



NEWSLETTER FOR SEPTEMBER 2009



Dear Volunteers and Friends,

September began with beautiful spring like weather with temperatures rising up to a bearable 34°C. However as the month progressed there became a pattern of more and more cloudy, cool days with some strong winds; which meant we even had to cancel our 'braai' night one Friday and eat indoors! The cloud cover has also been playing havoc with our telemetry, although eventually a positive came from the grey days in that we had the first rains of the season towards the end of the month. The insects are now starting to come to life and the dust settling.....

LION NEWS

The lions began the month in the Galon Koppie area, resting high up on the koppie during the most part of the day. They were extremely difficult to spot hidden away amongst the rocks but after some intense scanning with the binoculars their tawny shapes could be made out as they lay relaxing in the heat of the day. They remained there for the next day and after another drive of the telemetry bouncing off the koppies we were very lucky to see Amarula and Mica and their cubs come for a drink at Galon Dam. On the 2nd we had a very good visual of all the lions on a female wildebeest kill on Koedoesrand.

After spending the first few weeks of the month in the Galon area the lions moved south nearer to the LEO base. They then spent the rest of the month further south, so along with the cloud cover affecting our telemetry so have the magnificent koppies of the Lillie area much to our frustration.....The sub adult males split off from the pride again and were on their own for a while in the Mahoed area, they also joined up with Shaka for a while whilst the rest of the pride were down south on Lillie 2. Shaka then moved down to meet up with his females and they moved up once again to the Mahoed Clearing area. Mid-September Stitches and Skinny were seen together near Mahoed but Mbhurri had remained with the pride. One morning we found Shaka scent marking and making his rounds of his territory and to our surprise, thinking he was playfully jumping on a log, it was actually Skinny and Stitches. After their brief meeting Shaka moved off to find his females again and they had once again moved down south onto Lillie near the airstrip.

Towards the end of the month Skinny and Stitches were still together away from the pride but near the LEO base, the rest of the pride were down near the koppies known by LEO as the Knuckles.

A FAMILY AFFAIR

On the 3rd we had a frustrating morning with only the occasional beep here and there with the telemetry. Late in the morning we had a signal pointing north but the sun was high and the day heating up so we headed home to start the challenge again in the afternoon. Again it was a frustrating drive with the telemetry once again not giving us a clear signal, wherever the lions were it certainly did not like it, then much to the volunteers delight due to perseverance, the entire pride were located at Paw Paw Clearing. It had been a while since we had seen them all together.

The cubs were in a playful mood and Stitches was trying to get in on the action. Amarula did not like this and slapped him away with a swift paw. After a while she relaxed and Stitches went on to play with the youngsters. The cubs took great delight in bringing down the rain gauge that sits in the middle of the clearing on a wooden stump, and continued swatting it around and chewing at it. One of Mica's cubs decided to hog the rain gauge and would not give it to Amarula's cub to play with, so Amarula promptly stepped in and urinated on the cub's head much to its shock!! The other two sub adults Skinny and Mburri were sitting alone slightly away from the pride, not showing Stitches' boldness in trying to get any closer to join in the fun.



One of the cubs relaxing in the clearing

Shaka and Selati were also away to the side together lying in the afternoon sun, and Shaka tried to mate with her on a few occasions. Mica and Amarula lay watching the cubs play and on leaving the sighting all adults were silently dozing whilst the cubs continued with their playing. It was such a delight to see the whole pride together again and in such a relaxed mood, it definitely made the hard days searching worth the while.

A BIT TOO CLOSE FOR COMFORT...

On a few occasions this month the lions have been roaming very near to the LEO base. On the morning of the 8th excited volunteers and LEO staff found Shaka, Mica and Selati on a wildebeest kill about 400 metres west of the house. They did not remain on the kill for long, Selati and Mica heading off first both contact calling as they went, then followed by Shaka around 25 minutes later. We followed them through the bush as they headed east and at one point past right next to our generator – much to the shock of Sheldon who had been there 30 minutes earlier starting it! The sub adult males were also near along the fence line of the Sable Camp.

On the morning of the 16th just as we were getting ready for game drive, staff and volunteers spotted many lion tracks around where the game viewers are parked. They excitedly followed them past the outside shower and toilet and right in front of the LEO house!! It looked like the three boys, and one of them had decided our mattresses looked like fun to play with and had dragged it about 5m from the house and chewed the end!! (now you know why we do not let you sleep outside at night!!). The tracks then went down the road towards our gate at the Sable Camp and along the fence line to the east. We then found them walking down Sable Camp Road and along Bushpig and followed them for a while until they decided to disappear into the block.

TAMBOTIE AND ROOIBOS

This month we teamed up with Izelle Joubert and some students to carry out a call up for Tambotie and Rooibos – our two male lions who left the pride in November 2007 and have remained elusive ever since. It is unsure whether they are still on the reserve however tracks have been seen of males north of the Selati River, when we know that all the other males are down south and have been for some time so could not be the owners of these tracks. Last month we discovered 3 young rogue male lions north of the river, and there is still the possibility that Tambotie and Rooibos are also on the reserve. On the 16th we sat with impala bait in the area where tracks were seen, waiting for 2 hours. We had no sightings of any lions whilst we were there although see later for what we did see....

LEOPARD NEWS

On the 2nd we were able to carry out a call up for Cleo due to the provision of some bait from the reserve. We had her on a signal 4.5 and it was getting dark so we decided to hang the bait nearby. After around 30 minutes of waiting we did not spot Cleo, but once again the three rogue male lions showed up!! (These are three males that we found on the reserve last month who are not members of our pride). These guys once again enjoyed their free meal even though it was not meant for them.

Later in the month we did have a lucky leopard sighting when out on call up for Tambotie and Rooibos. During the call up we found that Cleo was on a signal 5 in the area though she did not show herself we had a glimpse of another leopard in the distance, slightly smaller than Cleo, one of her cubs perhaps?? Nevertheless our volunteers were very excited with the amazing sighting.

ELEPHANT NEWS

The beginning of September was a busy week for Elephant sightings. When on a drive up north near Telegraph Road we had a sighting of an unknown herd of 7 females slowly strolling through the bush. We were also lucky enough to see a herd at Mahoed Clearing of 3 females, 2 sub adults and a calf less than 6 months old. According to Izelle this is a very secretive group of elephants so made the sighting all the more special as we watched them drink and browse.



An exciting sighting of the secretive elephant herd with young calf

When out looking for our lions in the Galon area we got to see over 40 of our 60 elephants all together on Koedoesrand at the base of Galon Koppie. It was great to see so many family groups together and an unforgettable experience for our volunteers. We also had an unexpected sighting of George, Junior and another male in a drainage line between Middle and East Galon. They were happily wandering down the drainage line where they had been digging for water and quietly browsing. Though the rest of the month was fairly quiet for elephant sightings perhaps as we were spending more time further south with the lions and the ellies were remaining up north.

RHINO NEWS

It has been a busy month for rhino sightings however the majority are still running off on our approach and do not remain visible enough for a great sighting. Although one afternoon we were driving past Galon Dam and spied a female and her calf that had been wallowing in the mud and cooling off. We slowed down and crept towards the dam so we could get a good look at them and luckily they remained calm enough and stayed in sight. Another sub adult was also present but did not seem as relaxed as the mum and calf and ran off as soon as we approached.

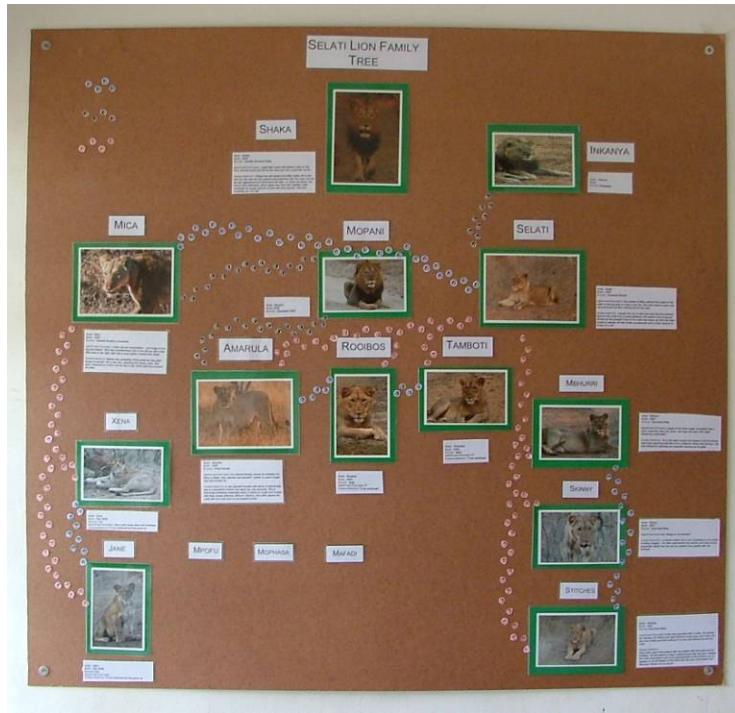


A great sighting of mum and calf by Galon Dam

OTHER NEWS

LION FAMILY TREE

Finally after weeks of planning and several trips to Phalaborwa for resources (!) we managed to finish the Selati Lion Family Tree – it has been a long time coming! It now sits on display in the lounge where we have taken to staring at it for along time due to the effort it took to make and how wonderful it looks. Thank you to everyone who took part in helping put it together.



Also a big thank you to Kaitlin who put together this sign for our new volunteer board, where volunteers will be able to stick up any pictures, photos, poems etc. and a big thank you to Sheldon for carving the board to give it an authentic look!



IS IT A POOL...OR JACUZZI...? OH IT'S HALF A WATERTANK!

One hot afternoon we decided that it was about time to make our 'pool' (aka half a water tank) look more appealing... We decided that it would be a great idea to have it sunken in front of the house so volunteers could sit back in cool off overlooking the wonderful view of the majestic Selati Game Reserve. Sheldon and (brave) volunteer Ryan set to work with pick axes and shovels and gradually found out that it was most definitely going to be harder than we first thought... Several days later we had a visit from a Selati Reserve staff member who thought we needed some help so sent in their JCB to help dig. It was an awesome sight in the LEO

backyard, and after what seem an effortless half an hour the hole was dug, and onto the moving of the 'pool' and leveling off. It was a great effort by those who helped us out – thanks very much! Still we have some finishing touches to do but we will keep you updated.



Sheldon could not cope after Ryan left, so we had to bring this in.....

THE MANIAC IS BACK....AND HE'S BROUGHT A FRIEND!!

Yes the LEO honey badger has returned to base on several occasions – particularly turning up uninvited to our Friday night braais!! A visitor who stayed for one night could not believe us when we said that this small creature had the ability to kill lions and buffalos – they can be extremely vicious! He also surprised the girls when he entered the boma whilst they were sitting around the fire and their shrieks could be heard from the kitchen. On the 29th he returned but brought a friend who was slightly smaller in size so possibly a female, perhaps the maniac has a girlfriend...?

FAREWELL JEN

This month we are saying farewell to Jen who is off on another adventure. We wish her the best of luck and will miss her enthusiasm – even when frustrated with the telemetry - and constant bug-saving addiction. Good luck Jen!

Regards from the bush,

Kate and Sheldon

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