



NEWSLETTER FOR April 2011



Despite the continued mild rainfall, winter is most definitely back. The mornings see us freezing both in and out of the cab of the game viewer. Fairly certain the volunteers will bring out the sleeping bags for drive soon. The plants are a bit confused, sending out new growth and flowering, but they will soon get the message, hopefully before they waste too much energy. The nights as well are quieting down as the summer creatures of the night burrow themselves away until next year. Thankfully the francolins are still there to make sure we're up in the morning!

LION NEWS

The gang has been together for most of this month, mainly hanging around north of the river in Farrell. This seems to be a definite favorite of the girls and where the girls go, the boys are sure to follow. Jane has had her hands full as it seems she is the flavor of the month. All the boys have been mating with her at different points, but especially Skinny. Not that anything will come of it, but Mbhurri has been mating with Mica as well. When the pride has wandered about, they seem to go from camp to camp. Easter weekend coupled with some national holidays has provided ample braai smells from all the different landowners and their respective camps. Luckily the lions are more interested in the boerewors than the people cooking them!

The pride visited the quarry by the Sable Auction house again which always provides an excellent backdrop for photos.



The Pride lying in the quarry

One day we were following the pride around the Farrell area when they sneaked off into the bush. Moments later we heard wildebeest alarm calls and then the unmistakable sound of a kill. We were able to find a way into the bush and got to the kill in time to see entrails being pulled from the abdominal cavity and the pride fighting for first rights. Very cool to be so close to the circle of life.

ELEPHANT NEWS

We have had several good elephant sightings this month, but the real excitement came at the end of the month. This was the month where some folks from Disney came and sponsored an elephant vasectomy program for our bulls.

Veterinarians from South Africa and the United States came to perform the operations. Among them was the head veterinarian of Disney's Animal Kingdom; also the creator of the quite successful technique of elephant vasectomy. The vet performing the majority of the procedures was a whale veterinarian from the aquarium in Durban.



Sedated bull about to lose his manhood

The basic process is as follows: the bull is found and singled out through the use of a helicopter. The bull is then darted from the chopper and the ground crew moves in. The tranquilized bull is hoisted onto the flatbed of a truck (aka the operating table). Then veterinary assistants scrub the incision location much like a nurse would do to prepare a human patient for surgery. After the vets have scrubbed themselves down and donned surgical gowns, the process begins. They make an incision just by the bulls pelvis. Using rib breakers designed to open a human chest cavity during open heart surgery, they brace open the incision. They then use an elephant sized endoscopy device, essentially a long stick with a camera and cutting tool mounted on the end, to explore inside the elephants abdominal cavity. Once they find the testes, they must isolate the elephant equivalent to the vas deferens, the tube that delivers sperm from the testes to the penis. Once isolated, they remove about a three inch section, effectively disabling the sperm transfer process. It is only the vas deferens that is severed, however, enabling testosterone to still be delivered throughout the body. This means the bull will continue acting as he normally would, going into musth, pushing over trees, fighting for hierarchy, and mating, just not producing calves. After sewing up the incision, the bull is injected with an antidote to the tranquilizer and is up on his feet in less than five minutes and ambling off into the bush to resume his life. The entire process takes no more than two hours. This process will enable reserves to limit the number of elephants to a manageable carrying capacity without the need for culling. Here on Selati, they performed the procedure on 15 bulls in total in less than a week. Quite impressive and efficient work.

RHINO/LEOPARD NEWS

We've been rather unlucky this month with rhino sightings. They seem to be as elusive to us as leopard which we as well have not seen.

OTHER NEWS

We have been lucky, however, with some other very exciting sightings. We have seen several honey badgers and porcupines. Also, we have had two sightings of caracal and one sighting of a serval. Along with those, which are absolutely incredible, we saw an African wild cat during wood collection in the Sable Paddock.

Until next time, best regards

The LEO team



LIMPOPO ECO OPERATIONS (LEO)

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

Contact No: +277 79 877 2717

Email: infoleo@polka.co.za