



Newsletter

May 2008



Dear Volunteers and Friends,

Winter is upon us, bringing chillier nights to Selati. As we grab for another blanket, we hear the ferocious grunts of rutting impala filling the air as males battle one another to control territories for potential mates. While the impala and other antelope are busy finding mates, our local reptiles are responding to the cooler temperatures by becoming less active. However, we have still managed to see striped skinks, plated lizards and a single black mamba taking advantage of the remaining midday warmth. And because cooler mornings mean the lions remain active later into the day, our volunteers have been thankful for the chill as they collect data from the back of the vehicle while enjoying the sightings.

May has been a great month with some fantastic sightings of our lions and most exciting of all, is that we have seen Selati's three cubs again!

LION NEWS

Kudu Kill in Mahoed Clearing

On the afternoon of May 4th Mica, our beta lioness, brought down a large male kudu in Mahoed Clearing with Amarula, the female sub adult. Shaka and Mopani had joined them for the feast by the time we arrived the next morning, finishing over 80% of the kill in just one day's time. We spent nearly four hours observing four very full lions as they drank water, teased and played with each other near the giant Nyala Berry tree in the heart of Mahoed. That evening all four of them slept very contently right by the kill.

On the morning of May 6th, scavengers eagerly gathered to finish off the remains of what was left of the carcass. As we pulled up, we were greeted with the spectacular site of over a hundred vultures lining the trees of the clearing, waiting for the chance to swoop in. The boldest birds approached while the lions still guarded the kill, only to be scattered by Mopani and Amarula. When the lions finally decided they had finished, a feeding frenzy ensued as five different species of vultures battled for their share.



Vultures homing in on the remains of the kudu kill

Since then, those four lions have been spending time together, both in pairs and as a group of four. Later in the month, Mica and Amarula made another kudu kill without Shaka and Mopani. A few days after that, we came upon Mopani and Amarula on their way to Mahoed Clearing, roaring in the early morning mist. Their roars were answered by Shaka and Mica, and the four were again reunited for a short time at Mahoed Clearing on May 16th.

On the morning of May 28th, we found Mica and Amarula hunting on the Thankerton cutline. They disappeared off into the bush and we sat and waited. Our patience paid off and we were rewarded with the sounds of a chase and then squeals of a warthog being caught: Mica had made the catch and we watched as she carried the warthog off still alive and grunting. She took her kill into the bushes to feed first, making Amarula wait her turn!



Chilling out!



Mica carrying her freshly caught warthog, still kicking, while Amarula stands watching us

Stealthy Selati

Selati continued to avoid being glimpsed as she cared for her cubs atop of Golan Koppie for most of the month. We had been within meters of her on more than one occasion, only to find that she had made a break for it at the perfect time to avoid a visual. Twice we'd seen her tracks crossing our own just around a corner from where we passed moments earlier. We had also sat at one side of a rocky outcrop while she played waiting games on the other, slinking away along the one path that was invisible to us. However, this behaviour bodes well for the health of her cubs; she

would not be so cautious or spend so long away from the rest of the pride unless she was caring well for them.

The month of May ended on a real high with a fantastic sighting of Selati's three cubs, although Selati remained her usual elusive self. Very happy and extremely lucky volunteers saw all three cubs chilling on a rocky ledge near the top of Sunrise Viewpoint looking extremely cute and cuddly, and most important of all - healthy. Unfortunately there are no photos as it was right on dark and no-one had a decent enough camera or lens and. It now remains to be seen if Selati will move the cubs again now that we were so close. Hopefully we'll have more sightings again soon.....

OTHER NEWS

Leopard Update

Selati is not the only cat on the reserve who is a master of concealment. Cleo the leopard also expertly avoids being seen. However, we have successfully come very close to her on the west side of the river twice this month. On May 10th, we had her on a telemetry signal of over a five twice, on either side of Telegraph Road. Since then, she has moved a little northeast to just northwest of River Road, where we had her on a 5.5 on the 17th. This behavior is not surprising considering she likes to spend her time near the riverbed.

Elephants

The time has finally come for the collared elephants to be named. We had actually picked two names already, however! These names have since been controversially disputed! So, in order to appease all, we're giving the chance for everyone to have their say. We'd like the names to reflect the personalities of these two old girls. The first elephant that was collared (collar number 25), is a confident, slightly aggressive individual who is not afraid to let her presence be known. She even tried to swat the helicopter out the sky when we last replaced her collar! Conversely, elephant number two (whose collar is confusingly numbered 01!) has a very pleasant demeanor and often gives us great sightings of herself and her clan. So, for those who are keen, email us (infoleo@polka.co.za) your suggested names for these matriarchs. We will pick 3 names for each elephant from the offerings and then put them in the next newsletter and let everyone vote! We can't be fairer than that!

In this last month we've also seen two more separate breeding herds that did not include either of the two collared matriarchs. They were seen from the top of Mahoed Koppie, with herd sizes of 18 and 11. We watched them from above as they walked towards Mahoed clearing where they hammered some trees and drank most of the water, as is their want! We also observed another breeding herd crossing the road on a morning drive at the end of the month. We sat and watched as they filtered across the road directly in front of us, which was great, although one or two of the girls took a little too much interest in us for our liking!



An elephant chomping down on some vegetation

Rhinos in Mahoed

This has been a very successful month for rhino sightings with numerous animals sighted and scored as to their condition, especially on Rhino Ridge Road near Mahoed Clearing. The rhinos have generally been in good condition, with one notable exception. An adult female had obviously been injured; she had cuts between her front legs and around her teats. She also suffered flank injuries on both sides as well as on her hind legs. She may have been injured while defending her youngster from the attention of the resident dominant male. Although one of the cuts showed signs of bleeding and may have been infected, happily she was seen a week later and didn't appear to be suffering too badly. We haven't seen her since that sighting so we can only hope the remaining wounds continued to heal well.

Dying vulture on Lesser Burren Koppie

This month we were surprised to find a dying white-backed vulture on a rock on the top of Lesser Burren Koppie. Clearly it had been there for a quite a while but didn't appear to be injured in any obvious way. It is rare to be able to get this close to a vulture and be able to appreciate the sheer size of them, as can be seen in the photo where Steve was examining it. We left the vulture to die in peace after this.



Steve checking out the dying vulture

And that's it for another great and interesting month at LEO, made extra special with another sighting of Selati's cubs which we have waited so long for.

Until next month.....

Kind regards

The LEO team

Steve, Gay and Nick

(with special thanks to Heather and Vicky)

LIMPOPO ECO OPERATIONS (LEO)

P.O. Box 41, Gravelotte, 0895, Limpopo Province, RSA

Contact No: +277 79 877 2717

Email: infoleo@polka.co.za

Website: www.leoafrika.org

