

Singita



WILDLIFE JOURNAL
SINGITA SABI SAND, SOUTH AFRICA
For the month of June, Two Thousand and Twenty Three

Temperature

Average minimum: 13.1°C (55.5°F)
Average maximum: 26.8°C (80.2°F)
Minimum recorded: 10.0°C (50.0°F)
Maximum recorded: 35.0°C (95.0°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 3.5 mm
Season to date: 649.7 mm

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 06:36
Sunset: 17:12

Now in the dead of winter, and the middle of the year, things are starting to dry up significantly here at Singita in the Sabi Sand Nature Reserve. Although now a lot less, the Sand River is still trickling and attracting a lot of the larger mammals. The mornings are crisp - hot water bottles and seat warmers are very much appreciated by all! Further away from the river, grasses have keeled over allowing us to see a lot further into the bush from the roads, and a lot of the larger trees have all started losing their leaves. It is also that time of year when the Environmental team starts burning the firebreaks, which are areas between properties and along fencelines. Sunrises and sunsets are spectacular with it being so dry and having dust in the air.

Here's a wildlife overview for the month:

Lions

- The Mhangene Pride, five lionesses and nine youngsters, have been the go-to lions for the past while. Up until very recently have they ventured into the western sector with the cubs in tow. The cubs are still all very healthy and energetic little lions, they continue to spoil us with some incredible sightings. The five lionesses caught a buffalo bull at the beginning of the month and they went and fetched all nine cubs taking them back to the kill. One of the Plains Camp male lions (fathers to the cubs) was a bit slow to the buffalo, but was seen with cubs one morning. He was very tolerant of the little ones' energy until it became too much and he moved off.

Leopards

- Nkuwa female and her two cubs have been seen in rocky areas. One of the cubs is a male with a "two:two" spot pattern. The other cub is still not quite accustomed to the vehicles but we continue to practice sensitivity around them in the hopes that it becomes more comfortable.
- The Mobeni female seems somewhat displaced, she has been found all over the property, very close to the lodges one afternoon, to a lot further south the next morning. She has been causing some disruptions to the Schotia female.
- The Scotia female leopard has been seen around the lodges and to the west of them. There was a recent sighting of her and her youngster where the Mobeni female leopard made an appearance along with several hyena at an impala kill. Some worrying sounds were heard by one of the guides - we are unsure as to what exactly went on but we are yet to see the Scotia female leopard and her cub. We are hoping that all is still well there!
- The Hlambela male leopard has been operating under cover. The more dominant Thamba male has made his presence known even further north of the river where we had been seeing Hlambela.
- The Talamati Pride were seen briefly over a couple of days in the north before moving far east of Sparta, east of our lodges.

Cheetahs

The same young male cheetah has been seen, from as close to the lodges at the river to as far south as the railway line. He continues to scent mark as he goes which is very encouraging for us. We are hoping to see a lot more of him in the future.

- A remarkable sighting of him this month was seen by George who watched him chase, catch and kill a young impala, not far from Castleton.

Wild dogs

- We've got some very exciting news regarding the pack of seven. We believe that they are back again and denning north of the lodges - an area that they've denned in before successfully. We will update you in the July wildlife journal if we have confirmation of puppies!
- Guide Andries and his guests had a spectacular sighting of them one morning. Driving around one of the waterholes they saw the dogs chase an impala into the water. Hippos kept chasing the dogs away until they eventually gave up. Then the dogs wrestled the impala from a crocodile who took an opportunity at the free meal before a clan of hyena eventually stole the kill from the dogs!

Elephants

- Elephant sightings continue to amaze us, from the lodges at the river most afternoons, to further afield. The larger herds leave obvious signs of where they have dug to get at roots and bulbs beneath the surface. Those along the river have the best of both worlds as they eat the phragmites (reeds) and then can drink when they please. They provide us with endless entertainment, always busy doing

something as they move along feeding. They have been a big help finding some of the predators, flushing them from their hiding places along the river. A recent sighting of a herd chasing two male lions one afternoon allowed us to find out exactly where they had been hiding all day!

Wellness moments

- Winter sunrises have been perfect to get everyone up, with a cup of “to go” coffee, and find a quiet spot out in the field and appreciate nature’s beauty. It also just allows us to stop and listen to the dawn chorus, rutting impala and maybe even the distant monkey alarm calls which may help us start searching for predators. From the main deck area at both Ebony and Boulders one can still hear the Sand River flowing. It is always good to stop, listen and reflect on just how lucky we are to be out here! There’s also the chance of spotting a Cape clawless otter while doing just that.

Bird List

- The bird list for June includes five new species, bringing our yearly total to 257.
- Special sightings were of a secretary bird in early June.



The Environmental team busy with the firebreaks. Image by Matt Durell.

An article follows, as well as the June Gallery of images.

African wild dog denning season

By Marc Eschenlohr

Every year just before the onset of winter, there is excitement amongst the guiding teams in southern Africa because it is African wild dog denning season. Here at Singita, in the heart of the Sabi Sand Nature Reserve, we are always very eager to discover where the dominant female will give birth. Wild dogs are Africa's second most endangered carnivore. A pack raises a new generation each year, and each dog with its unique patchwork coat is a priceless asset to a well-functioning ecosystem. This year our team of guides and trackers discovered a den-site on 12th June, north of the Sand River.

Wild dogs are cooperative breeders and are unique amongst large carnivores as the alpha pair breed every year. We suspect the alpha female gave birth in early June and we have zoned that area for five weeks to avoid any den disturbance.

In southern Africa, in May or June, the dominant female will start looking for a suitable den-site to give birth to her pups. She will typically look for an old aardvark burrow in an old termite mound, with sufficient cover, to give birth. A pup's birth weight is just over 300 grams and she can have up to 21 pups, but the average litter size is ten.

Wild dogs are highly social and are active in the early morning and evening. They need to hunt daily as they have high energy expenditure. When denning the mother of the pups will mostly remain confined at the den-site where she is lactating the pups, and will be fed by the rest of the pack who will regurgitate meat for her and the pups. The pups will start feeding on meat at three to five weeks and are weaned at five to ten weeks. The pack should remain at their den-site for about 12 weeks.

If our pack has a successful litter we will be delighted to monitor the progress of this very special family. I look forward to the next couple of weeks to see how this story evolves.

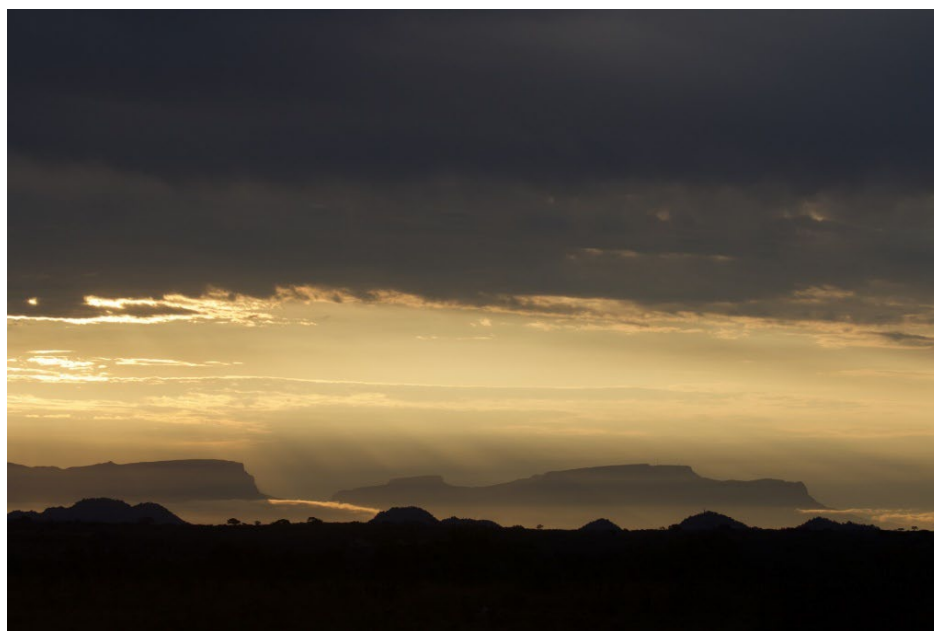


The Othawa Pack (five males and two females) in the Sand River, in May 2023. Both females were pregnant but it seems like the subordinate female is no longer lactating - an indication that she no longer has pups.

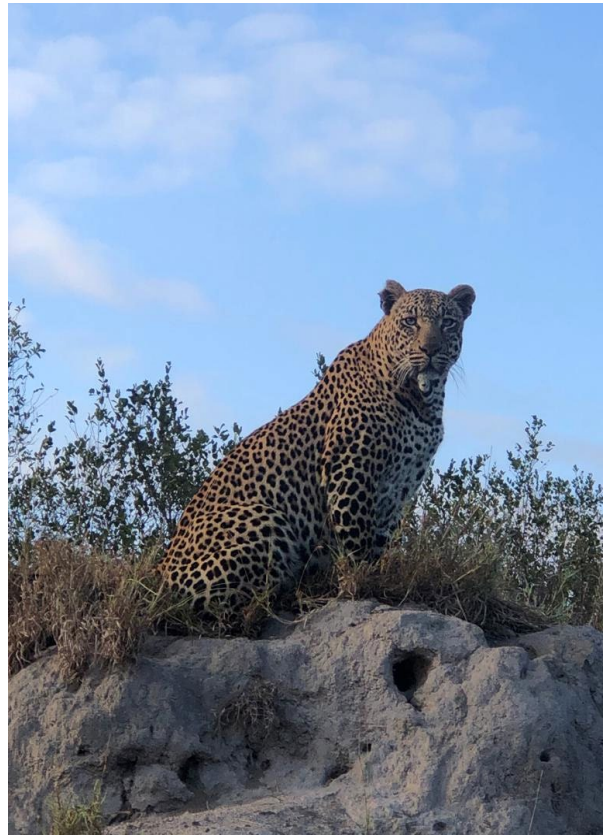
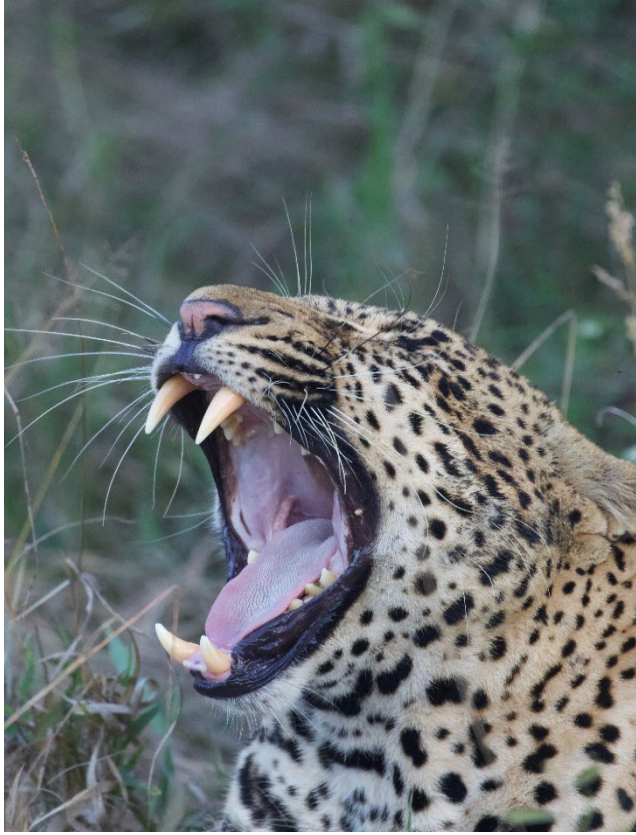
June Gallery



A tower of giraffe stands ruminating while watching their surroundings. Image by Sipho Sibuyi.



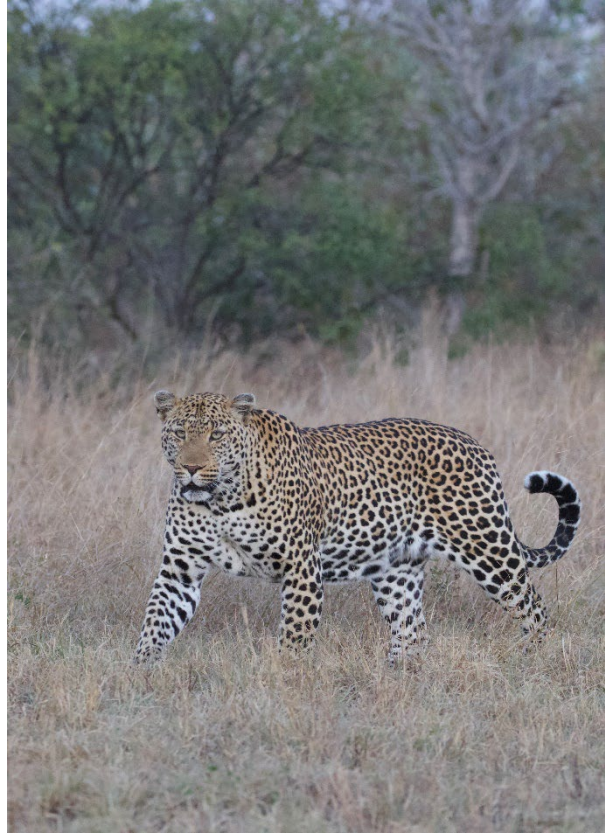
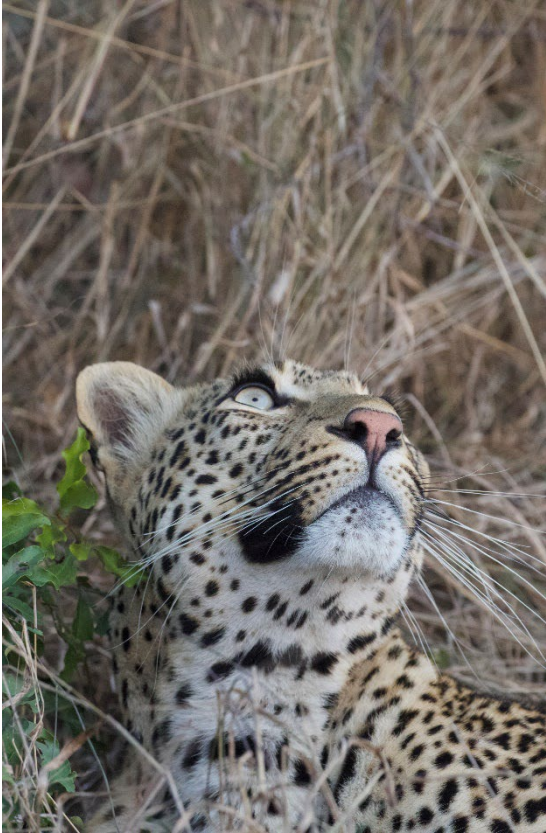
Rolling hills and sunset to the west of Singita Sabi Sand. Image by Matt Durell.



The Thamba male leopard yawning. The Thamba male perches atop a termite mound looking for his next potential meal. Images by Matt Durell and Sipho Sibuyi



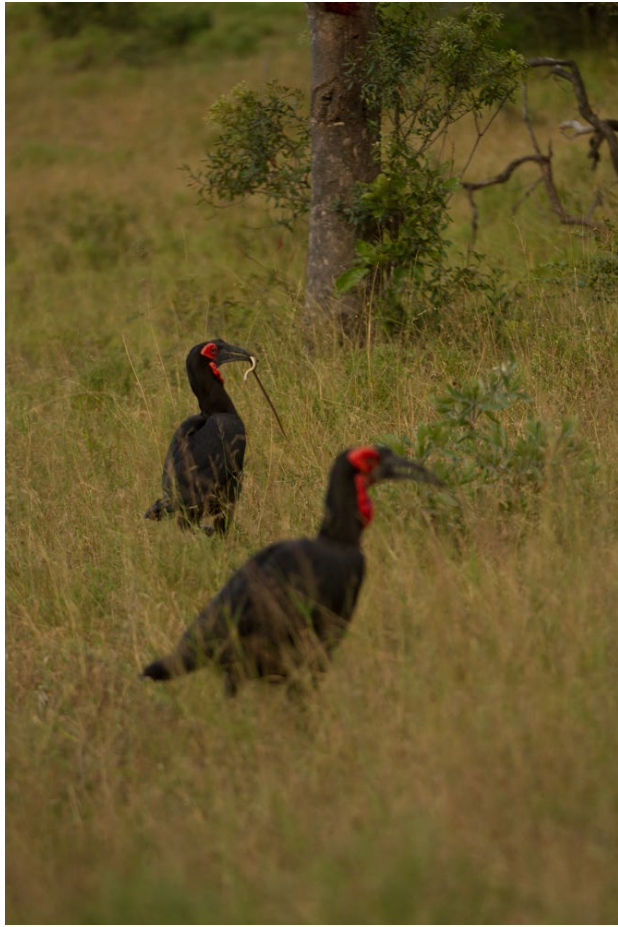
Seven of the nine Mhangene cubs watching one of the lionesses walking away. Image by Matt Durell.



The Nkuwa female watches a tree squirrel above her. The Xiphuku male leopard walks away from impala who sound the alarm at him. Images by Matt Durell.



A young male cheetah hunting in golden light. Image by Marc Eschenlohr.



Not a good day for this snake after an encounter with a southern ground hornbill. Image by Marc Eschenlohr.
A majestic kudu bull. Image by Marc Eschenlohr.



A rare sighting of hippo mating. Image by Marc Eschenlohr.