



**NEWSLETTER FOR
July 2011**



Another month has gone by and Selati seems to finally be in the full swing of winter with even the Aloe plants near our base losing their flowers...a little late but better than never! We are still appreciating the lack of vegetation cover, for it has helped us to make some really nice sightings recently but are not appreciating the very cold morning drives quite as much, but, you can't have one without the other!

LION NEWS

One of the biggest updates for the lions this month is that we have finally had a re-emergence of Jane, the elusive female. She showed up randomly with Selati and Mica toward the beginning of the month, and has been traveling with the girls and boys on and off since.

When we first saw Jane, she was looking very thin and small compared to the sisters Mica and Selati, as she had obviously been finding life a little difficult on her own, away from the comfort of family and enhanced hunting odds.

It seemed to take a few days for the lions to re-adjust to Jane's presence but they were getting on fine soon after, with Jane looking healthier in no time.

Now, with the return of Jane has come the competition between Mbhurri and Skinny for the ladies attention.

In one sighting, the team had Jane, Mbhurri and Skinny on a visual in a road near the Lillie area. It became evident of the competition here as Skinny had spent a full day alone with Jane and Mbhurri had come to try and nuzzle his way in! Skinny would lay relatively close to Jane and when she made any sign of moving, he would jump up and not allow her to leave, all the time with Mbhurri edging in closer and keeping an ever watchful eye on the pair. Mbhurri, being the gentleman that he is, took this fairly well and merely lay at the back giving the occasional deep, disapproving growl!

The groups have been traveling a lot in the last 2 weeks; they have spent over a week in and around the Farrell area in the north, and right up to the northern fence lines where they can prove slightly tricky to find which made our lives just that bit harder!

There is one problem that we have encountered in terms of finding the lions, and that is, that strangely, the 3 collared lions, Mbhurri, Selati and Mica, all very much enjoy spending time together without the others. So the only lions that we can get signal on are the ones that are together anyway! But this changes always.

As hard as Skinny is to find, we did have a beautiful sighting with him not long ago. We had traveled up to Farrell area to hunt them down and after hunting for most of the day, found them in the area of Mine Airstrip Main, we arrived at the area as twilight was setting in, to see Skinny and Mbhurri on the road already. Skinny broke away from Mbhurri and turned toward our vehicle, he came and sat maybe 5 metres from the front of the bakkie and proceeded to contact call, presumably for the girls as they were not with them. After 10 or 15 minutes he stood up, and slowly, keeping his eyes on the bakkie,

strolled alongside us, before rubbing himself along the back of the vehicle. Needless to say, for some of our volunteers in the back it was their first sighting, and the looks on their faces, to see a lion so close, was brilliant!

We then followed Skinny for a half hour more, with him sniffing bushes and spraying along the way, evidently looking for the girls, which he had found by the next day.

All in all, it has been a fairly good month for the lions, we also have logged them on a giraffe kill this month, it was a fairly young giraffe but the sad thing about that kill was that, when we arrived, the mother was standing back and could do nothing for her baby. But, this is the way of nature, after all.

And to top off the month, we have just had Skinny and Shaka come and visit Leo base, fortunately we knew they were there before anyone walked outside, they stuck around for a while and then headed off into the darkness, back on their night travels.



Skinny trying it on with Jane

ELEPHANT NEWS

To start the elephant section we have a bit of sad news. Unfortunately, Junior, one of the male elephants was found dead in the Lillie area earlier this month. Junior had been part of a small group of male elephants to receive vasectomies on Selati, and, although the procedure went well and there were no problems, complications seem to have arisen after the operation and it is highly likely that his death was due to an infection picked up in the

un-healed wound some time after. It is estimated he was around 25-30 years old.

On the upside, there have been some really nice sightings of the herds recently, we have had Elza's herd on the south of the river a few times this month, which makes for slightly easier sightings than in the dense Mopani scrub further north.

Just this week, we were on the 'long way round' in Danie looking for the lions when we picked up signal on Elza's herd very close, we made a beeline for them and found them halfway along the 'long way round' road. They had just crossed the road in front of us so we stopped on the road and watched in awe.

Not long after, Seek, the other collared elephant in the herd, made an appearance, heading straight for the bakkie! She came strolling over and started giving us a few warning displays, all in jest, no truth to her showings! She intently stood and took note of us for 10 minutes before wandering off to join the herd. She had obviously been in a scrap recently as she had a fresh scar on her side, fortunately, she wasn't in the mood for a fight with us!

We then attempted to come back over the river after leaving the herd, only to find that they had the same idea, they were busy crossing over, and by this time it was night, so, not the best time to be around a large herd of elephants! Luckily they were all very well behaved and we made it back safe and sound and so did they.

We have also had a nice visual on Lillie's herd recently and the collared lady herself. This sighting was actually also near road 6 in Danie. It was early morning and we were again up that way looking for the lions when we bumped into Lillie's herd, they came out of the bushes, silently as always and proceeded to stop to our side, in the bush, nice and chilled out, and begin an eating session! It was a really nice sighting and we were with them for a good long while. We saw 4 adults, not including Lillie, and 4 juveniles. They did not seem to mind our presence at all which always adds to the sightings.



ELZA AND HER HERD NEAR GALON DAM

RHINO NEWS

This month we have been taking to walking some of the rhino game paths in the hopes that we can find out a little more about exactly where these rhinos have their different territories and exactly who is congregating together.

We have been doing a lot of general checking up on the rhino and have been climbing koppies to watch for the rhino's and as part of a poacher watch which we intend to carry on doing, sitting atop a koppie for a morning or evening, keeping check of who, what, when and where things are happening in Selati.

We have also been checking for our other rhino's using signal most days now.

There have been some really good sightings of the white rhino this month, only the other day, the team were in the middle of a lion sighting when up strolled three adult white rhinos, completely unphased into the area, the lions didn't seem to mind them.



FROM THE CAMERA TRAP

LEOPARD NEWS

This month we have had our first leopard sighting for a while, finally!!! We headed out on a night drive, specifically to look for the elusive creatures, we headed into the sable paddock near next to Leo base as we had seen tracks in there fairly recently, after driving around for nearly an hour, there was a mysterious shape seen on the other side of the fence (just outside Selati!), we stopped, reversed and had an awesome view of a female

leopard slinking her way through the grass, it was a remarkably clear view for being at night and she didn't run away, just stayed in the area for a good few minutes. We are counting this as a Selati sighting none the less!

Other than that, we have found tracks all around South River Road, near the Mahoed area and a lot around Elephant Boma Road.

SPECIAL SIGHTINGS

This month has been slightly down on the night sightings, especially of aardvark compared to last month, no new sightings of those creatures to report, but we have had a fair share of other special sightings to replace them!

In the daytime, we have seen the Sable that roam free on Selati, funnily enough near the Sable breeding area, probably keeping in touch with their friends or checking out the new ladies in the area!

Mountain Reedbuck has also been spotted toward the north, not too far from Selati HQ during the day, it was a sighting of two females, the first that we have logged for a long time.

There have been Klipspringers logged down south in the Lillie area roaming around on the koppies, their favourite place to be.

We also had a really good and very rare sighting for Selati a week ago of a pair of Cane Rats, down on Concrete Crossing. This was fantastic because as far as we can go back we have never logged any on Selati before!

Then there have been the usual sightings of Civets and Bushbabies dashing through the trees and grass with the occasional Genet popping up here and there, last night we actually had a Large Spotted Genet running down the road in front of us which was fantastic to see.

We had a brilliant sighting of Eland not long ago, when one drive was out there were only members of staff left at base and we had eleven Eland come up to the water hole out the front of Leo house, this was in the golden hour just before sunset so it really looked quite special, seeing all those magnificent, huge creatures lined up side by side, each equally as alert as the next, surveying the scene before taking a drink. It was fantastic.



“Bah, why is this waterhole so small!!”

OTHER NEWS

We have had the Leo base animals running around yet again this month, with Maniac, the honey badger, crossing our paths recently and also the porcupine which seems to be very fond of the bushes just outside the house! Something tells me that they may have avoided the place the night the Lions were here though!

And that is about it from the Leo team for this month, so,

Until next time, keep well.

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