



**NEWSLETTER FOR  
August 2011**



August has ended with spring slowly approaching with an influx of hotter weather, so much so we have cleaned and prepared the pool. The drives in Selati have been leaving later in the afternoon due to the oven like temperatures, which has given us some great early evening sightings and still have the advantage of clear cover through the bush.

## LION NEWS

Right at the start of August the lions spent a few days in Red Sun Road with the males and females together, which seems to have been a place where they have had a lot of luck with kills. Mbhurri made an excursion down to Lillie, before making his way back to meet with girls where on afternoon drive noises of lions roaring along with galloping antelope could be heard in between Double Highway and Red Sun Road. After another day of them still in the same spot, we made an extreme off-road night drive into the bush to see a very fat Mica and Shaka along with the others hiding further. No signs of a kill at first, but once they had left we found remains of a giraffe, which gave them a belly score of five, though it really should have been more with Mica looking very rotund!

The pride then decided to challenge us by separating into lions with collars and those without and at one point Mica and Selati gave each other some space by being apart for a few days. We had to double check the signal to be sure, as Mica was with Mbhurri and Selati a few blocks away in the Lillie part of the reserve. With the signal bouncing off the koppies, was quite a challenge to pin point them to realise the two older females were apart.

On one of the evening drives, the team were moving a tree that the elephants had kindly pushed into the road for us, when Shaka roared rather close and naturally everyone jumped back into the vehicle pretty sharpish!. Shaka and Selati strolled past with Shaka making himself heard right next to the vehicle, which was impressive to hear and see. Mica and Selati finally grouped back together in the BVB part of the reserve and the males heading up to the northern part. All of the lions have met up very often this month, with Jane including herself a lot more and looking a lot healthier for it. At one point the big worry was with Skinny, where all the other lions were seen up in Farrel with Skinny by himself down in Mahoed clearing with a bad limp. But being a tough lion and with unmistakable dangerous look in his eye he made it through to team up with Mbhurri again after a couple of days. The origins of his limp is unknown, as he had no visible signs of injury, could have either been a case of Shaka, pulled muscle or just trying to hard to get Jane again. During this spell of Skinny's limp his belly score of course went down, but he is currently not showing any signs of this injury of late and is sure to be able to give anyone a fright in the night again.

With them occasionally hiding in a block with nothing but rocks and thick vegetation, we then had some lovely sightings of the males in Mahoed clearing with them all showing big fat five belly scores and looking like they can't move due to the extra weight in their stomachs. This was a brief pleasure to see, as our lions like to move about and surely enough made their way up into a nice rocky high point near the Deck view point. We finally tracked them down here at night, with vultures taking off from the trees that lined the road as we drove past! The next day, as the girls were near Galon Dam, we tried to get a visual on them first before heading up to where the boys had been tracked down to. Jane was seen drinking from a dried up river bed, where she had dug a hole to find water to quench her thirst, along with a lot of birds and some energetic tree squirrels chasing each other. Once she was finished, she made her way back into the extremely thick bush and join the other two females, who gave a nice growl when a few rocks needed to be moved. The next day, the whole pride were seen in the open in the BVB area of the reserve feasting on two sub adult elands, so you can guess the belly score for that one.

This month has not been bad with the lions on the whole staying together, until recently and there have been quite a few bush walks to locate missing kills, with some success being made with Warthog, Giraffe and Eland kills being found! Jane is still with Mica and Selati, having been seen near the knuckles koppies and Mbhurri seen down in Lillie two, looking healthy and heading into a the rocky block to find that better shade away from the sun which is definitely increasing it's power on Selati game reserve.



## ELEPHANT NEWS

The elephants have been on the same side of the river as LEO base this month quite a lot and have given us some great sightings closer to home.

A sighting of a lifetime for our volunteers occurred at the very beginning of this month. The team had tracked down the elephant herd to the Mahoed area, and had a brief visual of the herd some of the more thicker bush, and decided to climb a koppie to try and get a better view! After spending about half an hour on the koppie watching the few elephants that were visible, it was decided that it was time for a coffee, so drove along to the smaller section of Mahoed Clearing. Whilst chilling with their coffee, one of our volunteers spotted an elephant moving out of the Mopane trees. Again, a pretty quick scramble was made to get back onto the vehicle! And then our volunteers couldn't believe their eyes as elephant after elephant strolled their way out into the clearing. They all started moving closer to our vehicle, but were still very relaxed with us. We certainly thought this was an incredible sighting, but little did we know that there was more to come!! After a few minutes, yet more elephants moved out of the bush, until there were nearly 50 elephants around our vehicle! One was munching quite happily on a Mopane tree about two or three metres away from the truck!! Of course, camera's were clicking and videos were being taken – one of our volunteers took a whopping seventeen minutes of video of nearly all of this incredible sighting, including one of the younger bulls trying to mate with one of the females in the herd!! There were a fair few younger elephants in the herd, including about two or three tiny elephants, which of course delighted everyone on the sighting as we watched them trot along, trunks flopping and ears flapping!!



## RHINO NEWS

It has been really good month for rhino sightings this month and we also carried out some walks to find specific ones and make sure they're doing well and see if they're still in the areas they have previously been in the past.

We have managed to get visuals on quite a few of the elusive rhinos, with Epaki's signal proving to be the difficult one. But luck would have that we finally saw him in the middle of the road towards the end of the month.

We have also had some great sightings of a white rhino and her calf in Mahoed clearing on consecutive days, three in a row! The mother and calf who regularly visit the water hole there, is looking healthy and is always quick to leave in front of the mother. Yet on one sighting during a sundowner, they seemed not bothered by our presence and turned up while everyone was outside of the vehicle, making for an awesome sighting.

Three rhinos were also seen nearby to where the lions were on Galon Koppie Road, where they had been sighted last month, although this time, we were able to see some notches on their ears. Hopefully we will get to see and know these rhino more, especially the mother and calf who are locals to the area.

## LEOPARD NEWS

August has been exceptionally good for leopard sightings, even better than last month. On one of the afternoon drives, the team were heading back, having not seen a great deal, but were rewarded with three leopard sightings! The first was a young subadult by himself and then ten minutes later a mature female and a very brief sighting of a male next to her, all along the same stretch of road.

The first sighting of the subadult was absolutely fantastic – at first, all we saw was an animal trotting along far down the road, but upon closer inspection there were excited whispers of “It's a leopard, it's a leopard, go go go!!” But as we got closer, the leopard swerved into the bush, and we thought that was it! But then the spotlihter picked up eyeshine, and there he was! A wonderful sighting of a fairly relaxed leopard, who moved off quite slowly. Not two minutes later did we see the female and a very brief visual the male! Both sightings suggested that they were trying to enter the sable paddock and were fairly relaxed with the vehicle's presence and the male strolled in the road for a while before heading off into the darkness of the night time bush.

The energy on the vehicle from the team was of course immense and everyone returned that night with big grins on their faces, as this is certainly not an every day occurrence. Since this sighting, we have been driving along these stretches of road far more often in the hope of another incredible sighting!!

We have also seen leopard tracks in many areas of the reserve, so all we need is for these sneaky creatures to become a little less shy!



## **SPECIAL SIGHTINGS**

Sightings have been pretty good this month, covering a nice broad variety of creatures and we have managed to get those aardvark sightings back up from last month again. Two were seen in the course of one night, sniffing around in the long grass and continuing to be camera shy.

On one drive, we had a nice group of special sightings, starting off with a porcupine rummaging around during the daylight near Galon Dam Area. Then later on another two aardvarks were seen, with one hanging around to be viewed and the other taking off. To top off the night a pair of side-striped jackal decided the road was easier to take and allowed us to follow them for a while, again near the Galon Dam Area.

Steenbok have not been scarce this month either, providing many sightings throughout the daytime drives. And we have also been fortunate enough to have seen African Wildcat, Serval, more Porcupines, and even a Sharpe's Grysbok and Honey Badgers whilst tracking down the lions in the evening. Maniac has been around the camp also, making his visit to the usual place. He was quite happy to have his picture taken, until the

flash went off...he didn't take particularly kindly to that!! We got a nice show of his bared teeth, and an angry growl before he jumped out of the bin and snuffled off into the bush! A lovely sighting of a small spotted genet occurred recently, and it passed right by our little yellow 'pool', with it's eyes as big as those of the volunteers who spotted him! Besides the cheeky vervet monkey who likes to steal the odd apple, hopefully these creatures will become as regular visitors as Maniac is.

Towards the end of this month we have managed to have a couple of sightings of klipspringers, again down in the Lillie area of the reserve. On one sighting they were right at the top of a really high koppie and making their alarm call, which sounds like the beginning of a party whistle! The other sighting, they were pretty close to the vehicle and remained quiet, checking us out for a minute or two and then bolting for the next small group of boulders and rocks, to observe us from there. It's always great to see them, as they seem just as inquisitive as we are of them.

We finished off this month with a Reedbok visiting the water hole at LEO base and then on the same day in a totally different part of the reserve, we saw seven of them at once! Not bad considering they have been quite elusive until now.



## OTHER NEWS

Our volunteers have had some exciting excursions this month, including a two day trip starting off with a day in Kruger National Park, a night spent at White River and then a stunning drive down the Panorama Route, stopping at various waterfalls, viewpoints, and even the Big Swing at Graskop!!

They had some fantastic sightings in Kruger, with literally hundreds of buffalo drinking at a dam, accompanied by a fair few hippos out of the water munching on the greenery surrounding the dam!! A crocodile joined the party, but was swiftly chased back into the dam by a rather large hippo, creating quite a splash!! Of course, there were plenty of elephant sightings, typical of Kruger, but they were fairly lucky to have seen a few Saddle Billed Storks at a dam where some elephants were drinking at bathing!! It's always a privilege to see some of the more endangered species in South Africa!



The next day, feeling slightly worse for wear, our volunteers set off on the Panorama Route, stopping off at Mac Mac Falls, the stunning God's Window Viewpoint, the Three Rondavels, and also the Big Swing at Graskop! Naturally, many photos were taken, some of which are on the LEO Facebook page, and there was a fair amount of persuasion to make some of the more reluctant amongst them to brave the Big Swing!

Following that week, we had a great sleep out on the deck view point in the Willie area of the reserve. It turned out to be a great night for shooting stars and hyenas also! We had to drive to see a small clan of hyenas strolling around in the bush at night with their distinctive red eye glow as they looked into the spotlight. Falling asleep to a sky filled with stars, the constellation appearing clearer at 3am, the next morning everyone was in a great position to watch the sun rise over the Selati reserve, koppies and mountains, for another day ahead in the wild bush.



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](mailto:infoleo@polka.co.za)

