



Newsletter
September 2008

“Of prides and herds”



Dear Volunteers and Friends,

Things have been heating up on Selati this last month as the temperature begins to creep into the 30's, touching 38 on one blistering day. We're not quite into summer just yet but it's starting to feel like it, scorpions and snakes are becoming a lot more active necessitating the daily shaking out of boots, sleeping bags and clothes.

To our great delight, September has seen the elephant herds putting in many more appearances and a very exciting visual of Selati's most elusive collared animal. Not to mention loads of lion sightings.

LION NEWS

Another excellent month for lion sightings with the 'Selati pride' sticking together for the majority of the month and both sets of cubs are becoming more and more habituated as each day passes.

Selati pride news

The start of this month found all the lions still together. The very first drive of September found all the lions together on little Mahood Koppie, a great sighting with Selati's and Mica's cubs playing together, and occasionally getting reprimanded by the adults. Since then the pride have remained largely all together moving between mahood and burren koppie's, offering us some excellent visuals of all the cubs, who are becoming more and more relaxed around the vehicles.

Towards the end of the month the pride started to split up more, Shaka and Mica stayed together but Selati began roaming further a field. A great sighting was had on the 24th when Selati, Mica and Amarula turned up to drink at Mahoed Clearing before going hunting, a girl's night out, with no sign of Shaka (presumed baby-sitting) and the cubs.

By the very end of the month they had all hooked up together again and were found on the small Koppie off Rhino Ridge. All lions present mostly lounging about on the rocks doing what they do best, but this peaceful scene was punctuated by two of Selati's cubs inside a cave, noisily devouring a warthog kill, the echoes giving the impression that two full grown lions were inside!



The Ladies, hitting the town on a night out

A total of eight kills were discovered and attributed to the lions this month. They have been mostly eating two Eland, one Warthog, one Wildebeest, one Duiker and three Kudu. Also discovered was an unfortunate Serval caught by the pride at Mahoed Clearing, though this was not eaten.

Rooibos and Thamboti have still yet to be spotted though Spore and kills have continued to be found to the north of the property, particularly around the river. Obviously there waiting for center stage like true Prima Donna's. In the meantime they will have to make way for....

Cleo the leopard

September started as usual for Cleo monitoring, lots of beeps and no visual. I'm sure many volunteers and visitors to LEO have had their doubts as to whether she existed at all, that we are following phantom beeps for a ghost cat. This all changed though on the morning drive of the 25th. Whilst searching for Shaka around Paw Paw we picked up strong beeps for the little cat and decided to follow up and see if we couldn't get another reading. After much driving back and forth and running into the elephant herd by accident, we managed to pin her down to a small jumble of rocks just off Kudoesrand road. A short but tricky bit of bush bashing saw us around the base of the rocks and we were rewarded with a long overdue visual of our mystical leopard. Standing on

the top of the rocks, checking us out, no doubt slightly miffed that we had managed to find her this time. And just to prove it here is photographic proof, the camera never lies.



One slightly unhappy Cleo, caught by the camera against the odds

Rhino

Rhino continue to be found on an almost daily basis, and this has allowed us to collect much data on condition assessment. With the dryness and lack of water on Selati at the moment the Rhino's have started to show noticeable changes from the fat and healthy animals of the summer.

A particularly memorable sighting was had on the 16th when we came across a female with two calves, one from the previous year or so and the second barely more than a few months old.

Elephants

The beginning of the month saw LEO stepping up its elephant monitoring, aided by a visiting fellow researcher from a nearby elephant project. Both collared and un-collared elephants have been found and observed many times, and an identification portfolio has started to take shape. The herds have largely stuck to the north of the property, occasionally venturing to the southern side of the river only briefly before making their way back.

The middle of the month also saw the arrival of a dedicated elephant researcher to Selati, who intends to collar a few more females and track their activities over the coming year. Welcome Elise, we'll see you on the reserve.

The last few weeks of September were delightfully surprising as we seemed to bump into various elephant herds on an almost daily basis. Several herds seemed to have made their way down from the north and were moving around the Mahoed area. The week 22nd to the 30th had us encountering multiple herds' seven drives in a row even when not actively looking for them!



The elephants are back in town, watch out Lions, Landowners and LEO researchers!

Until next month behave

Kind regards
The LEO team
Gay and Ben

LIMPOPO ECO OPERATIONS (LEO)
P.O. Box 41, Gravelotte, 0895, Limpopo Province, RSA
Contact No: +277 79 877 2717
Email: infoleo@polka.co.za
Website: www.leoafrika.org