

Singita



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

Temperature

Average minimum: 11.4°C (52.4°F)
Minimum recorded: 07.0°C (44.6°F)
Average maximum: 24.1°C (75.3°F)
Maximum recorded: 28.0°C (82.4°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 0mm
Season to date: 331.5 mm

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 06:31
Sunset: 05:27

As we pass the half mark in 2025 we reflect this month not only on the marvels of nature that keep on giving but also the life changing moments we are a part of with our treasured guests. As guides we are in the prime position to hear reactions and comments from those that travel from far to witness Nature first hand. "I never want to leave," and "This is the best vacation ever," are some comments we hear often. For some it was the first time seeing the southern skies at night, constellations that were all new to someone that had spent many nights photographing the stars in the northern hemisphere, while others pushed their personal comfort zones to experience the bushveld on foot. Feelings and emotions which can be heart-racing or heart-warming are what we hope our guests experience.

A sightings overview for July follows:

Cheetahs

- In the south the territorial male cheetah has been providing regular sightings for our guests. Some guests have even witnessed him in full sprint as he hunted an impala.

Elephants

- Temperatures have been cool to mild and there has been less mud bathing along the Sand River but the river valley has provided woody reed species and dense grass stands. Ebony trees which are fruiting, have been a good starting point when looking for elephants.
- A special sighting was coming across a newly born elephant calf that must have been hours old. For the guests witnessing such an intimate time of an elephant's life, this alone, "Made the trip worthwhile." The mother elephant still had afterbirth on her trunk from helping the tiny elephant to its feet.

Buffaloes

- The herds of buffalo have been feeding in all parts of the reserve, from the south all the way to the Sand River, occasionally spending the midday period resting in the river itself. Food is scarce so their movements are further and further, day by day. Signs of the herds are ever present as their dung litters the surroundings, an important ecological influence.

Lions

- The Othawa Pride is now four members stronger as they have been seen with their new cubs across the Sand River, in the safety of the Hukumuri riverbed.
- The Ximungwe Pride has been viewed a few times to the west of the lodges. On one occasion hunting a waterbuck successfully, only to have it stolen by one of the Plains Camp lions moments later.
- The Tsalala lioness is close to giving birth. She has been seen from Ebony and Boulders Lodges every other day hunting as much as possible as they day nears to the arrival of her new litter. She captivated guests during while they had lunch, by giving chase to a herd of waterbuck in the Sand River.
- The Mhangeni Pride, now three adult females and just three remaining sub-adult lions, have been hunting mainly in the south of Singita and have had successful kills of buffalo and wildebeest. The Talamati and Nkuhuma males have taken over as pride males.

Leopards

- The Nkuwa female and her two cubs are doing well and we have noticed a relaxed nature around the vehicles from the cubs. Guests have had front row seats to leopard viewing from these three cats.
- Another female that has taken our breath away is the Rivala female who has been viewed resting in some of the ancient trees of the Sand River, valley close to Ebony Lodge.
- We have had the occasional sighting of a young male leopard that must have come from beyond the Sabi Sand Nature Reserve boundaries. He is still getting used to the vehicles and will require more time around the game viewers before he is comfortable with us. A rewarding process to be a part of.
- The Ntoma female had been seen mating with the Thamba male.
- The Ntomi male made a successful kill as a storm rolled in from the south, only to have it stolen by a male lions. The setting made for a once-in-a-lifetime sighting as the winds picked up, rain poured down, and the leopard watched from a tree as his hard-earned impala kill was fought over by the Nkuhuma and Talamati male lions below.

African wild dogs

- Although the Othawa Pack is denning with the current litter beyond our traversing, they have been hunting quite frequently in the western parts of Singita.

Birds

- Our bird count reached 280 species, with a great record of a white-crowned lapwing seen from Ebony main deck. Other worthwhile mentions include the southern white-faced owl and marsh owl.

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

There's something about a winter sunset in the Lowveld that feels otherworldly. As the sun dips low, the dust in the air catches the last golden light, and the bush seems to pause - waiting. That's when we found her tracks. They were fresh, pressed into the soft sand along a game path. All signs pointed to Nkuwa, the leopardess that rules this stretch of the southern drainage lines. She's elusive, known for her quiet confidence - and sure enough, not long after, we spotted her: low to the ground, stalking.



Just ahead of her was a herd of impala, completely unaware. The setting couldn't have been more perfect. A slight breeze kept her scent downwind, and the soft terrain masked her steps. She crept forward like a liquid shadow, every movement smooth and precise.

In the vehicle, we were silent. One of the guests whispered, "Is this really

happening?" The excitement was written all over their faces - eyes wide, cameras forgotten in their laps. It wasn't just a sighting; it was a scene unfolding in real time, a private moment in the wild that we were lucky enough to witness.

The impalas shifted. A ram looked up, frozen, ears flicking. Nkuwa stopped mid-step. You could feel the tension - no one even breathed. Everything - the golden light, the dust, the stillness - seemed to press in around us.

Then, she launched.

A blur of muscle and intent, she tore across the clearing. The impalas scattered, their alarm snorts sharp and panicked. For a moment, it looked like she might make it - her focus locked on a young ewe. But with a final jink and burst of speed, the antelope slipped away.

It was over in seconds.

She stood there, chest rising and falling, watching the bush close behind her fleeing prey. No meal tonight. But there was no sense of failure - just part of the rhythm of life out here. She turned and melted back into the thickets, swallowed by the shadows.

It's not just about the hunt or the leopard, it's about being right there, in that golden, dusty moment, with wild Africa unfolding in front of you - a secret being shared. An absolutely incredible experience that we are often privy to, providing that we show respect and patience.

I have noticed a curious little ritual that some elephants perform when dusting themselves after bathing or mud wallowing: After scooping up a trunkful of sand or dust the elephant will sometimes press its trunk against the ground before tossing the dust onto its back. It's a subtle movement, and easily missed.

Elephants are deeply tactile animals with astonishing control over their trunks, which contain over 40 000 muscles. Dust bathing plays an important role in an elephant's self-care routines. My interpretation of this behaviour is to sift and shift the sand. When they lift sand or dust from the ground, it's not always evenly packed. The fine particles they prefer for dusting - used to protect their skin - can sometimes clump together or shift as they lift their trunk. By pressing the trunk to the ground or rolling it slightly, the elephant is possibly adjusting the weight, breaking up larger clumps, and repositioning the load to create an even spray when it releases it.

Dust bathing serves several essential purposes for elephants. First, it acts as a natural sunscreen. The fine layer of dust settles on the skin and shields it from the harsh sun. It also functions as an insect repellent, discouraging biting flies and parasites. Additionally, dust helps to dry any excess moisture after a bath or rain, preventing fungal infections and irritation in the thick folds of their skin.

Elephants are not only practical but precise. This small act of pressing or rolling the trunk before dusting might seem insignificant, but I think it's a key part of an efficient grooming routine - one that balances comfort, hygiene, and protection from the elements.

Watching an elephant perform this series of movements reminds me that even the smallest gestures in nature are often layered with purpose and intelligence. In the gentle sweep of dust and the grace of a trunk's motion, elephants reveal the quiet wisdom of the wild.

There are so many different types of symbiotic relationships, but today I want to share with you the following two types.

Mutualism, is where both parties benefit from the interaction, for example, buffalos and oxpeckers. Oxpeckers eat parasites like ticks and flies that infest buffalos and compromise their health. In return the oxpeckers get a reliable food source and a safe place to perch – see the photo below. It is amazing how many creatures provide a service for each other, with each gaining a benefit from it. Here, the oxpeckers provide a cleansing service, removing all sorts of ectoparasites, while they get a reliable meal from the buffalo.



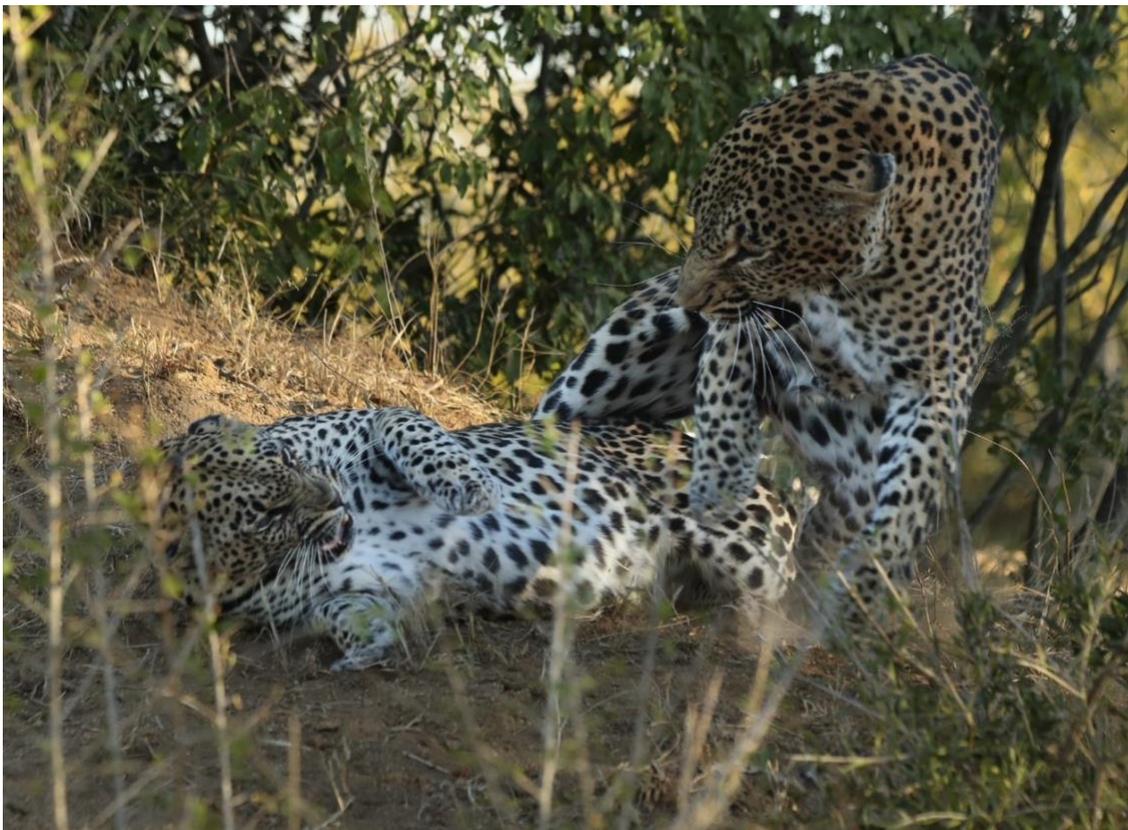
Commensalism, is where one species benefits, and the other is neither harmed nor helped. An example is when a bird builds its nest in a tree. The tree does not benefit or get harmed, but the bird is the one benefiting as it has found a shelter in that tree.



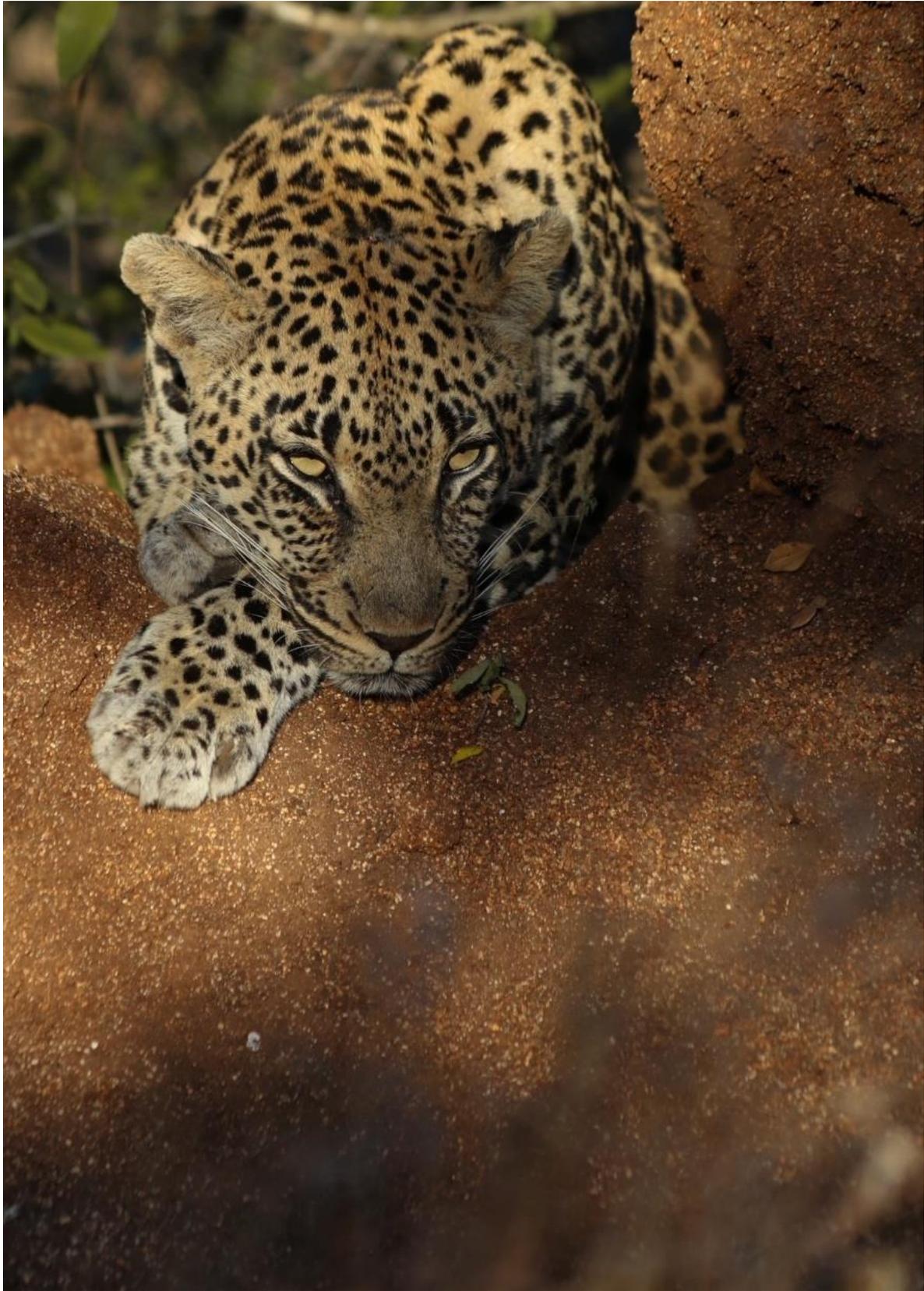
July Gallery



An elephant calf takes a few minutes rest under the safety of its mother guard. Image by Matt Durell.



A feisty affair as the Thamba male and the Ntoma female leopard are seen mating. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.



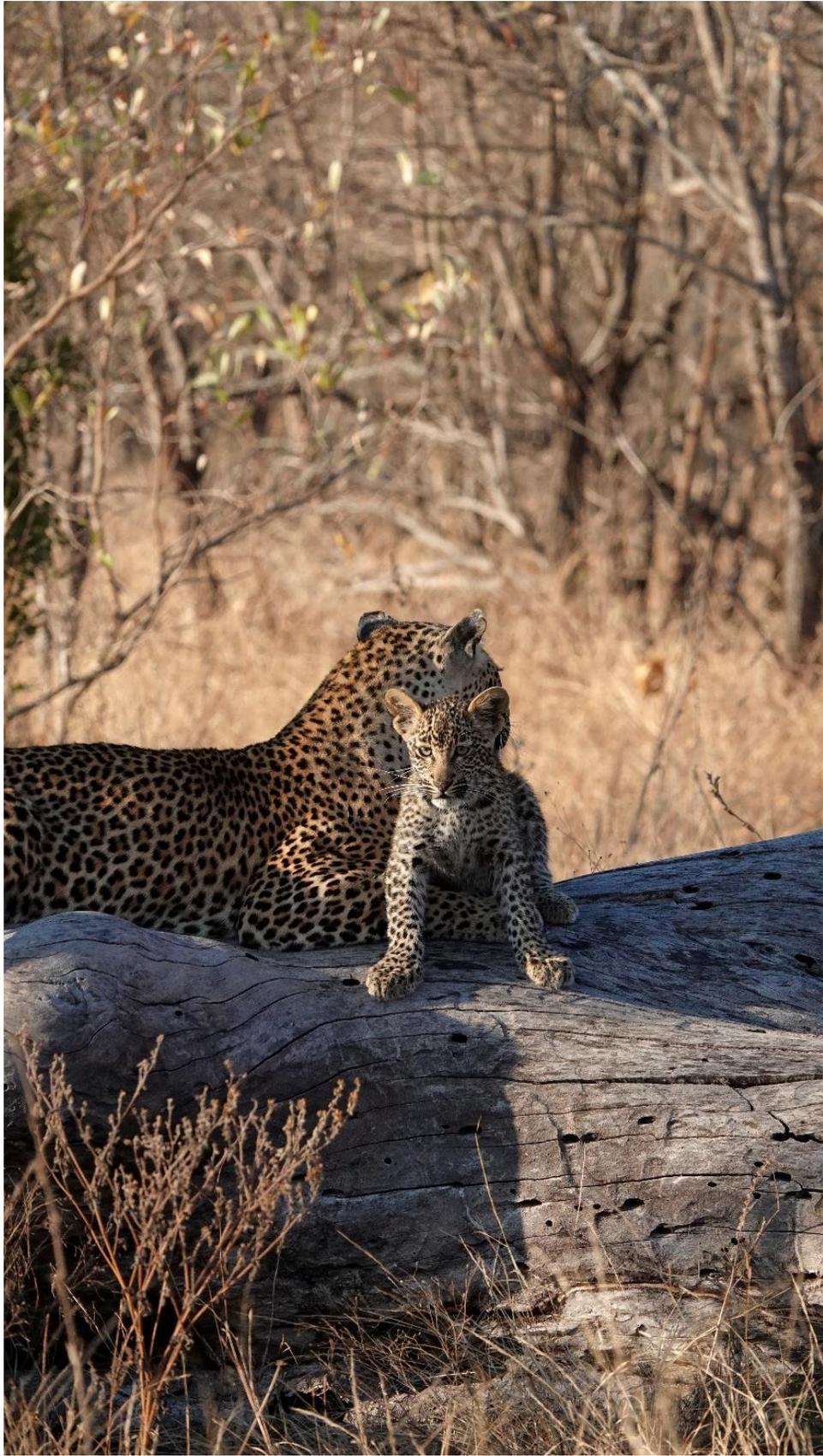
The Ntoma female leopard pausing between a bout of mating with the Thamba male leopard.
Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.



A male cheetah atop a termite mound as the full moon steals the show. Image by Lucy Stoffberg.



One of the few winter flowers, the aloes currently attracting all the pollinators. Image by Matt Durell.



The Nkuwa female and her cub watching a flock of helmeted guineafowl. Image by Lucy Stoffberg.



Could it get any better? A once-in-a-lifetime shot by Lucy Stoffberg.



The two female offspring of the Tisela female leopard. They are roughly 18 months of age now.
Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.