

Singita



Nkumati coalition, paws up. Image by Marc Eschenlohr

WILDLIFE JOURNAL SINGITA SABI SAND, SOUTH AFRICA For the month of September, Two Thousand and Twenty-Six

Temperature

Average minimum: 16.6° C (61.8° F)
Minimum recorded: 12.0° C (53.6° F)
Average maximum: 26.3° C (79.2° F)
Maximum recorded: 35.0° C (95.0° F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 42.1 mm
Season to date: 646.3 mm
(*Season = Oct to Sep)

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 05:51
Sunset: 17:47

A September of colours and fragrances! The red flowering weeping boerbean and sausage trees as well as the fragrant white and yellow bushveld gardenia have added a spectacular splash of colour to the canopy of greenery. The month saw a decent amount of rain that's added more life to the bushveld. Predators have been frequently seen throughout the month and general game have been plentiful in now, the lush green parts of the reserve, that were burnt in August. Large journeys of giraffe stand tall in the vast vistas that we explore, giving us even more time to stop, scan and appreciate the area we work in. The southern grassland has been inundated with sightings of the larger mammals too.

Here's a summary of sightings for September:

Elephants

- We have had a number of large elephant families moving throughout the reserve. They provide endless entertainment as they feed and interact with one another as they go. We have also observed a lot of elephant bulls, either individually or in groups together, throughout the property.

Buffalo

- The large herd of buffalo continue to roam the reserve, north and south of the river. Herds ranging from about one hundred odd individuals to larger groups totalling more than six hundred!

Lions

- Mhangeni Pride members have been seen regularly. The three older lionesses together with the four cubs of about nine month, that were fathered by the Nkumati males, and then the sub-adults (two females and a young male).
- The Nkumati Coalition have been seen mating with one of the Bateleur lionesses in the south.
- The Plains Camp males have been heard regularly but seen only a handful of times. Often within reach of the other Nkumati Coalition but haven't come into contact with one another as yet.
- Other sightings for the month include the Othawa Pride and the Tsalala lioness.

Leopards

- The Nkuwa female leopard has introduced us to her two new cubs on a handful of occasions, allowing us a tiny window into this very special and vulnerable time of their lives.
- The Thamba male has been seen on a number of occasions throughout the property too.
- The Serengeti female in the north with her two cubs have also been seen.
- The Xirhomberhombe male (from Nkuwa's previous litter) has been seen too and more often than not with prey items he has managed to take down and hoist successfully.
- The Rivala female continues to make the Sand River her more permanent home and we hope, with this is the introduction of what would be her first litter!
- Other sightings for the month include the Xiluva female and Ntoma female leopards.

Cheetah

- The Makatini Coalition of male cheetah have been seen sporadically throughout the southern reaches of the Sabi Sand Game Reserve. We hope, as they become more dominant, those parts become their territory.

African wild dogs

- The Othawa Pack of wild dogs have been seen far and wide. The rain has made it particularly tough to pinpoint their movements. They were spotted hunkered down in the pouring rain on the airstrip this month.
- There had also been a pack of three dogs seen in the south-eastern parts of the property on a handful of occasions.

General game

- The open grasslands to the south of the reserve, as well as the areas that were all previously burnt, have provided the zebra, wildebeest and large herds of buffalo with ideal grazing vegetation.

Hyena

- Hyena have been seen sporadically throughout the reserve. Often almost a guarantee to be seen either trailing a pack of wild dogs or waiting patiently below a tree that a leopard has hoisted a kill in. After a few days of little to no leopard sightings, two hyena forced the Nkuwa female leopard up a beautiful marula tree where she had to finish the remains of her cane rat kill.

Unusual sightings

- Honey badgers have been seen several times this month.
- An African wild cat as well as a white-tailed mongoose were also seen!

Bird list

We have added one more species to the list taking the total to 283 birds. The secretary bird was the highlight for the month!

Some Bush Stories to follow, as well as the Images for the September Gallery.

The 1st of September, while not the official equinox, is the day that many of us in southern Africa think of as the start of spring. It marks the end of the dry cold winter and is a magical time of new beginnings. The sun rises a little earlier every day and sets a little later. The drier period is coming to an end and the green and lush period is about to begin. For our ancestors on this land, it signalled a time of harshness to be over and a time of plenty and abundance to begin. They used biological signs and signals to tell the time of year, such as the Scorpio constellation rising early in the night sky to signal winter in May. It is now high in the sky at sunset to signal us that spring is here. Soon Orion the Hunter constellation will rise early in the night sky to signal summer. For now, though we look forward to spring. Let's tune into our senses and experience spring through them.



Sight

Spring begins with a change of colour.

The dusty golden tones of winter give way to vibrant greens of spring. The first rains and an increase of warmth let the plants know it is time to start producing their new growth. Sunrise becomes warmer rather than crisp. The sunsets are vibrant in colour as the rays bounce off the green tones creating contrast between the green and gold. Colourful flowers start to litter the landscape in hues of yellow, purple, blue and pink, such as a painter's canvas taking effect.

Sound

If winter is stillness, spring is filling the stillness with sound.

On the 18th of September a very special visitor could be heard arriving and calling. The first European bee-eater was heard. These birds travel thousands of miles to Singita, a place they call home for the warmer months. Their sounds can be heard as they tell us the tales of the last few months of their travels. The dawn chorus of birds is getting earlier every morning. Birds can be heard before sunrise at 05:00. An increase of

warmth and moisture also invites an array of invertebrates to begin moving. The sound of cicadas can be heard through the bush and if you're lucky enough to see a rhino you can hear the hum of insects swarming around it as it climbs into a mud wallow. Whilst enjoying time around the lodge the song of the river is amplified as recent rains have increased its flow.

Smell

The smell of the bush is often overlooked. Yet it can provoke the deepest memories.

The dry earth is starting to become saturated. The smell of rain and moisture fills the air in the early mornings. The aroma of coconut sage is intoxicating. During morning safaris, or even more so during bush walks, it is unmistakable. Due to moisture filling the air smells are often more intense during spring. A lot of the trees have started to flower and it's a must to stop and smell the flowers. Wild jasmine, knobthorns and bushman fever tea have an incredible fragrance. The smells not only invites us but also an array of butterflies that use the flowers as a host plant.

Taste

Taste is not the first sense you think of when it comes to safari. However, it integrates more into it than we know.

There is something special about enjoying a morning cup of coffee with Amarula or a cold mimosa on a beautiful spring morning. The taste of fresh fruits that will begin to grow are highly anticipated by the animals and us! Spring is the time of new growth and there is no better time to sample some of these edible plants in nature. Aside from us the animals seem very excited about all the new leaves and grass, and they rush into areas where greenery is shooting through the earth, offering them a tasty treat.

Touch

Spring can be felt long before it is fully seen.

The warmth of the sun as the days develop. With longer daylight hours our bodies thank us for the extra sunshine. The shade definitely lends a helping hand as the days warm. The warm sand contrasts amazingly with the cooler water of the Sand River inviting elephants to the river during the hotter times of day. Take some time to feel the new growth of trees and bushes, as they are more supple and have a waxy texture to help protect them from the animals that feed on them. Springtime offers the perfect time to explore outside the vehicle whether it be sitting along the river feeling the sand, standing under a shady tree or feeling the rubbing post that the rhinos have started scratching on again.

Feeling

Not a sense that can be measured or even explained.

Feeling is such an overlooked sense but something that we all experience differently. Whether it be humans, lions, birds or insects. It is a well-known fact that in some animals hormones are affected by daylight hours. Serotonin increases as spring moves along and is known to raise our mood, energy and focus. Apart from that, the feeling of spring is a time of joy and appreciation. Our ancestors understood this and lived from it. It marks the end of a harsher time and a time of joy, abundance and new beginnings. Spring brings strong emotions to us and the animals. You can see the shift in behaviour and it is so deeply rooted in all living creatures. It is truly a great time to be alive and out in the bush.

In spring the lions call a little louder, the birds sing a little earlier and the elephants trumpet loudly with excitement on the way down to the water!

The hidden network that wakes up after the first rains

Article by Luke Botha

In the Lowveld of South Africa, the land stays dry for many months until the first good rains fall in spring or early summer. Then the bush suddenly turns green. One of the most important changes happens under the ground, where fungi and their mycelium wake up.

Mycelium is the main body of a fungus. It looks like a web of thin white threads spreading through the soil. The mushrooms we see are only the fruit. The real fungus lives mostly underground as mycelium. These fungi are very important because they recycle nutrients. They break down dead leaves, grass and animal dung and release the goodness back into the soil so plants can grow after the rains.

Most plants in the Lowveld form a partnership with fungi. The mycelium attaches to the plant roots and reaches further into the soil than the roots go. It brings extra water and nutrients, especially phosphorus, to the plant. In return the plant gives the fungus sugar. This helps plants survive the dry times and grow quickly when the rains come.

Some termites grow special fungi called *Termitomyces* inside their nests. The fungi break down tough plant material so the termites can eat it. After good rains these fungi push up large mushrooms that people in some areas collect and eat.

Mycelium also holds soil particles together. This stops the soil from washing away in heavy storms and helps it hold water better.

When the rain soaks the dry ground, the mycelium becomes active. It grows fast and starts producing mushrooms. These mushrooms release spores so new fungi can start. At the same time plants get the nutrients and water they need to flush with new leaves and grass. This supports insects, animals and the whole food chain.

Without healthy fungi and mycelium, the soil would be poorer, plants would struggle more in dry times, and the Lowveld ecosystem would be weaker. The mushrooms we see after the rains are a sign that this hidden network is working hard under our feet.

The poison tree - *Euphorbia cooperi*

Article by Sipho Sibuyi

There is one particular tree that seems to catch the attention of our guests. It stands proudly in our turning circles, almost as if it is there to welcome guests as they arrive and bid them farewell when they depart. Its strange shape, beautiful structure and unmistakable appearance often have people reaching for their cameras.

I have also noticed that, sooner or later, someone wants to reach out and touch it.

That is usually when I say, “Before you touch it, let me tell you a little bit about this tree.”

This is the Transvaal candelabra tree, *Euphorbia cooperi*. Although it may look like an unusual succulent, this tree has a fascinating story to tell — a story that takes us back thousands, and perhaps millions, of years.

Long before modern technology, vehicles and even the roads we drive today, this landscape was home to nomadic hunter-gatherers. These people were incredibly skilled at making use of the natural world around them. They fashioned tools and weapons from materials such as bone, stone, flint, animal sinew and hide. Their survival depended on their intimate knowledge of the plants, animals and landscapes that surrounded

them. Among the many plants they learnt to use were species containing powerful poisons.

The milky latex of *Euphorbia cooperi*, along with trees such as the tamboti, was part of a remarkable knowledge of natural toxins. Combined with other sources of venom and poison found in the environment, these substances could be used in hunting practices to help bring down larger animals. What may look to us like an ordinary tree was therefore potentially a very important tool in the lives of people who depended entirely on their surroundings.

And this is what makes standing beside this tree so special.

It reminds us that the African bush is not simply a collection of beautiful scenery and wild animals. Every plant, insect, reptile and tree has a role to play. Some provide food, others shelter, medicine or materials, while others have developed chemical defences that can be incredibly powerful.

The *Euphorbia cooperi* is a perfect example.

So, the next time you see one of these magnificent trees standing beside the road, perhaps take a moment before reaching out to touch it. Instead, look at it a little differently. Think about the generations of people who walked through this landscape long before us, and the knowledge they carried about the plants beneath their feet. In the bush, even the trees have stories. Sometimes, all we need to do is be encouraged to stop and listen.



Twitter



Crested francolins - Kung Fu fighting.
African wattled lapwing looking into the sky.
Images by Marc Eschenlohr



September Gallery



Mhangeni Pride cubs and scavengers finishing off the remains of a wildebeest. Image by Marc Eschenlohr
Giraffe mom and calf. Image by Marc Eschenlohr





A serene scene in the southern part of the reserve. Image by Marc Eschenlohr
Mhangeni Pride full bellied. Image by Marc Eschenlohr





Great view of two honey badgers in the open. Images by Marc Eschenlohr