

Singita



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

Temperature

Average minimum: 13.5°C (56.33°F)
Average maximum: 26.3°C (79.38°F)
Minimum recorded: 09.0°C (48.20°F)
Maximum recorded: 36.0°C (96.80°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 0mm
For the season to date: 0mm

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 06:21
Sunset: 17:36

Blankets, scarves and ponchos wrap around us whilst the steam rushes out from our breath and the warmth of our takeaway coffee has us ready to head out on morning game drive. A low mist covers the land with a streaming sun beginning to burn through as we come across a crisp, clear footprint left in the sand by a male lion... followed by the tracks of a female lion and little paw prints alongside her. We start our day painting a picture of the pride who moved through the night. A time past with only the story to tell. It is all in the tracks! We follow with bated breath waiting for an ear to show itself from behind the tall grass, when finally we find them... Lying in the most beautiful golden light with shimmers of a reflection, bouncing from their amber-yellow eyes. Nothing can quite explain the excitement of finding a pride of lions on a late winter's morning, watching as they begin to fall back into rest and another day in the wild begins.

Here's a Sightings Snapshot for August:

Lions

- There is nothing better than having a stable lion pride living in the central parts of the property with excellent viewing on most days this month. The Plains Camp males and Nkuhuma lionesses along with their two cubs continue to thrive with signs that the amber-eyed female is pregnant again and will hopefully be bringing some new members into the pride within the coming months.
- The Plains Camp males have been pushing further to the west and have been seen right in the northern parts of the reserve this last month, having warded off the Birmingham and Nkuhuma males from moving any further back east. They too seem to have settled in the western parts of the reserve with the Ximungwe lioness.
- A great new duo has evolved with the older of the Mhangene lionesses leaving the pride to join the single young Tsalala lioness. At first we all thought it was the Ximungwe lioness who had become her new pride member, however on closer inspection we noticed that this older female had since decided to stick with her. Great to see the Tsalala and Mhangene bloodlines reuniting.
- As for the Mhangene Pride themselves, they have since made a return from their time in the south of the reserve and have been seen on several occasions on the southern parts of the property, with the youngest of all females seemingly doing very well and even getting involved with hunts.

Leopards

- With their first mating having been unsuccessful, the Schotia female and Nyeleti male were mating again mid-August, having both fed on an impala and a baboon whilst together. There is a strong territorial push from the Thamba male moving further toward the river, so we will have to see what the next few months bring for this female.
- The Nkuwa female has also been seen mating with the Xipuku male this month, having unfortunately lost her cubs she has since mated with the Senegal Bush male, possibly also the Thamba male and the Xipuku male. All three males border her territory.
- This month brought a newcomer onto the scene, the Eyrefield male leopard, who moved through the central parts of our property and into the western part of the reserve. It will be interesting to see where he ends up with the Thamba male and Ravenscourt male currently dominating the western parts.
- We had some more great viewing of the Mobeni female this month, as well as the young Kangela male who is still thriving and keeping us entertained for hours.

Buffalos

- Right across the reserve we have continued to view great numbers of buffalos, with large herds still moving mainly through the southern parts of the property. One buffalo bull seems to have made himself at home at Camp Pan, having seen this particular male at the waterhole every day now for the last few weeks. He's picked a beautiful spot as his retirement home!

Elephants

- Around the beginning of the month, there were still a few fruits left from the greenthorn/torchwood trees which are absolutely devoured by elephants for being such a wonderful sweet treat. We viewed a few bulls fighting over a tree for its fruits which kept us entertained for some time.
- There have been large herds, some over 30-40 elephants, moving through the area, and watching the family dynamics is always fascinating.

Cheetah

- This month we had a number of great cheetah sightings, mainly of the male cheetah as well as the mother cheetah and her young male cub who is getting bigger each time we view him. He's now almost the same size as his mother!

Bird List

- The bird list for August includes two new bird species, bringing our bird list for the year up to 272 birds so far. Specials for the month included speckled pigeon and southern fiscal.

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

My best game drive ever

Article by Quentin Swanevelder

As a guide I often get asked what my best sighting was, or game drive I have ever done. I have been guiding for 22 years, so there have been more than a few... I think my memories of best sightings gets triggered by a current sighting that I might be at, with a current group of guests. Much like picking my favourite music album or band, I think my favourite changes all the time.

In saying this, I think my most intense and exciting sighting happened at Singita Lebombo three years ago when we witnessed the Shishangaan Pride take down a buffalo right in front of us. At the time the pride still had the sub-adult white lion with them.



The herd of buffalo consisted of about 300 individuals, and on hearing the distress calls of the now fallen cow they all decided to return to where the lions were bringing her down. Fortunately for the lions, the cow had by this time been killed and we sat and watched for around three hours as they battled between the herd chasing the pride, and the pride chasing the herd, off the carcass. It was eventually probably obvious to the buffalo herd that the cow was dead and then very slowly they just started to move off.

This was an extremely intense, powerful and emotional sighting to watch and showed how tough and cruel the bush really can be.

As incredible as that sighting was, my ultimate favourite memory, and those who know me well will know, is that every time I see or think of my favourite bird, it is the little blue waxbill. They always bring back great memories of trips to the Kruger Park as a child, and I realize how lucky I am to call Singita my home.



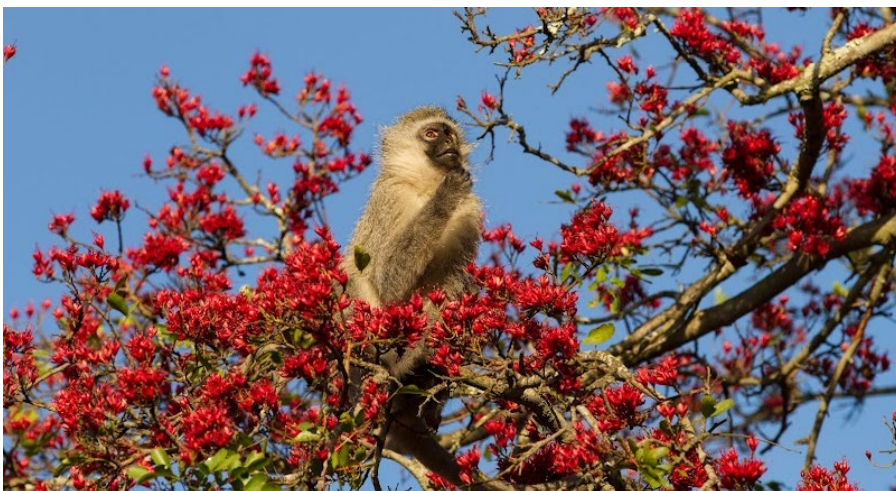
The weeping boer-bean (*Schotia brachypetala*)

Article by Nick Du Plessis

This stunning tree is one of my favourite species on the property, and at the moment can be seen from miles away with the deep dark red flowers creating a stunning contrast to the otherwise dry landscape of the Sabi Sand. The unusually early bloom, which runs from August to November, ensures a longer feeding season with less competition in the earlier months from a pollinating perspective.



The tree is one of many names, mostly referred to here as *Schotia* which many readers or previous guests would recognise because of our resident female leopard, the Schotia female. My favourite name is, without doubt, the local Shangaan name "uvovovo." The onomatopoeia is because of the incredible noise that surrounds the tree, it literally hums and is a real hive of activity with the flowers attracting any number of animals, birds and, in particular, bees and other insects. The flowers produce so much nectar, it can only be described as copious amounts, and the tree literally 'weeps' as the nectar overflows from the petals. This is also thought to be the origin of the common name, the weeping boer-bean, or in Afrikaans huilboerboon.



I always say the term 'edible' is a very broad one, basically it means you can eat it and you won't die, but the nectar is honestly delicious and the roasted beans can be eaten and have been used as a coffee substitute in the past.

This is definitely a tree to look out for on your next visit!

African wild dogs (*Lycaon pictus*) are the most stunning and interesting creatures on the savanna plains. They are co-operative breeders living in packs of about 10 individuals but sometimes up to 30 dogs. Remarkably only one pair, being the alpha pair, does the breeding and all the other members of the pack co-operate to hunt and support the breeding effort of the alpha pair.

Within the pack there is a beta male and female which occupy a hierarchy position closest to the alpha pair. If the alpha dogs were to be injured or killed, one of the beta animals will automatically take over the leadership of the pack. It can happen that if the alpha female dies, the alpha male will lose his alpha status but remains in the pack as a high ranking subordinate, a helper and mentor to the new related young alpha male's pack, such as taking the lead in hunting, locating water and prey in dry season as well as making sure that the pack avoids areas with lions.

Sometimes the beta pair will mate and breed but this, in most cases, takes place after the alpha pair has reproduced. The alpha female will normally either kill or adopt the beta female's puppies.

Wild dogs burrow out dens in other abandoned burrows, rocky sites or sandy banks. The pups are born blind and helpless and need the safety of the dens to develop.

The wild dogs time their denning period to coincide with the end of the impala breeding season (rutting season) being in May, June and July. At this time of the year there are a number of rams in poor condition, exhausted by intense territorial defence and breeding stress, therefore it becomes easier for the wild dogs to hunt them and feed the puppies.

The wild dogs carry the meat back to the den in the safety of their stomachs where they will regurgitate solid chunks of meat for the puppies and the babysitter to eat. There is a great deal of excitement around feeding time! The pups leave the den between two and four months old - they may struggle during hunts but they follow the adults by scent and the adults come and fetch them once the kill is executed.

They are an endangered species, and we do not have regular sightings of these amazing animals in the reserve, so when we do it is tremendously exciting, and extra special.



One beautiful morning, while enjoying a stunning sunrise with our guests, we spotted a pack of wild dogs pursuing a herd of impala across the plains. We quickly gathered in the game drive vehicle and approached the area where the pack headed. There we spotted the most memorable moment - the pack had managed to subdue and kill two sub-adult impala ewes and proceeded to devour them in a matter of minutes. The impala carcasses were almost completely eaten.



During the chaos a pair of hyenas (*Crocuta crocuta*) came along and stole a portion of the pack's kill. It is such a privilege to encounter African wild dogs, and every sighting is be remarkable.

If there is one thing I always tell my guests, it's that patience is the best weapon in our arsenal and that almost every time it pays off! On so many occasions as a guide, this rule has been by my side and on this particular occasion I'm about to tell you about, it was the key to our success...

One beautiful sunny afternoon Ruel and I set out with our single guest, named Bradley, who was a keen photographer and very excited to be able to be exploring in an area with a high density of his favourite animal, the leopard. We had spent the previous afternoon and the morning beforehand looking for subjects to test his new camera on but now it was time to focus and find the perfect leopard sighting to get the shots!

Over the radio I get a call from guide, Johan Ndlovu, who alerts me to the fact that he's found two leopards together in the western parts of the property. GOLD! I let Ruel and Bradley know the amazing news and we all excitedly made our way into the area, only to find not two but THREE leopards in the same place.

When we arrived on the scene we found the Kangela male and Misava male leopards both growling at each other, as well as the Schotia female making her unhappiness known with the two young males. It wasn't long before the Schotia female had enough of the two "teenagers" fighting and decided to leave and move off. This left us with an interesting story between the two young males.

The Misava male leopard, now around six years old, happens to be fairly small for his age. This was due to his mother the Hlab'Nkunzi female passing away when he was very young, and he had to fight and scavenge for his own survival. The Misava male has a fairly subdued personality and seemingly doesn't have a very aggressive nature about him. He is the wiser and older uncle/half-brother of the Kangela male, as both males share the same father, the Nyeleti male.

On the other hand, the Kangela male is cheeky, with a lot of spunk and perhaps a bit too much confidence for his own good. More than half the age of the Misava male and yet gaining size by the day, this young male knows that he is stronger and so likes to take advantage and bully the older Misava male.

The growling continued with the Kangela male towering over the Misava male, and neither of the two were letting up until there was a breaking point. Seemingly having won the fight, the Kangela male decided to walk away in the direction of his mother, leaving the Misava male in peace to move off and do his own thing... or so we thought.

A few moments later, after watching the Misava male move slowly out of sight, the Kangela male, like a sneaky kitten about to pounce on a toy, emerged from behind us and began to stalk the Misava male. We couldn't help but laugh at this cheeky leopard as he tip-toed his way closer and closer to the older male! It was like a scene out of a Tom & Jerry cartoon! He inched closer until finally the older male turned to find him and again the growling ensued... After a little while the two males got bored of each other and the wiser Misava male was not putting up with this nonsense. Like a typical older brother, he sat there and didn't let the younger male get the better of him, he instead just ignored him.

Time went by and the sun was slowly moving closer to the horizon, the golden light was beginning to fall onto these beautiful creatures and Bradley was capturing some great images, when Ruel spotted something move in the distance... HONEY BADGERS! A female and her cub moved past a small termite mound close to the two leopards and the Kangela male caught a glimpse of them just as we did! He shot off in their direction, leaving the Misava male to make his own getaway, and the young cheeky male leopard began to stalk the courageous creatures. Luckily for them, the mother honey badger outsmarted the leopard and made a very quick escape

with her cub running away alongside her. The look of disappointment was written all over the Kangela male's face. He slunk away and lay on a fallen marula tree, feeling sorry for himself.

A little while passed and I had heard over the radio that some lions had made a kill but the three of us decided that sticking with the leopard would be a much better idea. "Let's just wait and see what happens from here" we said, knowing that patience pays off and you never know what Nature might conjure up next. So, we sat and watched until we saw a little lightbulb moment happen for the Kangela male. "Wait a second, where'd he go?" you could imagine the young male thinking to himself as he looked around to check where the Misava male had gone. By now we were the only ones left in the sighting and the entertainment this young male was providing us with was even better than taking photographs. We were just having so much fun observing his behaviour!

Down the road we went as we followed the Kangela male, now doing his best to follow the scent trail left by the Misava male. We began to follow the edge of the Sand River, to the west of Ebony Lodge, when up ahead of us we spotted a herd of impala and instantly the Kangela male froze and dropped close to the ground, hiding himself in some tall grass. The impala were oblivious and walking straight toward him when they began to run past, closer and closer. "OH MY WORD!" one male impala ran right into the leopard, realizing that at the end of his hooves lay a waiting predator and he bounced out of there quicker than you can believe. The young male could have literally hugged the impala he was that close, however it was the impala's lucky day because this young male was too invested in finding and irritating his older brother.

It was beginning to feel like one crazy thing was happening after the next: three leopards! Honey badgers! The intense interactions! As well as all of the emotions we felt through this afternoons ups and downs... but this wasn't the end of the story.

We continued along the road and another of the guides joined us to view the leopard. A few moments had passed and the scent trailing continued, when out of nowhere WILD DOGS! A pack of wild dogs, completely unbeknown to us, came rushing out of the bushes, chasing the Kangela male toward a tree where he could find himself a safer getaway from the painted wolves! It was during this time that a few metres up the road, we heard more of the dogs growling, barking and it seemed as if they were jumping, trying to reach something in another tree close by. It was the Misava male! Two young leopards, now both being harassed by a pack of wild dogs! We absolutely couldn't believe what had transpired in just one afternoon. It wasn't long before the wild dogs got bored of the leopards and began to run away to the south, potentially looking for something to hunt in the last few moments of daylight.

It took us a few moments to catch our breath from all the adrenaline and rushing excitement we were feeling, and move toward the tree to see the Misava male. As we did, the Kangela male shot down from his own tree, now knowing that his nemesis was only a short distance away, and ran up the tree where the Misava male was keeping himself hidden. A huge bout of growling, snarling and rustling came from the higher ends of the tall jackalberry tree and before long the Kangela male was back down with a very smug look on his face!

Walking into the darkness now with confidence, whilst scent marking and vocalizing, the Kangela male got his point across... that he was the bigger leopard! Again, we laughed and sat in awe with what we managed to witness that afternoon. Had we not decided to wait and see what would happen next and stay persistent we may have never observed the incredible actions of these different species. The way in which they all interact and with such character!

To all of my guests who have stuck it out with me, been patient and enjoyed the beautiful moments and gifts Nature provided us with, I thank you! And for anyone who still has not had the chance to visit this magnificent

place, I ask that when you do come, remember: Patience is the best weapon in your arsenal, and that the ways of the wild will always gift you with brilliance if you hold on to that very value – patience.



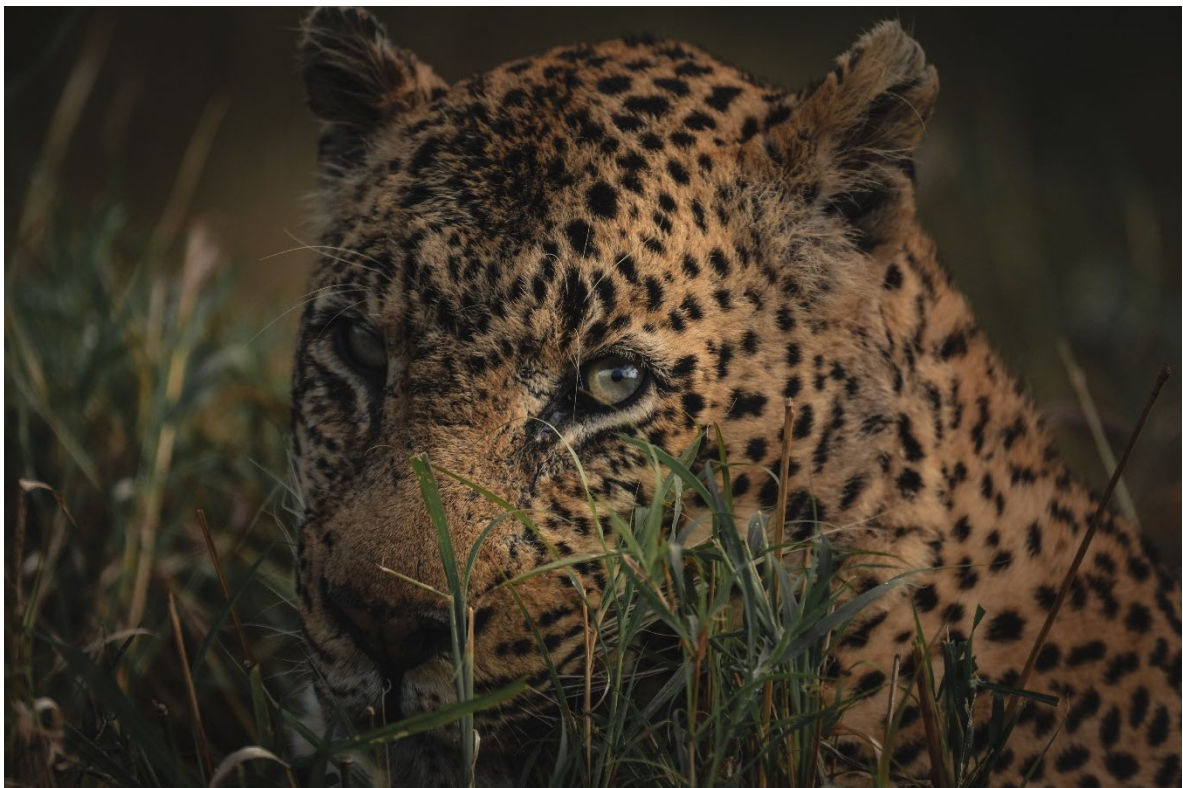
The Misava male watching as the Kangela male moves away.



August Gallery



One of the Othawa pack of wild dogs in the Sand River – Image by Matt Durell.



The eyes of the Nyeleti male leopard – Image by Chene Wales-Baillie



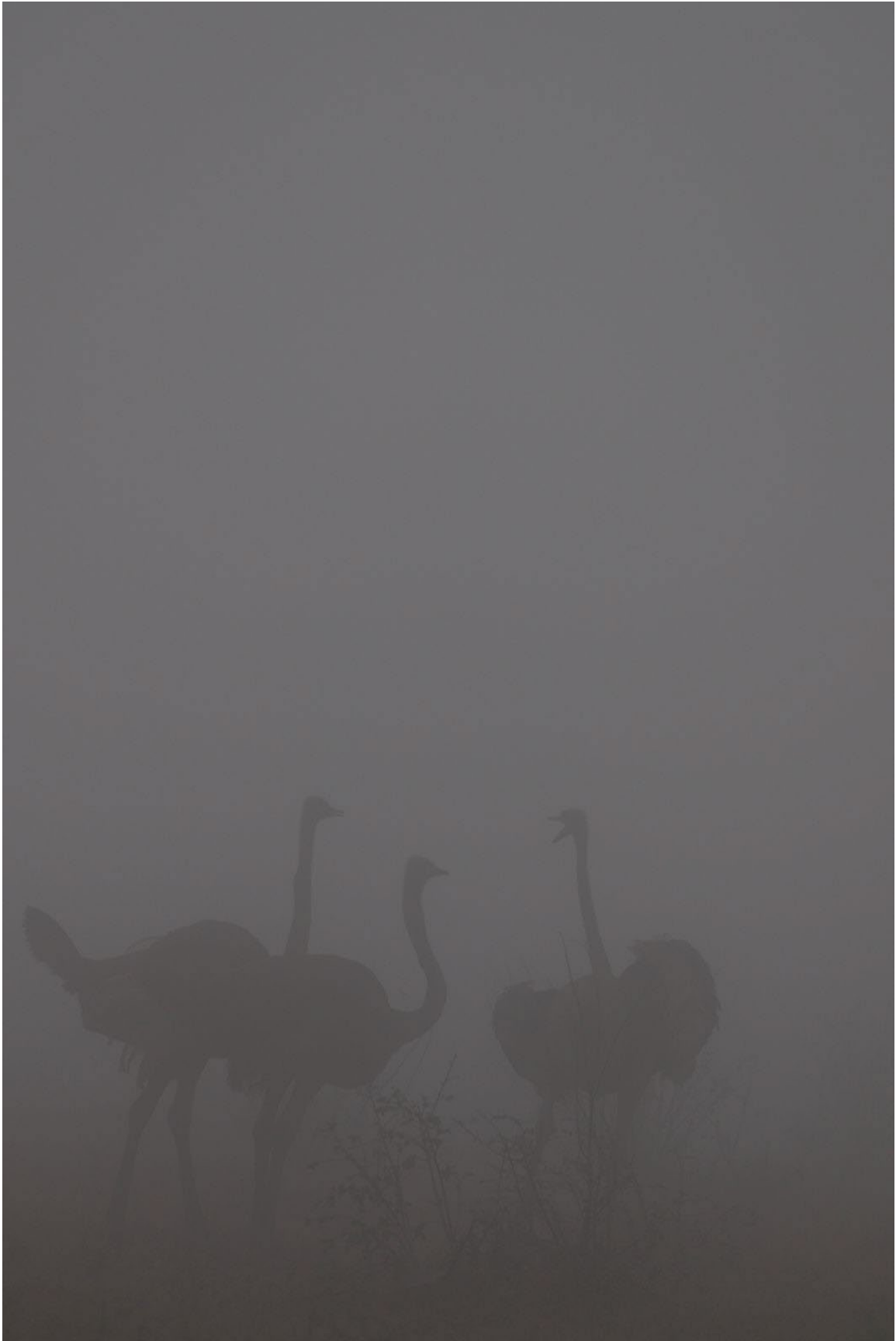
Zebra stallions fighting – Image by Matt Durell.



A curious black-backed jackal – Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.



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



Ostriches in the mist – Image by Matt Durell.