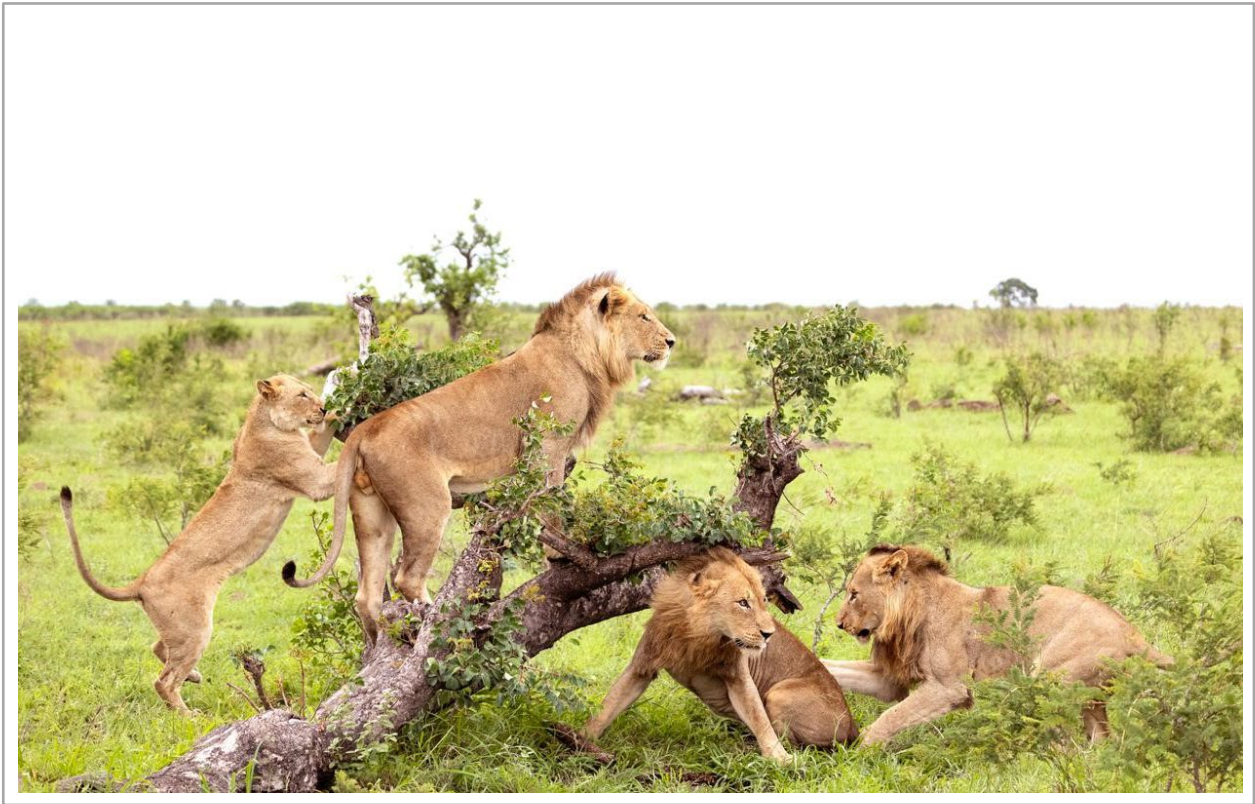


Singita



WILDLIFE JOURNAL

SINGITA SABI SAND, SOUTH AFRICA

For the month of November, Two Thousand and Twenty Two

Temperature

Average minimum: 19.1°C (66.3°F)
Average maximum: 29.8°C (85.6°F)
Minimum recorded: 16.0°C (60.8°F)
Maximum recorded: 38.0°C (100.4°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 67mm
For the season to date: 114mm

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 04:59
Sunset: 18:18

This month has always been a firm favourite for many wilderness enthusiasts and it certainly maintained the reputation as being one of the best times to travel to South Africa's protected wild spaces. Wildlife viewing for the month of November has been nothing short of spectacular with numerous big cat sightings being recorded daily, the births of the impala lambs and wildebeest calves and a few new bird species, there really has been something for everyone! As guides and trackers, we eagerly look forward to what the next drive will have in store for our guests.

Here's a Sightings Snapshot for November:

Wild Dogs

- A pack of eight has been hunting with great success across the Sand River in Othawa. One of the dogs

has a limp but the rest of the pack has been able to secure easy meals with the abundance of impala lambs around every other corner. It is a welcomed sight to see all of them with full bellies and hopefully building condition to next year's breeding season.

Buffalo

- The distant bellowing and grunting of a herd well over a thousand buffalo has been a common background sound when traversing the southern sections of Singita Sabi Sand, and we never get tired of it. Herds so large play a crucial role in the grassland biome and it has been evident when in the same area as these impressive bovines - dung beetles have been feasting on the moisture-rich dung while wildebeest herds and their new calves have been feeding on the short grass that has been grazed to their preferred length by the buffalo. The south is very active since the return of these large herds.

Lions

- The Mhangene Pride has claimed their territory back from the Nkuhuma breakaway lionesses. The Ximobonyana drainage, a riverbed that was once used to protect and hide the Nkuhuma lionesses' cubs, now falls within the newly claimed territory of the Mhangene Pride.
- The Plains Camp lions have been busy too. They have not only been actively pursuing the Birmingham coalition but have mated with at least four of the five Mhangene females.
- The lion dynamics to the north of the Sand River will be fascinating to watch in the near future as the Talamati Pride now outnumbers any other pride in that area.
- It is safe to say that the Nkuhuma breakaway lioness will have to look after her two older cubs by herself. The last sighting of the other female was in the beginning of October during an altercation with the Mhangene Pride over a kill. The interaction may have led to her disappearance.
- The Ntsevu sub-adult lions have been keeping a low profile but have been sighted both in the south and the north of the reserve. They consist of four males and one female around three years of age.

Leopards

- Leopard viewing has improved dramatically this month. We have also recorded a new, young female leopard in the area surrounding Castleton Camp. The Tsutsuma female, a two-year-old from the southern region of the Sabi Sand has been sighted on a few occasions. At first, she is shy when discovered but then settles down. The southern parts of Singita is a great place for leopards to take refuge, with a diversity of habitat, and we hope she hangs around and establishes a territory here.
- The Thamba male has really been impressing us with his remarkable hunting abilities. At times one may think he is simply showing off as his condition indicates he is far from starving. Of course, he is merely living up to the reputation of any big cat which is that of taking the opportunity which is available to him. During a period of seven days, he fed on a warthog for three and a half days and a young kudu bull for three days. All this feasting is adding to his already impressive physique.
- Sightings of the Schotia female leopard have been more regular. On one such occasion she joined the Thamba male leopard with his warthog kill and then followed him for a few days after. They also mated during this time. Will this leopard have cubs again? It has been some time now and we would have expected her to be denning with cubs if her first mating with Thamba was successful.

Bird List

- The bird list for November includes four new species, bringing our yearly total to 282.
- Special bird species include: Cape teal and collared pratincole.

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

The secret life of hyenas

Article by Quentin Swanevelder

Spotted hyenas are probably one of the most misunderstood and interesting carnivores in Africa. Interestingly, their behaviour changes within the geographical areas that they are found. Comparing the behaviour of hyenas here in the area of Singita Sabi Sand to those in the Masai Mara in Kenya highlights the differences.

It is well documented by our Sabi Sand guides that hyenas steal many of the kills that leopards do not hoist into trees quickly enough. This is the general public viewpoint of this amazing animal. They are also extremely patient in waiting for scraps of bone falling from trees. Hyenas extract the protein-rich and moisture content from the bone marrow that they crack open with their powerful jaws. They have been recorded splitting bones that are 7 cm in diameter!

In the Masai Mara where research has been done over the last 30 years on hyenas specifically, it was found that they kill 95% of what they eat and only scavenge around 5%. Most of their hunting and killing is done by night, and when we arrive in the early daylight hours to view them, we find mostly lions lying around the carcasses that have in fact scavenged them off hyenas!

These changes are great examples of species geographical adaptations, rather than species general behaviour. Hopefully this bit of information will make us look at hyenas as wonderful adept hunters rather than eternal scavengers.



The property in the Sabi Sand recently had several controlled burns done in different sections of the property and the results following the first rains of the season have been nothing short of amazing! Much like a phoenix, the rebirth after the fire is probably the best way to describe this beautiful transformation to a vibrant green that even the cameras are honestly not able to process and capture accurately. What has made it even more special is the areas burnt were not very productive game-wise before the burns, and are now the most productive sections.



The two main areas burnt are in the north-eastern block of Othawa for the first time in many years and our far southern section of Ravenscourt. Both are now flush with general game including massive herds of zebra, wildebeest and the large herd of buffalo which is almost ever-present. I always joke about it but if there is that much general game around, animals with sharp teeth are generally not far away and that has recently been the case. This has helped with the return of the Mhangeni Pride, sightings of the male cheetah on occasion, and even a few amazing sightings of leopards that we usually would not associate with that type of open terrain.

I must say I am usually someone who prefers to let nature be and manage itself but fires are very much an essential part of this ecosystem and would naturally occur anyway, but because of the lodges and threat to people it is best to manually initiate and control the burns. This does also obviously help with which areas and how sections are burnt at a time to not put too much pressure on a localised population. The reserve is also done in a 'rotation' so in a period the entire property will be burnt. This helps to ensure the entire property will not have the build-up of a moribund layer which can be detrimental to new growth coming through or even dangerous if left for too long and a wild fire rips through uncontrollably.

What many people ask when seeing the burnt areas is the obvious worry of what happens with the animals when the fire first comes through. Fortunately, most of the larger animals notice it and simply move off and the smaller creatures and reptiles who cannot move that fast for too long generally dig down to avoid it. Obviously, it is not completely safe but you would be amazed how few animals are caught in the blaze showing again the natural instincts to a necessary management.

Impala, the ultimate survivalists!

By Johan Ndlovu

Impalas are an abundant antelope in the Lowveld, they are also one of the most adapted species in the area, and they typically inhabit the transitional zone between two types of habitats being the savanna grassland and woodland. These two types of habitats carry high parasite loads and, in this regard, impalas need to be able to combat the effects of excessive ticks on their bodies and need to employ several methods to do so:

- Impalas are fastidious groomers, spending a large amount of time seeing to their personal hygiene. For this function they have modified teeth, their lower incisors are slightly loose in their sockets and splay open to provide a comb as the teeth pass through the impala's coat, successfully hooking out parasites.
- The impalas allogroom in a reciprocal manner, meaning that one impala will groom another in hard to reach places for example, the head and neck regions, and this will then be reciprocated by the groomed individual for almost the same amount of time.
- Impalas are the smallest antelope that allow oxpeckers to groom them. The oxpeckers act as grooming assistants removing ticks from the impala's pelage (fur). During the rut when males are too busy to self-groom and too territorial to allow allogrooming they accumulate six times the parasite load present on the herd females, and as a result have many more oxpeckers in attendance.

Impalas maximize on whatever food is available. They are mixed feeders and will browse leaves and graze grass, they tend to browse more in winter when there is less food and graze in summer as grass has more protein.

Impalas have excellent senses, their large ears detect sounds easily and their huge eyes provide them with excellent vision - they have side-positioned eyes which provide them with excellent peripheral vision.

One of the impala's most successful tactics in remaining numerous is their breeding strategy. In February the shorter day lengths trigger an increase in testosterone in the males and they separate out of their bachelor groups and begin the arduous task of setting up territories. Ideally these need to contain good food and access to water, the resources that will lure the females. The month of May is the peak of the rut and by this time the males cavorting has induced the females to come into oestrus, and this is a short period for impala ewes.

Within about three weeks all the females will be mated and by late November or early December all impala lambs in an area arrive within about a three week period.



This really is my favourite time of the year, going out on drive and observing impala lambs almost everywhere on the reserve. It really is making me happy!

November Gallery



A young Talamati lion takes his impala lamb kill to a secluded place to feed. Image by Andrew Taylor.



Moody views over the reserve before the heavens opened. Image by Matt Durell.



Stay clear! Image by Andrew Taylor.



A dung beetle proudly manoeuvres its prized ball out of the dung heap. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.



Thamba male leopard after another successful hunt. Image by Andrew Taylor.



An elephant having a whale-of-a-time at Enkhaya dam. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.



Lawrence enjoying the view after a lowveld storm. Image by Matt Durell.



Sunsets and silhouettes, summer season is here. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.