



Newsletter
November/December 2007



Dear volunteers and friends

Greetings from Selati! Thankfully the rains continued into November and the transformation of Selati from a dry and thirsty place into a lush green one is complete. There were several days of good falls with two truly impressive overnight downpours of 45mm and 43mm. The latter was accompanied by a fantastic lightning and thunder show enjoyed by all at the LEO base. By mid November Selati was completely unrecognisable from just a matter of weeks before. Summer visitors have arrived; milvus kites and steppe buzzards, woodland kingfishers and Eurasian swallows to name just a few, as well as the emergence of bull frogs and the birth of this year's Impala young. Summer also means the welcome of a new batch of skinks, chameleons and geckos around the LEO house and boma. We have also had many other (perhaps not so welcomed) reptilian and arachnid visitors both inside and outside of the LEO house!



LEO Visitors; flap-neck chameleon, steppe buzzard



**African bullfrog and a thirsty rhombic
egg eater**

NOVEMBER

Parva Update:

The vaccine has been administered successfully to the majority of Selati's lions with no real drama. Some lions barely cared about the sting in the rump. Shaka, while doing what he does best- sleeping, jumped up and growled when darted, then looked at the LEO vehicle, huffed and slumped back down and casually chewed on the vaccination dart! Others like the wily Selati continue to dodge our efforts and we have decided to leave her alone due to her current condition (more on that later!). We are continuing to monitor all the lions closely for any visible signs of distress such as diarrhea and loss of condition especially Inkanya, but all seem healthy in all respects.

The Boys:

Inkanya and Shaka

Shaka and Inkanya have been inseparable during November spending all their time together. They have been around and about at the BVB fence line, Gallon Dam, Mabottle, Mahoed, Lillie 1 and the Elephant Boma. Only on one occasion did they spend time apart and that was when Selati seduced Inkanya away from his coalition partner later in the month. Shaka, clearly not impressed he was not invited sulked and called for two days until he consoled himself with an unfortunate warthog.



I'm lonely- don't mess with me

The Girls and the Sub-adults:

Selati

Once again Selati chose to spend a considerable amount of time on her own during November. However she also met up with and hunted successfully with her sister Mica. Interestingly, these females have twice (that we know of) this month preyed on waterbuck. There is an old belief that lions do not prey on waterbuck because the strong musky odour of the fat taints the meat. However, there is no reliable data to support this notion and certainly Selati lions appear not averse to preying on this species of antelope.



Selati and Mica's waterbuck kill eventually finished off by Shaka

There is now no doubt Selati and Mica are pregnant which is very exciting. However we are not overly confident Mica will be a successful mother given her track record. Conversely, Selati has previously raised three cubs successfully and we are optimistic she will do the same again. With a bit of good fortune perhaps she may set the example for Mica as to how it is done.

The Brat Pack Sub-adults

Last month I mentioned we would need some luck to find the Brat Pack aka Amarula, Tambotie and Rooibos as well as Mica their apparent ringleader. And that's exactly what we got! Fortune smiled on us when Ian phoned to tell us he was looking at four lions on an Eland kill in the southern section of the reserve on the BVB fence line. This is a favoured hunting area for Selati's lions as they use the fence to chase game into. And that is exactly what these lions had done; they had chased a large female eland into the fence. Much to Ian's disgust they had significantly damaged the fence in doing so! We did not waste the opportunity, we rallied the troops and within a few hours Mica was sporting a new GPS collar (channel 09, fine tuning of 2). She also received her anti-parva vaccination. Amarula also received a vaccination dart to her rump as she fed on the carcass. It was the first time the youngster had been darted and she was not quite sure she liked it! But she soon continued feeding on the eland.

So from early November we have had numerous sightings of the pack including more kills. On one particular rewarding day we were able to watch the ever playful, attention seeking Amarula stalk and then chase a sounder of warthogs. The brat pack was on the smaller of the two Burren Koppies, when Amarula decided the warthogs feeding not 40 metres away were just too tempting to leave alone. After a promising stalk she ducked round behind the warthogs and crouched down low. It was going well until an unseen Impala ram spotted her and sounded his alarm snort, at which time she immediately took off after the disappearing suckers. She was ultimately

unsuccessful but the spectacle was exciting to watch! Curse the ever watchful Impala!



Amarula at the start of her stalk

Mica

Mica initially did not take too kindly to her new collar, often scratching at it and rubbing it against trees. However it only took a few days and she is now resigned to the fact she cannot rid herself of it. The spatial data we are collecting on her via the satellite hookup is invaluable. We get numerous readings a day on her whereabouts. As long as she stays within mobile phone coverage (vodacom *!) we are in the know. The real beauty of this is that we can see where she frequents and the distances she covers in between our visuals of her.

GENERAL NEWS:

Cleo (leopard):

The approximate home range for Cleo seems to have emerged. After some initial wanderings no doubt to survey her new surroundings, she appears to have settled on a particular area. Her favourite haunts are south and east of Bull Koppie around Head Quarters road and Paw Paw clearing close to where she was released. One or two prominent trees have been identified that she seems to often be near, complete with warthog and impala bones nearby. Cleo is still relatively shy of the LEO vehicles, but with continued quiet and cautious approaches, which, admittedly is difficult in very tight bush, (and zippers on camera cases muffled!) she is slowly becoming less afraid of the strange smelling, noisy things that are the LEO bakkies.

Elephants:

After a quiet start to November for ele sightings things improved dramatically mid month when the elephants finally left the southern Lillie sections of Selati and visited Salajen and then headed North West. Fantastic sightings were had by LEO and landowners alike. LEO has now started elephant identification kits. This involves carefully documenting any identifying characteristics of individual elephants. Things such as tears and holes in the ears, shape and size of tusks etc are used for future identification. We also note any characteristic behaviour of individuals as well as herd structure. The characters of some ele's are starting to take shape already. The second collared elephant (surely it is time we name the collared elephants!) and most of her herd are completely at ease with our presence. Conversely, the first elephant we collared is not at all happy with our presence. Similarly, one pugnacious young male that accompanies her often decides to show the LEO team who is boss. However, other than these incidences and a musth bull charge or two, nowadays the elephants are much more relaxed with the LEO vehicles. There have been several occasions in the last few weeks when we

have been privileged enough to sit at length with these giant and watch their antics.



Hey, I may only be small- but I'm still bigger than you!

Rhino

There have been numerous sightings of Selati rhino this month including the young male we released in October. He has made friends with a female and her young and has managed to dodge the attention of the dominate male in the Gallon region. The condition of Selati's rhino averaged 3 to 3.5 on the conditioning scale by the end of November. No doubt this will increase shortly with the rains improving the state of the veldt. It was amusing to watch one particular healthy male decide to join the brat pack! We were sitting on top of Burren koppie when we watched the male rhino decide to closely follow Tambotie as he wondered through the bush with Mica and co. No threat displays or signs of anxiety; the rhino was apparently only interested in what the lion was up to! Tambotie, after looking over his

shoulder several times decided the rhino was cramping his style and finally trotted off. It's hard to hunt with a two ton rhino following behind you.

DECEMBER

New staff Member!

Early December saw the arrival of a new staff member. We welcome Nick to the LEO team. Nick has just completed his 6 months training at bushwise as a game ranger and is now settling in nicely at LEO.



Welcome Nick!

Pregnancy update (no not Nick!)

As of the 14th of December Selati the lioness may well have had cubs. She is frequenting the same particular koppie on a regular basis. We have left the pending mother alone for more than a week now so as to not stress her in her condition. Fingers crossed a month into 2008 and we may have some furry little surprises!

Sadly, on the other hand, our fears seem justified regarding Mica and motherhood. It was obvious by the start of December she had had cubs. But she has not been stationary in one region at all. In fact she went walkabout immediately, came into estrous and chased down the males and demanded their attention.

Boys will be boys...

Mica had found the dominant males Shaka and Inkanya by the time the Leo team had located the restless female. They were all in the river bed of the far north BVB region. We watched as Mica turned suddenly and ran; the two big males immediately took off after her. We lost visual contact but in a matter of seconds we could clearly hear that the males had decided to stop and contest who would get the right to consort with the female. After a short search we found the two males, neither of them was in good shape. Shaka appeared to have come off second best, a badly swollen and bloody eye on one side and a long scratch down the length of the other. Inkanya was bloodied as well and both were limping slightly. They had ceased hostilities by now and were again rebuilding the bond between them by head rubbing and softly calling to each other. Mica had completely disappeared and we could not raise a beep for her. We left the wounded warriors to lick their wounds.

Lost the fight, but got the girl?

A day later we were interested to find Mica with Shaka in tow! Inkanya could be heard calling in the distance but clearly, it was his turn not to be invited to the party. Shaka and Mica were together for three days, Mica in obvious estrous and the pair mated on average of four times an hour. It seems apparent that regardless of how it appeared, Shaka perhaps did not lose the fight? Has the slightly smaller male won dominancy? Stay tuned for 2008.....

Auld Lang Syne

LEO has a break from mid December through until the New Year; so this is the last newsletter for 2007! On that note, as the sun goes down on 2007 the staff here at LEO wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a happy and prosperous New Year. Be safe and have fun!!! Cheers and you'll hear from us in 2008!!!

Thanks to Julius Aas for the photos.

Kind Regards

The LEO team

Steve, Sean and Nick.

