

Singita



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

Temperature

Average minimum: 22.6°C (72.7°F)
Minimum recorded: 18.0°C (64.4°F)
Average maximum: 33.9°C (93.0°F)
Maximum recorded: 44.0°C (111.2°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 31 mm
Season to date: 123.5 mm
(*Season = Oct to Sep)

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 04:59
Sunset: 18:39

December has been a very interesting month in comparison to the same time last year. In the month of December 2023, we had received over 200 mm (7.78 + inches) of rain for the month. This month, at one stage, the Sand River was merely a trickle in front of Ebony and Boulders Lodges. Rain in the surrounding areas have luckily aided the river level and it has subsequently risen. The extreme heat and soaring temperatures continue to force a lot of the general game to congregate around the waterholes and Sand River.

We've seen impala numbers almost double over the last month with the addition of all the new lambs! For some, sadly, its over before it even starts as a lot of the predators are taking full advantage of the lambs. Not only impalas but the wildebeest calves and warthog piglets too.

Fruiting marula trees have all the elephants smiling again and we've seen them return in their masses. The sour plum tree bearing its fruit has added that bright red Christmas cheer to the bushveld.

We look forward to a very exciting new year here in the Sabi Sands and we thank you all for taking the time to, each month, catch up with our news and stories from the bush!

Here's an overview of the sightings from December:

Elephants

- The larger herds of elephants have all returned to the Sabi Sands. We have been watching them on a daily basis as they continue to move between the river and the thicker areas that are well shaded for the heat of the day. The younger individuals provide endless entertainment for guests and guides alike! The larger elephant bulls that frequent the southern parts of the property have all scoped out the fruiting marula trees and are cashing in on them.

Buffaloes

- The large herds of buffalo continue to frequent the southern areas of the property. Disturbing all animals including the wild dogs that rest at some of the waterholes during the heat of the day, and being disturbed by the prides and coalitions of lions in the southern parts of the reserve.

Lions

- We continue to find the Tsalala lioness sporadically throughout the reserve, both north and south of the Sand River. She was recently seen with one of the Plains Camp males but we did not note any mating activity.
- The Mhangeni Pride continue to show their faces in the far south. They recently managed to bring down an adult buffalo bull, making the most of the weaker-conditioned individuals given the lack of good rain and vegetation.
- The Talamati and Nkuhuma male were also found feeding on a buffalo bull, presumably one they managed to take down, but with the ever-vocal Plains Camp males around they were not there for long.
- The Plains Camp males have moved far and wide this month. Here one day, gone the next. With the rain washing away all their scent marking pillars and posts they are kept busy re-marking their territory within the reserve.

Leopards

- Thamba, the Houdini, enjoys teasing us with views of him from the decks of Boulders and Ebony. Trying to then find him by vehicle becomes the hard part. He moves at any time of day to patrol his large territory.
- The Nkuwa female has proven elusive for the most part of the month, spotted only a handful of occasions but showing herself when we least expect it. She is making the most of the abundance of warthog piglets and impala lambs.
- The Ntomi male has become a firm favourite amongst the guides. He provides a challenging yet very rewarding tracking mission.
- The shy Ntoma female has also been seen on occasion in the south and western parts of the reserve.

- The Hlambela male inadvertently popped up when the wild dogs forced him up a nearby marula tree! He's under a lot of pressure from the males in the south (Thamba) and further north-east (Tortoise Pan male).

Cheetah

- The Makatini female has again graced us with her presence and all three of her cubs seem to be thriving! She was recently seen catching an impala lamb and bringing that back to her cubs for them to trip up and try hone their hunting skills.
- The male cheetah has been seen every so often in the southern parts of the reserve.

African wild dogs

- The Othawa Pack of wild dogs have been showing off this month with regular sightings. The eight pups are just about as big as the adults and have rather large appetites – typically taking over at the dinner table when they catch up with the adults after a successful hunt.

Unusual sightings

- Eagle-eye-Sydwell spotted a serval that managed to kill an impala lamb in the long grass! Viewed from a distance we were provided with some interesting views of the rather elusive cat.
- While following the pack of wild dogs hunting close to Castleton Dam, Kayla and her guests stumbled across two honey badgers who weren't too impressed with them. The two rattled and hissed at the onlookers before running away.

Bird list

- We have added just one bird for the month, taking our total to 301, with the addition of the dusky lark.

Some Bush Stories follow, as well as the December Gallery of images.

It was a pleasant morning with mild weather conditions. We began our adventure along the Sand River, heading in an easterly direction, feeling the early morning sun on our faces as we passed the rocky outcrops east of Boulders Lodge.

There had been reports of lions vocalizing along the river the previous night. As we drove past, branches and lush grass appeared to be moving, creating an illusion of animals hidden among them. Rocks and termite mounds looked strangely animal-like as we tried to distinguish between objects and actual creatures - an experience that is always part of the excitement of the bush.

We had enjoyed productive game drives over the past few days, so the idea for this morning was simply to relax, take in the sights, and learn as much as we could. The mood was laid-back, and whatever came our way was a bonus.

Then, things took an interesting turn. A lioness was spotted sitting next to the road, southwest of Taylor's Crossing. We identified her as the Tsalala female. She was on the younger side and had recently lost her three cubs, making her journey all the more difficult as the last surviving member of her pride.



The Tsalala lioness. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor

But the real excitement began when Howard, our tracker, spotted a mother cheetah with her six-month-old cubs being chased by multiple hyenas. The mother stood her ground against the aggressive scavengers, buying enough time for her cubs to escape. However, one of the cubs took refuge in a dead marula tree, only to find itself cornered. The mother led the other cubs to safety, but our focus shifted to the stranded cub in the tree. It was at high risk of being caught by the hyenas, and it seemed almost inevitable that it wouldn't make it.



The Makatini female cheetah glancing back at her cubs. Image by Matt Durell

The hyenas, hoping for a kill, remained near the scene. But seeing that there was no kill to be had, they eventually moved on. The young cub descended the tree and disappeared into the bush, reuniting with the rest of its family. This was a relief for all of us, and we could finally breathe easy, knowing the cub had escaped.

An afternoon game drive for the books

Article by Sipho Sibuyi

My name is Sipho Sibuyi, and I have been a guide at Singita for two decades. This day was particularly special in my career, as I had the privilege of experiencing an unforgettable moment with both my guests and my teammate, Isreal. It all unfolded before our eyes, and I will never forget it.

It started in the morning with four guests on our game drive. As we were moving along, Isreal suddenly told me to stop and that he had heard a sound. We soon realized it was the call of a buffalo. We decided to follow up, and soon after, one of the other guides radioed in to let us know that they had located the animals, not far from us. It was already a hot morning, and the buffalo were likely heading towards the water.

We joined them and found ourselves in the middle of a large herd of around two hundred buffalo, feeding towards Giraffe Dam, which was about a hundred metres away. The heat had driven them to the water's edge.

As we were observing the herd, Isreal spotted something in the distance - five lions moving behind the buffalo. Using binoculars, we recognized them as part of the Ntsevu Pride. The lions had broken away from the main pride, which is territorial in the eastern part of our property. We knew they were expert hunters, particularly when it came to buffalo, and we speculated about what might happen next.

While we discussed the situation, the lions started to move closer and seemed to focus on a lone female buffalo separated from the rest of the herd. The buffalo herd quickly became aware of the lions' presence and began warning each other. A sense of urgency filled the air as the buffalo started running towards the dam, kicking up dust and making loud noises. The scene was chaotic, as the animals stampeded towards the water.

Some buffalo fought back against the lions, creating a tense standoff. The dam, with its thick vegetation, became a battleground. As the buffalo continued to run around the dam, it became clear that the lone female buffalo had been cornered. In a desperate bid to escape, she charged into the water. However, the lions closed in on her, and despite her efforts to flee, they managed to overpower her. They dragged her to the side, killed her and began feeding.

The experience was both thrilling and terrifying. It was a raw, unfiltered display of nature at its most brutal and beautiful. At first, our guests were shocked and even scared by the intensity of the hunt. But by the end of the encounter, they had gained a deeper understanding of the harsh realities of the wild. It was a powerful reminder of the challenges wild animals face in order to survive, and how resilient they must be to thrive in such an unforgiving environment.

Life as a safari guide at Singita: a journey through cultures and wildlife

Article by Matt Durell

Working as a safari guide at Singita is more than just a job; it's an extraordinary lifestyle that combines a passion for wildlife with the unique privilege of meeting people from all corners of the globe. Singita, renowned for its luxurious lodges and exceptional conservation efforts, draws visitors from diverse cultural backgrounds who share one common goal: to immerse themselves in the wonders of Africa's wild landscapes.

Every day begins with the anticipation of adventure. From sunrise game drives to evenings around the campfire, guiding at Singita is an ever-evolving experience. My role goes far beyond spotting wildlife or explaining ecological facts; it's about creating connections. Guests come with varied expectations - some eager to see the Big Five, others hoping for moments of quiet reflection in nature. As a guide, I adapt to these desires, crafting personalized journeys that make their time in the bush unforgettable.

One of the most fulfilling aspects of this work is the opportunity to interact with guests from different walks of life. In a single week, I might guide a family from Japan, a honeymooning couple from Italy, or a group of conservationists from the United States. Each conversation is a cultural exchange, offering me fresh perspectives on the world while sharing the wonders of Africa with them. Hearing their stories and learning about their traditions enriches my own understanding of humanity.

The diversity doesn't end with people. The African wilderness is a world of endless variety, where no two days are alike. Spotting a pride of lions on the move, witnessing a herd of elephants at a waterhole, or marvelling at the intricate nests of weaver birds are moments that remind me of nature's complexity and resilience. Sharing these experiences with guests often sparks a deeper appreciation for conservation, which is what we hope for.

Being a safari guide is both a privilege and a responsibility. Every guest encounter and wildlife sighting are a chance to inspire awe and foster respect for the environment. At Singita, I've found a role that lets me live my passion while connecting with incredible individuals from around the world. It's a life of adventure, learning, and profound human connection - a journey I wouldn't trade for anything.

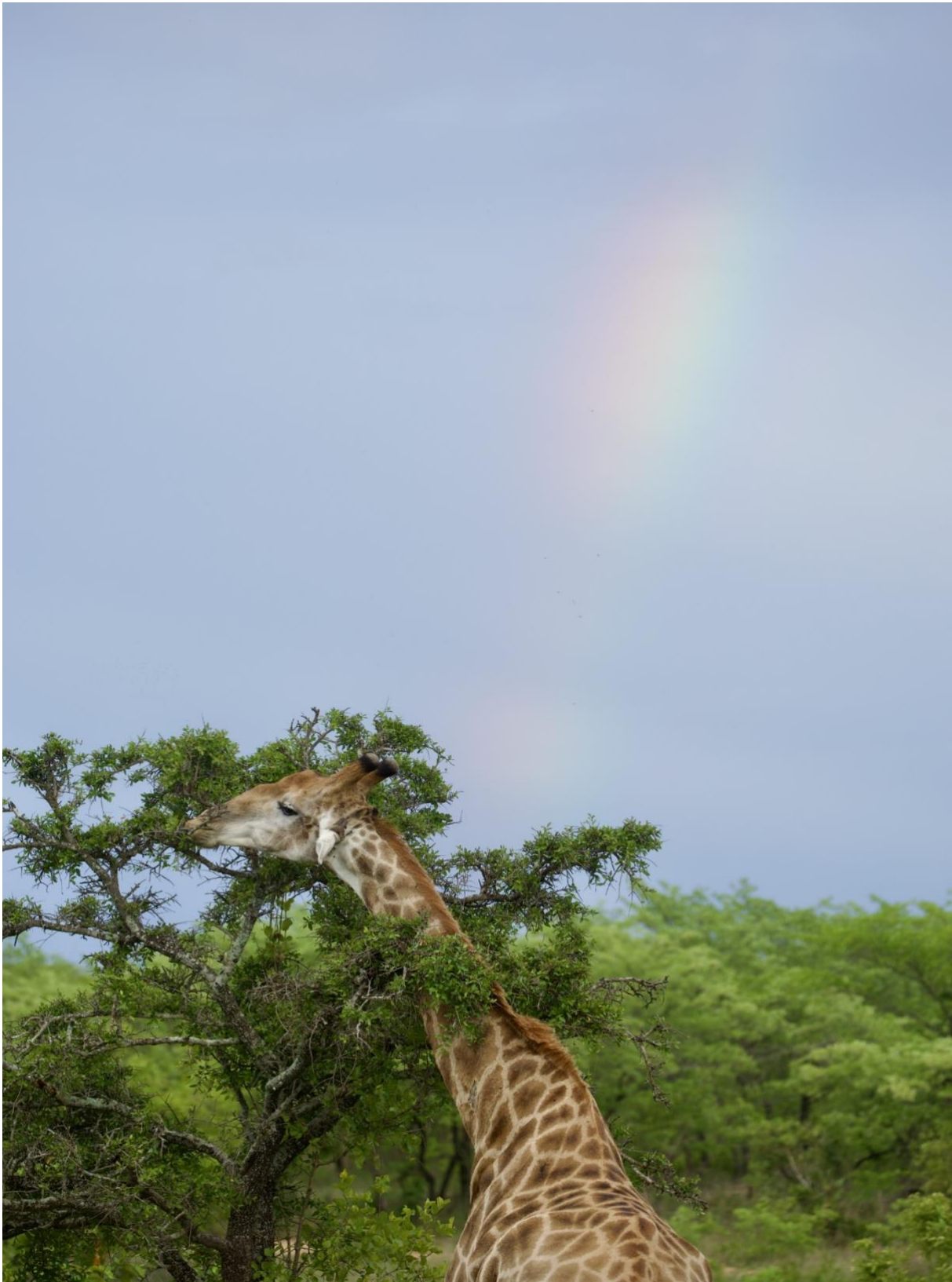
December Gallery



Afternoon naps, quintessential whilst on safari. Image by Matt Durell



A portion of the large herd of buffalo moving closer to a watering hole that wild dogs were using as their resting place. Image by Matt Durell



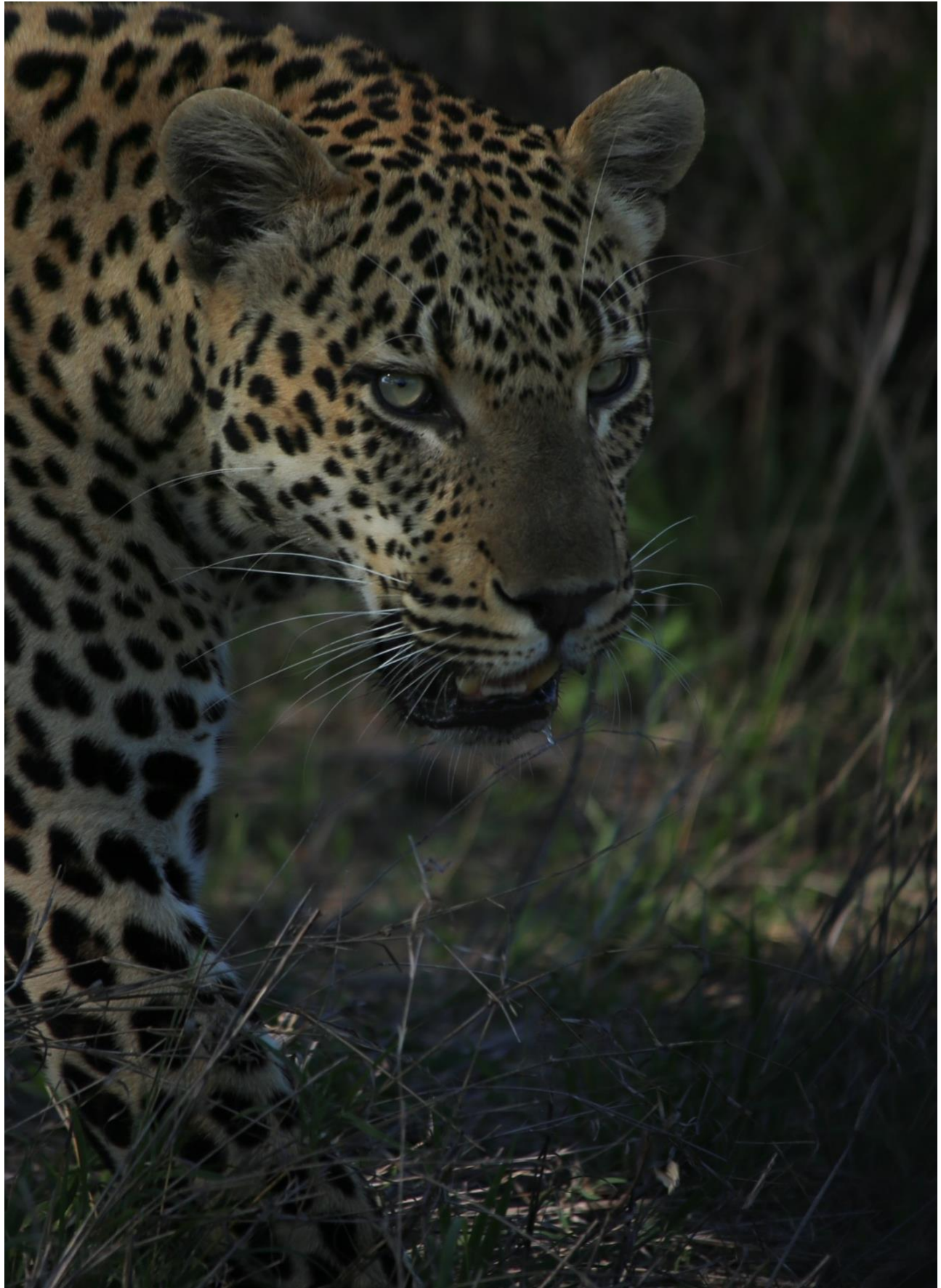
A giraffe browsing beneath a rainbow after a late afternoon downpour. Image by Matt Durell



A herd of waterbuck watching traffic pass by. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor



The Makatini female guards her well-earned meal for her cubs. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor



The Ntomi male leopard providing some phenomenal leopard viewing as always. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor



The ever-playful wild dog pups. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor



Our Christmas decorations are up! Image by Matt Durell