



## NEWSLETTER FOR September 2011



And so, here we are at the end of September already. Can you believe it? Summer is well and truly on its way and I'm sure the rain will be too, along with these continuing high temperatures, long may they last!

## LION NEWS

This month has been good for sightings of the lions, although for a lot of the time, the group has been split into males and females or Jane and the rest!

We have had a very elusive male here...Shaka. This month we were given the go-ahead to find Shaka for darting to put a new collar on him to help keep tabs on his whereabouts when he goes off on his lonesome for days on end. I think that he somehow heard people talking about this on the wind and decided to take a little holiday away from us for a while.

He was absent from any sightings for about 2 weeks and all anyone could find of him was the odd track here and there. Even when Doctor Paul Furnston came onto the reserve with the hope of darting him he did not dare show himself. He knew what we were up to, and he didn't like it!

We tried Baiting with impala meat and animal distress calls but to no avail.

The very next day, the Leo team went out on drive and, after finding signal for Mbhurri, baited a little just to use up the excess meat, and who do you think came strolling up to the bakkie window? None other than Shaka himself! The first day he turns up after 2 weeks and it's the day after a real drive was made to dart him. He is a very crafty animal indeed. Needless to say we have not managed to collar him yet as conditions have not been right but this will be happening in the very near future.

In other lion news, Jane has decided recently to go solo for a while, she broke from the girls after the boys had left to go travel the reserve and has been wandering solo since, which has proved very hard to get any sightings of her.

And now, a real pot-luck tale of the bush! This last week, the team found the girls up in the northern part of the reserve in Farrell, they were tucked nicely into a block adjacent to Dunn Dam. A walk in was attempted to get a visual but the bush proved too thick. Later that afternoon another walk in was attempted, this time from a different position and with the volunteers in tow, all hoping for a visual treat, little did they know it would be quite astounding. As the team walked into the bush, slowly getting deeper and closer to the lions there was a loud 'thud' heard, the group turned just in time to see a juvenile Leopard fall from a tree near the lions. The Leopard hit the floor and was up running almost instantly, Mica, the lioness swiftly took chase. It is not yet known whether the Juvenile Leopard met its untimely demise, but we all hope it managed to get away.

It was at this point that the group turned around and left the sighting after the unexpected action to call it a day.



*Brotherly love...*

Through our numerous encounters with the males over the last few months we have watched as Skinny and Mbhurri have grown larger and their manes get fuller. The two boys are starting to get much darker manes, and it is becoming more evident that Shaka just lets them get on with what they are doing, there is not as much 'beating down', as the boys get closer and closer to being able to challenge Shaka for the dominance of the Selati pride.

And only today the boys were seen on Mabottle link, Mbhurri and Skinny were taking it in turns to try and dig out an Aardvark from its hole, they nearly made it, Mbhurri could nearly fit his whole body inside this vertical shaft they had made but all of a sudden they stopped, we think this was because of a sudden rise in temperature as it was still early and starting to get very hot. It was a very interesting sighting for such an early morning.

## **ELEPHANT NEWS**

This month has seemed to be difficult for Elephant sightings, this may purely be due to the fact we have spent much longer looking for the lions, as they have been hiding away a lot of the time and therefore the team do not have as much time to look for the Eles. Nevertheless there has still been a few sightings.

Lillies herd was seen recently along the Galon Koppie Road, the team pulled into a drainage line after tracking the herd and suddenly, there they were crossing just to the

other side of the dip. This sighting went to show just how nervous some elephants on Selati get when they hear cars, as the team approached with the engine running the elephants – who were still a fair distance away and should not have felt threatened, started running for shelter, away from the vehicle, it was only when the engine was turned off that they started to relax and able along at their usual pace. It was a fairly brief sighting but was interesting to view this behaviour as usually they are ok with the bakkie.

## **RHINO NEWS**

There have been a lot of Rhino sightings this month, many of them brief, lasting only a few seconds but also some longer, more casual ones.

There have been sightings all over the reserve as recently we have been traipsing all over the reserve as the lions have been on the move a lot. There were Rhino seen in Josephine and Danie, Farrell, Huja, Transport, and Hoed. There are a large number of the Rhino with calves by their sides, many of the calves are now reaching sub-adult status but there are still some little ones out there needing attention.

The Rhino ID kits have been put together and are working well, unfortunately, with a lot of the sightings the time to check ear notches is too brief but we have been able to ID a good number.



*Like mother like calf*

## **LEOPARD NEWS**

So this month has not been a particularly successful one in terms of Leopard sightings ,

bar the one I mentioned with the lions!

The team saw a Leopard inside the Paddock are adjacent to Aardvark road recently but the sighting was at night and eyes were seen and binoculars were raised just in time to see it move into the bush, there is a known female that walks those fence lines and we believe it to be her.

Apart from that sighting it has just been Leopard tracks this month, tracks have been seen on Thankerton cutline, Elemboog fence line, Paw Paw north and South river road.

## SPECIAL SIGHTINGS

Just this week the team had a fantastic sighting of four Klipspringers down in Lillie 2, they were on the side of a kopje as dusk was falling and were seen dancing away from the vehicle on the boulders they love so much.

There was an aardvark seen near Telegraph road in Danie, it was a brilliant sighting as it did not run away and did not seem too bothered by our presence as it went about its scurrying business into the bush.

A Porcupine was seen on South River Road in the twilight hours but scurried away fairly quickly.

There was a really good sighting of a pair of side-stripe jackal, one male and one female.

It was on East Galon Sloop, the jackal were seen in the brush ahead of the vehicle, they did not seem nervous and when the vehicle approached they did nothing but watch. The vehicles engine was cut and the team and volunteers sat and watched as the pair hunted around the car, constantly checking for scents in the air, a Duiker ran slap bang into them and was seen off very quickly. The pair were followed for around 15 minutes before they continued their hunt into the bush and away from the vehicle.

There have also been a couple of Hyena sightings around the reserve with a good one on Phalaborwa main of a lone male which was followed for a few hundred metres.



*So that's what an aardvarks bum looks like!!*

## **OTHER NEWS**

In other news this months volunteers have had the chance to experience two baiting call out sessions in search of the lions, only one of which was successful with the lions but the other proved fantastic for Hyena sightings.

As a group we also attended the Sustainable living festival in Hoedspruit which was thoroughly enjoyed by all, the volunteers got the chance to listen to the perils of Rhino poaching from members of pro track and a save the Rhino group conservation effort.

We have also been taking time for some alien plant removal; there is a Queen of the night on the reserve which is positively huge and the team and volunteers have been going at it for a few sessions now which has proved fun and also good exercise! We will be working on that project for a little while I believe as it is just so big. Only a few minor injuries have been sustained so far, most consisting of those damned big spines piercing us like our skin was paper. But we shall fight on!!!!

Until next time, best regards,

The LEO team

### **LIMPOPO ECO OPERATIONS (LEO)**

P.O. Box 41, Gravelotte, 0895, Limpopo Province, RSA

Contact No: +277 79 877 2717

Email: [infoleo@polka.co.za](mailto:infoleo@polka.co.za)