came bolting out of nowhere and we had a few moments of sheer panic and lions running in all directions into the bush. They all shot off and the next lion we saw was Amarula, wandering, visibly lost and upset, making contact calls to which Selati responded.

After a small time we noticed Inkanya trotting up the fence line behind us, stopping to check scents, displaying the Flehmen grimace (a facial expression usually performed by males in reaction to the urine of females. The head is tilted and held up as the neck is stretched forward. The top lip is pulled upwards and back exposing the top teeth and occasionally the upper gums. The mouth is also slightly open and the nostrils wrinkled) and then he began roaring. He was obviously a man on a mission as he barely noticed our vehicle parked in his path and he just detoured around us and then sat about 50m ahead of us. Shaka was not long behind him and almost identically repeated Inkanya's behaviour, checking scent, displaying Flehmen grimace and then roaring. The 2 big males were clearly annoyed at the intruders on their patch and wanted them gone. We heard a brief scarp between what we suppose to be Shaka and one of the females.

Later on we located the 3 females sat further up the fence line unscathed although a little jittery and visibly alert, especially to the roaring cacophony from the neighbouring farm. We followed Selati, Mica and Amarula along the fence line until they went into the bush; we imagine they were off to find Rooibos and Tambotie.

The following day Selati and Mica were located, so the pride was still disbanded. Tracks of 1 male sub-adult were found at Mahoed so the lions really had spread out after the previous night's events.

Later in the month a female kudu carcass was found hidden under a bush close to the Elephant Boma, 100% eaten, killed by the sub-adults. They were not seen consuming the kudu but it was definitely these lions as denoted by the tracks.

GENERAL NEWS:

Elephants:

We have had some lovely elephant sightings recently, along Thankerton, BVB, Mahoed Slood, Mahoed Clearing and Sunrise Boulevard. They appear to be very healthy and we have had visuals of some very young calves, which is nice to see.

Leopard:

We have had a nice visual of Cleo (our collared leopard) this month; she was at Burren Koppies and quite relaxed with the vehicle, we were able to sit and watch her on the very top of the Koppie for nearly 2 hours. We have also picked up signals for her at BVB, Galon Koppies, Galon Dam, below the Elephant Boma, by the Suspension bridge and also close to headquarters.

We have also been lucky to have a sighting of an un-collared female leopard at Salajan. There was also a fantastic sighting of a large male leopard at Galon Dam and interestingly the same evening we had a strong signal of Cleo in the vicinity.

Other:

Along with all the above sightings we have been luckily enough also to have some fabulous special sightings. The team spotted a caracal at Mahoed Clearing and also a cheetah was sighted on the BVB fence line. On afternoon drive towards the end of the month the LEO team came across a female giraffe about to give birth. We would have loved to have stayed and watched this beautiful event unfold but she was visibly stressed with the vehicles presence and we did not want to attract attention to the new born, so we left nature to take its course.

Whilst investigating the Shaka break-out the Leo team made a surprising discovery; there are a number of hippos living on the Boundary Weir of the Selati River. Whilst looking for lion tracks a strange object was seen on the surface of the water which quickly disappeared. Upon closer inspection this object appeared to be none other than a hippo's nose coming to the surface for air. This was a very exciting moment for those present because there are no hippos within the Selati boundaries.

Sable darting:

Dr. Paul Meyer kindly invited the LEO team to see some of the sables being captured for the auction in October. The volunteers took it in turns to sit in the front of the vehicle with Herman and drive around selecting, darting and transporting the sable to a boma for Paul to take blood samples etc for quarantine. The lucky volunteers found this all very exciting, interesting and informative.

Lion names:

In regards to the naming of the lions we have not had any responses and so we have settled on:

- Collared sub-adult male – **Rooibos**
- Un-collared sub-adult male – **Tambotie**
- Sub-adult female – **Amarula**
- New sub-adult female – **Tinga**
- Leopard - **Cleo**

Thanks to Andy Clarke, Kenny Nutting and Tom Smith for the photographs. Lots of thanks to all the volunteers for their hard graft and eagerness over the last month, until next time...

The LEO Team – Steve, Sean & Sally

Contacting LEO

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Selati Rhinos

