



Wildlife Journal

For the month of July, Two Thousand and Fourteen

Temperature

Average minimum:	8.7°C	(47.6°F)
Average maximum:	25°C	(77°F)
Minimum recorded:	04°C	(39.2°F)
Maximum recorded:	29°C	(84.2°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the period:	0 mm
For the year to date:	262 mm

As white as snow Article and photos by Nick du Plessis

On the 11th of July we had a sighting, that when it came over the radio, you could hardly believe your ears! Clement had found and called in members of the Shishangaan pride with cubs, but one of the cubs was just a little different. He is snow white!

This happens due to a recessive gene that is carried by both parents. This may also give us a clue as to where the coalition of five males who took control of the Shishangaan pride late last year may have come from. The general perception is that the Timbavati section to the west of us and southern parts of the park is where this gene is most prevalent. What has got us so excited is the fact that both parents need to be carrying the gene for this to take place! Generally all the males within a coalition are related, and likewise with the lionesses stemming



from a core group of related females, all this meaning that there is potential for there to be more of these cubs running around soon with all the mating that's taken place...

What must also be explained is that although these lions are white they are not albino! In 1997 a study by Cruickshank & Robinson determined conclusively that white lions are not albinos. They have blue, golden or yellow coloured eyes, black tips to the tail and behind the ears as well as eye-lining. By distinction albino would lack any pigmentation and therefore have pink or red eyes that are a well-known trait of albinos, and lack black tips to the ears and tail that are seen as following markers.

To date there have only been two sightings of this cub with the pride, and although the mortality rate is known to be quite high for small cubs we have high hopes, as there are many factors in their favour. A few lionesses have given birth all around the same time, and will help raise these cubs as best they can together as a team. Winter is also a fantastic time for hunting, although the vegetation is thinning out, this means less feeding for prey species and a natural decline in their condition. This added to the great water sources we have left and the stable position of the cubs' sires, all looks promising.

The fact that this rare white lion is seen as far east as this in the Kruger National Park is nothing short of a miracle, and as far as we know has never been spotted or recorded in this area before! The fact that the rare white lions continue to reoccur in their natural habitat despite historical forced removals by humans for commercial trophy hunting and breeding in the 1970's is a real testimony to their genetic diversity and pure resilience! We hope this is just the beginning of something very very special at Singita Kruger National Park where we've always been known for our lions.



The nutcracker Article and photos by Nick du Plessis

The African openbill (*Anastomus lamelligerus*) is fairly uncommon in southern Africa but is actually known to be the most common stork in Africa! We've been seeing a beautiful variety of storks, like saddle billed, yellow billed, woolly necked and marabou storks, but the one we've been seeing the most of is this African openbill, at times soaring in flocks of more than 50 birds along the river. At this time of the dry season, the N'wanetsi River has stopped flowing and started to dry up to small pools. This makes it perfect habitat for a stork like this one, which feeds almost entirely on aquatic invertebrates such as fresh water mussels and snails.

This species is an intra-African trans-equatorial migrant making movements that are triggered by the rains. It breeds during in the rains when snails (its main prey items) are most readily available and nests in colonies of various sizes. What sets it apart is the unusual beak that it has for this feeding. The upper mandible is relatively straight while the lower has an unusual curve to it. This is used to hold prey underwater while the lower sharp bill opens and extracts the contents from shells.



Southern Ground Hornbill (*Bucorvus leadbeateri*) update Article & photos by Jani Lourens



Over the past couple of months the sightings of the Southern Ground hornbills have been scarce. This time of the year they spend most of their time foraging around for food on the ground. They are mainly carnivorous, occasionally running after their prey. They will eat reptiles, frogs, small birds, snakes, large insects and even tortoises. They are often seen walking with impala, zebra and other bushveld animals, catching food which has been flushed out by the large animals. At night they will roost in trees to be safe from predators.

While game drives and other activities continue, and sightings of mammals and all other creatures are observed on a daily basis, one always has the thought of where the southern ground hornbills might be today? Despite their name, these birds make use of cavities in large, old trees to nest in, usually as high as three to nine metres above the ground. The southern ground hornbill does not seal the entrance of the nests, which is known in all other hornbill species in Africa.



It was with great excitement that we found one of their nests! However, finding these nests is not an easy task as they tend to be quite secretive about their location, and it's not only the ground hornbill that makes use of these cavities. Creatures such as rodents, bush-babies, genets, the odd snake and a number of birds such as barn owls also make use of them.

Suitable nesting sites for this species are in short supply these days, and one of the factors contributing to their low breeding success. Fire and logging have both reduced nest availability, as has significant tree damage by growing elephant populations in some of southern Africa's bigger parks.

Although their breeding season only starts from September to December, after the first good summer rains, they might still keep an eye on a favourable nesting site, while foraging for food around this time of the year. They might even be seen carrying small bundles of dried leaves around later in August that the alpha male will use to line the nest for the female.

The life of the N'wanetsi concession Article & photo's by Barry Peiser

The N'wanetsi River in the local language of Shangaan is known as the 'shining one'. It flows from the west of the Singita property, meandering east and south to flow past Lebombo Lodge and meeting the Sweni River to flow as one east through the Lebombo Mountains into Mozambique. The N'wanetsi, Sweni and Gudzane Dam are the water sources and lifelines in the Lebombo, as the smaller tributaries and pans dry up in winter.

As these water sources are the attraction for game in the winter, the rivers can be busy with various animals and many storks trying to catch the fish in the shrinking pools of water. Water on Earth is limited and when it comes to available drinking water, most is salty, underground, locked up in ice caps or in the form of vapour, drifting over as clouds. The water available to animals is also not always clean, as hippos churn up the mud, defecate and cause some of the deeper pools to become soup-like. Water is life - we need to use it carefully and know that it is scarce especially in an arid country such as South Africa.

As game drives begin each day, hippos are returning after their night out, grazing on the river banks. Fresh tracks of hippos, lions, leopards and elephants tell us of the nocturnal movement of such animals visiting the river to drink. As the day wears on, the herds come through, elephants often swim and play and spray themselves. Without the water, the game would be forced to go elsewhere. It is hard to believe the amount of water during the summer that flows down the N'wanetsi and to see the little bit that now remains, just pools supporting an array of vast herds which kick up dust as they move to and from the water to search for more distant plains for grazing.



Game viewing

Lion: 103 sightings. The most sighted pride was the Shishangaan pride, a total of 55 times, and with the terrific news of the little male white lion cub. The white cub has only been seen twice since as the pride has proved difficult to locate as they are spending most of their time outside the concession. The Mountain pride has also been good viewing with a total of 35 sightings. There are a total of 16 cubs within the Mountain pride.

Leopard: 28 sightings. Multiple sightings of unknown female and male leopards mostly in the southern areas close to the lodge. There is a large male with a dark patch on top of his nose, who has established his territory along the N'wanetsi close to the lodge. The Xhikelengane female was not seen often, but it appears as if she has only one cub with her. The Mahlangulene female had not been seen for a few months and was seen looking for a male.

Cheetah: 19 sightings. All of the sightings were of the mother and two cubs, either around Kori Clearings or Cassia open areas.

Elephants: Sightings of breeding herds were 43, bulls were 22. Small groups ranging mostly south of Xhingwenyana crossing. The bulls mostly along the drainage lines, one sighting of six bulls together.

Buffalo: 21 sightings. Only one sighting of a herd when hyena pan still had water. Most of the buffalo bull sightings were also from around hyena pan.

Hyenas: Both dens still active and a total of 10 sightings recorded.

Other: A caracal was seen on the 18th around the stick thorn thickets.



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Singita Kruger National Park
South Africa
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