



NEWSLETTER

October 2007



Dear Volunteers,

Greetings from a much greener and verdant Selati! Thankfully the rains started at the end of September and continued into October for a good 4 days. At the LEO camp alone we notched up 64.5mm of rainfall. As a result the reserve has been transformed with trees such as Marulas bearing new green leaves, grasses turning a lush shade of green and the awakening of many bugs, frogs, lizards and snakes. Along with the rains we have had 1 or 2 very sticky days, followed by some great storms and also a few rather chilly days for the volunteers sat on the back of the vehicle! Thankfully only a handful of drives had to be shortened, abandoned or postponed due to the weather and we have had yet again another fabulous month...

AN UPDATE ON THE LIONS:

Inkanya:

Mid-October saw the boys as regular visitors at the Elephant Boma keeping a watchful eye on Mopani. After an exciting morning of rhino capture with the vet Dr. Paul Meyer, we took advantage of his presence and Inkanya's sleepy mood and proceeded to dart him and put a new collar on. The battery on his old collar had died and then mysteriously, he had managed to lose the entire collar somewhere! The first dart went astray but then rather helpfully Inkanya turned round and presented his rear end, a perfect darting target! Within minutes the drugs took effect and we were at the lion's side to put the new collar on (Channel 92, fine tuning of 0). During the collaring the Paul gave Inkanya the once over and almost immediately could tell something was not quite right. Inkanya was not only skinny but very dehydrated and suffering from diarrhea. Anti-biotics were injected into the ill lion and a total of 9 litres of fluid was administered via drips. Blood samples were also taken for tests to see what was wrong with our poor lion. It took a while for Inkanya to come round from the drugs due to his weakened state, but eventually he began to lift his head and move around, finally strolling off into the bush watched by a relieved LEO team and volunteers. Shaka was a continual presence in the background during the procedure and came and sat with Inkanya in the latter stages of his coming round. The following day LEO managed to get a good visual of

Inkanya but it had to be while on foot as he was understandably a little skittish with the vehicles.

The results confirmed that Inkanya had parvo, a form of cat flu, which can be serious but luckily we caught it in its early stages. As parvo is contagious it means all Selati's lions need to be darted with an antibiotic mix. As the month progressed so did Inkanya's health, he has since been spotted with a big belly and looking fit and well.



Inkanya receiving fluids



The poorly lion coming round



Inkanya back to fitness at Elephant Boma

Shaka:

Shaka and Inkanya have been inseparable this month spending all their time together. They have been around and about at the BVB fence line, Galon Dam, Mabottle, Mahoed, Lillie 1 and the Elephant Boma.

Shaka was successfully darted with the antibiotic mix later in the month by the LEO team and he appears to be in good health. On numerous occasions he has been seen with a fat belly so fingers crossed he is now parvo free as well.



Shaka at the Elephant Boma

Selati & Mica:

Selati has been seen together with Mica for a few days this month, in the Mahoed drainage line area. The rest of the time she has spent on her own at Mahoed koppies, Rooibos Road area and Mabottle.



Mica looking beautiful in the Mahoed drainage line

We are very excited because we're hoping Selati is pregnant. Nothing confirmed but it has been approximately 2 years since she had Amarula, Rooibos and Tambotie so the timing is right, we will keep you posted.

Selati managed to elude the vet's darting gun not once, not twice, but 3 times in an effort to place the new GPS collar on her. The first time she was found early in the morning on a kudu kill nearby the LEO Camp on Rooibos Road but unfortunately she became skittish on arrival of the vehicles and headed into bush too thick for accurate aiming. The second time at Mabottle Dam saw her turn from being a very calm, relaxed lion into a shy wily one again as the vehicle approached to dart. She headed into bushy terrain and try as we might we could not get Selati into an ideal darting situation; the net result was a shot deflected by a twig. The third time was back at the scene of the first attempt, near LEO base on Rooibos Road. She was on a warthog kill and was relaxed with a full belly, but unfortunately she outsmarted us yet again and moved into thicker bush. A couple of shots were had but she has grown too savvy and managed to dodge them like a pro. Selati will be left alone for a little while now otherwise we may adversely affect her behaviour and reaction to our vehicles.

The sub-adults aka Rooibos, Tambotie and Amarula:

Unfortunately we have not had any visuals of the 3 sub-adults over the last month. It has been a huge disappointment that Rooibos' new collar has malfunctioned. It is extremely difficult to find them without telemetry or a good dose of luck. Tracks were noted at Jan Fourie's farm and on Thankerton cutline but other than that we have had very little to go on. We are hoping for another incidental sighting or that Selati joins up with her offspring and leads us to them.

GENERAL NEWS:

Cleo (leopard):

We have struggled to get regular visuals of Cleo due to her shy nature and the fact the lions have kept us so busy. Good signals have been obtained at Paw Paw, HQ Road, Bull Koppie, Galon and also by the river. There was 1 fantastic sighting between Paw Paw clearing and HQ Road where she was found up a Marula tree in

very tight bush. After repeated signals from the area over the space of a week, we decided we must find out how she is doing. After an extensive search through extremely dense forest we were rewarded with a close up sighting of the Leopardess. She is in fine form and obviously doing well on the abundant impala in the area.

Elephants:

The elephants have been mostly in the vicinity of the cycad reserve in the far southern regions of the reserve. However they have also ventured up to Mahoed Clearing and we were lucky enough to observe 35 of them drink, including cavorting youngsters for half an hour right on dusk. They have also frequented Galon Dam and Thankerton cutline.

Rhino release:

After a morning drive in mid-October the LEO team received a call from Herman inviting us to watch a 4 year old male rhino get released on to the reserve. We sat with this beautiful animal until he had fully come round. He became very intrigued with our vehicle, getting quite close; he then snorted, shook his head, scraped the ground with his feet and trotted off into the bush.



Rhino release

Rhino capture:

The lucky October volunteers were invited to watch a rhino capture for the selling of 2 sub-adults rhinos: 1 female and 1 male, to a nearby reserve. The LEO team joined the downed animals after they were located and darted from helicopter. Dr Meyer checked the health and stress levels of the animals before we manhandled them onto a trailer for transport. It was a lovely opportunity for the volunteers to see these impressive animals so closely.



Game capture:

On a morning drive the LEO team stumbled across a game capture on the reserve at Sable Koppie and Herman kindly allowed us a closer look as 6 giraffes were captured. The volunteers found this very interesting as it provided a greater insight into what happens on the reserve.

LEO was also invited to assist in a giraffe darting on a neighbouring farm. A big male had an infected wound on his shoulder that required medical attention. As Dr Meyer flew in the helicopter to locate the giraffe we waited on the ground at the ready. The helicopter brought the animal into a great position and once the drugs took effect the giraffe toppled to the ground perfectly on the road. We all dashed in to place the towel over his eyes and secure him. His massive legs were roped steady and up to 7 people were needed to sit on his neck to keep him down. After some exciting moments the rather nasty wound was treated and in no time at all this very strong and healthy animal was back on his feet and heading into the bush.

With the excitement of this still in our heads we then proceeded to dart a very large, cranky bull buffalo to check its general condition and suspected skin irritation. The buffalo made it clear who was the bigger and stronger between our vehicle and himself, with prolonged urinating and head shaking and stamping but he eventually got into a prime position for darting. He didn't go down without a fight, he ran far and we had to chase him in the vehicle to keep up. Eventually the drugs overpowered the animal's adrenalin and he succumbed, falling to the ground. His faithful herd would not let us get in close to the bull to do the work so numerous men with banging shovels and pots were used deter these large beasts. The necessary injections were administered followed by a reversal drug, bringing him back to life very quickly. Members of his herd came immediately to lick and inspect him once the vehicle had backed off and it was very interesting to see their loyal behaviour.

Special sightings:

On a morning drive we were very lucky to come across a hyena on Thankerton cutline, believed to be a female. She approached the vehicle, sniffed curiously around and seemed reluctant to leave us. It was the perfect opportunity to photograph the most often nocturnal critter. One particular volunteer was particularly fortunate to have the rare sighting of two honey badgers while on West Galon. Unfortunately, they scurried away before the rest of us in the vehicle could catch a glimpse.



The friendly Thankerton cutline hyena.

Team news:

Sally has decided to take an exciting opportunity by the horns and will be leaving LEO at the start of November. She will be moving to Botswana to work for Cheetah Conservation Botswana living at a remote bush camp in Ghanzi. The conservation work will include spoor studies to establish the population in the area, helping and supporting local farmers and relocation of problem cheetahs. It has been a tremendous 4 months for her at LEO, a wonderful experience, both in terms of learning more about the bush and the wildlife residing within it as well as having a genuinely fun and enjoyable time with the volunteers that have passed through LEO's doors since July. I'm sure if any of you are in the Ghanzi area Sally would love to hear from you!!

A big thanks to Silje Harthoorn for the photographs and to the volunteers for their endless enthusiasm and hard work. Until next month,

Kind regards

The LEO Team – Steve, Sean & Sally

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Contacting LEO

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