



NEWSLETTER FOR

Dear Volunteers and friends,

Welcome to our April newsletter, this month we have seen so much rain that the bush seems to be thinking it's the beginning of summer again. There are tiny shoots of fresh green grass sprouting everywhere and even the frogs have come out once again, their calls being heard at almost every little bit of water that's lying around. It has been an exciting month for the LEO staff and volunteers alike read on and find out what we have all been up to.

LION NEWS

If you can remember from last month we spoke about the pride splitting up, and little Xena going missing in the aftermath. Well we pleased to announce she has rejoined the pride and looks to be doing well. The two sub-adult males, Mbhurri and Skinny rejoined the pride for a few days too until we once again found that they had been pushed out and are on their own again. However it was the females doing the pushing as Shaka hasn't been with the pride at all this month spending a lot of his time moving right down to Lillie. It seems in his old age he feels no company is better than his own. We have had some amazing sightings of our lions. One of them in particular

was finding Shaka just east of our base camp. Not only was he close to the camp making our job easy, he also gave us a good show roaring to advertise his presence. Let me tell you there is nothing more impressive than a lion roaring so close to the vehicle. The volunteers were in such complete awe of the power that some of them even forgot to take pictures.

On the subject of roaring, both Mbhurri and Skinny have started roaring which shows that they have reached maturity and it was definitely time for them to start fending for themselves. One night we went out only to discover our telemetry wasn't working as it should and we could not get signals for any of our collared animals. This meant we were pretty much looking for a few needles in a massive hay-stack. After having no luck driving around looking for tracks some coffee was in order. As the sun was setting we heard soft contact calling from a lion not too far from where we were. Had we found the needles? We quickly gulped down our coffees and heading in the direction of the sounds. It got dark quickly and the calling had stopped and beginning to think we were out of luck we turned the vehicle off to discuss the next move. When suddenly there was a huge roar about 50m behind us. So we turned around and headed to where we had just been. As we rounded a bend expecting to come face to face with Shaka, we were all shocked to see it was actually Mbhurri making the noise. To our knowledge this was the first time he had actually roared like a man and it's truly awesome to be able to witness our lions reaching milestones in their lives.



-Selati Private Game Reserve -
Mbhurri out on his own

The rest of the Selati pride have been making history and spent most of the month up in the far north of the reserve which is a first for them, but could just be an attempt to rid themselves of the boys. After spending about 2 weeks there they started making their way south again and have been seen a couple of times around the river.



Mafadi resting up in the afternoon sun

We are always excited to see what the next month holds in store for us and the lions of Selati

LEOPARD NEWS

The leopards have managed to lie very low this month. On a few occasions we managed to get a very good signal on Cleo but didn't get any visual. Then there was absolutely no sign of her anywhere, for the better part of the month we tried in vain just to get a signal but had no luck. We can only guess that perhaps she left the reserve for a little while possibly following a male in order to mate. Leopard females often leave their territories when mating under the protection of a big male and this could have been the reason why she went missing, as on a Cleo drive one evening Phil and the volunteers had her on a strong 5.5 signal and heard a leopard calling not far away.

The only sighting of leopard we had this month was Cleo funnily enough. On her return from her wondering we got a good signal for her close to Jan

Fourie's access rd under the steel power-lines. We all knew patience was the game to play with her and as we sat waiting for a happening we noticed her signal was slowly getting stronger. This gave us all more hope, but then...it stopped. However she was on a 6. We had to be able to see her at this distance. So after maneuvering the vehicle around, we scanned the bushes with the spotlight. After a few minutes we picked up an eye shine from something in a thicket. Was it her? Looking through the binoculars I could make out the tell tale rosette pattern of a leopard. It was her! Delight filled the air as all of us managed to see her little patch of skin. We spent what felt like hours with her as she lay there, every now and then lifting her head to look back at us. What happened next was a surprise to everyone. As I was scanning the surrounding bush another eye shine caught our attention. What was it? Possibly a hyaena? No it was another leopard, A sub adult male possibly one of Cleos' last litter. The pair of them then got up from their slumber and moved towards us passing right past the vehicle. The youngster lay down in the grass for a few minutes allowing rare pictures and video to be taken before both of them moved off into the night.

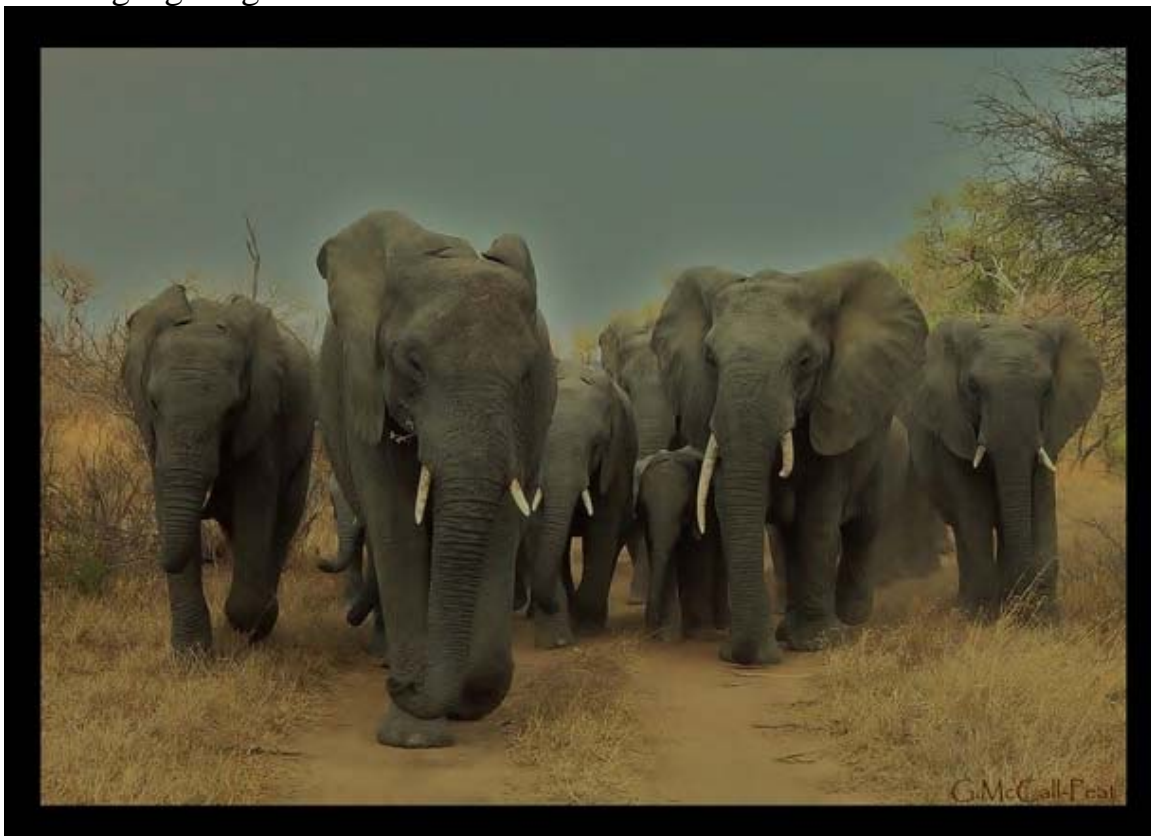


The sub adult leopard

We all could not believe our luck and set off with a feeling of fulfillment and delight. It seems that Cleo is relaxing more and more around the vehicles which shows that our hard work is paying off and we look forward to more sightings of this beautiful leopard.

ELEPHANT NEWS

Our elephant sightings have been few and far between this month. However the ones that we have had were amazing. On an afternoon drive in search of our pride we came across one of the herds on the back side of Tank Koppies. The herd wasn't too relaxed due to the presence of the pride close by and lots of trumpeting and screaming could be heard as the elephants made their way through the bush. We tried following their movements from the roads as we didn't want to get caught up in the middle of things between the elephants and the lions whose signal showed that they were pretty much amongst the elephant herd. As we rounded a corner in the road, one of the adult females walked out in front of us. She paused for a long time allowing the volunteers to take a number of photos before she decided it was enough and gave us a few warning charges before being joined by the rest of the herd. It was awesome to see so many elephants out in the open and so close. We even got to see one of the new editions to the herd, a tiny calf no taller than his mother's belly. As the elephants began to move off slowly we decided that we would leave the elephants after they blessed us with such an amazing sighting.



The herd of elephants in the road

RHINO NEWS

The rhinos have been out in full force this month with groups of up to 7 rhino being seen. It's really good to be seeing that our rhino population is doing so well and pretty much all the rhinos being seen are fit and healthy. One sighting worth mentioning happened on a morning drive. As we approached the Mahoed sloot we came face to face with a large rhino bull. He didn't seem to be bothered by our presence and moved across the road as they do. Then he turned around and approached us before circling around and headed off in the direction he had just come from before once again turning around and approaching us. Perhaps we looked like a rhino date but he seemed awfully confused, we watched him doing this for a good 15mins before leaving him to his confused self.

OTHER NEWS

Some of the volunteers were lucky enough to catch a glimpse of one of our other spotted cats. Yes a cheetah was seen, it was only a brief sighting but a cheetah none the less. On another occasion and surely one of the months highlights we managed to see the very rare aardvark whilst out on drive. The whole situation was pretty funny as just before we saw the aardvark one of the volunteers spotted a genet not far from the side of the road we were about to stop and have a look, until we saw the aardvark walking down the road in front of us. The genet was a distant memory suddenly as we all took in the sight of the aardvark. Hopefully this won't be the last time we get to see these shy animals.

Well another month comes to an end, as you can see we have been kept busy and we all can't wait to see what May has in store for all of us here at LEO. Until next month take care.

Kate, Greg and Philip

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