



## **Newsletter**

**June 2008**

**“Of thieves, villains, treachery and tightly kept secrets..”**



Dear Volunteers and Friends,

Winter has now definitely arrived with full force; there are few leaves left on the trees and the morning drives are chilly to say the least (10 degrees on one occasion!), but at least we get another half an hour lie in with the late rising sun. Another bonus of this time of year is that sightings of animals are easier because the bush is much less dense. The month of June started off with some fantastic lion and elephant sightings, even Selati showed herself again, although Cleo has been conspicuous by her absence.

### **LION NEWS**

Once again we've had some fabulous sightings of all the lions with cub sightings, plenty of kills (5!) and a reappearance of two handsome young males.....read on!

#### Mica and Amarula

Kleptoparasitism (stealing kills) between lions and cheetah is a common phenomenon however not often witnessed. At the beginning of the month this behaviour was seen when Mica and Amarula stole a warhog kill from a cheetah. Cheetah are rarely seen on the property thus making this sighting particularly exciting; to be able to see one of these amazing animals up close and watch the two lions consume it's kill!



One Hungry Cheetah

It is a fallacy that playing is solely reserved for youngsters! During one of their many hunting expeditions this month Mica and Amarula still found the time to play together, with Mica chasing Amarula across a clearing near Backhand Road. After a short game the commencement of the more serious business resumed; the hunting of warthog. The violent rustling of leaves and snapping of branches were heard before the squeals of a warthog broke the silence of a quiet winter's morning. Regardless of the fact that the warthog escaped (much to the joy of a volunteer who is particularly fond of warthogs!), the occasion still caused the adrenalin and excitement levels to rise quite considerably. One week later and we were lucky to arrive on the scene of a far more successful hunting expedition by the same two girls. Mica and Amarula headed away from the Mahoed koppies (where Mica has spent a lot of time recently, more on that later.....) and killed a female kudu just south of the knuckles in Lillie. Mica was tucking in while Amarula waited patiently beside her for 10 minutes before she could stand it no longer and joined her auntie in the feast. Mica was quite happy to let the younger lion join in, no doubt due to the fact there was plenty of food to go round.



Amarula finishing the kudu kill in Lillie

**More cubs!!**

Yep! More! It is true the animal kingdom has its secrets, and that's what Mica has attempted to keep to herself. - The secret that she is a mother. We had known Mica was pregnant again for several weeks; but we perhaps pessimistically believed she would not rear them again. However, we still waited with baited breath and heavy anticipation for an outcome. We had been keeping a very close eye on her since the start of the month. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of June we spotted her on top of Mahoed koppie. Whilst watching her relax on a rocky ledge, beside her something small and fluffy moved near the entrance to a small cave amongst a pile of large rocks. Mica walked over and licked what we first thought was the remains of a kill. However, with one big lick something yellow and fluffy appeared for a second before it was dropped behind a rock and out of sight. The cub or cubs could only have been a day or two at most of age, the size of the fluff ball less than half that of a dassie. Once again there is debate as to the number of and the sex of the new cubs! And, as Mica keeps herself and any cubs well hidden we will not know for quite a while. She has remained at the koppie constantly since, leaving only briefly when thirst and hunger have driven her to do so. We have followed and witnessed her hunt and eat but we deliberately give her space when she returns to the koppie and the cub(s). Fingers crossed, she will take a leaf out of Selati's book and be a successful mother. I think that this time she will be....stay tuned.

**Stealthy Selati**

Selati has been seen again at last!! She was relaxing on top of a koppie next to sunrise koppie and actually allowed us to sit and watch her for half an hour; unfortunately no cubs were with her this time. However towards the end of the month fate, luck and Murphy were on our side, whilst watching Shaka and Mopani on an eland kill, four lion shaped silhouettes moved behind some bushes- three shapes much smaller and one large one! Whilst only present for a second or two we were still able to identify Selati with her three cubs through the bush. Needless to say everyone was very excited and the sighting provided much to talk about, not just about Selati and her cubs but their final acceptance by the two males. We had feared, as Selati may have done, that Mopani might kill the cubs since he is 'new' to being a pride boss. Thankfully this was not the case and sightings of the cubs will be more frequent as a result. That was confirmed only days later when we found Selati and the three youngsters on a koppie. At nearly 7 months the cubs are losing their shyness. They can not help themselves, they are unable to sit still like their mother, they always pop their head up and investigate us. Then boredom sets in and they play- much to Selati's disgust and to our joy.



One of Selati's 3 cubs, 'clobber'- he has huge feet!

#### **Shaka and Mopani.... and other boys!**

Shaka and Mopani have been very active this month covering large distances in short time frames. Their movements have ranged far and wide including both northern and southern parts of the property. We speculate that they are searching for the two young males, Tambotie and Rooibos. Yes that's right! The two youngsters are alive and well and are on Selati. A neighboring property had reported two young males had arrived on their land and had killed a sable antelope in a breeding paddock. We could not help but think they were Rooibos and Tambotie due to the fact we had not seen them for weeks and were last known to be on the same property fence line. So it was with excitement and relief when we confirmed the boys to be on Selati!

Regardless of Shaka's and Mopani's wide movement patterns we have still had some wonderful sightings of both these large males. An especially interesting occasion was the visual of a large male waterbuck kill and the small dominance disputes between the two over the carcass. Only inches apart, nose to nose feeding on the animal, they constantly growled at each other. Mopani held his own and no scuffle was had.



## Shaka and Mopani on a waterbuck kill near Rhino highway

### Scats

Lion scats are still being collected at every opportunity, and it's such a delightful job that it is being embraced enthusiastically by all the volunteers (if you believe that you'll believe anything!). We have quite a number of samples of extracted hairs now, and these are currently being analyzed. It will be very interesting to find out the results of this so watch this space.....

### **OTHER NEWS**

#### Cleo the leopard

Well, they say leopards never change their spots, and Cleo is certainly proving that this is true as she has still not been spotted this past month. We have however got close to her on a number of occasions between the Selati River and Telegraph road. As some of you well know, when she is in the river bed reeds it is impossible to see her! Not without risking your life anyway!

Elephants

The month started with a particularly good elephant sighting; elephant '1' (frequency 25) and about 20 others, plus their young, were grazing at the junction of Burren koppie road and Mahoed Slot north. They were not perturbed by our presence at all, thanks partly to the wind direction but also to consistent cautious approaches by us in the past. The elephant herds have had no negative incidences with us (the last collaring a distant memory) so they are not overly concerned by our vehicle, even with numerous youngsters in the herd. The sighting lasted for nearly half an hour and finished only when we decided to leave.



**Happy elephants**

Until next month..... be good and if you can't be good be careful, just like the LEO team!

Kind regards

The LEO team

Steve, Gay and Nick

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