



Newsletter December 2008

“Of Santa and Shaka”



December evenings on Selati, waiting for Santa

Dear Volunteers and Friends,

Well December is upon us, the year draws to a close and Leo prepares to shut down for the Christmas break. This year has seen a huge change in the dynamics of the pride, with the loss of Inkenya and Mopani, Thamboti and Rooibos being pushed out, and the arrival of no less than three sets of cubs. It's also seen the coming and going of several staff members, not to mention hordes of willing volunteers. One thing that has remained constant though is the fantastic sightings and December has continued this right up to Christmas.

LION NEWS**Selati pride news**

Although the rains have died down a bit, the lions still remain elusive, hiding deep in thick bush particularly around West and Middle Galon Slood and between Burren koppie and Galon Mahoed Main. Most of our sightings have been brief glimpses as they move from block to block, however they have played ball on number of notable occasions.

**Ho, Ho, Ho its Shaka, looking for his Christmas presents**

One early evening drive located Shaka hiding under some rocks at Mahoed koppie and the females moving through the block close to Burren koppie. We decided to sit with Shaka until dusk, hoping he would emerge and give us a visual. True enough, as the sun fell he left his hiding place and climbed to the top of the koppie to survey his domain. Eventually he started to make his way through the bush to Mahoed clearing, so we quickly drove off and parked up in a prime spot covering the waterhole. Within five minutes the females and cubs showed up from the opposite direction to drink before surrounding the vehicle. The nearby presence of two impala herds to the south put the lions in a rather restless mood, broken only when Shaka finally showed up. They all immediately rushed over to greet the big man, before resuming their interest in the

impala. Sadly there was no chance of them sneaking up on the small antelope, and when they realized this they quickly lost interest and parked off in the centre of the clearing.



Skinny, have you been a good boy this year?

The 20th of December found all the lions at the eastern edge of Mahoed clearing. The whole pride was present including Amarula, taking time out from her cubs to catch up on the latest gossip. It was easy to spot her swollen teats and Leo hopes to catch its first glimpse of the new arrivals when we return in the New Year. The sighting itself was perhaps the best we had seen for some time. The pride lounging around in an open area, relaxing and playing with each other, before all of them wandered straight past the vehicles to drink from a small wallow that had been opened up with the rains. The sun was dipping below the horizon when a small adult male rhino showed up to use the wallow. Rhino eyesight is poor especially in the dusk, so it didn't immediately notice the pride hanging around its local haunt until it had almost reached the wallow. The cheeky lions were quick to take advantage and surrounded the rhino, rushing it from all sides and darting out the way when the rhino spun to confront them. Even Mica's small cubs were getting involved, dashing around the rhino and running away when it charged. Shaka of course just kept watch from the shade of a nearby bush. Eventually the rhino had enough and began to move away, whilst the pride flopped down around the clearing to rest, clearly pleased with their efforts to terrorize the much bigger animal.

OTHER NEWS**Cleo the leopard**

Cleo was located in the Josephine and Farrell areas, north of the river, however no visuals were attained. No further sightings of the female and cub spotted last month have been obtained either but one of the landowners did manage to spot a large male from his deck just on the northern banks of the river.

Elephants

The month started well with a small un-collared herd of 14 taking a mud bath at Mahoed clearing. For the rest of the month though the elephants only offered us brief glimpses as they have kept to the thick bush to feed. This hasn't stopped us from taking photo's when we have encountered them and allowed us to further our elephant ID kits. It was also interesting to watch a large herd moving across the clearing at Galon Dam alongside a Rhino and her very small calf. Both sets of mega herbivores were relaxed with the others present and it was great to see the two of the big five together like that.



Blind female elephant being helped along by a youngster

Rooibos and Thamboti

Leo managed to spot some adult lion tracks on telegraph road near the beginning of the month, but this has been the only evidence of the two for the last couple of months.

Cheetah

The big male cheetah spotted last month appears to have drifted further north close to the river. Leo hasn't been lucky enough to spot him again, but several landowners have, so it's good to know he is still around.

We wish you all a Happy Christmas and New Year.

Kind regards

The LEO team

Gay and Ben

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