



Newsletter
November 2008

“Of Rains and Electric Greens”



Dear Volunteers and Friends,

The heavens have finally opened up and transformed Selati into a lush green paradise. The change from dry, dusty Selati to a green tapestry has been quite remarkable. Previous volunteers would scarcely recognize the place. A grand total of 107.6 mm of rain has been recorded this month, filling up the many waterholes and resulting in an explosion of insect and bird life. LEO has been treated to some spectacular storms, some of which were experienced very, very first hand but this hasn't deterred the brave LEO volunteers who come rain or shine still remain eager for a glimpse the animals.



The brave LEO volunteers, 'this is Africa' they cry

LION NEWS

Selati pride news

The coming of the rain saw the pride hide themselves away on a regular basis, making November a bit of a dry month for lion sightings. Luckily the sightings we have had more than made up for the rather wet drives that were stoically endured by our volunteers.

A great highlight involved an interesting interaction with the elephants at Galon dam. All of Selati's cubs entered the clearing from the West Galon Slood side and inadvertently spooked an elephant belonging to the nearby breeding herd. All three were subsequently chased about by a rather irate sub adult bull elephant. Selati, Mica and Mica's cubs were also there but wisely remained hidden in the bushes. Shaka was also present lounging around next to the west end of Galon dam, however he typically took no interest in the cub's plight and continued his power nap.



Selati's cubs, living dangerously, cheeky little blighters

At times the rain and a lack of sightings can begin to get volunteers and staff members down a bit. So it was with the third week in November, but this being Selati a great sighting is always just around the corner. One evening we had stopped at the end of Rhino Ridge for some telemetry and quickly realized that amongst the beeps we could actually hear the lions somewhere in the bush in front of us. Ditching the telemetry set we quickly went off road into a close encounter with the females and cubs on a warthog kill. The adults had already eaten and had just left the cubs to finish what was left. Cue much hilarity as Mica's two little terrors kept pinching bits of the kill from the older cubs and running away. Their antics at trying to avoid the irate older cubs more than made up for the rather wet week we had endured up until then.



Shaka surveys his territory from on high

Amongst other news it has become clear that Amarula has finally broken away from the rest of the pride to have her cubs. She was spotted on rhino ridge with a warthog kill on the 14th and later in the month picked up a in the vicinity of Mahoed koppie. There are many small caves around Mahoed and Lesser Mahoed koppies, some of them used in the past by Mica with her two cubs, and it seems likely that Amarula will use these too. This was all but confirmed later in the month when Amarula was sighted around the two koppies, having clearly given birth. LEO was quick to notice that her teats are very swollen and wet with the hair ruffled around them, a sure sign of suckling. It will however be at least a couple of months before she introduces her cubs to the rest of the pride and hopefully to LEO, till then we can only feverishly speculate on how many she has had.

OTHER NEWS**Cleo the leopard**

Cleo is still her usual frustrating self, but following on from last month's male leopard sighting we have managed to have another couple of encounters with these elusive and beautiful cats. A sharp eyed Koos managed to spot a female with a small cub on a koppie close to the Mica/Gravelotte road whilst returning from town. Unfortunately further expeditions to the koppie inside the reserve didn't manage to get another visual. Most likely the female had already moved the den site, something both they and lions will do on a regular basis when cubs are still small and vulnerable.

This was later followed by sighting another female leopard close to Cleo's stomping grounds, and following eco-trainings reports last month of a cub seen north of their camp it seems likely that this is its mother. These sightings are very encouraging, hopefully Selati's leopard population is becoming more and more used to the vehicles, increasing our chances to spot them.



Well done Koos for spotting this little beauty

Elephants

Luckily the excellent sightings of the elephants we have been having in the last couple of months have continued into November. Note-able sightings this month included an awesome visual of 7 very relaxed bull elephants drinking at Mahoed clearing, all from the same reservoir at once. The 28th saw a great gathering of 33 ele's (all un-collared) come to drink and socialize at Mahoed clearing. As a bonus, later that evening the collared herd also turned up, but a bit late to the party as everyone else had moved off into the bush.

A total of 20 sightings for this month proved that whilst the lions were huddled away in the thick bush the ele's were having none of it and continued to put in appearances on a regular basis. A little bit of rain is not really going to bother an elephant is it?



Mahoed clearing, the usual suspects turn up for beverages

Rooibos and Thamboti

Not a sausage this month regarding the two errant boys, but LEO still reckons they're about, hiding in the shadows, taking tips from Cleo most likely.

Cheetah

The month started well with several cheetah kills being recorded, an impala off Gallon Mahoed Main and surprisingly an adult kudu on the BVB cutline. Coupled with further reports from the landowners of a large male in the area we have been on tender hooks on drive hoping to catch a glimpse of Selati's newest resident cat. The 28th of the month saw our prayers answered when he was spotted walking along next to Rooibos road, quite relaxed and completely unaware of our volunteers nearly falling off the vehicle in delight.



Cheetah taking a stroll down Rooibos road

Until next month behave

Kind regards
The LEO team
Gay and Ben

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