

Singita



WILDLIFE JOURNAL SINGITA SABI SAND, SOUTH AFRICA For the month of June, 2026

Temperature

Average minimum: 13.0°C (55.3°F)
Minimum recorded: 10.0°C (50.0°F)
Average maximum: 23.6°C (74.4°F)
Maximum recorded: 28.0°C (82.4°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 2 mm
Season to date: 569.2 mm
(*Season = Oct to Sep)

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 06:36
Sunset: 17:12

The month of June has brought crisp chilly mornings and beautiful subtle hues of brown and russet-red. The now shallow Sand River still runs soothingly on, and we are seeing herds of elephants, impala and the odd buffalo bull bathing and drinking. Heading out of the rut, impala rams are seen in bachelor herds again, peaceful after all the competing. The bushwillow thickets in the north are losing some leaves and grass plains in the south become sparser as nature continues its winter seasonal cycle.

A Sightings Snapshot for June follows:

Elephants

- The effects of winter have started to show, and elephant herds have been spending more time along the river. We are seeing more movement from the herds, and large marulas and knobthorn trees are left uprooted in their path.

Buffaloes

- Large herds still roam all around the reserve, with some individuals falling victim to the Mhangeni Pride's appetite.

Lions

- The Mhangeni Pride has been around the southern parts of the reserve. The four cubs are doing well and seem to be gaining more confidence by the day. They have been seen on many buffalo carcasses, where all members were present.
- The Tsalala lioness has only been seen on her own this month. She appears to be making successful kills but is tormented by hyenas quite often. She was even seen stealing a kill from a young male leopard.
- The Nkomati males have most recently been seen mating with a younger female from the Mhangeni Pride. Earlier this month a different female was adamant on mating with the males as well, eventually being successful. Hopefully in a couple of months, we will be seeing an expansion in this resilient pride's population.
- The Plains Camp Males are as vocal as ever and have been seen frequently in the north, and around the lodges. Most recently they were seen just west of the lodges with the Bateleur Pride.

Leopards

- The Thamba male leopard, in his usual fashion, has been moving quite a bit. He has been seen mainly in the central parts of the reserve. Field guide Danelle and her guests recently had a very special sighting of him successfully hunting a warthog but then having it stolen by hyenas.
- The Nkuwa female and her young male cub have been spending more and more time apart. The young male is not quite of age to be establishing his own territory; however he is becoming more and more confident on his own for longer time periods.
- Both the Xiluva and Xihangu females seem to be spending most of their time in the western sector and have only been seen on a couple of occasions this month.
- The Hlambela male appears to have been quite busy in the north. He was recently seen mating with the Tiyani female in the west and again with the Shinzele female in the east.

Cheetahs

- The male cheetah has also been seen sporadically throughout the southern grassland sections of the reserve and closer to the central sections.
- We have been so lucky with sightings of the three Makatini sub-adults this month. They appeared to have separated from their mother, although they have been seen following behind her, clearly reluctant to be on their own.

African wild dogs

- The Othawa Pack has become more nomadic after the loss of their puppies. They are crossing in and out of the central parts, often spending a day or two on Singita. What a privilege to have them around.

- A new breakaway pair of dogs, male and female, have been seen for most of the month on the property. The male is collared for research purposes. we hope to see these two dogs successfully establish a pack.

Unusual sightings

- Danelle and her guests had an incredible interaction of three different species. After responding to a distress call from a wildebeest, they found the Tsalala lioness busy attempting to take down and smother an adult wildebeest. The panicked alarming from the individual attracted the attention of a nearby hyena clan. The scavengers pestered the poor lioness and a very lucky wildebeest managed to escape the jaws of the lioness and the hyenas. The hyenas later chased her up into a tree.

Bird list

- Our bird list is sitting at 275.

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



Every so often, the African bush reminds us why no two game drives are ever the same. The Sabi Sand is renowned for its incredible wildlife encounters. From elusive leopards and powerful lion prides to the countless smaller wonders that often go unnoticed, every day brings the possibility of something extraordinary. Yet even in a place as remarkable as this, there are sightings that stop you in your tracks.

Recently, we were fortunate enough to spend time with one of the rarest and most captivating animals you could hope to encounter in the wild: a white zebra foal.

At first glance, it almost doesn't seem real. Against the golden grasses and earthy tones of the bushveld, its pale coat stands out dramatically. The familiar black-and-white pattern that defines a zebra is replaced by soft cream and white tones, creating an animal that appears almost ethereal in the African sunlight.

Conditions such as albinism and leucism are exceptionally rare in wild zebras. These genetic variations affect pigmentation, resulting in animals with unusually light colouring. While beautiful to look at, these animals often face additional challenges in the wild, making it even more remarkable when they thrive and become part of a healthy herd.

For guests and guides alike, moments like these are difficult to put into words. In a world where so much is predictable, the wilderness still has the power to surprise us. It's one thing to read about rare genetic variations in wildlife; it's another entirely to witness one standing before you in its natural habitat.

The curious world of "-phagy"

By Danelle Ferreira

As a little girl I once had an experience while staying in the Kruger National Park that confused me terribly. I had heard a ruckus outside our chalet and found a bushbuck had gone through our trash and was now chewing on a chicken bone thrown away after our dinner. With no knowledge of the interesting nutritive supplementation of animal diets, I thought I had made a rare discovery of a case of some sort of interspecies cannibalism. Later in life I would go on to become a field guide and learn about all sorts of feeding behaviour, including osteophagy, which was what I witnessed.

Animals will practice a -phagy, which is the eating of a specific substance, when there is a deficiency in their diet. The bushbuck was busy chewing on a chicken bone most likely due to a lack of calcium or phosphorus. Osteophagy is done by chewing on dry and weathered bones and leaching out the nutrients, mainly calcium, in them. It is commonly observed in herbivores like kudu, giraffe and domestic cattle. Phosphates are not commonly found in vegetation although they are important for skeletal development, lactation and foetal development, and metabolic processes. Hyenas practice this to get to the marrow on the inside, that other carnivores normally cannot get to.

Other forms of phagy like geophagy, or the eating of rocks and soil, is also often observed in birds like ostriches. Due to not having teeth, they use the ingested stones or gastroliths to aid in the mechanical breakdown of seeds and plant fibres. Matriphagy is a strange phenomenon observed in spiders, where spider offspring eat their own parents. This is generally seen in social species of spiders like community nest spiders. Another -phagy that is observed in some herbivores, carnivores, rodents, reptiles, birds and insects is coprophagy, the eating of dung/scat. It is done for a host of different reasons from mineral deficiencies to necessity. Dung beetles practice coprophagy as their main method of feeding. Rabbits and hares practice a special type of coprophagy called refection. This means eating their own dung, and they do this to extract all possible nutrients from their food. The dung pellets are normally eaten once and after a second defecation is dry and powder-like. These dry powdery pellets make for perfect wind testers when crumbled between one's fingers.

It is incredible to watch as nature always goes back to equilibrium and how deficiencies are dealt with. This instinctual behaviour from organisms, big and small, keeps them healthy or even secures their survival. It is an extremely interesting behaviour to witness, and puts me at ease knowing I did not discover a cannibalistic bushbuck.

Powerful reproductive state of an elephant bull

By Johan Ndlovu

In the wild, few natural phenomena are as remarkable as musth, a temporary reproductive condition experienced by sexually mature male elephants. During this period, a bull undergoes dramatic hormonal, physiological, and behavioural changes that increase his chances of reproducing and establishing dominance over other males.

Musth does not occur at a fixed time each year. Instead, its onset and duration vary between individuals and is influenced by factors such as age, physical condition, social status, and environmental conditions. The defining feature of musth is a dramatic increase in testosterone levels, which can rise to many times their normal concentration. This hormonal surge triggers profound changes in a bull's physiology and behaviour, enhancing his competitiveness, dominance, and reproductive drive.

During musth, bulls often travel considerable distances in search of receptive females and may engage in confrontations with rival males to establish social dominance and maximise their reproductive success.

These movements can appear unpredictable, as bulls temporarily abandon their usual home ranges in pursuit of breeding opportunities.

A bull in musth can usually be identified by two distinctive physical signs. The first is a dark, oily secretion that flows from the temporal glands located between the eyes and ears. The second is the continuous dribbling of urine, which carries chemical signals that communicate the bull's reproductive condition to both females and competing males. Together, these signs provide a clear indication that a bull is experiencing this heightened reproductive state.

Musth is accompanied by pronounced behavioural changes that distinguish affected bulls from their normal temperament. During this period, males become significantly more assertive and spend less time feeding, instead concentrating on locating females that are receptive to mating. Interactions between rival bulls often involve displays of dominance, intimidation, and, in some cases, intense physical confrontations. Although elephants are generally recognised for their calm nature and remarkable intelligence, bulls experiencing musth can exhibit heightened aggression and unpredictable behaviour, making it essential for people and vehicles to maintain a safe distance.

Once the musth period comes to an end, testosterone levels gradually decline, and the bull's behaviour typically returns to its usual state. Aggression decreases considerably, feeding patterns normalise, and the elephant resumes a more relaxed and socially tolerant temperament, interacting with other elephants in a far less confrontational manner.

Musth is a natural and essential phase in the life cycle of male elephants, playing a fundamental role in the species' reproductive ecology and the process of natural selection. During this period, the increased competitiveness of dominant bulls often enables the strongest, healthiest, and most socially successful individuals to secure greater breeding opportunities. As a result, advantageous genetic traits are more likely to be passed on to future generations, contributing to the long-term health and resilience of elephant populations.

Beyond individual reproductive success, musth helps maintain genetic diversity, strengthens the adaptive capacity of elephant populations, and supports the long-term survival and evolutionary sustainability of the species in the wild.

Understanding musth provides valuable insight into elephant behaviour and highlights the importance of respecting these magnificent animals, particularly during this powerful and biologically significant stage of their reproductive lives.

June Gallery

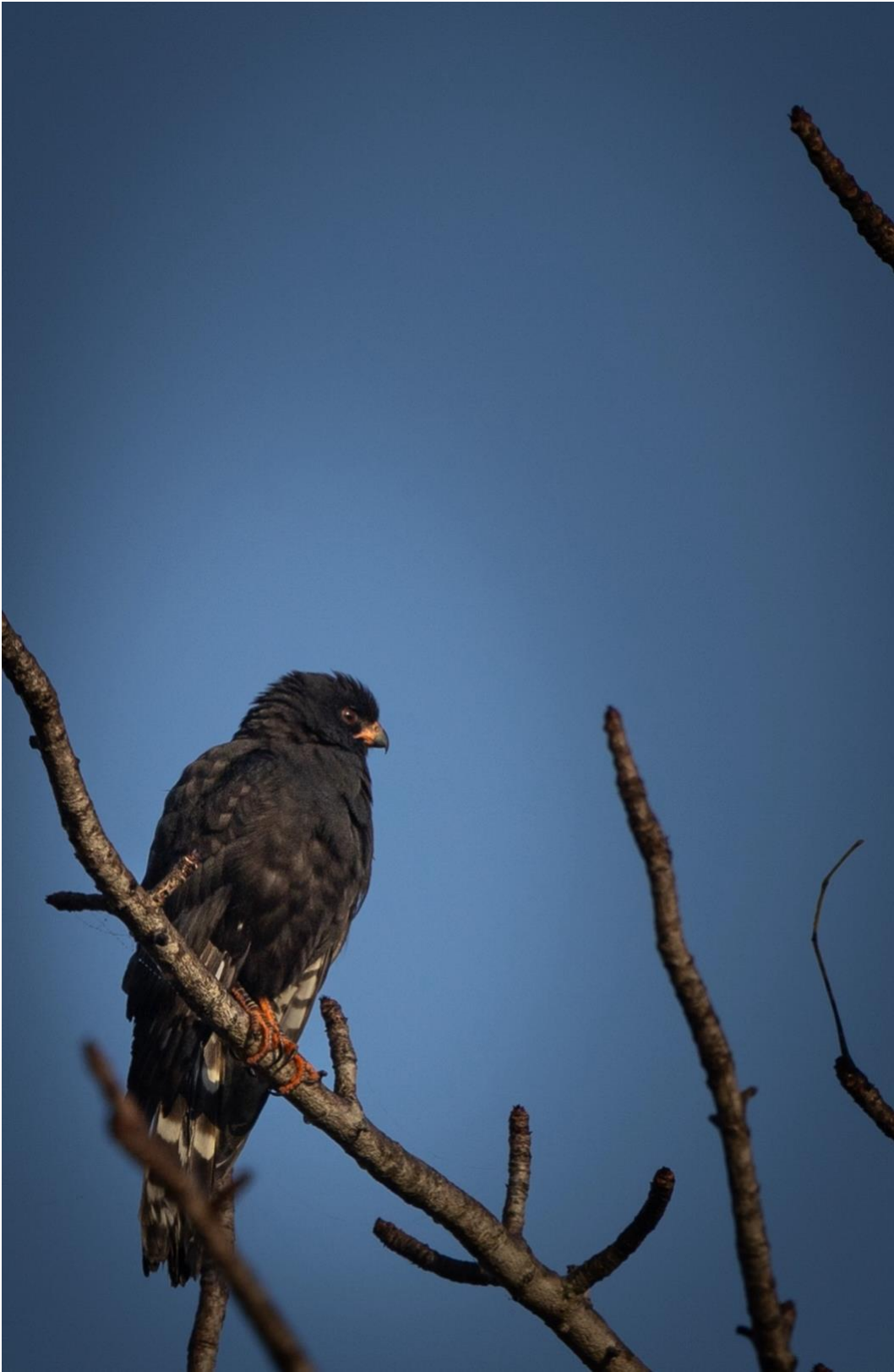
Elephants quenching their thirst over a misty watering hole.



Sunrise over the Sabi Sand.



Melanistic gabar goshawk. By Danelle Ferreira.



Mom and baby white rhino having a stare-down. By Danelle Ferreira.



Field Guide Andrew demonstrates how to relax like a leopard. By Andrew Taylor.

