

# Singita



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

**Temperature**

Average minimum: 10.7°C (51.26°F)  
Average maximum: 22.1°C (71.72°F)  
Minimum recorded: 06.0°C (42.80°F)  
Maximum recorded: 26.0°C (78.80°F)

**Rainfall Recorded**

For the month: 7.8mm  
For the season to date: 773.8mm

**Sunrise & Sunset**

Sunrise: 06:36  
Sunset: 17:13

Very few things can compare to departing the lodge on morning game drive - mist fills low lying valleys, and birds find the highest perch possible in anticipation of the sun's rays. The sounds of the bush travel further during the cold mornings while dew settles on the numerous animal tracks on the soft, sand roads. The pursuit is on to find wildlife which has been abundant throughout the Sabi Sand Game Reserve, let the adventure continue...

## Here's a Sightings Snapshot for June:

### Lions

- Our lion sightings have been dominated by the Nkuhuma lionesses, their two cubs and the Plains Camp lions. The roars can be heard almost daily. It has been rewarding spending time after the sunsets with the males in particular, as they start to wake up. Often they will call just before moving off into the night.
- The Nkuhuma lionesses are looking in fantastic condition due to their success in hunting on a regular basis. They managed to bring down a zebra in the gabro grasslands in the central area of the reserve. They fed on it for over three days.
- With buffalo herds frequenting the southern grasslands lions have been in close proximity, mainly lions from the Nsevu Pride, which has seen a number of young males becoming nomadic and chancing their luck with these big bovines.

### Elephants

- Elephants can be found on almost every game drive. With green grass still plentiful, they have lots to choose from. Termite mounds offering nutritional grass species often play host to these hungry pachyderms. Guests at Boulders and Ebony lodges are spoilt with frequent views of family groups from their decks, looking down into the Sand River. What a way to spend the down time between drives!

### Leopards

- The Mobeni female has offered some great viewing. As we weave our way through the woodlands of central Singita a sharp eye may just lock eyes with this watchful leopard. This old female continues to hold her own in the area surrounding Castleton Camp, and sometimes one may just hear her calling from the lodge itself. One memorable sighting from this month was when she hoisted an impala in a marula tree off of the old Castleton airstrip.
- Nkuwa female and her cub have been occupying the rocky outcrops that line the Mobeni drainage. One late afternoon they graced us with their presence and lay in some beautiful golden sunlight. Guests had the opportunity to capture a very special moment as mother and cub played and groomed with one another. Truly unforgettable.
- As we depart Boulders or Ebony the search begins for the Schotia female leopard. We have been seeing her more than what we did in May. One sighting of her jumping from rock to rock as she ventured to the northern bank of the Sand River comes to mind.

### Wild dogs

- Although we have not had many sightings of these canids, when they have appeared it has been action packed! We have followed tracks in Othawa to the north of the Sand River with very little joy, but one afternoon we were delighted to have them hunting in the eastern grasslands where they caught and devoured a steenbok. They action picked up a notch as a clan of six hyenas came bounding in, and the chaos commenced. The pack of nine held their own and managed to fend off the hyenas, while a dazzle of zebra looked on.

### Bird List

- The bird list for June concluded on 264, with standout sightings of a pair of trumpeter hornbills and a half-collared kingfisher hunting close to a pair of Cape clawless otters, at Taylor's Crossing.

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

## The hunting technique of African Wild dogs

Article by Coman Mnisi

It was a beautiful afternoon and a first drive for the guests as they arrived earlier the same day. Our plans were to drive around the western section of our property hoping for signs of elephants and any general game species such as zebra and wildebeest as an introduction drive, since it was towards sunset time.

As we drove around, we got an update from the guides working in our neighbouring property in the western section that there was a pack of wild dogs that had crossed over to our side. We all got excited since we had not seen them in a long time. We were one of the vehicles to arrive in the area and at that time the dogs had already run past there, but we were fortunate enough to find their tracks and figured out which direction they went.

Because it was late in the afternoon, we started losing light but were able to keep up with the tracks of them trotting along the road. It was a bit challenging to keep up with their speed because they are always running and we tried not to lose the tracks at the same time. Within about 10 minutes of tracking, we spotted a clan of four hyenas running the same direction with the pack, and that's when I started smiling because I knew that hyenas stay close to wild dogs whenever they are in the area.

After having spotted the hyenas and thinking that the wild dogs might not be too far ahead of us, we decided to stop looking at the tracks because of low light, and started driving a bit faster. Soon we drove past the hyenas and located the pack of wild dogs in one of the open clearings. They were staring at a herd of impalas that were busy feeding and looking to settle down for the night in the clearing.

It was so amazing to see that wild dogs hunt differently compared to other predators because they don't use the element of surprise or try to stalk closer. When they all think they are ready to attack they just go! We saw them dash towards the impalas that were a distance away, it was a herd of about 50+ impalas and when they saw the dogs coming their way, they all started running in different directions. That was when the other two vehicles arrived, and I was so glad that they also got there in time to experience the chase.

Everybody was so excited to see how everything turned out. I also got an opportunity to point out some facts to the guests on the difference in behaviour of the impalas when they see wild dogs compared to when they see a leopard or lions. With wild dogs they don't alarm call because they know that once the dogs spot them, they will keep chasing until one of the impalas get tired. Wild dogs have so much endurance and can run for miles without having to take a break.

Fortunately for the impalas they were too good at their speed that evening and none of them got killed.

We followed the dogs as they moved away from that area, and I was amazed to see that even after running fast they did not take a break to get their energy back, but carried on trotting away looking for other hunting chances before it was their time to sleep and give space to nocturnal predators.

They know that if they try to hunt in the dark, it might not end well for some of them because that's where leopards and lions get more active and move around a lot because that favours their nature.



Othawa pack of wild dogs – Image by Ross Couper.

For many years now all throughout Africa, the wilderness areas are shrinking and it is becoming a common vision for us as humans to learn to live alongside the African wilderness and the wildlife it contains. There are multiple aspects that have to be looked at in order to keep Africa's beauty, such as taking care of the wilderness areas as well as the surrounding communities.



Community development and conservation really do complement each other and work hand in hand - they support one another and this is highly important to protect, as it ensures the safety of the wildlife and at the same time helps to keep local traditions alive. This has always been a big focus for Singita and one can see what an amazing impact it has had in various countries on the African continent.

One of the biggest conservation projects has recently taken place at Singita Sabi Sand and the surrounding reserves. There has been a mission to de-horn all of the rhinos to try and curb poaching of this iconic African species. It has been a bitter-sweet project but one that is vitally important as it is hopefully going to save a gene pool and save the species.

It is a massive undertaking to start such a project with multiple opinions and a lot of research. By removing the horn of the rhino, it is hoped that this will deter poaching as the rhino no longer holds such a high value for its horn. It is a fast process when the de-horning takes place and the rhino is sedated for a short period. During this time, the horn is removed ensuring no damage to the growth plate from which the horn grows, and at the same time it allows for the vets and researchers to get vital information such as DNA of the rhino and to do ear notching that will allow for future research of the animal. The ear notching allows for specific animals to be identified. A reversal drug is then given to the rhino ensuring a fast wake up to allow the vets to ensure that the animal is up and mobile and in good condition.

It has been difficult to witness but at the same time it is ensuring that we will be able to view these pre-historic looking animals in the future, and allowing for generations to come to see such a unique species. This also ensures that the keystone species can continue to add its crucial value to the environment.

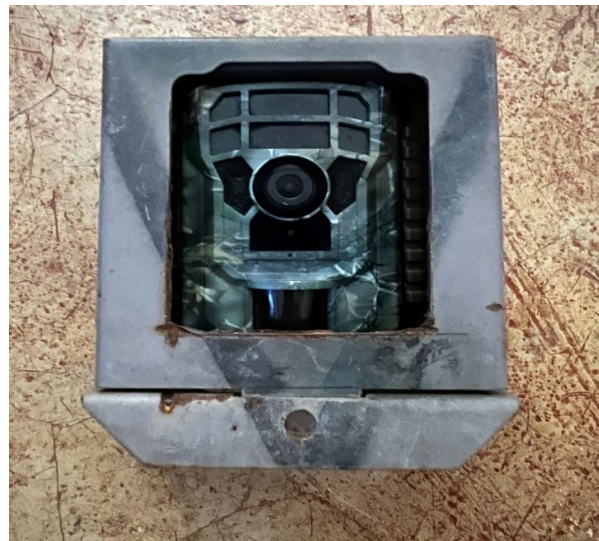
It has been a real privilege to be involved in such a project and it has been an amazing learning curve, one that will most definitely never be forgotten.

Anyone who has ever been with me on safari will know that I love to set up trail cameras whilst out on drive, leave them for a couple of days, or sometimes weeks, to see what animal images I will be able to capture as well as any interesting behaviour.

A trail camera, camera trap or game camera is an automatic camera that detects movement via a Passive Infrared Sensor (PIR) when there is any movement in front of it, typically up to 20 metres. The data is recorded on a memory card and most record sound. For night-time I prefer trail cameras that have a no glow infrared illuminated flash as they don't alert the animals as much as a bright white flash. They generally come with a tree strap or mount. A protective case is useful in this environment but not always a guarantee to keep it safe.



Trail camera on its own.



Trail camera with metal security case.

I got my first trail camera in November 2013 and since then it's been one of the greatest joys of living in the bush. It's an expensive hobby though as leaving trail cameras out in the wild presents certain risks. Even though I do have a number of protective cases that are supposed to protect them from the elements and wild animals, I've learnt the hard way that elephants, hyenas and lions (to name a few), are curious animals and will often take a liking to them. Hyenas, culprits on a good number of times, have bitten the strap that secures the camera to a branch or trunk of a tree and taken it for a joyful adventure in the bush! I've been fortunate to always find them (except once), but sometimes up to 100 m from where I left them either with a couple of dents or beyond repair.

Currently I have three that are in working order and have lost at least eight. I do have one that's at the bottom of a dam after our high summer rainfall. It was on a log, well above the water level, but is now about 2 metres below the surface. I had tried to collect it and got one of the biggest frights, as I was precariously perched on the log probing the floor when all of a sudden a hippo bull emerged from his daydreaming state and sent me flying like a chacma baboon to terra firma.



The result of an inquisitive hyena!  
It was strapped about 1,5m above ground.



Despite the camera being well protected an elephant bull managed to break it open.



A well camouflaged trail camera courtesy of the same elephant bull. I'd spent about 30 minutes looking for it and found it lying in the mud a couple of metres from where it was attached.



Possibly a female armadillo seen 10 days after the armadillo below. Armadillo will use large tunnel systems with several entrances and are where the females give birth. This was the case here - so exciting times as they normally give birth between May and August.



This was taken a couple of metres away from the photo above.





One of my favourite videos was taken at a seasonal pan when a lioness from the Mhangeni Pride and her four cubs came to drink and I was able to get some amazing footage of them all drinking and playing, as well as lots of other species of mammals and birds, before it was shattered by a curious elephant bull, but luckily I was able to retrieve the memory card.



A porcupine and her baby, a porcupette. This year I have been fortunate to capture at least three different families. Still high on my bucket list is to see a pangopup - a baby pangolin!



Cheetah will often use the same fallen tree to urine mark and deposit scat. This tree is often used by a territorial male. Interesting to see that despite its diurnal habits, this individual has often been observed marking his territory well after dark.

Herewith is a list of mammals I've managed to capture on camera:

Aardvark	African elephant	African wild cat	Chacma baboon	Vervet monkey
Thick-tailed bush baby	Lesser bush baby	White rhino	Scrub hare	Giraffe
Tree squirrel	Porcupine	Greater cane rat	Cheetah	Nyala
Leopard	Lion	Serval	Spotted hyena	Bushveld gerbil
Black-backed jackal	Side-striped jackal	Dwarf mongoose	Porcupine	Banded mongoose
White-tailed mongoose	Meller's mongoose	Slender mongoose	Cape clawless otter	Civet
Honey badger	Wild dog	Blue wildebeest	Bushbuck	Buffalo
Common duiker	Hippopotamus	Klipspringer	Kudu	Impala
Steenbok	Waterbuck	Warthog	Pangolin	Zebra

Trail cameras are used to monitor population of endangered species. They are of great help to estimate population numbers. They also allow us to monitor the behaviour of the more secretive species.

I'm hoping to get some footage of a caracal as well as a striped polecat as these two species elude us!

June Gallery



Male cheetah at sunset – Image by Coleman Mnisi.



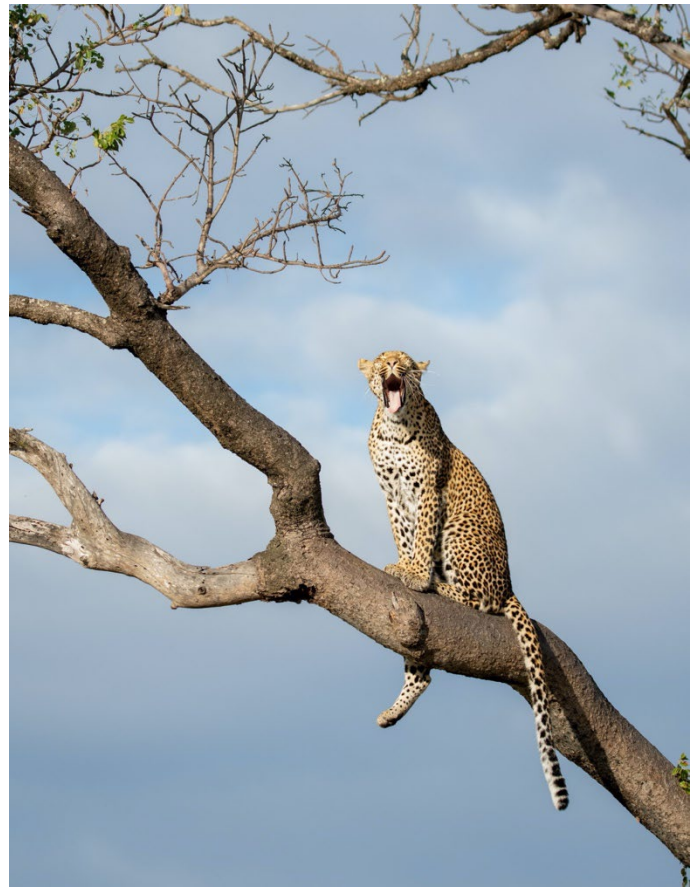
Nkuhuma cub – Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.



African hawk eagle – Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.



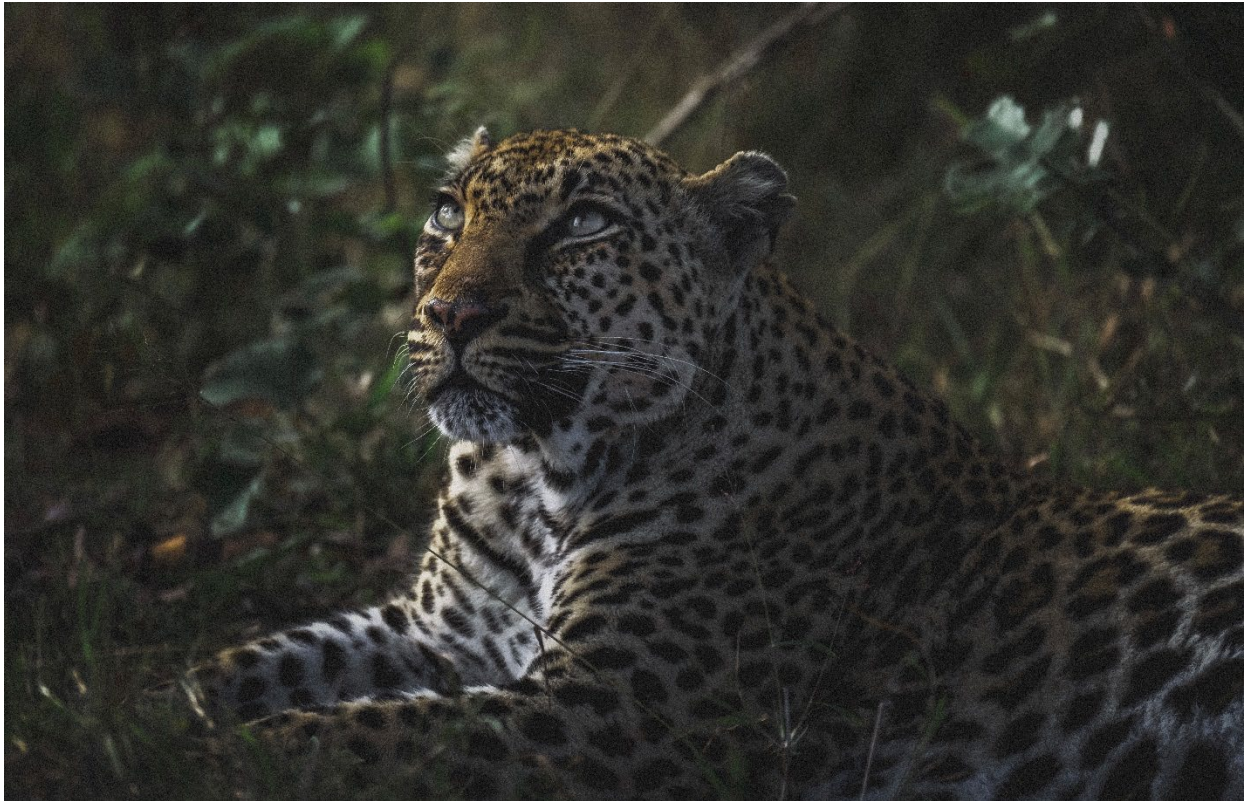
Breeding herd of elephants – Image by Matt Durell.



The Nkuwa female leopard – Image by Paul Josop.



A cute hyena cub and its mother at the den-site – Image by Marc Eschenlohr.



The Mobeni female leopard – Image by Chene Wales-Baillie.