



NEWSLETTER FOR December 2010



Green, green everywhere! The browns and tans of winter are completely gone and we are fully immersed in summer. When the sun is allowed to shine it is blisteringly hot, but having said that it seems to be overcast and plenty of rain has seen the Selati River in full flow. This weather combined with the thick foliage makes the animals quite a challenge to spot. If they are more than 10 meters into the bush (sometimes even less!) they are effectively invisible. But we don't let a little bush growth get in the way of our game-spotting, especially with the lions!

LION NEWS

Given the amount of new growth in the bush we seem to be walking the lions more than getting roadside visuals. This of course provides its own set of exciting challenges, especially when the lions cannot be bothered to even lift their heads out of the long grass when we approach them. They know we're there, we know they know we're there, but we need to see them and they won't even show their faces.



Lions in the long grass... watch your step...

This month has been 50/50 with the girls and boys being separate and together. Mbhurri has been out on his own several times and there was a time when Shaka and Mbhurri were out together. It seems Shaka may be trying to pass on his knowledge to the younger generation. Meanwhile Skinny has been mating, or at least attempting to, with Jane. So maybe, just maybe we'll have some cubs soon!

We had a couple of spectacular sightings of the lions this month. One sighting was of the entire pride at dusk. We were watching the lions at an intersection and shortly after sunset a rhino decides to trot out into the same intersection. Skinny decides he's going to have some fun with this rhino and charges it while the rest of the pride watches intently. Skinny ran and jumped on its back, but to his surprise the rhino was quite nimble. The rhino spun around almost instantly and faced Skinny head on. Skinny was shocked for a moment and the rhino used the opportunity to turn and scamper off. Quite a good sighting!

Another particularly fun sighting was of Shaka and Mbhurri. They were hanging out at a dam in the early evening. Ash and the volunteers had just escaped a tremendous electrical storm (always a fun time when standing and using the telemetry!) when they decided to deal with the wet clothes and go see the boys. He and the volunteers were but three meters from the boys!



Mbhurri astonished at how cool the LEO guys look in their Hi-Lux

As they were watching Mbhurri decided he needed to relieve himself... right next to the vehicle. He walked up beside the vehicle, turned around and defecated right next to the back of the truck. Needless to say, we left soon after. In the back, the volunteers realised the lions do everything to the fullest.

ELEPHANT NEWS

In elephant news we have seen Lillie's herd quite a bit. There are several new calves all playing in and around the herd. There was one day while looking for the lions, we came across Lillie's herd, stopped and watched awhile and carried on. As we turned a corner a ways down the road, we crossed the herd again, so we stopped and enjoyed them a while longer then continued our lion quest. Not five minutes more and we came across the bulls that were following the herd. After watching the boys for a time, one of the bigger bulls, that was in musth, turned and faced us. He gave us a few warning signals including

a nice trumpeting that told us it was time to continue our quest for lion. Granted it was all associated with the same herd, we had three great elephant sightings back to back.



George checking we know who has right of way on Selati's roads

RHINO NEWS

The rhino have been as present as ever. We are very lucky to see them quite often. It seems anytime you go to Mahoed Clearing after nightfall, you see the rhino. We had one particularly great sighting of the rhino in Mahoed Clearing one evening. We were following the roar of the male lions into the clearing. We got there and there was a massive herd of about 40 elephant all eating and drinking in the clearing. Then we saw the rhino. About 8 of them came trotting out into the clearing, right towards the elephant. The elephant didn't seem bothered and the two groups ate and drank together. Meanwhile we could hear the boys roaring behind us, very close, and there were baboons in the massive Nyala-berry tree we were parked under. To top it all off, we saw all of this illuminated by the full moon, no lights. Absolutely amazing!



Our rhinos have been extremely obliging, day or night!

LEOPARD NEWS

Unfortunately there has been a distinct lack of leopard sightings this month. Hopefully the New Year will bring us some Ingwe Luck!

OTHER NEWS

Genet, klipspringer and even aardvark... We had two very cool sightings of aardvark rummaging around on the road (of course making holes that we must avoid the next day) before scampering off into the bush; both beautiful and comical looking creatures that are always a delight to see. Also, we saw a good number of genet on our night drives along with the ever so cute bush-babies jumping about through the trees. We even saw a klipspringer standing as always like a statue on one of our majestic koppies. Speaking of the koppies, we also managed to spot some rock dassies or hyraxes perched atop the koppies. A group of about 5 even ran across the road right in front of the vehicle! Cute little things and hard to imagine they are so closely related to the elephant.

In other news we had to say goodbye to Ash and Amy this month. Their time at LEO has come to an end. Jane played a little too rough with them on one of the walks and they are now part of the great circle of life (actually a far worse fate befell our comrades; they had to go home... hopefully to return sooner than later). But fortunately they were promptly replaced by two far superior and much better looking bush men who set up a small memorial in their honour... very deep in the bush where no one will ever see it. Tom and Trey are from Bushwise like Ash and Amy before them and have some very big shoes to fill.

So, it's been another fantastic month at LEO. Join us next time for our first newsletter for 2011; can't wait to see what we will see!

Until next time, best regards

The LEO team



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