



## NEWSLETTER FOR

**May 2010**

Welcome to another exciting month at LEO. As the temperatures begin to drop in the mornings and evening and we start to feel the onset of winter finally. We can see some of the leaves are slowly turning orange and the grasses are fading into light browns. Pretty soon the bush will start thinning out and we should start to see more movement from animals as they search for food and water. This month already has provided us with some amazing sights here at LEO so read on and find out what we got up to.

### LION NEWS:

May has been an interesting month for our lion pride. Mbhurri and Skinny were on their own for the first part of the month until they were joined by Shaka for a short period. He then left the boys and moved back to the pride. Just when we thought the boys were once and for all separated from the pride one night we found them very close to the whole pride including Shaka. We didn't think they would actually try get back in but they did. And a huge fight broke out. Unfortunately we couldn't see what was going on but the sounds that we heard were fierce and the fight lasted about 5mins. This was then followed by loud roaring presumably from Shaka. Then silence. We tried in vain to get a visual and see if any damage was done. We decided to head back to base and follow

up the next morning. We all thought the boys had learned their lesson and taken the hint that they no longer welcome but to our amazement the following day we found all the lions together on BVB airstrip. Skinny was sporting some claw wounds on his face and Mbhurri had a slight limp but other than that they all seemed to be one big happy family again. Since then Shaka and Skinny left the pride and spent time in the southern section of the reserve, whilst Mbhurri remained with the pride. He seems to have taken charge a bit in Shaka's absence and has started to mark territory and take up the rear when the pride is on the move. It is also amazing to see how much his mane has grown in the last few weeks, he has really started to look like he has come of age and I think he will be a bit more of a handful for Shaka in the next few months.



Shaka in one of his moods

On one night drive, we found the whole pride together walking down the road towards us, we pulled off the road slightly and all the lions passed by along side us mere metres away. The cubs were their curious selves and lagged behind to give us a closer inspection. Next thing the adult females were off at a rate of knots into the bush to the side of the road. All the cubs joined them we moved forward to see what the excitement was, when the lions reappeared in front of us with a honey badger. The poor honey badger was screaming but fought for its life against all the lions. It's truly amazing to see the spirit of the honey badger even with the odds stacked up against it. As we were trying to follow the chaos, Selati and Mica left the honey badger and ran back off the road and killed a nyala antelope that must have been preoccupied by the scrum of lions and the honey badger. But before the girls had a chance to enjoy their catch Shaka was there and chased them off claiming the kill as his own. We spent a good hour watching as he fed; every time one of the pride

members ventured too close he would growl and put himself between the hungry lions and his nyala meal. We decided to leave the lions, extremely happy with our live national geographic show and head back to base. The honey badger incident wasn't the only action we got from the lions this month. On one particular day we got signal for Shaka from the base, excited that he was close we set out to find him. At first he made us drive around in circles trying to find him then he appeared behind us. As we repositioned he killed a warthog not far from us, he seems to be a pro at warthog killing as it didn't even make a sound which is unusual, more often than not a warthog will scream until the very end, but Shaka was having none of this a quick quiet kill before settling down to eat in a thicket below a marula tree.

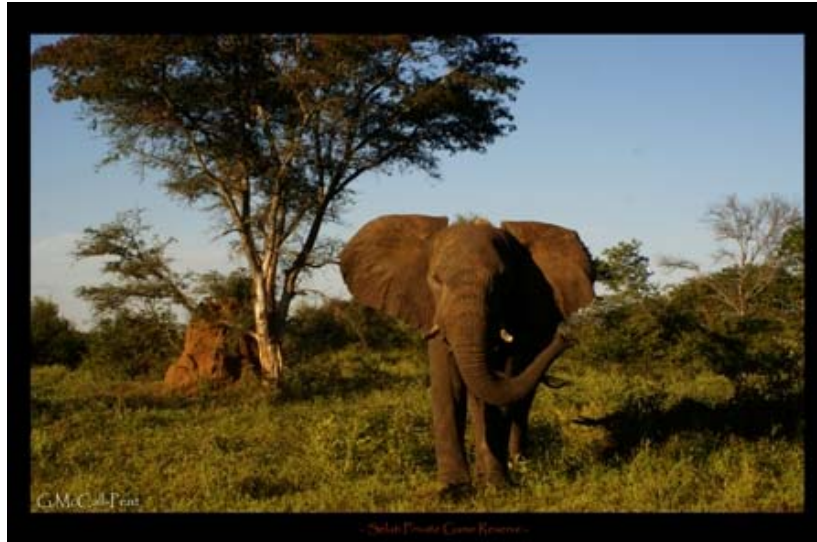


Shaka killing the warthog

We sat with him for a bit before going off to search for the rest of the pride. I imagine as the bush thins we will get to see more predator/prey interactions and we look forward to the prospect of more kill sightings here at LEO.

#### ELEPHANT NEWS:

It has been a busy month with regards to our elephant sightings, we have been seeing Lilly's herd quite a lot around the Galon area. The quality of sighting has been amazing with the herd actually approaching the vehicle to get a closer look before displaying with head shakes and throwing dust. It is also good to see that there are quite a few young calves in the herd. There is really nothing cuter than a baby elephant as it learns how to use its trunk or how it thinks its bigger than what it really is often charging at the vehicle before losing courage and scrambling back to mum for support.



George displaying

The best elephant sighting we had this month was when we drove to Mahoed open area in search of Lilly only to find pretty much all the elephants on Selati spread out over the clearing. Where ever we looked there was elephants, and a combination of that and the perfect afternoon sunlight made it almost a magical experience, and one that we won't forget in a hurry. We noticed that one of the big bulls Junior was in musth meaning he was in the mood for romance but the females didn't seem as keen and we watched as every time he approached a cow she would hurriedly move off taking her herd with her. He then decided to take his frustration out on a nearby knob thorn tree, which he decimated in a matter of minutes.

It's always fascinating to watch elephants so we hope that we continue to get regular sightings in the months to come.

#### LEOPARD NEWS:

The sightings of these elusive cats have been few and far between this month. We haven't had any sightings of Cleo. She has proved extremely difficult to locate and we haven't had much signal for her. On a few occasions we came close but didn't manage to get any visuals of her. There have been lots of tracks for leopards around which shows us our population here is healthy and the leopards are here we just need to find them.

We did manage to see a young female very briefly as she ran across the road in front of the vehicle but as quickly as we saw her she was gone. We then got a quick glimpse of her as she melted into the night just making sure all the volunteers had seen her.

Hopefully we can do a bit more leopard focus in the future and get to see them a bit more often.

#### RHINO NEWS:

We didn't see many rhinos, and the sightings we did have were usually very brief. One sighting does however stand out. We were driving down middle gallon sloop rd when we came across five rhinos they were standing in a clearing and as we approached they started to move off and that's when we saw that one of the cows had a tiny new born calf, so five and a quarter rhinos in one place. The little one tried its best to keep up with mum as she moved off, but the long grass wasn't helping. It's amazing to think that such a small baby will grow into a two ton monster one day. I'm sure as the grass begins to die off it will force the rhinos to move around more and we will get to see more of them.

#### OTHER NEWS:

One morning drive we were blessed with a cheetah just outside of base camp, we came across the cheetah sitting in the road. As we were watching it, the cheetah suddenly got up and shot off into the bush, before we knew it, a side-striped jackal burst out of the bush onto the road with the cheetah hot on its heels both of them eventually disappearing from view. It was a rare sighting of two rare animals and another privilege to witness. One afternoon, the house was suddenly filled by a loud chirping sound. I thought it was perhaps a bird that had found itself trapped inside I followed the sounds and to my surprise found no bird, but a spotted bush snake with a foam nest frog in its jaws. The snake only really had the frog by its hind legs and the frog was putting up a fight of champions trying to escape. We all watched the whole process, as the snake's venom began to work and the frog became slower.



The spotted bush snake with his frog prize

Once the snake started to swallow the frog we saw it had gone about things all wrong and began eating from the back end of the frog. This made the swallowing extremely difficult as the hind legs stuck out either end of the snake's mouth. It all took about 45mins and the frog

disappeared and the snake had a newly acquired bulge. We left the snake to digest its meal and later saw it leaving the house through one of the windows.

That wraps it up for us this month here at LEO and we are all excited to see what next month has in store for us.

Regards,  
Greg and the LEO team.