



**NEWSLETTER**  
**March and April 2007**



**THE CUBS – BEFORE THE PLAYFUL MOOD SEIZED THEM**

Dear Volunteers

LEO has had another great few months, as you will see from the update that follows. Despite a lull in volunteers numbers we have achieved a lot of work and got some great results, sightings and have started a few pilot studies. Also, thank you very much for your thoughts we finally received that much needed downpour about 3 weeks ago at the end of March. Game are slightly harder to find, but now water holes have filled up and our world is much greener.

All is going well from LEO's side although I'm afraid to say we have some very sad news regarding staff. Laurence has decided to spread his wings and head south. He is due to leave this beautiful land in a couple of days time to study his Masters in Forest Ecology. We are all going to miss him. But on a happier note we get to welcome the new project manager Steve Ryan, he has been left with a large space to fill, but I have faith in him.

Steve brings a wealth of varied experience in regards to working with people and wildlife. As a young man Steve spent three years in the Army Reserve as an infantryman, and a



couple of years as a stockman and feral animal controller in outback Australia. His attention shifted to dealing with tourists as a tour guide and safari guide. Several years of guiding clients were spent abroad working in numerous countries including several African ones. After a year as the manager of a small safari company in Northern Botswana, Steve returned to Australia to

complete an Honours degree in Zoology. After a short stint working as a field officer for the Commonwealth Scientific Industrial Research Organization of Australia, the call of Africa was just too strong and he returned to Southern Africa once again. After completing a 6 month research stint for the University of KwaZulu Natal, Steve now finds himself settling in with the LEO team on Selati. We wish him well.

## **The Main Events on the reserve....**

### **Mopani:**

This artful dodger was last seen yesterday up on the 18<sup>th</sup> April in Lillie feeding on a male impala, a fantastic sighting which we could have missed from the stench of the carcass just 5m off the road. Prior to this he was seen looking quite fat on a belly score of 4 on the 6<sup>th</sup> April whilst heading south along the BVB Cutline close to the log cabin. Although he was not seen as regularly as the rest of the pride because he manages to position himself in various locations inaccessible to our wandering eyes, we did receive a signal for him on many occasions in his many haunts from up north of the Selati river to right down in Lillie. At the end of March we did pick him up with the pride (minus Inkanya) close to Galon in the company of Shaka, who was otherwise occupied with Mica's pheromones. Due to our tracking perseverance and determination, for the rest of March he was seen fairly regularly about once or twice a week looking healthy both in the company of Shaka or on his own, again between Lillie and north of the river.

### **Inkanya & Shaka:**

The coalition males have been spending a lot more time together, walking the roads together since the 6<sup>th</sup> April, with Shaka and Mopani last being seen together on the 29<sup>th</sup> March but only for a couple of days. This has been the trend over the last month since the females ended oestrous (period in which they are ready to mate). On the 5<sup>th</sup> April the 2 were seen at a subadult warthog kill which Shaka brought down just 200m from the base just off William and Maria's road. It was interesting to note that Inkanya did not try to steal it from Shaka, but stayed in the bush watching him eat and finish the kill.



**Shaka**



**Inkanya**

The Cubs:



These crazy menaces have recently been showing their more playful sides again. They have been rolling and tumbling, boxing and chasing each other in the water, out of the water and up trees, some mind-blowing sightings. The two males have started growing manes, and they've over-taken their sister in size, as you can see on the front photo (with the female showing her belly to the front, a male behind her and the other sitting up). But this hasn't stopped her fighting back or throwing the first initial punch on many occasions. As well as spending many hours of the day relaxing and sleeping, the cubs have also been displaying more adult behaviours such as flehmen. This is a grimace pulled in which the lips are pulled back and the teeth and gums exposed. Males perform it when tasting female urine for the hormones produced during oestrous. Previous studies have not shown whether this behaviour is 'copying' adult behaviour, much like they do with hunting, or whether they too can pick up specific hormones stimulating the Flehem grimace.

Selati & Mica:



Selati has been seen often, and always with the cubs around. Since ending oestrous most of the time she has spent alone with the cubs.

Mica however, is an entirely different story. She hasn't been seen since the 30<sup>th</sup> March



when she was in the company of Mopani and Shaka, during which time Shaka attempted to mount her, but with little success. That's now 3 weeks since our last visual of her; the chances are looking good and we suspect that we'll have some more tiny cubs on site within the next month or so.

### **GENERAL NEWS:**

In the previous newsletter, I mentioned our wee critter, Pungsi the Duiker. She lived relatively happily under our roof, becoming rather fat over the few weeks we sheltered her, but it became obvious that she needed more support. She departed for a new rehabilitation home where she has become friends with another wee duiker, the proud owner of sadly only 3 functional legs, its going to be a match made in heaven.

There has been about 80ml of rain since the beginning of March, most of which fell over a period of 2 days. Temperature has mostly varied between 17°C and 35°C, with one anomaly last week with a low of 14°C and a high of 41°C. Winter is now approaching, with early mornings and evenings on the back of the bakkie are spent wrapped in a jumper or jacket.

Times are very exciting at the moment, with a total of 4 projects keeping us busy and on our toes. They include the continued lion project, and we are in the process of adding an elephant project, and rhino project and a leopard project, keep reading for more details.

Within the last 2 weeks we have also been incredibly lucky to join in both an elephant darting, for re-collaring, and a number of rhino dartings.



With the buzz of the helicopter overhead we took precautionary shelter behind a dam whilst the elephant darting occurred and 35 elephants milled around looking for their fallen dame. But it wasn't long before she was back up and on her feet, albeit slightly groggy with a new telemetry collar round her neck. So now we'll be able to monitor the movements of a herd of ellies within the reserve. Other than the darting we've had 5 elephant sightings since the beginning of march, all in different locations from Lillie up to north of Paw Paw. Herd sizes have been small, again other than at the darting in which the herd size was 35 individuals, these other sightings have been no more than 4 animals.



The rhino dartings involved 4 individuals and about 6 hours on a neighbouring property. The first one was caught, and due to be sold, but it's horn was not long enough so it was ear tagged, as were the other three, and released. Two very cool and exciting days everyone enjoyed. On Selati there have been 17 sightings of rhino since the beginning of March, many of which have included 2 individual males (tagged 53 and 80) in a number of locations between Sable/Fig Kopjes and Galon. With this information hopefully we'll be able to assess individuals' home ranges, territories and their associations with others.

Furthermore, we are incorporating this general information into a new pilot study. The new investigation will evaluate the body condition of individual rhinos and how or if it varies throughout the year. This will no doubt be correlated to rainfall and hopefully will provide a long term reliable estimate of the general nutritional status of white rhino on Selati.

There has been quite a lot of leopard witnessed over the last month. A number of leopard tracks have been recorded on average about once a week over these last 6 weeks. We've had 2 leopard sightings, one females hunting and a young male in a tree on 23<sup>rd</sup> March by Middle Dip off Headquarters Road. There was also a cheetah drinking at the dam at the same time. The other sighting was a young male at the dam 100m in front of the base. It was a great shame that the situation was unfit for darting and collaring at the time. So we set a bait for him, and had an awesome sighting of a spotted hyena, but no sign of the



leopard. Towards the beginning of march, traveling south down Leopard Trap Road, at the junction of Paw Paw the smell of death was in the air and it took us several minutes to locate the object offending our nasal passages. As you can see by the photo we had an awesome sighting of a young zebra 10m up a tree, a definite leopard kill. The individual responsible for this spectacle we

believe was soon spotted by a different vehicle. A large, quite relaxed male enjoying a drink at Galon Dam after his large feast. We are also working towards a fourth project (on top of the lion, elephant and rhino projects). Within the next week or so we are also hoping to collar a leopard, the ball is rolling, but we know this is not an easy task, so wish us luck! To speed up this process we have been putting a bait (either warthog or impala) in a tree by the dam in front of the base. As yet we haven't had leopard sightings at the bait, but again we have had some more brilliant hyena sightings. More positively, 2 individual leopards have been identified by their tracks, a female close to the base and a male close to the Sable Camp. Hopefully by the end of next week we will also be following leopard activity in an area around the base. There are several theories on the number of leopards on the reserve many of which depend on the size of their territories; hopefully this forth project will make things clearer to us but our first priority is collaring and habitation of a resident leopard.

Cheetah activities have been few and far between. A few tracks have been seen, and there was one memorable sighting of a young male running parallel to the BVB Cutline on the day of the elephant darting.

We'd like to thank all the landowners for their support and volunteers for all their hard work.

I think that's it for now folks. So till next time,

**The LEO Team – Laurence, Steve, Sean & Kirsty**

Contacting LEO and lines of communication

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