

Singita



WILDLIFE REPORT

SINGITA SABI SAND, SOUTH AFRICA

For the month of September, Two Thousand and Twenty One

Temperature

Average minimum: 15.7°C (60.32°F)
Average maximum: 29.1°C (84.44°F)
Minimum recorded: 11.0°C (51.80°F)
Maximum recorded: 38.0°C (100.40°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 6mm
Season to date: 6mm

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 05:51
Sunset: 17:48

Branches are bare as the final few leaves remaining float towards the soil. The still evening air is filled with the distant roars of lions and the slow beginnings of a frog chorus beckoning for summer to bring its rain. Yet Mother Nature begins to tease us with moody cloud formations following glorious hot days, she shows signs of her migrant birds beginning to return and with every sunset so rises the starry scorpion who moves ever closer toward the western horizon as he chases Orion across the sky. The people of the land knew of these signs, the whispers of the wild, steadily revealing the changes. Thus, we too observe the beauty of change as nature once again unmask the veil of winter and brings forth abundant new life.

Here's a Sightings Snapshot for September:

Lions

- Having found themselves a safe haven along the banks of the Sand River close to the lodges, with very little pressure, the two Tslalala lionesses continue to thrive and show signs of being extremely healthy and well looked after. We have noticed however that the older lioness is now missing the tip of her tail which we believe may have been bitten off by a hyena over a carcass they were feeding on at the beginning of the month. They have given us an abundance of great lion viewing over the course of this month, often resting near the river, basking in the golden light and even making a few successful hunts in the late afternoons.
- The Plains Camp male lions have been seen on a number of occasions, most recently with one and sometimes two Nkuhuma females. We often hear their roars on the northern bank of the river during the night and have viewed them feeding on a number of successfully hunted prey species.
- With the unfortunate passing of the Styx male lion and now one of the three Tumbela males to our west (he has been reported missing for an extended period of time after being in a very bad condition), the future of the single Nkhuma male remains a mystery as all coalitions surrounding him comprise of two male lions (the Tumela males, the Plains Camp males and the Birmingham males). However, he has still been a regular fixture in our lion viewing this month. Having killed an adult bull buffalo on his own to the east of the lodges, this allowed for a long amount of viewing of this beautiful single male as he fed, slept and vocalised each day.
- There haven't been any further sightings of the Black Dam male who was seen last month with the Nkuhuma male.
- Remaining in the southern parts of the property, the Mhangene pride who still have all members of the pride including their youngsters, are seemingly doing well amidst the changes in coalition dynamics. They continue to keep a low profile and stay constantly in an area where they appear to be most safe from any pressure caused by other lions.

Elephants

- With the temperatures beginning to rise and the limited amounts of water available, large herds of elephants have been keeping everyone in awe along the rivers and around the waterholes that still hold this vital resource. Hours can be spent with these large pachyderms as they play, swim, mud wallow and feed. It has been a wonderful month for elephant viewing and a real privilege to spend such extended periods of quality time with them.

Wild dogs

- This month's wild dog viewing has comprised mostly of the Othawa pack who were very unfortunate in their breeding season this year, having lost all pups on a neighbouring property. This has meant that they have been on the move across the reserve with sporadic sightings every now and then throughout the month. We had a few interesting interactions viewed with them this month. On one occasion they were fast asleep and abruptly woken up by one of the Mhangene pride females who happened to be in the area after having a drink close by. She gave chase and then moved off, back toward the rest of the pride who were feeding on a buffalo carcass nearby. The second interesting interaction was between the pack and a herd of wildebeest who were having a standoff. The wildebeest were not backing down and continued to push the pack of wild dogs further away. Even after the dogs lost interest, the wildebeest were clearly not amused by the pack's playful interest in them.

Leopards

- The month started with Schotia female and Nyeleti male mating once again which brings the hope of a new litter of cubs in the coming months.

- Schotia female continues to thrive, having made a number of successful hunts throughout the month which allowed for some magnificent leopard viewing. She continues to separate herself from the Kangela male, however the two of them have been seen together on the odd occasion.
- Guests at Singita Boulders were treated to a very different leopard sighting this month when the Kangela male caught and hoisted an adult female impala in a tree close to one of the room's outdoor shower. Unfortunately, the kill was stolen by the Nyeleti male who continued to force the young male away whilst feeding on his scavenged meal. There were no guests staying in the room at the time, so we allowed the other guests to come and view this rare sighting!
- The Ntoma female has been viewed on a number of occasions this month with brief glimpses of her two little cubs. We hope to see them thriving with their ever powerful mother keeping them safe. They are still a little bit nervous when there is any sort of vehicle presence but the Ntoma female herself is beginning to show more signs of being relaxed in our presence which we hope helps her cubs to do the same.
- Both Thamba male and Hosana male continue to exude their presence across the reserve. With the Thamba male becoming larger and stronger, he was even seen to be chasing off the Xipuku male who we believe originally pushed the Thamba male further into the south-west parts of the property when he first arrived. He and the Hosana male seem to be pushing their territories just slightly further into Nyeleti male territory with sightings of the Hosana male in parts of the river we have not yet viewed him before.
- A very interesting arrival of the Senegal Bush male became apparent when he moved into the property along the river from our east. Many may not know, but the Senegal Bush male is the older brother and previous litter of the Hosana male. Reports of pressure from the Maxims male, Mawelawela male and the Flat Rock male mean that this could be a new exciting chapter for the Senegal Bush male if he continues to expand his territory further in a westerly direction, and we look forward to observing his movements.

Cheetah

- Seeing one cheetah in the area is a fairly rare sighting, however to see two cheetahs in the same place is a gift! We have been truly blessed to have seen both the male and female cheetah on a few occasions over this month with some interesting interactions viewed between the pair. The female cheetah and her cubs are also beginning to move from their den area and seem to be exploring further to the south.

Pangolin

- We were extremely lucky again this month when Marc Bowes-Taylor spotted a pangolin on the move during a morning game drive. These animals are extremely endangered and it was a real treat to introduce some of our guests to this incredible creature.

Some bush reflections and articles follow, as well as the September Gallery of images.

It's that time of year once again, the fire season. During our previous rainy season, we received close to double the amount of rainfall than usual and this in turn has resulted in a large fuel load due to the vegetation drying up. The dry vegetation provides little to no nutrients for animals to feed on. This is where the importance of fire comes in and brings with it multiple advantages, not only for feeding purposes for the animals but also for the game viewing and photographic opportunities. Having the chance to see a large variety of animals feeding and taking advantage of the new growth is something exceptional to see.

One will notice when driving around the reserve that there are multiple areas that have been burnt. One of the reasons for this is for fire breaks. Fire breaks are extremely important as they not only stop a wild fire from spreading but they also allow for vegetation and animals to be unharmed. Should there be a wild fire it can often be fairly tough to contain, so having these areas of fire breaks where the fuel load has been burnt allows for the teams to get a wild fire under control at a much faster rate and aids in preserving all forms of life. When we are doing these firebreaks, it is always great to see everyone getting involved and doing what they can to help with the success of the environment. It also offers some unbelievable bird viewing as multiple insects are flushed out of the grasses and one can see a large number of bird species having a field day filling themselves up on all the easily available food sources, everything from the smaller passerines to the larger birds of prey.

When it is time to burn larger areas that have not been burnt for a number of years, fire plays a crucial role in the success of the environment. Not only does it allow for the bush to thin out benefiting all types of species from insects to large herds of buffalo, it also helps with promoting new growth and feeding opportunities. When the larger areas are burnt, there will often be a number of trees that will burn fairly slowly and over a long period of time - the advantage of this is that there will be a large amount of nitrogen deposited into the soil, that combined with some light rainfall is the perfect recipe to promote new growth, giving the animals some much needed nutrients.

We have already been fortunate enough to see the benefits of the burns after receiving a small amount of rain. It has created a green carpet layer bringing with it beauty and fantastic feeding opportunities. Not only has it drawn the grazers to the area but we have also seen an increase in predator activity. The new fresh vegetation brings the prey species that then attracts the predators that will in turn attract the scavengers.

It is amazing to think that this is all the result of fire and really explains the circle of life in the bush and the importance of fire out here in the wilderness. I have always said that fire can be seen to be a great servant but at the same time it can be a harsh master. Thanks to our environmental teams at Singita we are able to manage these burnt areas and ensure that they are as close to their natural state as possible.



She opens her heart to reveal a deep magenta centre. Each of her five petals delicately expanding to radiate her beauty. From the side she holds an elegant trumpet-like figure, a vast contrast to the thick bulbous stems that elevate her. A plant so overlooked in summer months, but in winter is the star of the show.

A bright rich fuchsia outlines the star, bleeding softly into the pure white of each petal. These show-stopping blossoms attract many creatures, from the Natal bar butterfly (*Cigaritis natalensis*), pictured below, to baboons, duiker and impala.



Another name for this species is the impala lily or desert rose (*Adenium multiflorum*).

Not all is quite as it seems however. Hidden in her stems, bark and trunk can be found a highly toxic and deadly latex. A latex so poisonous that it was honed by African tribes and used to cover arrow heads when hunting.



Nature creates such stunning aesthetics and it's hard to sometimes resist the urge to want or need such beautiful things. In a world where attraction and wanting is thrust upon us and the sense of *never really quite having enough* is indefinite, it can be hard to live life with sufficient adequacy.

Sometimes it's enough to stand back and admire, to appreciate and behold without interference or intervention. For even the most beautiful of objects can have a deadly side...

The terrific termites

Article by Sipho Sibuyi

A termite colony is one big business. Termites have a specific role to play within the colony and together they create one of the most effective organisations on Earth.

The termite mound is their castle. It is built by worker termites which use a regurgitated mixture of sand and their saliva. Saliva acts like cement, which make the mound very difficult to break open. The mound looks solid from the outside but inside it is a maze of passages and chambers. The mounds have a cool air central channel and passage way, which are kept damp by the termites. Mounds come in many different shapes and sizes forming an integral part of bushveld landscape.

The queen lies in the royal chamber and is so rotund with eggs that she can't move easily. Her job is strictly to lay eggs - sometimes up to 30 000 a day depending on the chemical pheromone message passed on to her from the worker termites in the mound. She will produce either workers, soldiers or future kings or queens.

After heavy summer rains when the ground is soft thousands of termites leave the mound and take to the skies. These are the potential future kings and queens of new colonies. Once they have landed on the ground they shed their wings and look for a suitable nest site to begin a new colony.





This tiny nocturnal primate is often glimpsed on night drives. Most of the time all we get to see are big red eyes glowing from a tree or shrub before they disappear into the night. A bushbaby is an exceptionally agile climber and leaper that can jump over two metres upwards and five metres in length. It is a primitive primate that belongs to the prosimians group, which includes lemurs, lorises and tarsiers. It belongs to the Galagidae family and is found only in Africa.



During these last couple of months we had some very good sightings and, armed with a little patience, we were lucky to watch a pair exit from a hollow in a marula tree, at sunset, on a number of occasions.

Their diet consists mainly of invertebrates as well as tree gum, especially during the winter months when there are less insects. They have comb-like incisors called tooth-combs.



Males are slightly larger than the females weighing in at around 160 grams. The tail is long and bushy towards the tip. The total body length is around 37 cm - head to body 15 cm and tail 22 cm.

According to a primate specialist group Africa has 216 species of primates (111 on the mainland and 105 in Madagascar). Before 1980 only six species of Galagos were recognized, but studies since then, especially of their vocalizations, have resulted in the identification of up to 20 species, but scientists believe there could be close to 40 species in Africa.

In southern Africa we have three species, the lesser bushbaby or lesser galago, the larger thick-tailed bushbaby, occasionally seen on safari here at Singita Sabi Sand, with 2021 proving to be a great year as we have enjoyed at least three sightings so far in the staff village. About a month ago we heard one alarming with loud cries for over 20 mins at a young male leopard that was lying close to the staff village, a first for me! The third species, Grant's lesser bushbaby is found in coastal and evergreen forests of Mozambique.

This evening as we were heading home after a wonderful drive where we were lucky to spend time with a pack of 12 wild dogs, playing in the open southern plains and having the most amazing sundowner with a breeding herd of elephants walk pass us, Musa spotted a bushbaby bouncing like a kangaroo just as I was talking about the journal entry that was now due!

Photo Gallery





Pied wagtail at sunset – Photo by Marc Bowes-Taylor



Buffalo bull – Photo by Gareth Poole



