

Singita



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

Temperature

Average minimum: 14.9°C (58.7°F)
Minimum recorded: 11.0°C (51.8°F)
Average maximum: 28.3°C (82.9°F)
Maximum recorded: 38.0°C (100.4°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 4.0
Season to date: 461.8 mm
(*Season = Oct to Sep)

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 06:21
Sunset: 17:36

Spring is just around the corner, and we can already feel summer hot on its heels. We are still experiencing very extreme winter weather conditions: both crisp, cold mornings and piping hot, what feel like summer, days. The bush is very dry and game viewing across the Sabi Sands has, as always, been living up to its high standard and providing some special moments and memories for our guests. We've noticed the sjambok pod (*Cassia abbreviata*) trees, tree wisteria (*Bolusanthus speciosus*) and the knob thorn (*Senegalia nigrescens*) trees all flowering, adding a splash of colour to the dryer winter hues. We have seen the first Wahlberg's eagle return too, and we are looking forward to hearing the familiar migratory bird calls soon! It won't be too much longer before we have the woodland kingfisher singing throughout the reserve.

Here is a closer look at some of the highlights for August:

Cheetahs

- The female cheetah with four cubs has been seen regularly. She continues to supply consistent meals for them. She too has been seen interacting with a male cheetah that has frequented the southern parts of the reserve for the duration of the month. The cubs, while mom is present, are keen to explore, run around and climb any tree they can. She has done extraordinarily well to keep all of them alive to date, and we hope she continues to do so.

Leopards

- Every so often the Tiyasela female has been seen in and around the lodge vicinity as well as the western parts of the Singita property. Occasionally her two cubs have been seen with her.
- The Thamba male and Ntoma female have again been seen mating for a couple of days not too far from the lodges.
- The Nkuwa female's movements within her home range have again been rather erratic, with the arrival of a new male, the Ntomi male, making his presence known in the area. He has been seen mating with her and then, on another occasion when she had hoisted an impala in a jackalberry tree for her two sub-adult boys to feed on, he too was present. He tried to confront one of the younger males but that proved rather tricky in the high canopy of an apple leaf tree. During all of the commotion, the Southern Avoca Male lion made an appearance. With the impala as well as the leopards all up in trees, he soon left the vicinity. On a separate occasion the Nkuwa female and the two younger males were seen in the Sand River, with their grandmother, the Nhlangueni female (Nkuwa's mother). One of the young males chased her out of a tree to feed on a hoisted carcass.
- Other leopards viewed include the Hlambela male who was seen with a more skittish female north of the Sand River – potentially the Serengeti female.
- The aptly named Hlambela male (which means "to swim") was seen wading into a waterhole to retrieve a wildebeest that had been killed by a crocodile! He got half way before aborting the mission and retreating to the shore where the Xinzele female was waiting patiently. They subsequently have been seen mating together.

Lions

- Not far from Boulders Lodge, and in the close proximity of the Sand River, we have been extremely lucky to watch the Tsalala lioness and her three cubs as they frequent the area. They are forever playful while mom is around, then remain out of sight and out of mind when mom is out hunting.
- The Mhangene Pride have had altercations with other prides and dominant males. Sadly, they now only have seven of their youngsters with them. The Tumbela male continues to live his best life feeding on what the lionesses manage to take down, while the Plains Camp males are preoccupied in other parts of the Sabi Sand Game Reserve.
- The Plains Camp males have been seen mating with one of the Othawa lionesses just north of the river. They create excitement on the cooler mornings when we hear them roar.
- The Nkhumu sub-adults are also seen from time to time on the property. They recently stole a kudu bull from the Tsalala lioness who had gone to collect her three cubs and take them to the kill.
- The Talamati and Nkhumu male lions have been seen occasionally. Most recently feeding on a buffalo bull they managed to catch in the southern parts of the reserve.

African wild dogs

- We are still patiently waiting for the Othawa Pack of wild dogs to appear with their ten puppies. They have started running with the adults in the pack.
- The Toulon Pack, who last month took over the puppies of another pack of wild dogs, have moved dens entirely now too. The adults were all quenching their thirst at a waterhole after a successful hunt when

they were chased off by a large herd of buffalo. We read more about these fascinating creatures in this month's articles.

Elephants

- Elephants continue to flood the Sand River in the warmer daytime temperatures. Larger herds have been seen across the reserve at most of the permanent watering holes for their daily intake.

Buffaloes

- Larger herds are still frequenting the reserve, moving more through the woodlands where there are slightly more nutritious grasses. The regular buffalo bulls dotted in the river in the late afternoon are almost always a guarantee.

Unusual sightings

- One morning, a loud, "Stop" from a guest led to a sighting of a grey-headed bushshrike hunting a vine snake. The bird succeeded and it was a first for all the occupants of the vehicle!
- Marc Bowes-Taylor recently viewed a lesser bushbaby or galago which was a first for him and his guests in a long time.
- On a walk along the Sand River a giant kingfisher caught a tilapia. While flying off with its prized possession, it dropped the fish and an African fish eagle stole it!
- A honey badger was seen, just its tail sticking out while digging in a hole right next to the road. Once it noticed the vehicle it growled at everyone, trotting away with its tail in the air, growling until they lost sight.

Bird List

- The bird list for August includes three new species, bringing our bird list for the year up to 288 birds. Specials for the month included a purple-banded sunbird, white-breasted cormorant and an African darter.

Some bush stories follow, as well as the August Gallery of images.

Patience at the wild dog den

Article by Gregory Heasman

At Singita Sabi Sand we are very privileged to have frequent sightings of African wild dogs. I have been a guide for 12 years, and today I witnessed something I have never seen before when observing African wild dogs.

On our afternoon drive we decided that our plan was to go down south to where there is a wild dog den-site. After arriving at the den which is an excavated hole in a termite mound, we drove around and didn't see any dogs. We stopped and listened and then noticed the adults 50 metres from the den, in the long grass. We sat and waited patiently for the adults to start becoming active, as the sun started to get closer to the horizon and the temperature started decreasing.

Soon after one of the adult females started stretching and approached the den. She stood at the hole on the mound and started calling into the hole with soft chattering. The pups didn't emerge and she started moving away from the den. She left the other adults in the long grass.

I thought it was a good idea to follow her which definitely paid off. Not too far away from the den she stood next to a small fallen tree that was overgrown with grass. She had a good look around, then suddenly put her head into the long grass looking for something. She then started feeding on pieces of meat, moved 50 metres away to another overgrown grass patch and fed on more meat pieces. She moved to a third spot and fed again.

I started putting thoughts together and realized what she was going to do next. I went and waited next to the den where we could see her in the distance. Another female woke up and came towards the den, she started to call the pups out, and suddenly the pups appeared greeting each other. The other female that was feeding on all the pieces of meat returned and the pups started to chatter and beg for food. She then regurgitated the food she had just swallowed.

I was mind blown by how smart and energy-efficient these animals actually are. Wild dogs will hunt morning and afternoon to support the pack, especially when they need to feed the pups. They will kill and feed really quickly and run straight back to the den to regurgitate for the pups.

We realised that the pack must have killed something substantial in the morning and came back and regurgitated for the pups. The female must have still had a full belly and went to regurgitate into the long grass so she could stash the meat, to avoid it digesting in her stomach, so that they didn't have to go out and hunt again. After discussing this with our guiding team we all agreed this was a rare and educational experience.





Wild dogs surround a male impala that has found a waterhole for refuge from the pack.

The African wild dog, scientifically known as *Lycaon pictus*, is a captivating and endangered species native to Sub-Saharan Africa. Renowned for their intricate social structure, exceptional hunting prowess, and distinctive coat patterns, these canids once roamed across much of the continent. However, due to various threats, their population has drastically declined, making them one of Africa's most endangered large carnivores.

African wild dogs historically inhabited a range extending from savannas and grasslands to scrublands and open forests. They are highly adaptable but require large territories to thrive. Today, their range has significantly reduced, primarily due to habitat fragmentation caused by human activities such as agriculture and urbanization.

One of the most fascinating aspects of African wild dogs is their social structure. They live in packs that can vary in size from a few individuals to over 20 members. Each pack has a complex social hierarchy led by an alpha breeding pair. Cooperative hunting is a hallmark behaviour, where members work together to pursue and bring down prey, often through relentless pursuit rather than ambush tactics.

African wild dogs are specialized hunters known for their stamina and teamwork. They primarily prey on medium-sized ungulates such as impalas, gazelles and wildebeests. Unlike big cats that rely on stalking and ambushing prey, wild dogs use endurance running to wear down their quarry, relying on their superior stamina to keep up the chase until the prey tires.

Despite their unique adaptations and social behaviour, African wild dogs face numerous threats that have led to a significant decline in their population. Habitat loss and fragmentation remain the most critical issues, as human development continues to encroach upon their territories. Additionally, they are vulnerable to diseases transmitted by domestic animals, such as canine distemper and rabies, which can devastate entire populations.



The pack finally catch the impala as he approaches the edge of the waterhole.
The pack starts to devour the impala as he loses his life fairly quickly.



Conservation efforts aimed at protecting African wild dogs are multifaceted and involve various strategies. These include establishing protected areas and corridors to maintain their habitat connectivity, monitoring and research to understand their ecology and behaviour better, and working with local communities to mitigate human-wildlife conflict. Captive breeding programmes also play a role in safeguarding the genetic diversity of the species.

In conclusion, the African wild dog is a species of great ecological and behavioural significance, yet it faces numerous challenges to its survival. Efforts to conserve these animals are crucial not only for their intrinsic value but also for the broader health of African ecosystems. By addressing habitat loss, mitigating human-wildlife conflict, and implementing effective conservation strategies, we can hope to secure a future where these remarkable predators continue to roam the African wilderness.

Singita within the Sabi Sand game reserve, observe three different packs of wild dogs from time to time. Two packs denned this season and we follow their dynamics as much as possible. Here's hoping that the pups thrive in this competitive environment.



The sounds of the impala dying attracts a clan of hyenas, which in turn steal the catch from the wild dogs.

Understanding and appreciating the African wild dogs unique characteristics and the challenges they face underscores the importance of global conservation efforts. As we strive to protect these endangered canids, we also commit to preserving the rich biodiversity and ecological balance of Africa's landscapes for generations to come.

Mysteries of a game drive

Article by Johan Ndlovu

One beautiful warm afternoon, I was guiding six guests staying with us for three nights in one of our lodges, Ebony. Our guests arrived at the meeting point, where we served them drinks and snacks while they watched the wildlife. By wildlife I mean the non-Big Five animals grazing along the river right in front of the lodge. Seeing all these grazers and browsers while enjoying drinks and snacks added to their excitement.

After that, we headed out into the bush to look for more animals. Not long after we left the lodge, one of my colleagues reported a buffalo sighting, which caught our interest. On our way there, our tracker spotted tracks of a pride of lions, which immediately changed our plan. Instead of heading to the buffalo sighting, we decided to follow the lion tracks.

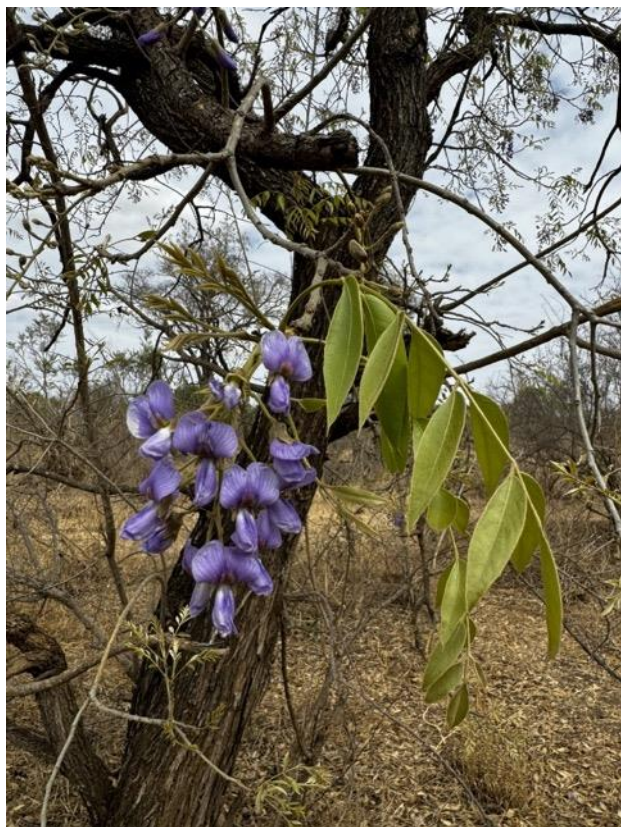


We followed the lion tracks for a while before suddenly spotting some vultures perched in a tree, with some hooded vultures on the lower branches. Seeing the vultures perched all around the area gave us a clue that there was a kill nearby. It was possible that the same lions we were tracking had made the kill, as vultures are scavengers; they do not hunt but rely on other animals to make kills and then swoop in, hoping to get a share. As I mentioned earlier, game drives are unpredictable. We went closer to where the vultures were perched, and upon closer inspection, this is what we discovered: a pride of 17 lions, including two adult males, five adult females, and ten young lions.

What an amazing sighting this turned out to be, hyenas also visited the scene, which added even more excitement.



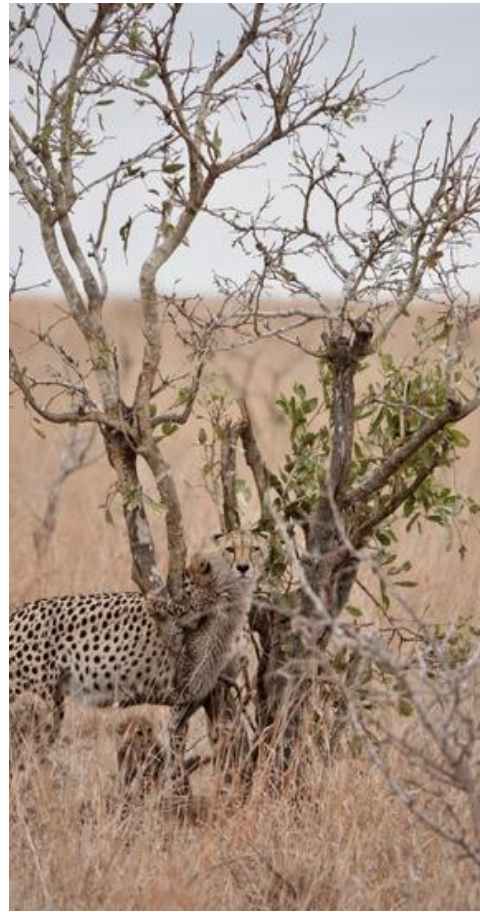
August Gallery



Tree wisteria (*Bolusanthus speciosus*) and sjambok pod (*Cassia abbreviata*) flowers.



A precious little white rhino calf and its mom pause briefly at the water's edge. Image by Lucy Stofberg.



Sunset and a Verreaux eagle owl's silhouette.

The young cheetah cubs are keen tree climbers while mom keeps a watchful eye.
The Hlambela ("to swim") male leopard risks the water for a potential meal. Images by Lucy Stofberg.





The recent discovery of some new faces at one of the previous well-used hyena dens. By Lucy Stofberg. The Tsalala lioness and her three cubs enjoying time together in the Sand River. Image by Marc Eschenlohr.





Following in mum's footsteps.
The serene Sand River. Images by Marc Eschenlohr





Moments that last a lifetime. Watching a female cheetah and her cubs. Image by Lucy Stofberg.