Singita

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

Temperature
Average minimum: 20.0˚C (68.0˚F)
Minimum recorded: 18.0˚C (64.4˚F)
Average maximum: 28.4˚C (83.0˚F)
Maximum recorded: 37.0˚C (98.6˚F)

Rainfall Recorded
For the month: 145 mm
Season to date: 286.4 mm
(*Season = Oct to Sep)

Sunrise & Sunset
Sunrise: 04:58
Sunset: 18:38

In December, the Lowveld landscape undergoes a breathtaking transformation into what is known as the 'Green Season,' as summer rains rejuvenate the parched landscape into a lush, emerald paradise. This vibrant period marks a significant 'baby boom,' particularly in the Sabi Sands and Kruger National Park, where thousands of newborns – from wobbly impala lambs to wildebeest calves – fill the plains, subsequently drawing high levels of predator activity from lions and leopards, to the wild dogs, and even cheetah. While the thickened foliage can make spotting wildlife more challenging, it offers spectacular, dust-free conditions for photography and exceptional birdwatching as migratory species arrive from the north. December offers a unique blend of warm summer adventure and the rejuvenating magic of new life.

Elephants

- The larger pachyderms have been getting stuck into the lush green oasis that now surrounds them. The warmer summer temperatures mean frequenting the mud wallows, waterholes and rivers for a regular cool off. The little ones keep themselves and each other preoccupied while the adults feast.

Buffaloes

- A large herd, almost a thousand strong, have been frequenting the grasslands in the south. Western cattle egrets, among other birds, are hot on their hoofs looking for insects they may flush.

Lions

- Lion dynamics seem to be on the brink of changing! The Nkuhuma and Talamati males are confirmed to be the fathers of the Mhangeni lioness' two young cubs. Lucky Luke Botha managed to get a sneak peek at the two tiny cubs! Those two males have also been seen mating with the other Mhangeni lionesses. The young sub-adult male from the Mhangeni Pride is cautiously spending his time in and around the area that the two larger males frequent.
- The Bateleur Pride of three females have been with the Plains Camp males, close to the lodges. They caught a wildebeest and the Plains Camp males stole that from them. Preoccupied with the kill, the lionesses managed to put some distance between themselves and the males.
- The Othawa Pride's five members in their territory north of the swollen Sand River are doing well.
- Other lion sightings include the Styx male and Kambula lioness.

Leopards

- The Nkuwa female and her young male cub are thriving with the abundant impala lambs. They were recently seen together with his father, the Thamba male.
- The Tisela female and her now independent female offspring (Xiluva and Xihangu) continue to frequent the western parts of Singita along the Sand River.
- The Rivala female is also a fairly permanent resident in the west. She's a rather photogenic leopard (as are they all), but she's very accommodating posing in unobstructive branches.
- The Thamba male has been hard at work with all the rain, having to scent mark all of his pillars and posts to refresh his territory.
- Other leopard sighting includes the young Vutomi male and the older Nhlanguleni female.

Cheetah

- With the tall summer grass it makes for finding or even spotting the resident male cheetah rather tricky. He recently managed to catch a wildebeest calf, a rare summer sighting indeed!

African wild dogs

- The Othawa Pack of wild dogs, comprising of eleven adults and seven youngsters, have been seen sporadically. With all the impala lambs the adults have made sure the youngsters are well looked after.

Unusual sightings

- An African Civet running past the guides office mid-day!
- A male and female Reedbuck were seen at the beginning of the month.
- Marc Bowes-Taylor observed a baboon spider hunting termite alates.

Bird list

We have added three more species to the list this month, taking the total to 294 birds. Montagu's harrier, blue-billed teal and squacco heron being the highlights for the month.

Understanding the ebbs and flows **Article by Daniel Hartman**

I've learned that if you want to understand this landscape, you don't watch the animals first — you watch the river.

At first light, the Sand River is almost anonymous. A thin, patient line of water moving through the Sabi Sand, carrying the night away without ceremony. Fresh elephant tracks crease its banks, still sharp enough to tell you who crossed, and when. A fish eagle calls once upstream — not to announce dominance, just to confirm the morning has arrived.

As the sun lifts higher, the river begins to draw life toward it. Impala step down cautiously to drink, never fully relaxed. Birds arrive in layers — storks, herons, kingfishers — each using the river differently, each understanding its boundaries. The Sand River doesn't offer safety; it offers opportunity.

By midday, the heat presses down and the river tightens its grip on the day. What water remains becomes essential. Crocodiles lie still along the edges, perfectly comfortable waiting. When elephants arrive, they do so with purpose — calves first, trunks searching, dust rising as water meets skin. The river absorbs the chaos without changing its course.

In the afternoon, the Sand River becomes a pathway rather than a destination. Leopards move along its banks, using its cover with practiced ease. Shadows stretch, bird calls multiply, and the light softens into gold. The river reflects the sky, carrying the weight of the day without ever revealing what it holds beneath the surface.

After dark, the Sand River belongs to those we rarely see. Lions cross where the water is shallow. Hyenas follow its line with quiet confidence. Hippos emerge, their presence announced long before they are seen. The river listens — it always has. These stories are familiar to it.

By morning, the evidence will be gone. Tracks softened, crossings erased, the night folded neatly back into the river's memory. And once again, the Sand River will wait — not for attention, but for life to return to its banks.

The Rivala female leopard **Article by Andries Mohlala**

Rivala, which translates as "the clearing", is a young female leopard that has moved onto our Singita property in recent months. She is generally seen in the western part of the property which boasts resources that would entice any young leopard looking to establish a territory. The area is beneficial in terms of hunting grounds – especially for impala, and has good vegetation cover. There is a network of river drainage lines and large trees that allow for hoisting of prey. The Sand River to the north attracts a lot of animal activity and cool paces to rest on warm days. Rivala came into the area at the right time as there was then little female leopard activity in that part of the property.

The west also offers plenty of places for denning in the form of rocky outcrops where a mother leopard could safely (relatively speaking) leave her cubs while she goes hunting.

Another positive for the area and Rivala is that a dominant male has it as part of his territory. This drawcard offers confidence to the female knowing there is security in place, and that she won't have to deal with roaming males coming and going and potentially killing her cubs.

We look forward to following her story and sharing it with you. This furry, four-legged, tree climbing feline is already a favourite colleague in our Guiding Department!

Summer is here! **Article by Andrew Taylor**

It's that time of the year where we have received a substantial amount of rain, and the terrain is transforming dramatically from its brown/yellow hues back to the green and colourful wonderland that we are seeing out on game drives at the moment. It is truly one of the most beautiful times of the year.

Wildflowers are blooming which usually starts in December with our first good rains and transforms the bush into the incredibly vibrant landscape that we are lucky enough to enjoy in summer. There are several different species of wildflowers which bloom in different areas across the reserve, and it is a joy to point these beauties out to our guests as we trundle along on game drive.

One of the most striking flowers, and one of my personal favourites, is the lion's eye *(Tricliceras laceratum),* a vibrant orange flower that usually appears directly after rain and stands out amongst the greenery which makes it an easy one for us to spot while out on safari.

It's not always just about the beauty of the flower but what that flower may attract. The hibiscus family which has over 50 different species would be a great one to mention too, specifically the wild hibiscus *(Hibiscus engleri)* with its large yellow petals that draw in a number of different butterfly and bird species.

Over 4 500 plant species thrive in the Lowveld, with a many of them occurring right here on Singita.

This time of year, would also have to be a favourite for many avid photographers because of the lush green landscape and all of the photographic opportunities that we do not get in winter, such as all the insects, flowers and migratory birds that have returned after spending winter in different areas.

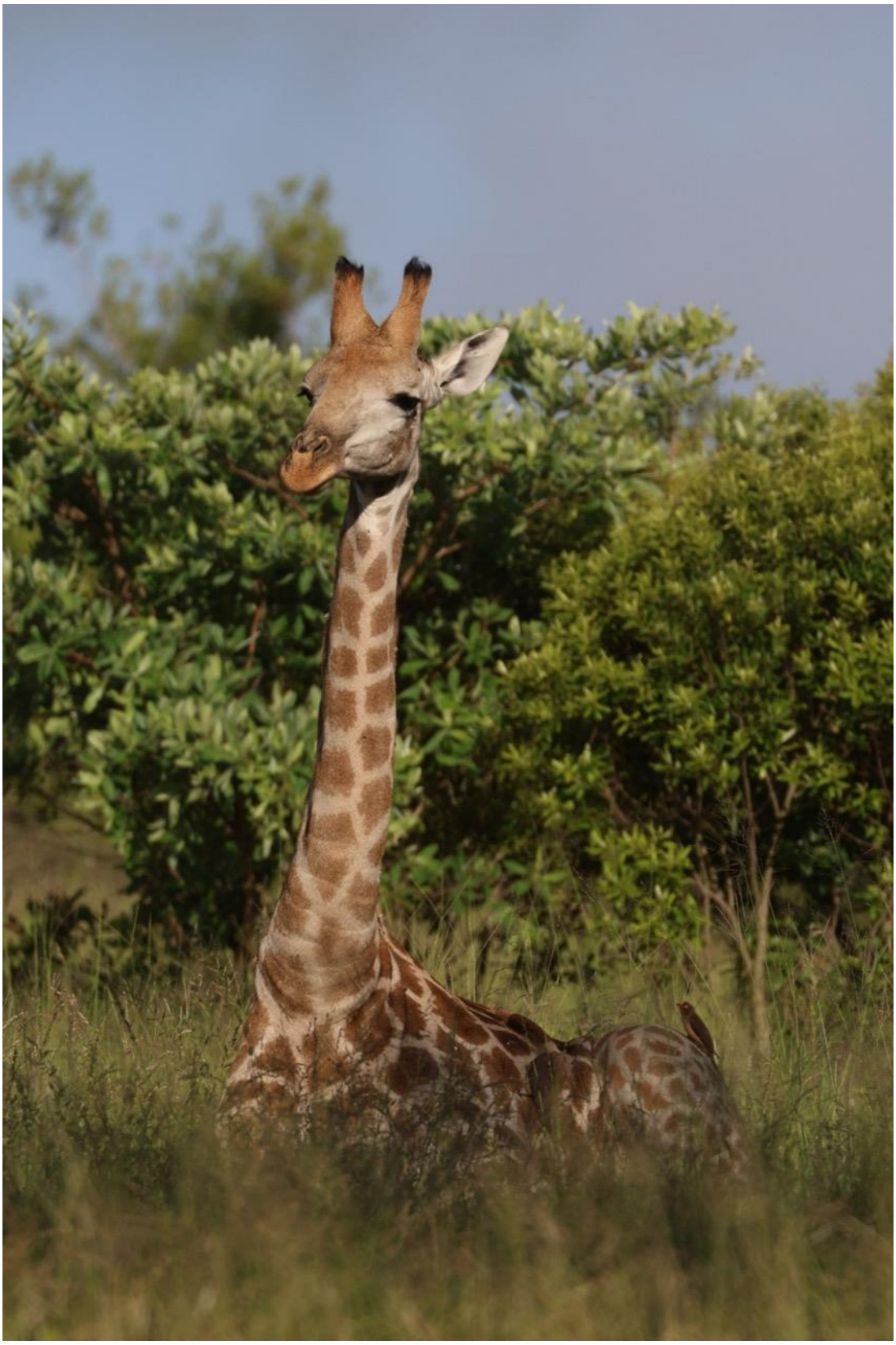
It's a time of year that I would definitely recommend for a safari!

Twitter

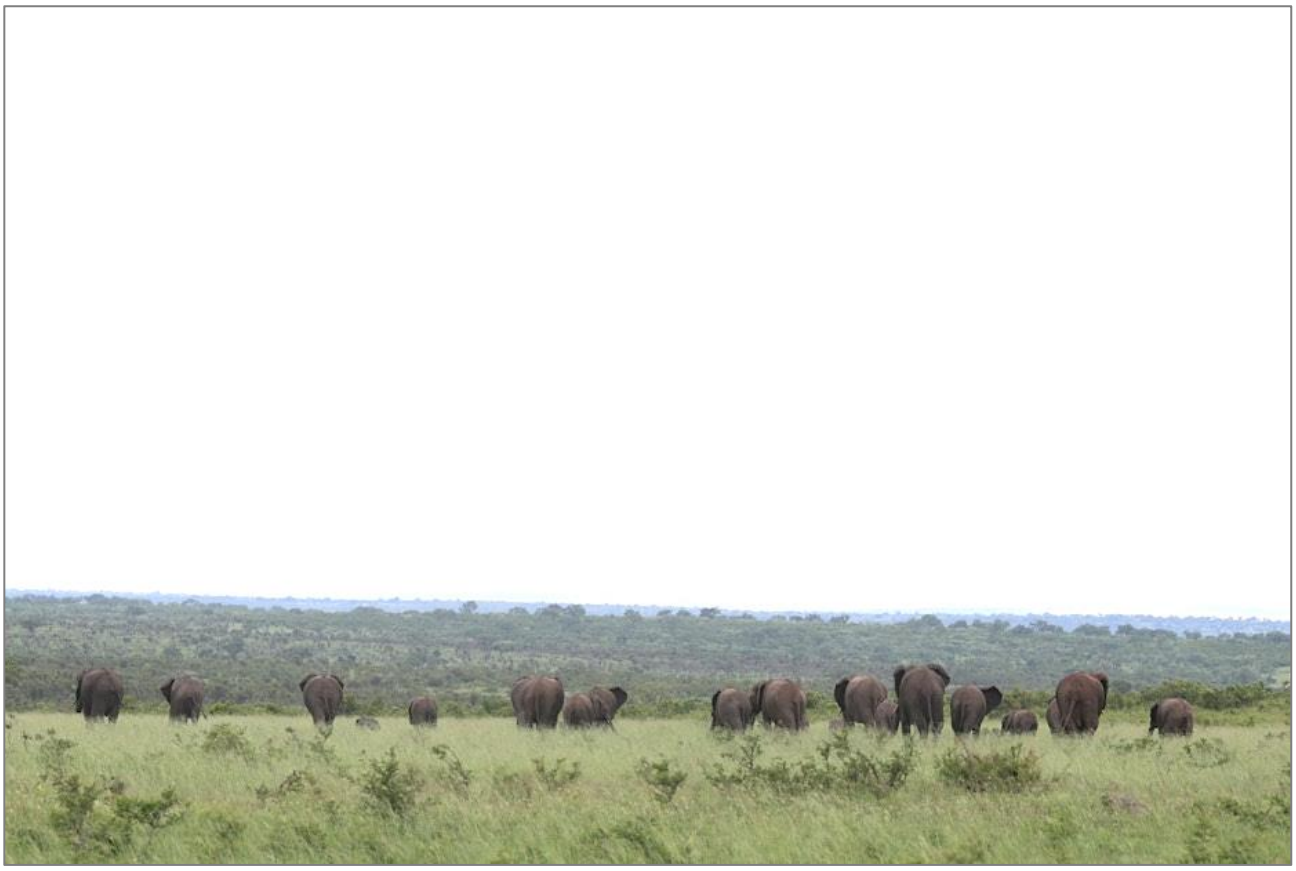
A martial eagle and its hard-earned reptilian meal! Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.
A female bateleur eagle. Image by Matt Durell.

A Verreaux's eagle-owl looking displeased by the paparazzi. Image by Marc Bowes Taylor.
Egyptian geese and their goslings! Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.

December Gallery



A rare sight of seeing a giraffe sitting down to rest. Image by Matt Durell.



A herd of elephants enjoying the vistas. Image by Matt Durell.
A large herd of buffalo take time to quench their thirst. Image by Marc Bowes Taylor.

A lioness admiring a Southern foam nest frog nest