

Singita

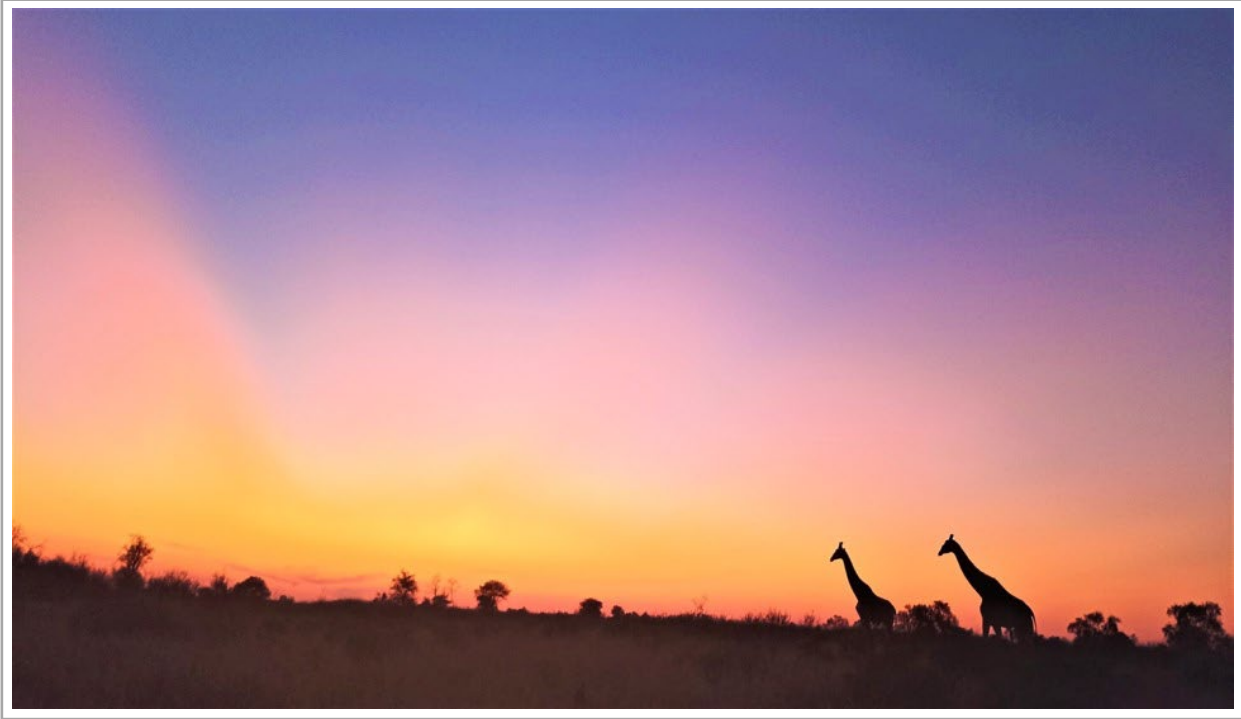


Photo by Monika Malewski

WILDLIFE JOURNAL SINGITA KRUGER NATIONAL PARK, SOUTH AFRICA For August, Two Thousand and Twenty-two

Temperature

Average minimum: 14°C (57.2°F)
Minimum recorded: 09°C (48°F)
Average maximum: 29°C (84°F)
Maximum recorded: 37°C (98.6°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 0 mm
Season to date: 506 mm

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 06h13
Sunset: 17h45

This year has shuffled along rather quickly and the days have warmed up and stretched out a little bit longer until sunset. The mornings retain an icy feel but it no longer lasts as long as before. August is usually our windy month, and this year has been no exception. It seems to become drier by the day and the little green grass that was left has given way to hues of gold and brown. The roads are dusty and the tracks of the animals are showing well on morning drives. The sun sets blood red with an afterglow in the west each evening. As the water disappears from the pans, the rivers are full from the summer rains and are sure to yield some great wildlife experiences for our guests in the coming months.

The bright orange of the flame creeper (*Combretum microphyllum*) dots the Lebombo's ridges now, interspersed with splashes of pink of the candy-striped impala lilies (*Adenium multiflorum*), adding a pop of

colour to the stark contrast of the rugged mountainous terrain. The cherry-red flowers of the weeping boer-bean (*Schotia brachypetala*) trees in camp are a hive of activity with lots of insects as well as avian visitors to the nectar. The tall knobthorn's (*Senegalia nigrescens*) cream-coloured flowers have made an appearance, which is a tell-tale sign that spring is just around the corner.

Here's a Sightings Snapshot for August:

Lions

This month has been an incredible month for lion viewing.

- The Mananga Pride continues to produce great sightings. The larger portion of 16 members, has continued to search far and wide for prey. They are focusing on the large herd of buffalo that have been moving through our concession. They have been viewed attempting to bring down buffalo on a few occasions, in an almost never-ending "cat and mouse game" they have trailed the herd all night and then spent the day resting, almost in view of the herd, then once the sun begins to set, they follow again. They had success bringing down a large buffalo bull that was split from the herd, north of the dam. The entire pride gorged themselves on the bull, including the Shish males. It was a spectacle to remember with all 26 members of the pride finishing the carcass in less than 24 hours! The smaller portion of the pride, the two females and six cubs, are seen in and around the Gudzane Dam area, and the cubs are growing well.
- The Trichardt male lions have continued to be seen in the southern parts of the concession, mainly along the N'wanetsi River. They have been mating with the Shish females and, on one occasion, they were seen mating near the lodge entrance! They brought down a big buffalo bull shortly after sunset during the middle of the month. The buffalo struggled with the two big males for almost an hour until he took his last breath. The males were joined in the following days by some of the Shish females and, incredibly, even the old Kumana male lion - very unusual behaviour. These Trichardt males do seem to have asserted themselves as the controlling territorial lions in the south, however, the Shish females were seen mating with a rival coalition of three lions from the west. These three males were seen marking territory, calling and looking for the Trichardt males. Once they found them a fight ensued, separating the two Trichardt males, and they gave chase into the mountains. There did not seem to have been any blood spilled during the day-long altercation and the intruders were seen far west along the H6 during the following days.
- The Mountain Pride continues to be elusive. They were found in the far north-east feeding on the remains of a buffalo, and they seem to be spending some time in Mozambique.
- The Kumana and Maputo males were seen not far from the Mountain Pride. Initially hopes were that they had joined the Mountain Pride however, both males have been seen separated further south towards the last days of the month.

Leopards

- The Dumbana female leopard and her two male offspring have continued to be the mainstay of our leopard sightings for the month. The mother has managed to kill several impalas and all three have been viewed regularly together finishing off the carcasses. A carcass does not last more than a day. This female caught an impala but her luck turned as the Trichardt male lions were resting close by and, after hearing the commotion, they trotted in to investigate and then abruptly stole the carcass from her. She managed to escape.
- The Nhlanguene female and her cubs have been seen a handful of times this month. Guests were treated to both the Nhlanguene female with cubs and the Dumbana female with the two sub-adults in one sighting. It is possible that after the Nhlanguene female killed and hoisted an impala, she set off to fetch her set of six-month-old cubs, and the Dumbana female found the hoisted carcass and seized the opportunity of a free meal. There was a total of six leopards in one sighting, which is truly special.

- Sightings of the Mbiri Mbiri male have been unusually quiet. On one occasion he was viewed hunting warthogs.
- The Gudzane female was seen on a few occasions near the Gudzane Dam but the sightings were not long as she is shy during the day.

Wild dogs

- A pair of dogs were found running north in the Central Depression area, late one evening. There have been tracks of some dogs on the Mozambique border.

Spotted hyenas

- We have had fairly regular sightings of hyenas, mostly after sunset, of individuals walking around searching for something to eat or patrolling the clan's territory. One afternoon a leopard had an impala carcass stolen by a single hyena, and the hyena finished the entire carcass!

Elephants

- Breeding herds have been seen across the concession and are often viewed in the mountains during the colder mornings, and along the rivers in the afternoons.
- Elephant bulls and bachelor groups are encountered regularly.

Buffalos

- The very large breeding herd of buffalo, which numbers between 500 and 1 000 animals, is regularly seen. This huge herd is often the focus of the lions in the area and it seems to follow a circular route through the grasslands, then looping back towards the river.
- There are also several old bachelor groups of grumpy bulls found along the drainage lines in the mountains.

Plains games

- As with most months, the general game viewing has been fantastic this last month. There have been large herds of plains zebras and blue wildebeest dotted throughout the concession. The large journeys and towers of giraffes are a regular sighting as well as the healthy post-drought years warthog population. The waterbuck herds are easily found along all of the river systems and are often in large mixed groups of different species including kudu, impala, and baboons.

Cheetah

- We have had a few sightings of cheetahs this month. Most sightings were on the H6 around the recently burnt areas. Then around the middle of the month, we had several sightings of four sub-adults in the central areas, and two males were seen in the open areas that surround the Gudzane Dam.

Rare animals and other sightings

- Serval, caracal, African civets, African wild cat, and Sharpe's grysbok have all been recorded this month.
- Honey badgers have been seen on the concession and often in and around the lodges and staff village.

Birds

- We have seen a total of 165 birds for the month. Birding has been good considering the late winter dry conditions. With spring approaching some of our summer migrants have already started arriving. Yellow-billed kites have been seen this month. Some of the sandpipers have also returned. The Wahlberg's eagles have also returned and we are excited to see that the pair that usually nest in the trees just upstream from the lodge are here again for another season. One of these birds is an uncommon snow-white pale morph.

The sun had set, leaving only a crimson glow in the west. My tracker, Sunday, with spotlight in hand, was scanning the horizon for any fluttering reflection of light in the nocturnal animals' eyes. A fiery-necked nightjar took flight suddenly from the road in front of us. As we descended to a section of the track near the N'wanetsi River, we heard the unmistakable bellow of a distressed African buffalo. I had just turned the engine off to establish the direction of the buffalo's cry when the call came through on the radio. Two lions were attacking an old buffalo bull 100 metres west of us.

We turned off the track, manoeuvring through a dense stand of purple-pod terminalia trees, towards the spotlight illuminating two big male lions on the back of a massive buffalo bull. As I came to a stop, the mighty buffalo collapsed to the ground and the lions took their positions. One on the rear and the other attempting to bite into the buffalo's spine. The mighty buffalo was not going to make this easy for them. The lion at the rear tried his best to hold the bull down while the one near the head struggled to grip the spine, eventually climbing off the back, taking a moment to weigh up his options. With a quick tuck of his head, he slid in underneath the huge neck of the buffalo and tried to get a hold of his airway. Instinctive behaviours with smaller prey are very effective and, for the most part, a quick death results. The size of this bull, however, made this an impossible feat for even this very large male lion.

We had identified them as the Trichardt males. These two males have been pushing into our concession and have already been seen mating with one of the older females of the Shish Pride. Since their arrival, sightings of the Kumana male have been scarce and the Maputo male hasn't been seen for over a month now.

Realizing there was no hope in suffocating the buffalo via his windpipe, the lion hastily jumped to the other side and clenched his jaws over the mouth of the buffalo. This is slightly easier for male lions as the females have smaller heads and struggle to kill their prey in such a manner, though not impossible. The second male had managed to turn the buffalo on its side and was biting into the inner thigh, which I explained to my guests was a way in which he could reach the main artery, and the animal would bleed to death.



The buffalo would have been in so much shock and full of adrenalin that he would be feeling little pain. By now both lions appeared to be exhausted. Every so often the male would release his grip on the mouth and the buffalo would let out a gurgling bellow, to which both lions would quickly react and put all their weight into keeping the buffalo down. Twice the bull had managed to get back to his feet, before being overpowered once again by the very impressive Trichardt males.

After about 30 minutes we thought the buffalo was taking his last breaths. And so did the lions, because they both stepped back, their bellies moving up and down rapidly as they tried to catch their breath. The buffalo, whom I now have even more respect for than ever before, pushed himself up, backing into a stand of trees behind him. He was looking worse for wear, and even if he had escaped, he wouldn't have made it very far. His determination left us speechless. One lion hung onto the neck of the buffalo, attempting to regain the grip over his mouth and the other, dodging kicks from the hind legs, managed to pull the back leg out, which brought the buffalo down to his final position. He had put the Trichardt males through the ultimate test, but the circle of life was on its final revolution and after the fight of his life, the buffalo met his end.

Volcanic sunsets

Article by Garry Bruce

The topography of Singita Kruger National Park concession is incredibly diverse, from the open basalt grasslands to the rugged rhyolite cliffs of the Lebombo Mountains. Basalt and rhyolite are types of volcanic rock formed from the rapid cooling of lava flows, which were exposed to the surface of the earth many millions of years ago. These ancient cliffs have a variety of vantage points for us to take a quiet moment to enjoy the setting sun. Over the past few months, our guests have been experiencing unusually fiery, vibrant sunsets.

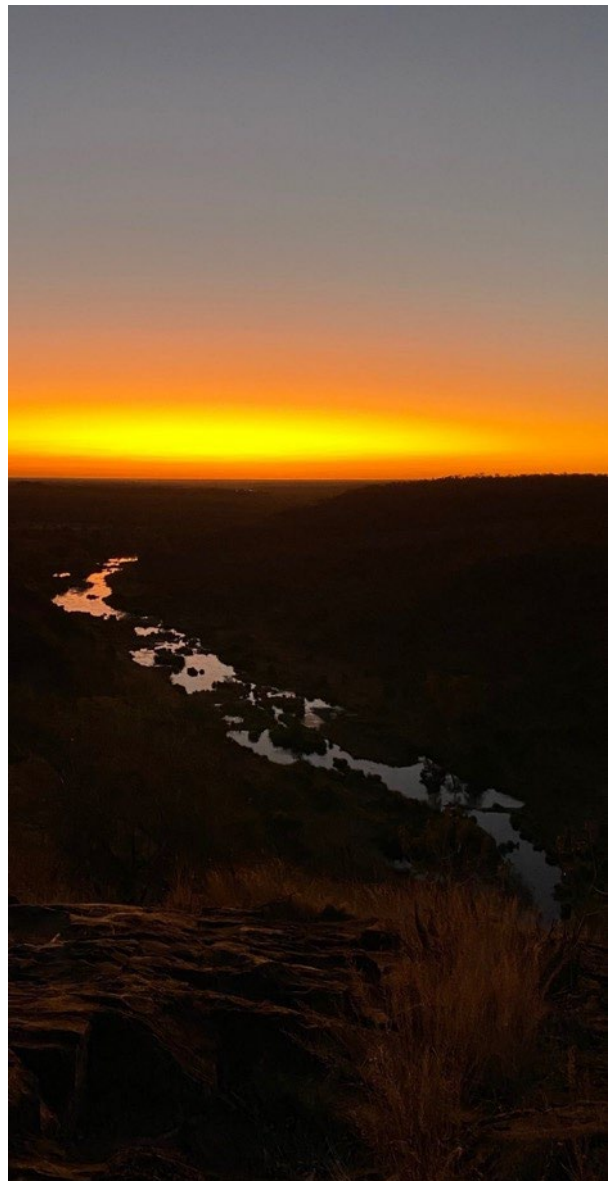
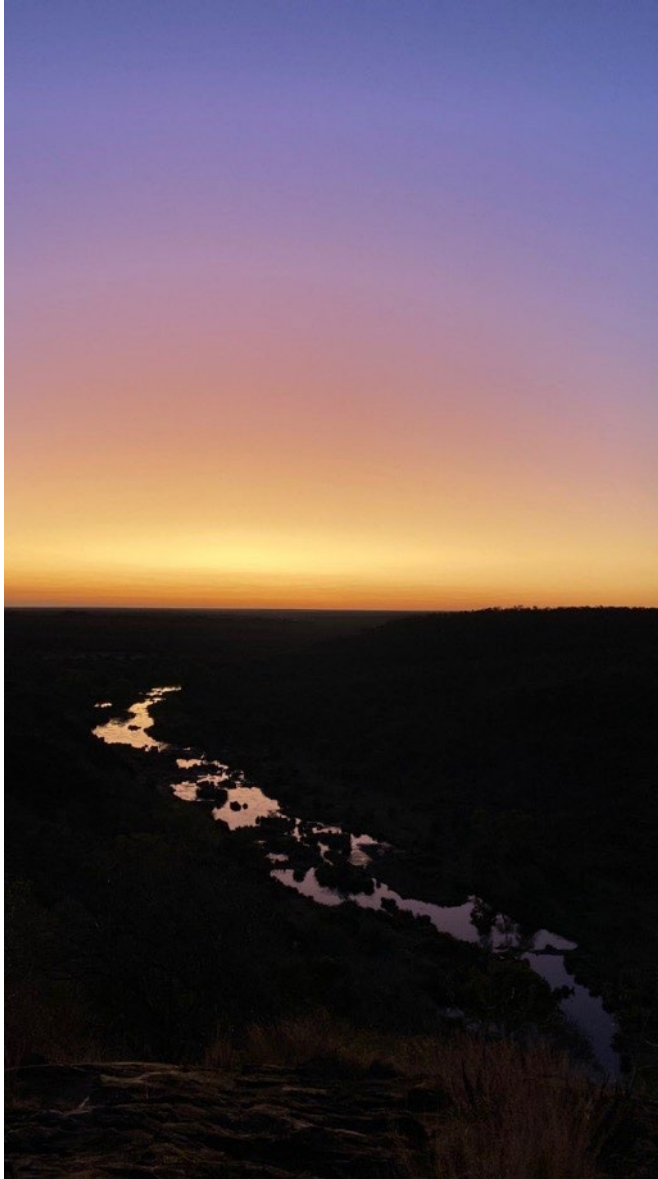
About seven months ago, on 14 January, on the other side of Earth close to the Pacific Island nation of Tonga, a massive eruption of an underwater volcano, likely the biggest recorded anywhere on the planet in more than 30 years, occurred. Dramatic images from space captured the eruption, as a huge plume of ash, gas and steam was spewed up to 20 kilometres (12.4 miles) into the atmosphere, and tsunami waves were sent crashing across the Pacific. Studies then showed that the plume of gas burst into the third layer of the atmosphere, the mesosphere, reaching up to 58 kilometres at its highest point.

Volcanoes are the cause of the world's most spectacular sunsets. Immediately after an eruption, small particles of gas, dust, and ash, called "volcanic aerosols" are sent high into the atmosphere where they then spread around the world. Currently, it seems to be over the southern hemisphere. The particles can't be seen during the day but immediately after sunset, the volcanic twilights are known as "afterglows".

Usually, when you see a sunrise or sunset, it is the clouds that morph into the most resplendent colours, but it's now the aerosols that are present in our skies, scattering and bending the light as the sun dips behind the northern Drakensberg Mountain range far in the west, that are creating a glow in the sky with hues of blues, pinks, purples, and even some violet, particularly about 15 minutes after sunset when conditions are right and the sky lights up in a brilliant "afterglow".

This is not a new phenomenon. For many hundreds of years, these post-eruption sunsets have sent artists scrambling for paint and canvas, inspired by the dazzling skies. Some researchers have connected these spectacular skies to the Norwegian painter, Edvard Munch's famous 1893 painting, 'The Scream', with the explosion of Krakatoa in 1883. However, Munch wasn't the only artist to be inspired by volcano-enhanced sunsets. There are hundreds more, in the years following volcanic eruptions, where paintings seem to have more red depicted in their sunsets.

It seems that in the past this phenomenon has lasted for months or more and it is expected that these brilliant, bold blazes of sunrises and sunsets could continue for up to 18 months, enhancing our nightly sundowner stops by colouring our skies with luminous afterglows of drips of gold. They leaves us to ponder how a such a huge disastrous natural event on the other end of our planet could give us such beautiful experiences, leaving us delighting in the power and beauty of Nature.



August Gallery



Dumbana female leopard, and resting cheetah, by Kirsten Tinkler.





Sharpe's Grysbok by Monika Malewski



Odd-toed ungulates, by Kirsten Tinkler.

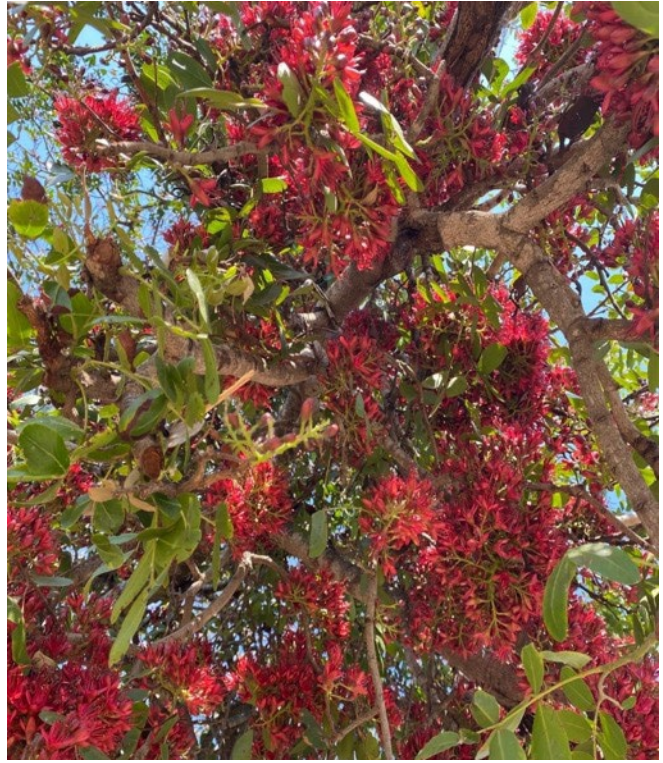


Breeding herd of elephants, and Maputo male lion, by Kirsten Tinkler.



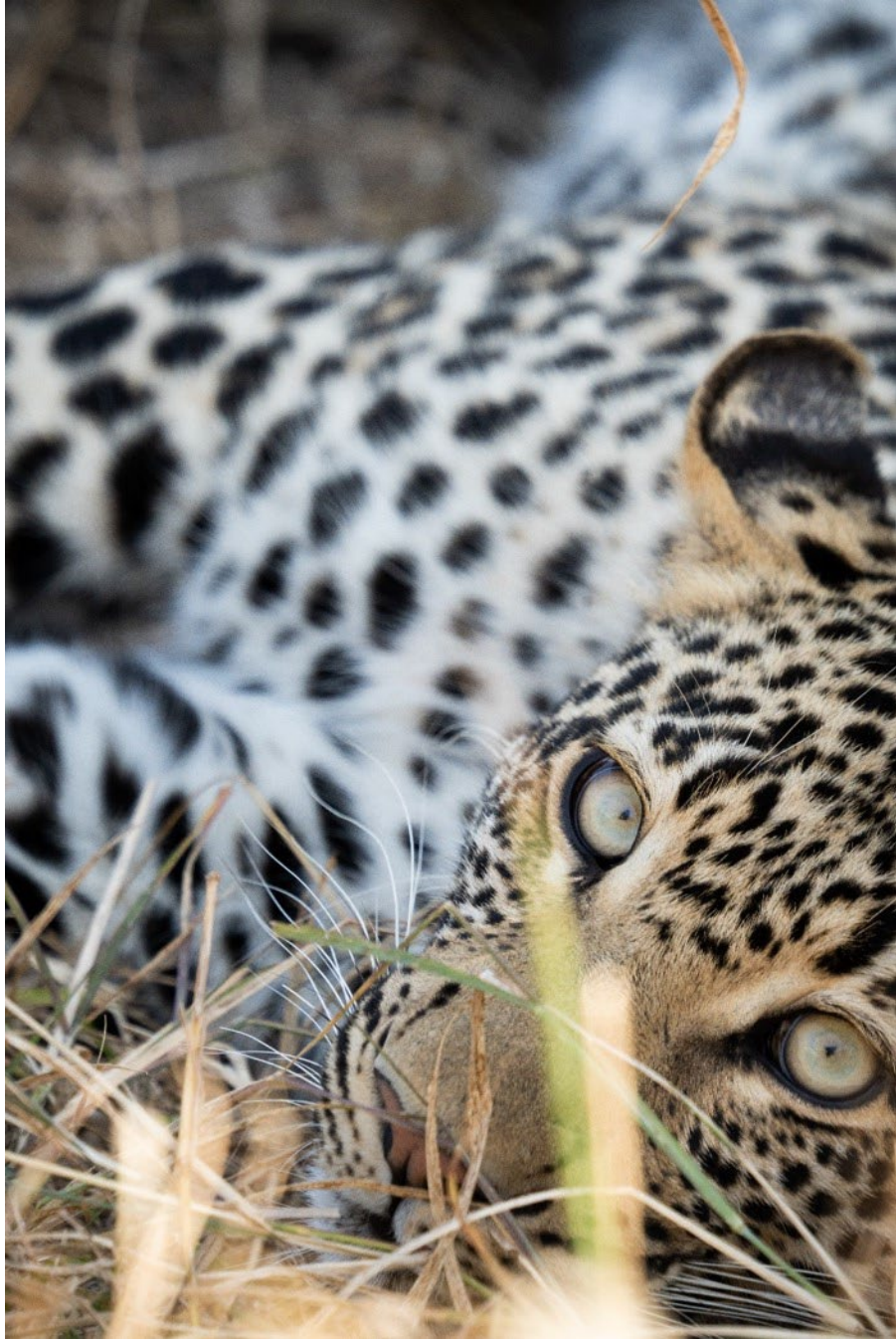


Mananga lioness and pride, by Kirsten Tinkler



Impala lily and weeping boer-bean flowers, by Kirsten Tinkler.





Dumbana young male (3:3), by Kirsten Tinkler.