



SERENGETI LION PROJECT - JUNE 2012 REPORT



The Transect Pride is still going strong with their many young lions. Last time I wrote there were six adult females and 17 yearlings. They all seem to still be alive and healthy though one of the yearlings might be missing. It's too early to tell yet since they often are in a terrain where they are difficult to observe and a lion can easily go unseen.



To see all the 23 lions in the Transect Pride together is an impressive sight.



The other day I was driving off road looking for this pride. I'd just spotted them in a tree not far away. But to get to them I had to cross a dry creek with very tall grasses and scrub. I wasn't sure how deep the creek was so I had to get out of the car and investigate. I walked to the front of the car and a bit ahead of it to make sure I wouldn't get stuck if I drove further. It seemed fine and I got into the car again. As soon as I shut the door a lion shot out of the grass near the car and ran away. It came from very near the car and I must have been close to stepping on it on my little walk. The lion had probably been lying there surprised and probably a bit scared as I got out just next to it. When I closed the door it took the chance to escape.

New cubs have been seen in the Maasai Kopjes Pride. Stan saw the collared female, Mato Keo, carrying two very small cubs between the rocks at Maasai Kopjes. Lately this pride hasn't been very successful in raising cubs so we hope for these ones to grow up and live a healthy life.

A while ago I saw some of the females in this pride by a zebra kill. One of their resident males, Dogger, was with them too. He was already full and didn't eat any at the time. Still, he wouldn't let the females eat from the zebra. The only one he'd let eat was a cub who was also using the carcass as shade from the blazing sun, hiding under the ribs. One of the females, Mutant, approached the male in a soliciting fashion. Normally a male would be flattered by this but maybe she was just bluffing and wanted to taste the meat. The male saw through the bluff and responded by giving her a bite on the back. This rather small female responded with exploding rage, turned around and slapped the male, twice her size, on his shoulder so hard his mane stood straight up. Her claws had dug into his skin and she pulled it hard before letting go. It all happened in a split second and in loud growls. The other females were on their feet and about to come for her aid but the fight had already stopped. All lions lay down again and the cub was hiding in the tall grass, terrified.



Mutant teaching Dogger a lesson.



Being out here full time, basically living with lions and getting to know their society helps you understand what you see much better. One good example of that happened earlier this year. A film team was out filming me and Craig Packer working. We were identifying a group of the Cub Valley Pride's lions resting in the shade of a tree. An adult male was slowly approaching. It was Malin, a coalition member and cousin to Dogger just mentioned above. To the film team this probably didn't look like anything dramatic, it looked like a male going to join some lazy lions under a tree. But Craig and I were holding our breaths. Knowing the history of this pride and the male coalition we knew that the sub-adults under the tree were not fathered by the male approaching them. The females were probably going to be fine but one of the sub-adults was a male and could be killed if he didn't watch out. The young male woke up and saw the big male approaching. Watching him getting closer and closer his urine started running uncontrolled, wetting his pants out of fear. Luckily for him Malin stopped short of the tree and the young male snuck away, keeping a low profile in the tall grass.



Malin approaching.

The Naabi Pride is doing well raising their cubs in the difficult areas around Naabi Hill. The male coalition with old Porky and younger Narnia used to stay with this pride more or less full time. But lately they have been seen with the females Sasha and Splash from the Simba East Pride. This is interesting since the cubs of these females now are grown and are trying a life on their own. The future will show if they will start a new pride or eventually settle with their mothers. Sidney, though, will surely not return to the natal pride as he is a male and will have to find other prides with females to mate with. And then there are the females Skvimp Sarah and Sonia who are still busy raising their cubs. For now they stay away from the rest of this pride. But one day Porky was seen with Skvimp too. That time her cubs were staying away, a wise decision since Porky would surely have tried to kill them, not being his offspring.



The Simba East Pride by a water hole. C-Boy and Hildur in the background.

So the Simba East pride will be very interesting to follow the next few months. Will the older females mate and have cubs with Porky and Narnia? Will the pride stay apart and form three different prides or will they reunite? Will Porky and Narnia take over the whole pride and replace C-Boy and Hildur? Will the smaller cubs be able to stay away from the new males and stay alive?

For some weeks time Little My's signal was heard from a palm tree thicket by the Seronera River. We suspected she was denning there with new cubs. Now we've confirmed that The Mukoma Gypsies Pride has six new little members and the proud mothers are Little My and Snork. In May this pride was seen next to the main road. I could tell something was going on straight away because the females were upset. Suddenly there were lots of loud growling and the females chased a young male away. He got a little beaten up but nothing serious. He took shelter in a drainage channel from the road. The females came down there with their cubs to drink, not far from the hiding place. When they left he came out and I could see that it was one of the sub-adult males born in the pride. He probably wanted to be with the pride again and eat their food. But the females couldn't accept that since they have six new mouths to feed now.



The Mukoma Hill Pride searching the plains for prey.

The Mukoma Hill and the Mukoma Mischief Prides have been difficult to see lately. The mischiefs have been wondering widely around both beyond the east and the west of our study area. The Mukoma Hills on the other hand have been more stationary but on top of the Oldanyo Rongai Hill and thus impossible for us to see. We've had to do with locating them there with their signal from the collar. A couple of times though, they have been seen with two new males. These males were unknown to us before and are born outside of our study area. They are now named Nisse and Sotis.