



SERENGETI LION PROJECT – OCTOBER 2013 REPORT

PREPARED EXCLUSIVELY FOR AFRICA DREAM SAFARIS

About a month ago we were running out of water at the Lion Research House. At the Serengeti Lion Project our only source of water is rainwater collected from the roof of our house. We use it for drinking, cooking, washing and cleaning. The gutters lead down into big water tanks all around the house. Now we were down to only one tank with water and just a few liters remaining in the bottom of the tank. One morning a baboon managed to open the tap to get a few mouthfuls of water in the dry weather. But he was not considerate enough to close the tank afterward and the rest drained out and disappeared down the ground, making bees and butterflies happy. The rainy season wasn't expected in another couple of months, at least. Just when we were getting really desperate for water, the Matabele Ants, living under the house, decided to move their eggs to a higher situated location. This is usually a sure sign that rain is on the way. Sure enough, the next day it started raining and we got at least some rain every day for a weeks time. Sometimes it was pouring down filling our tanks in the hundreds of liters. In the end of the week we had about 8,000 liters. We were very lucky to get that in the dry season, just when we needed it the most.

Let me introduce you to a lion pride called Simba Survivors. It's a small pride struggling on the seasonally harsh plains near Simba Kopjes. The pride consisted of only one adult female, a young brother and sister, and three small cubs. In December 2012 the adult female died, likely in a fight with other lions. We thought that the young brother and sister, Leo and Kira, could possibly survive on their own. They were only 3.5 years old and inexperienced. But but for the three cubs, only being 5 months old, we had no hope. After their mothers death all the rest disappeared and we didn't see them again. Not until mid May 2013 when I was driving along a shallow valley on the plains, quite far from their normal territory. I saw a young male together with a small male. At first I didn't realize who they were. But after plowing through all the lion ID-cards I found a match with Leo and one of the small cubs. Later I also found Kira. I was amazed, not only had the young inexperienced lions managed to survive. But they had also managed to raise one of the small cubs too. The Simba Survivors has proven to be true survivors. They are still roaming around the vast plains. It seems like they haven't settled in a territory yet.





Another pride I haven't written about before is the Rofliondo pride. It's a fairly recent pride that broke off from the Loliondo pride. The Rofliondo Pride is a bit of a mystery pride to us. We still haven't managed to put a collar on any of the females and thus have to rely on luck to find them. The place they have been spotted most often is near Sametu Camp. The pride seems to consist of five females between 6 and 8 years old with five offspring. On late July though, one of the females was seen with a long lost male, TR146, from the Transect pride. They were mating. So if everything goes well there will be some new tiny lion fluff-balls born in mid November 2013. The gestation time for a lion is about 110 days.



There are lots of news from the Transect pride. In September 2010 eighteen cubs were born in the Transect pride. Fourteen of those were males! Now, just over three years old, it seems like they finally have left the pride to start a life on their own. Since we don't have a collar on them and males from the Transect pride typically disperse to the north, out of our study area, it will be difficult knowing what they are up to. But a male coalition of fourteen is something unseen in the history of our lion project. Typically a male coalition consists of two to four lions. A coalition of fourteen could theoretically do whatever they like and crush any other competition for females. But since they then would have to share the females among themselves such a big coalition is very unlikely to persist. It's more likely to break up into several smaller coalitions.

As for the rest of the pride it looks like they are breaking up into two separate prides. Tarragon, TR141, Pippi Långstrump, and Lotta På Bråkmakargatan are busy raising their now seven one-year-old cubs. The four young females from 2010 are now reaching an age where they can start being reproductively active. And as a matter of fact, they have just started to solicit two males, Nisse and Sotis. These impressive males have come into our study area from the west and are already the resident males and fathers in the Mukoma Hill and Tower Hill prides. Together with these young transects are also Zico, the old grandmother born 1998. She is probably in menopause now but has valuable experience to share with the young females. Last week I also saw Madicken with this group of lions. She hasn't been seen since June this year and she looks pregnant.



But Tarragon, Pippi Långstrump, TR141 and Lotta På Bråkmakargatan and their seven cubs better stay away from the new males. Nisse and Sotis are not the fathers of those cubs and will kill them if given the chance. That's why we think that the Transect pride will split up. While the younger females will want to start having their own cubs as soon as possible, the older females that already has cubs still has about a year and a half before those cubs reach independent age. With different interests it makes sense to split.



The demography of the Maasai Kopje pride has changed drastically since last I wrote about them. All the really old females that were in this pride hasn't been seen for long and are surely dead. Now Mato Keo, born in 2002, is the oldest female in the pride. Together with her is now Blixten, MK129 and Laura. They have had a small baby boom and there are now eleven cubs in the pride. But they have failed in synchronizing their litters, something lions often do to better be able to raise the cubs together. The oldest cubs are now about one year old while Blixten just introduced us to four new cubs.

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