



**NEWSLETTER FOR
June 2011**



Selati is looking drier each day, despite the one random day of cloud and rain early on in the month and is creating a greater need for the animals use of the remaining dams. The temperature has also dropped, reaching ten degrees one morning, making for an exceptionally cold wind chill factor while we wait for the sun to rise, or bask in its light before it disappears. But with this lower temperature, the nocturnal animal sightings have increased and provided some great viewings.

LION NEWS

With Mbhurri's new collar secured last month, locating the male lions has been relatively frequent. The lioness's and males were separate at the beginning of this month and then came together for a few days, which made for some sightings of the whole pride, except Jane, who was still illusive. What made it exceptionally satisfying was the fact they were a ten minute drive from LEO base. During this point, Mbhurri was slightly injured and had a slight limp, which was most likely caused by Shaka demonstrating his dominance over the pride. But luckily within a few days he seemed to have got over his injury to his right arm and was left only with a scratch or two.



A day or so after the pride separated again, with Mica and Selati heading towards Lillie farm and the males closer to Mahoed sloot south. When we got a visual on Mbhurri again, he seemed to be alone for a day or two, which was worrying as he still had a limp from his injury. The next day we had a close sighting of Mbhurri and Skinny next to the koppie on Mahoed sloot south and then they moved to the clearing nearby where they

snoozed off their nights activities, only raising their heads to keep an eye on us. After watching them for some time, we left them to get their rest and returned later to find them still nearby in the overgrowth. In the afternoon we tracked Selati and Mica to Lillie, where their signal bounced around the surrounding koppies, before finding a strong signal and direction. From here we drove into where they were as far as we could to spot Selati staring at us all the time. Later that night we headed to Galon dam area from Mahoed clearing, to find Shaka strolling down the road towards us. We stopped to let him pass us right next to the vehicle giving us all a glance as he strode along. The male lions over the next few days appeared to be happy to stay around that area of the reserve, before moving towards the river making their way along due south of the reserve. Meanwhile the lioness's were accompanied by Skinny up in the BVB areas, where we sighted them on the road, but was only brief, because as soon as they saw us they went off into the bush. The next day or so they did not seem too keen on the presence of vehicles and tended to head off when we got close to them.

Tracing Shaka and Mbhurri's tracks into Arundel, we heard Mbhurri calling at night, which helped us to find him and the direction he was heading. We obviously picked a great spot to stop, as he roared about fifteen meters from the vehicle and then immediately appeared out of the long grass and walked right behind us. Having seen him we headed home to see Shaka just entering the road next to us, making a quick turn around we followed him a long way, watching him spry now and then and ending with Mbhurri's roar followed by Shaka's reply.



Meanwhile the lioness's had made it across the river all the way up to Farrel almost at the most northerly tip of the reserve. At night again, we decided to have a night drive and try to get a decent sighting of them. Waiting and driving around the block they were in for a while, an elephant crossed our path into the area they were hiding out in. We then came

back to where we had the strongest signal and saw Mica and Skinny to the side of the road in the long grass. After we left them that night, they decided to drink and chew some of the furniture at Farrel camp, before Skinny decided to leave the girls and meet up with Mbhurri and Shaka to see what they can get up to south of the river.

ELEPHANT NEWS

This month we have had a few sightings of elephants, still preferring the north part of reserve and are making sure there is lots of half chewed branches and trees to remove from the roads. Early on we had a brief sighting of two elephants in Elena's heard, who were resistant to leave the small block with dense vegetation obscuring any really clear views of them. But we had a good sighting of five elephants in Lillie's herd in the northern far corner of Farrel and were able to watch them for sometime before they chose to be surrounded by food instead of investigate our vehicle in return.

As mention we had brief night sighting of a male bull which first crossed our path while we were tracking the lioness's and then trumpeted for an unknown reason. We then caught a sight of him as we passed the block in which the lions were also in, but chose to carry on, as he seemed to be quick to edge towards too keenly.

Towards the end of the month we had a great drive at dusk on the northern side of the river, We had been tracking the lions and had logged them near telegraph road, we then called it a day and started the return drive, as we were coming along toward the east end of telegraph road, we came into a clearing with 2 water troughs....it was quite a surprise to us to see 4 elephants having a merry time around the area! We established that they were part of Lillie's herd and as they started to move off we drove slowly further along the road, when, about to take a turning, 9 more elephants moved quickly in behind us to the water for a drink!



It was slightly more surprising than we would have hoped as the light was fading and, well, you know how Ele's can be in the dark!! We sat and watched cautiously as they moved around and drank long and noisily, the elephants crossed behind us and we noticed a couple of juvenile's with the herd, we were given that hard elephant stare from some males as the female crossed behind us with the young one, but after they had crossed they were quite happy to carry on drinking, they then continued their journey heading north out of the clearing and we let them be.

We were with them for a total of around 20 minutes, it was a really fantastic sighting and we were very glad that they all seemed so relaxed with our presence.

The Ele's seemed a bit too thirsty to be bothered with us....thank goodness!!

RHINO NEWS

We have been lucky to have a number of rhino sightings this month, with a sighting of Humba the black rhino which we caught a sighting of on a night drive. We also have come across many white rhino, with one sighting in the Arudel area of a large male bull. The picture to the right is of him checking us out whilst still with mouthful of grass, moving side to side slightly before heading off. There have been other sightings of other white rhino, including a few sightings of the female and her calf who like to preside around Mahoed clearing, both of which look healthy.



LEOPARD NEWS

Leopard tracks have been found relatively near to LEO base in the Transport area and also some young leopard tracks which were leading from Galon dam. Although they are determined to be illusive and not allow us a great sighting of them as yet this month.

SPECIAL SIGHTINGS

The nocturnal wildlife this month has been extremely active and some of them have appeared to quite enjoy being watched and having their photo taken. Many civet sightings, some nights we have seen three in a row, in places such as Galon dam and the Arundel areas. We have also had some great sightings of small spotted genets, one which was only a couple of meters from our vehicle and didn't seem too bothered by us at first. After driving for a minute or so we saw another one, who was more shy and didn't stay for too long. The bush babies have been great to see at night recently also, with one being right on one of the trees at LEO base. On another occasion we had a bush baby who seemed as interested in us as we were with him, starring for a while before getting bored of us and jumping into the trees away from the road.



But saving one of the best pieces of news until last, we have been lucky to have two separate sightings of Aardvark this month. The first one was of a youngster who made it's way into a burrow not big enough to fit them and had their tail still exposed when trying to hide. It did succeed in not getting a great photo shot of their face, but was still a fantastic sighting. On another afternoon drive, we came across a large adult who we must have surprised, as they were only two meters or so from our vehicle, as we all rushed to grab our cameras, without wanting to take our eyes of the great viewing. The aardvark was not sure which way to go at first and gave us time to see them really up close before they too made their way away from us in a rush scuttling off into the nigh time bush. Hopefully all these types of sightings will continue into next month and we will be able to get a photo of an aardvark raiding a termite mound.



Hyenas have all also been present a great deal, with sightings of them over a number of days in row. Two of them were first spotted in the Arundel area cantering along the road away from us as we followed them. The next day we had great clear sighting of most likely the same two hyenas at galon dam, one of them sniffing around the dam before heading off. As we made our way west of the dam the same two were running along away from us again, maintaining a good sighting of the for several minutes before the realised they could lose us if they just head off over some mounds. On the next morning drive we had another good sighting of a lone hyena on Ekaya which was right around the corner from LEO base, so we are now hoping they are moving next door to us and we will seem again more often like this.

OTHER NEWS

Honey badgers have been spotted a couple of times this month, with two trotting after each the in the direction of Mahoed clearing, seen briefly before the sun set. On another night we had a resident honey badger, now named 'Maniac' who we caught a brief view of climbing out of our bin at base.

We would also like to welcome Adam and Paul to the LEO team, who started here early on in the month and will hopefully continue to get some great sightings of all the creatures on Selati. Unfortunately we had to say farewell to Trey and Tom who left LEO this month and we are all sad to see them go. They have left their mark here, doing a great job with tracking lions and rhino and they we be certainly missed and we wish them all the best with the future.

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