



Newsletter for August 2009

Dear Volunteers and Friends

Welcome back to another eventful month here at Leo, once again our pride has kept us very busy and entertained we hope you enjoy hearing from us this month. Leo took a great turn this month with the extra help of Donnie and Koos, both highly experienced guides who joined our Leo team for a few weeks giving the volunteers some great opportunities on foot, their enthusiasm and expertise was a great bonus to Leo so a big thanks you!! Hope you enjoy our latest adventures.

Lion news

After such an eventful month in July, August started off very quietly. The pride continued as normal with no signs of all the drama the previous month (sub- boys Mburri, Stitches, Skinny being "kicked out"). The beginning of the month was a very lazy one with our entire pride resting in the Mahoed area then moving up to the Paw Paw area. Our Nyala berry tree is officially a play thing for our ever playful cubs who reach newer, and more precarious heights every time we see them, their play toys also extended to our data sheets when a clumsy

volunteer (you know who you are!!) dropped it off the vehicle and watched horrified as it was quickly picked up by one of our cubs and hastily ripped it into tiny peaces! Volunteer (and us) was extremely thankful we back up all data the night before.

Shaka was a bit restless at the beginning of the month and we often found him a little way away from the pride pacing or sitting up high.

All about the boys (2)

We had expected, after the boys' ordeal the previous month to have noted some change in social dynamics of the pride or at the very least some change in their relationship to each other/ pride but they seemed to have slotted in as if nothing had occurred. Stitches is once again very much a "mommies boy" spending a lot of time in Selati's company he is also the most playful of the boys and is often rough and tumbling with the cubs, he also seems to like to pounce playfully on Mhburri who is the more calmer of the 3 and the least likely to play, he is usually on the outskirts of the pride observing rather than taking part. When the boys left the pride for a short time last month we

noted a huge difference in Skinny's behaviour he was he was less inquisitive and would not even take notice of the vehicle when he walked past. On the 11th of August we found Mica, Selati and cubs and boys all in a drainage line between Middle and West Galon, as we all sat appreciating watching Mica groom her cubs while Mhburri and Stitches slept so heavily we could even here them snore, no one spotted Skinny sneaking up behind us until a volunteers yelped. He had snuck round the shrubs up the bank, snuck sneakily passed us just to come up from the rear to sniff our tail gate. He really is a naughty one but it was nice to see a bit of the old Skinny in him nevertheless.

Though the boys now seem very much part of the pride, although we did witness on several occasions them moving of on their own.

The morning of the 28th was proving to be a difficult one with only a few scattering beeps of our pride, when we passed an old road that needed to be blocked off we thought we would take the slow morning as an opportunity to get our hands dirty, we jumped off and set to work dragging branches and logs caring stones anything to make this road inaccessible, once we had finished we looked at each other with a sense of satisfaction "no one will get through that". And so we continued our search, 3 minutes down the road we stop dead in our tracks the boys are their!! Oops! All very relived we'd finished before they had got closer! And then to our amazement the boys walked up to the barricade we had just put so much effort in and side stepped it and proceeded to walk parallel to the now non usable rd, Murphy's Law!!! all we could do was watch with amazement as the lions walked further away from us.

Walking with Shaka

As mentioned previously, Shaka has spent increasingly amount of time alone this month, if not in gullies or on top of koppies he was in some dense shrub somewhere, though we did not

get as much visual of him as we would like he has provided us and the volunteers with some fantastic memories this month. On the 9th of August while picking up signal of Shaka once again in a dense block we all decided to head off to Mahoed and have a coffee break, after about 10 minutes all of us sipping hot chocolate and enjoying the sun set we hear a tremendous roar close by, we all looks and their in all his glory is Shaka! He gives us another heart trembling roar and struts towards the water hole and proceeds to drink, what a coffee break!

The 12th of August proved to be another memorable day when Donnie and Koos decided to take us into the lions.....we were only a short way in when Shaka jumped up unexpectedly from dense grass on our left, we held our breath... he gave us a quick look over, gave a small mock charge and then retreated further in - wow!! We later found a koppie to watch without disturbing our pride, a memory that will never be forgotten.

Mica outside the reserve!!

After an uneventful morning drive, volunteers and Leo staff returned to base where there was news that signal for Mica was outside the fence, what the??? We had not picked up signal for either Mica or Selati all morning, but surely they have not left the reserve!! A quick scout down south reveals a signal over our fence line, panic follows with a billion questions as to what to do if they have actual have left, but first thing first we needed to locate them. A very humorous drive follows as our Leo vehicle, plus all volunteers are driving up and down one of the main highways out side the reserve, on several occasions we would have to pull over for a volunteer to stand and use the telemetry as several cars passed with a look of confusion as to what we were up to. Finally we figured it out they were in fact in the reserve but so close to a neighboring fence line they were practically on it, when we arrived Stitches was dominating a warthog kill, seems like this was his kill and not prepared to share, the cubs kept approaching slowly but they backed off when they realized Stitches was not in one of his playful moods. This was the first time we got to witness Stitches so dominating and it was nice to start to see some dynamics amongst the 3 brothers, Skinny and Mburri watched on and when Stitches had enough food the two boys attacked the warthog, a small squabble proceeded and the warthog was ripped into two halves, Skinny instantly devouring his bum end while Mburri just seemed content with ownership and cradled the head under his paw.

Who are you?

For a while now Leo and Selati reserve managers have been discussing what to do about our 2 adult males that reside up north (Amarula's brothers), since their departure from the pride in November 2007. The last confirmed contact they had with the pride was in August 2008. No sighting has been witnessed since by LEO though tracks have been found and a few stories of possible sightings by visitors or landowners. As more and more reported sightings started

to materialise we quickly realized there maybe more going on up northern part of the reserve than we realised, a meeting was held and the permission for us to conduct a call up was granted.

On the 17th of October an impala was donated by the reserve, once the impala had been halved and its inner organs and entrails removed and placed in a bag we were off. Now as the word call up suggests we were basically going to “call” the lions to us, this would work by baiting the lions (attaching fresh meat to a log/tree etc) and playing either a distress noise such as an impala dying or another antelope in some distress or playing hyena food calls, basically any noise that the lions would relate to a free meal. Now this sounded really exciting to begin with but as our volunteers soon found out it was dirty work. When we had chosen a suitable place, which we had noted had fairly recent tracks in the area, we set to work. As well as baiting we would make a sent trail this would ensure even without the audio the lions could still find our bait. The inner organs was tied securely to an end of a peace or rope and would be dragged behind the vehicle in a large circle around the bait, bit smelly, then to the unsuspecting volunteers at the back we gave the best job, we placed between them the stomach and split it open to reveal all the undigested food/dung etc and their job was to throw little balls of this concoction out of the back of vehicle as we were dragging our entrails, this would help in ensuring a good scent mark was left. Lucky them.

Once scent trail was left, stomach contents scattered and the bait attached to a tree, high enough so hyena would not reach and hidden enough so vulture would be unable to spot, we began the call up.

Listening to an impala dying over and over and over again is seriously soul destroying noise, imagine listening to ‘I’m a Barbie girl” over and over for 2-3 hours but what was the worst part about it was beginning to get used to it!! Knowing which scream of pain was coming next, and hearing volunteers whistling it at breakfast!!!.

The first call up was unsuccessful, though just as we were leaving a hyena came for a look but quickly disappeared, the following night and the night after that also was a disappointed but yet we pushed on. On the 21st had an unexpected sighting at call up (see leopard news) but alas no lions.

Our impala was starting to look a little worse for wear so we repeated the process and replaced the bait with a waterbuck, an hour passed then another and just as we were about to give up 3 young male lions appeared wow!! These were too young to be Tambotie and Rooibos who are they? Where did they come from? What do we do about them?

These three sub adults could pose a problem for our existing pride. They are not quite mature enough to take over a pride just yet, as they are thought to be around 2 years of age. Male lions reach sexual maturity at the age of 4 so it could be sometime in the future that they

become interested in finding females to mate with. We informed the reserve of the visual of three male lions and are awaiting their decisions as to what the next step should be.



"Who are you??" We could ask you the same question! One of the young rouge male lions.

Leopard news

We have been increasing our searches for Cleo this month and with the call ups being held up north (Cleo territory) there were many a time we had a signal for her but her being so elusive we never got a visual. One evening (21st) on a call up for the rouge males we checked a signal for Cleo, she was on a 5! We switched all lights off and sat with only the sound of the bush for very nearly an hour, the moon was almost full that night giving us a nice light. Then, I think all of us did not register what we were seeing for a few seconds, but there right in the road were 2 leopard cubs who seemed equally amazed at us as we were them!! They strolled right passed the vehicle a few time giving everyone an amazing sight, Cleo was a mum! And though we did not get to see Cleo that night we just knew she was there watching us watching her cubs, it was indeed very special night.

After all this time of speaking of the allusive Cleo I'm sure you will be as excited as us to see her, words cannot do justice so I will leave these photos to speak for themselves



Cleo showing herself just 10 minutes after LEO and volunteers had left the bait.



Cleo and her cubs enjoying the bait.

Elephant news

It has been a nice month for elephants this month no really special sighting occurred but scattering of visuals through out the month. At the beginning of the month we kept bumping into Lillie and her herd around the Lillie farm area. On the 7th we came across Lillie's herd as well as Elsa's herd who had seemed to have joined forces for a while, at least 40 elephants were present from large females to tiny babies not much more than two months old, they circled the vehicle and Elsa even came quite close, trunk extended smelling us. George and Junior as well as an uncollared male have been regularly spotted around Galon Dam area this month; these boys are beautiful to see and are far less bothered with our presence than the overprotected moms in the breeding herd.

Other news

New Staff Member

This month we welcome Kate Saunders from the UK who is the new Programme Manager at LEO. Kate has FGASA Level 1 and Trails Guide Theory and joins us from another volunteer programme on a neighbouring reserve where she has experience with the Big 5 and research. She comes from the UK and began her love affair with Africa when she volunteered for 3 months doing wildlife conservation work on a game reserve in the Eastern Cape after finishing a degree in Zoology. There she had the time of her life and it instilled in her a passion for Africa. She returned to England to do an MSc in Conservation but found it difficult finding a job due to only having one thing she really wanted to do – return to Africa! A year and a half later she was enrolled on the Bushwise Field Guides course and after a year and a half of training and practical experience now finds herself at LEO. Kate has a passion for all big cats and research so is looking forward to contributing to LEO's success.



Regards from the bush,
Kate, Sheldon and Jen

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