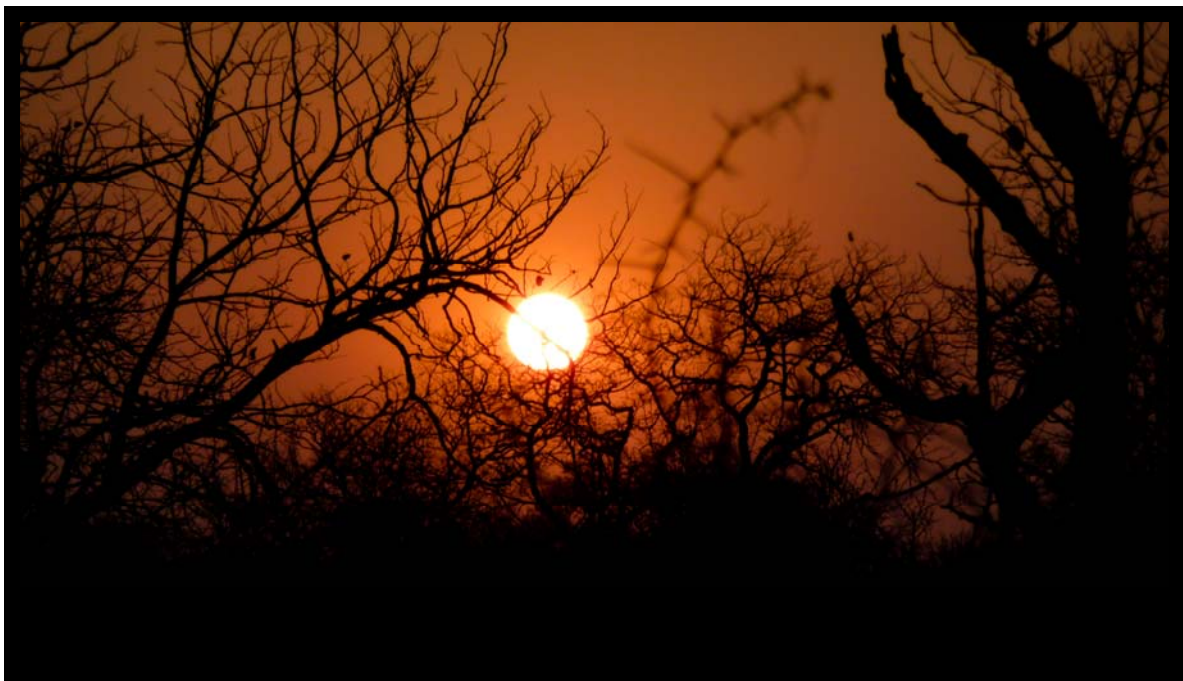




Newsletter
October 2008

“A silent prayer for momentary reprieve”



Dear Volunteers and Friends,

Summer certainly has arrived daily temperatures have been soaring between 14 to 43 Degrees Celsius practically every day. The first summer rains have brought a few days of coolness to these sweltering temperatures bringing smiles to many a face. Thus far only 5.5mm of rain have fallen on the desolate and desperate Lowveld with both man and beast alike eagerly awaiting the onset of rains that will bring new life and reprieve to the region. The bush is livening up with the passing of each day with the ever present singing of cicadas and other insects and birds.

LION NEWS

Selati pride news

This month the pride has busied itself doing a disappearing/re-appearing trick with the research vehicles. Much to the staff and volunteers exasperation they have hidden themselves away on various hard to get to koppies. However they still managed to give us some good sightings from time to time to keep us keen.

As a bonus we also managed to find Shaka's little hidey-hole on Mahoed. A small cave right at the end where he has recently been lying up and frustrating us with a regular signal 5, visual 0.

The major news this month is Amarula's growing pregnancy. She has been getting fatter and fatter and looking more uncomfortable everyday. It won't be long now before she splits from the pride and finds a quiet spot to give birth. Once this happens she will keep hidden from both the researchers and the rest of the pride for at least two to three months.

The 18th found the lions around Burren koppie and an interesting interaction with a rhino. Both Mica and Selati were present with their cubs when a rhino turned up to investigate. Mica quickly called her cubs over and retreated up the koppie. Selati was having none of it however and sat in a face off with the rhino, both watching each other at a distance of no more than seven meters. Selati's cubs started to join Mica's in retreat until Selati called to them to come back. Eventually having satisfied its curiosity the rhino turned and trotted off in the other direction without a backward glance. Only then did Selati deign to turn around and follow Mica up the koppie.



The Management!

Another particularly memorable sighting had all the cubs including Mica's two small urchins approaching very close to the vehicle and posing for photo's as if they were at a model shoot. The lucky volunteers on the vehicle all agreed it was one of the best sightings they had ever had, and there is a wealth of pictures to prove it.

OTHER NEWS

Cleo the leopard

After last months long awaited visual Cleo has clearly decided that this was more than enough sighting for us and has returned to her frustrating and wily ways. Readings have been obtained from both sides of the river but as usual no visuals.

Then just as the month drew to a close we had an incredible sighting at Mahoed clearing. No not our little minx Cleo but a big male leopard showing up to drink from the central reservoir before calmly sauntering away into the bushes. As fate would have it the vehicle in attendance was full of newly arrived volunteers on their very first drive, an incredible sighting which is going to prove very hard to top.

Elephants

The elephants have truly graced us with their presence this month with regular sightings of multiple herds occurring throughout the month. Many of these encounters have been by chance, even when unaided by our trusty radio telemetry we just kept running into them! Early in the month we had a close encounter with an elephant calmly eating in the middle of the road, luckily the elephant seemed to completely ignore us and continued to eat, clearly not going to move until it had finished its dinner. Then on the 13th a magnificent sighting, an incredible 62 elephants were found playing and bathing at Mabottle dam, a sight leaving all volunteers and staff present in awe.



Mabottle Dam – Standing Room Only

Rooibos and Thamboti

It's been a quiet month with regards to the two young males. We know they are still around as they were heard roaring close to a landowner's camp north of the river on the 22nd. We have been expecting them to make an appearance for the last couple of months but as yet they seem content to roam in the north.

Cheetah

Interestingly this month has also seen multiple reports of cheetah, both tracks and visuals, from the landowners and reserve management alike. Leo has yet to see any of these cats, other than a few brief, blink and you'll miss it, glimpses but it's exciting to know that we may come across them on any drive.



Leo staff member Gay directing the volunteers to another fantastic sighting, probably a bush baby

Until next month behave

Kind regards

The LEO team

Gay, Ben and Koos

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