

# Singita



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

### Temperature

Average minimum: 19.3°C (66.7°F)  
Average maximum: 31.5°C (88.6°F)  
Minimum recorded: 16.0°C (60.8°F)  
Maximum recorded: 41.0°C (105.8°F)

### Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 21mm  
For the season to date: 47mm

### Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 05:20  
Sunset: 18:00

October brought with it sporadic rain, new life and awoke many from their temporary slumber. Dung beetles are back at work, securing their treasured dung balls, while seasonal flowers of all colours can be seen throughout the reserve. In the south green pastures of new grass sprout after the necessary burning of uneaten vegetation. Large numbers of grazers can be seen scattered in the gabbro-dominated soils which support a bounty of nutritious grass species. Birds are busy with building their nests and taking care of their new chicks. October fills us all with a sense of hope as the natural world regenerates and flourishes.

## **Here's a sightings snapshot for October:**

### **Lions**

- Lions have certainly been a hot topic this month. The Mhangene Pride now consists of five adult lionesses and two very young cubs (three or four weeks of age). The one-year-old lioness is presumed dead after Johan discovered a hyena feeding on a lioness carcass, the size of the head matched that of a sub-adult lioness.
- One of the Plains Camp lions was seen mating with the youngest Mhangene female. If successful this will be her first litter. The pride has been seen frequently in the south where new grasses are growing after a controlled burn, which in turn has attracted large numbers of grazers.
- The Nkuhuma lioness and her two cubs of about 11 months are doing well too. However, there is growing concern over the fact that the other lioness has not been seen for quite some time. Let us hope she is simply focused on raising her litter of cubs.

### **Leopards**

- The Schotia female and Thamba male were mating again at the beginning of the month. When will she give birth? This is the second time they have mated. Besides the sightings of her and Thamba, sightings of her have been scarce. However, on the last day of the month, she was seen right in the heart of Singita Sabi Sand.
- The Mobeni female is now the most viewed female leopard here. She continues to delight our guests with her captivating glare. One afternoon, just before a big storm rolled in, Nick, Vusi and their guests watched her skilfully catch a genet! She finished off the kill which would sustain her for a short period of time. Many of us suspect she may be close to having a new litter of cubs soon.
- The Xipuku male leopard has a firm hold on territory to the south and east of Castleton camp. He is showing promising signs of settling down around vehicles. We have implemented a one or two vehicles at a time when spending time with this male leopard.

### **Wild dogs**

- A pack of eight and a pack of three have made brief appearances on our section of the reserve. Very little can compare to the madness of a wild dog chase! Guests love experiencing the thrill of a pack on the move.

### **Elephants**

- Sightings of large herds of elephant are still as frequent as they were in the middle of the winter months. With most of the eastern parts of the Greater Kruger still extremely dry, the lush vegetation of the Sabi Sand has kept many of the pachyderms in the area. Green grass is a favourite of theirs which now makes up a large part of their diet. It can be quite comical watching a young calf trying to master the art of collecting grass in its trunk.

### **Bird List**

- The bird list for October includes four new species, bringing our bird list for the year up to 278 birds. Specials for the month included a white-backed night-heron. A pair of secretary birds were seen in the south on two occasions.

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

We often associate the smaller creatures as timid or shy. Bigger animals are known to be mighty and brave. Well, these stereotypes can, and often are, thrown out the window when their young are involved. Maternal instinct can bring out the best in a mother and is inspiring to see.

We were fortunate enough to witness a pair of blacksmith lapwings courageously defend their nest which had eggs in it. To be fair to the buffalo they simply wanted to come down to the water to drink, and of all places to nest the birds chose a water-side view! Buffalo are herbivores so were not interested in the birds or their eggs, however they could quite easily crush the eggs accidentally.



The herd was a hundred strong, and thirsty. The lapwings had waited all year, preparing themselves and their nesting areas for breeding season. Nothing was going to disturb them. As the herd approached we could hear the distinctive call of the blacksmith lapwings, “twing, twing, twing,” like that of a blacksmith forging iron. The call got louder and more frequent as the large bovines got closer. A warning to them to stay away and give them space.

When you have so many animals on the way to water, space is hard to come by. A couple of buffalo came closer, so the birds opened their wings to make themselves look bigger and more noticeable. Soon more and more buffalo unknowingly approached the nest. The birds were having none of it! Short bursts at the buffalo, loud squawking and wings flapping, their message was clear.

Most of the buffalo altered their course respectively. One young buffalo got too close which was dealt with by the birds with a swift kick to the muzzle. This was incredible to witness. What bravery and good parenting!





Sitting and observing the smaller details can be so rewarding in many ways.



Strong winds and low temperatures of about 17 degrees Celsius is not exactly a good weather to go out looking for cats, especially oversized wild cats. After about two hours of seeing very little in the way of sought after safari sightings, and enduring the low temperatures and blustery wind, a leopard simply appeared. He was a young male of about two years and I have never been happier to see him! He gave my guests the experience they wished for, but he had more in store...

He seemed to be engaged in a hunting position, we just could not see what he was stalking. All the tell-tale signs of a hunt were written all over him - he was so focused it was like we didn't exist at all. Then a breeding herd of elephants entered the scene and were moving towards the leopard, and they would be pushing whatever he was hunting towards him. We were in the right position to experience a kill. We waited in anticipation as the elephants kept moving slowly, great sightings all around.

Then the elephants started trumpeting and running towards the leopard but they were not trumpeting at him. A male lion materialised from the long grass exactly where the young leopard was looking in his hunting crouch. So, the elephants chase the lion towards the leopard, and the leopard takes off up a marula tree!

I was engaged in some fancy footwork and driving, trying to avoid an elephant stampede, a running lion and a leaping leopard, and simultaneously wondering what that leopard had been thinking stalking an enormous lion several times his weight and strength!



It was so exciting and such a brilliant sighting that we were all blown away – and so were our weather worries!

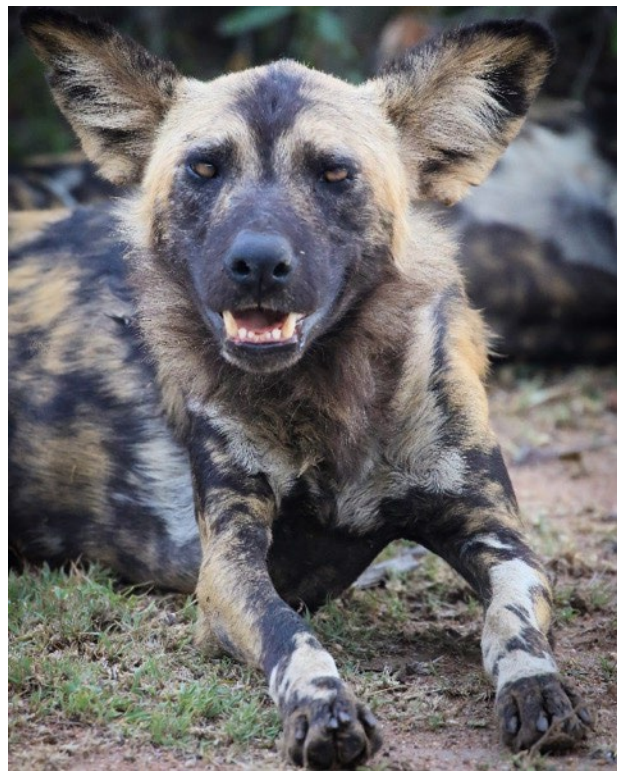
Probably not quite the story heading one would expect from a safari guide, but in reading this story the strategic moves will be revealed.

As a guide taking guests out on safari there is a lot to consider and so much to factor in on a game drive. Do the guests speak English? Is it their first safari? What is the weather doing or going to do while we are out there? What is there to be found? Where are all the other guides going to look? Whose guests have seen what?

We all set off on game drive with an intended route and species we are hoping to find. But things very rarely go according to plan out here! We may spot a fresh set of leopard or lion tracks that are too good to pass up. There are often many distractions along the way – a herd of elephants busy feeding, a white rhino cow and calf meandering, or even interesting birds may catch our eye – so many things can slow us down in our search for a certain something, but each moment adds to the overall story and excitement of the drive.

In the search of specific animal(s) the best bet is to head back to where the animal was last seen by others – preferably their exact last known location. Often, elusive nocturnal animals will have moved, as they do under the cover of darkness. When we are all fast asleep, the nocturnal creatures awaken. If the sought after animal is not in the last seen spot, the next move, if fresh tracks from the course of the night have not yet been found on the road, is for the guide and tracker to get off the vehicle and try to establish in which direction the animal set off. It is important to keep in mind that animals usually take the path of least resistance - they will use the road or game paths, but often neither.

Let me tell you that when the stars align and everything you have said and done in the search for an animal comes together, it is one of the most magical moments! So, rewarding and very much like a well thought-out game of chess. Every move you make is calculated; it has a reason or a purpose for the end game, and with a lot of skill and perhaps just as much luck, we get our checkmate.







## Life of Hope

Article by Marc Eschenlohr



The Mhangeni Pride is my favourite lion pride and each member has given guests from all over the world a lot of joy. This is a story about a young lioness called Hope that we've been privileged to watch grow up at Singita.

We don't normally give names to individuals in a pride but rather name the pride itself. However, each member of the pride does have distinctive features (age, scars, behaviour, dental composition, colour) that allow us to tell them apart.

This female had a distinctive scar on her right nostril that made it easy to identify her. She was last seen in January 2018.





The young female, above and below, that we named Hope was seen on her own from 20<sup>th</sup> September to 29<sup>th</sup> September. Guests and I called her this as she had been separated from her pride of what was then six adult females.





We are not sure how she got separated but it was certain that without the protection of the pride she would be in trouble if other predators were to come across her.

She was born around March 2021 in a litter of three. At that time four adult females out of the six had a total of 11 cubs born between June 2020 and March 2021. Very sadly the other ten cubs did not survive and she was the only one that remained. The possible reason for the high mortality of the cubs was that the dominant male and father of the cubs, the Othawa male, was killed and discovered on the 9<sup>th</sup> May 2021 much further east of his territory. That left the pride at the mercy of other male lion coalitions and predators. The pride became nomadic and she had done very well until then to keep up with the adults.



The Othawa male with his young cubs, mid 2021.

We knew the rest of Hope's pride were not very far away, a couple of kilometres as the crow flies, and "hope" was all we had. On the 29<sup>th</sup> we saw her join up with one adult from the pride (pic below) and a couple of days later the whole pride was reunited! It really is a lovely feeling to see a social species reunite with its family!



Hope had already survived a close encounter with Nstevu Breakway Pride on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2022. We did not witness the fight but did see 11 lions chase a seven-year-old female through the open plains for about 200 metres. That female did escape and once the Nstevu Breakaway Pride had reunited a few of them had fresh wounds from a recent fight. Hope did manage to survive that skirmish and was soon reunited with all the adults.

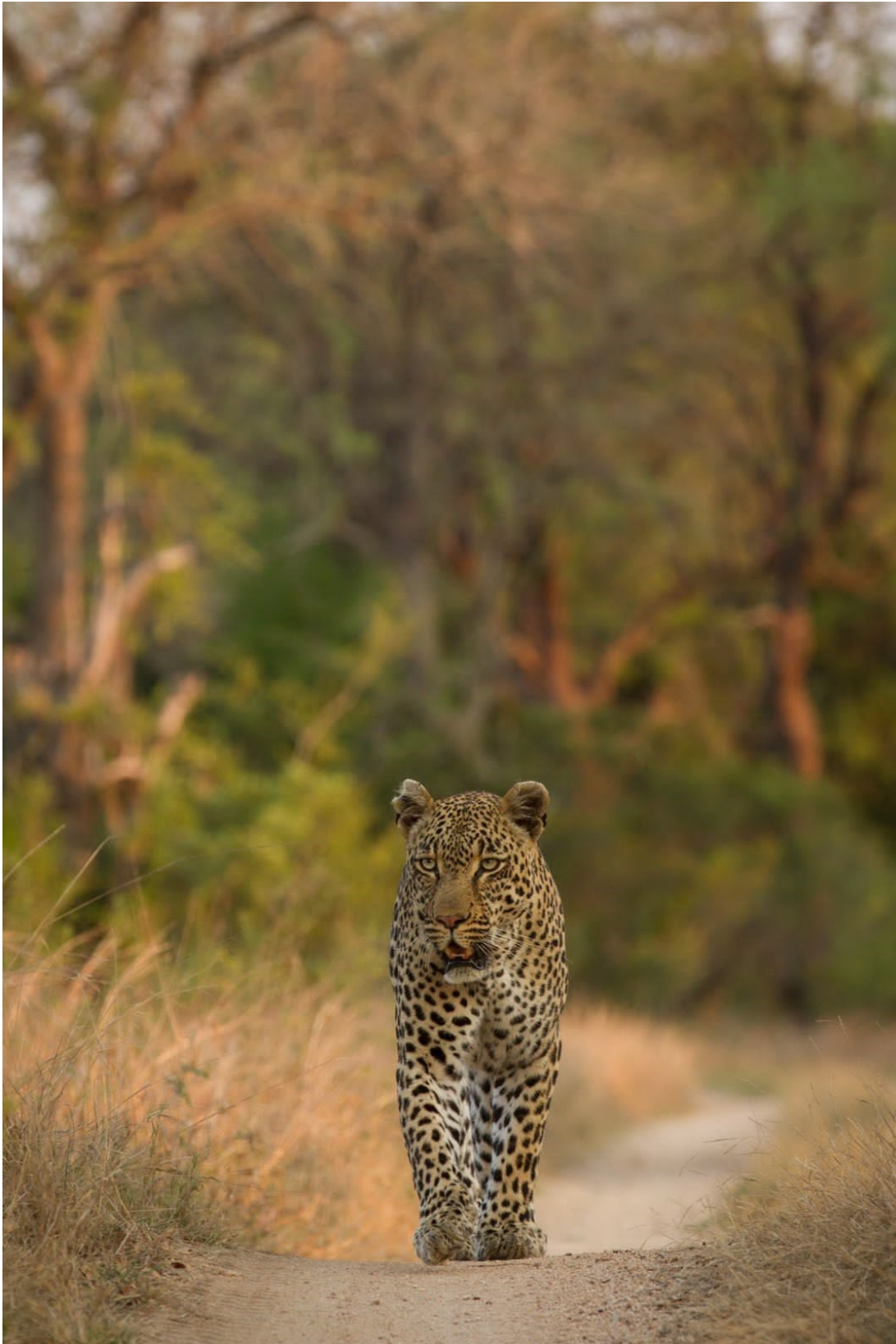


I was hoping to write my story about Hope's resilience but sadly her life was cut short on the 20th October this month when her remains, being fed on by a hyena, were discovered in a waterhole. She had done so well, and it is hard for me or any other compassionate guide or guest not to get emotional when faced with the twists of fate that occur in the wilderness. We get to spend so much time with these animals and really do care about their well-being.

The Mhangeni Pride now consists of five adult females and two one-month-old cubs. They are the fifth or sixth litter of the older Mhangeni female. May they live long, wild, successful lives.



## October Gallery



The Thamba male leopard on patrol. Image by Nick Du Plessis



A Ndhzenga male lion watches vultures on a hot morning. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor  
A proud male ostrich and his chicks. Image by Nick Du Plessis.







Leopard descent at sunset. Image by Nick Du Plessis.