

Singita



Hippopotamus bull – Photo by Monika Malewski

WILDLIFE JOURNAL
SINGITA KRUGER NATIONAL PARK, SOUTH AFRICA
For March, Two Thousand and Twenty-Four

Temperature

Average minimum: 21.6°C (70.8°F)
Minimum recorded: 18.0°C (64.4°F)
Average maximum: 31.6°C (88.8°F)
Maximum recorded: 42°C (107.6°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 79mm
Season to date: 533.5 mm

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 06h00
Sunset: 17h50

After an unusually dry February and scorching start to this month, we were finally blessed with some rain as Tropical Cyclone Filipo made landfall in Mozambique during the middle of the month, spilling over into the eastern parts of Kruger National Park, and transforming our concession from the early autumn oranges and yellows into a once again green landscape. Butterflies and beetles are so abundant, it's as if they never left. The European bee-eaters are gathering in numbers as they, and many of the other migrants prepare for the long flight back north at the end of this month. The misty early mornings hint that winter is on the way.

A Sightings Snapshot for March follows:

Lions

- The first half of the month saw the Shish Pride spending most of their time west of our concession, enjoying the plethora of zebra, wildebeest and waterbuck on the basalt plains, with multiple sightings of them on the H6. However, with the mid-month rains, the Shish Pride returned to hunt in the open areas near where the Ntsimbisane drainage meets the N'wanetsi River. All 14 cubs are healthy and growing bigger every day.
- Two cubs from the Mananga Pride were seen once early this month moving west into the stickythorns with one of the females and sub-adults. Thereafter only small portions of the pride adults were seen, mostly along the S41 between the N'wanetsi River and Mananga trails. We believe they had moved the den-site to the west of our concession somewhere south of the S100 and west of S41. At the end of the month however, seven cubs were seen at stickythorn quarry and the next morning they were back at the original den we found them at almost a month ago, in the stickythorns in the centre of our concession, with three nursing females. It appears as though two of the original nine cubs might have not survived, but this is still to be confirmed. It is a harsh reality with lions though. Being so small and defenceless means that infant mortality is high amongst this top predator.
- The “outcasts” from the Mananga Pride, the four young sub-adults who chose to save themselves from potential injury and death when they fled from the pride as the Trichardt males started taking over last year, have been seen on a few occasions this month, but never together. The youngest female has been hanging around the central depression and west from there. Her sister was seen chasing a wildebeest in the same area but sadly appeared to have been injured from not only the wildebeest but we suspect, also another predator, whether it was hyenas or lions is hard to tell, but her back and legs were severely scratched.
- The Trichardt males were seen with a few Mananga lionesses near the beginning of the month feeding on a waterbuck carcass on the S41 just north of the Gudzane drainage before moving back west out of our concession. Two weeks later they reappeared at the most northern edge of our concession and were seen mating with a lioness. A few days later they trekked all the way south to check in on the Shish Pride and their cubs.
- The Maputo male and Xai-Xai have also been seen mating with a single lioness in the northern regions of the concession.
- With the Mananga Pride spending more time south of the Gudzane Dam, an unnamed pride of at least six females has been seen recurrently northwest of the dam and on the S41 near Mananga Trails. The younger members appear to be rather nervous around vehicles compared to the older females.
- At the end of the month, we were treated to a great interaction between these six females, Xai-Xai and Maputo trying to keep hyenas away from their zebra carcass.

Leopards

- As most of our sub-adult leopards have officially separated from their mothers and are beginning to establish themselves as adults, the guide and tracking team at Singita Kruger National Park have decided to give the unnamed leopards official names. (More on this in our wildlife article below.)
- The son of Dumbana female, previously known as Dumbana 3:3 (his mother's name and his spot pattern) is now Kalanga, referring to his inclination to hunt baboons. He has been spending the majority of this month along the N'wanetsi River around Dave's Crossing. He then turned up in the central parts of our concession, showing that he was exploring areas to settle in as his territory.
- His brother, Dumbana 1:1 (also his mother's name and his spot pattern) has been named Nitavuya (nita vuya, the Shangaan for “I will come back”). He has previously moved out of our concession only to return a month later. Unfortunately, the last we heard of him was over a month ago when he was seen near Orpen Gate.
- The Dumbana female and her cubs left beautiful tracks for us to find many mornings, but due to her den-site being presumed to be up on Milk-berry Ridge and virtually inaccessible to vehicles, we have not been able to view the tiny cubs until the end of the month when the trio was found feeding on an

impala carcass in the valley east of the Milk-berry Road. We estimate the cubs to be around five months old now so should start moving further from the den in the coming weeks.

- Nhlangueni's daughter with the spot pattern 4:3, has been named Madaka (pronounced madaga), and has been seen more frequently. First near Double Crossing in a large jackalberry tree and then later in the month feeding on a kudu calf in a marula tree. Her sister, with the spot count 4:4, has been named Nhungu, meaning "eight" in Shangaan. She was seen twice this month, once not too far from where her mother was feeding on an impala carcass in a tree.
- Who we used to refer to as the Plains male has now been renamed Zamani male in remembrance of Christoff, our friend and legendary tracker who sadly passed away this month (Zamani was Christoff's first name). Zamani is a beautiful, strong and regal male leopard that occupies territory around the Gudzane Dam and the open basalt plains nearby.
- The Lebombo male is holding his territory along the N'wanetsi River, but due to the rains, has not been sighted as often as in previous months.
- The Mondzo male continues to move just along the edges of Lebombo's territory, making another encounter inevitable.

African wild dogs

- An uncollared and therefore supposedly newly formed pack of five males and one female have been present this month, roaming between the H6 in the south to where they were seen hunting impala on the basalt plains west of the Xinkelegaan drainage in the northern regions of our concession.

Cheetahs

- A single female cheetah has been seen this month near the stickythorn quarry. She was spotted after following up on vulture activity. It appears that she might have killed an impala, fed, and moved to the west.

Spotted hyenas

- Majority of the hyena sightings were of solitary individuals moving along the roads in the early morning and evenings, heads held high sniffing the air.
- The clan is still denning north of the hyena crossing in the Lebombo Mountains with up to three cubs present sometimes. Due to proximity, it was likely members of this clan that were staring down the Shish Pride one morning.
- Another clan of five were seen moving around the central depression.
- The Maputo male, Xai-Xai and the unnamed pride from the north were surrounded by a clan of 11 hyenas nervously waiting for the remains of a zebra carcass but not daring to get too close to the two large male lions.

Elephants

- At the start of the month, when all was still dusty and dry, and we whispered fears of a drought, the elephants were plentiful. Hundreds lined the N'wanetsi River and the last pools in the Xinkelegane drainage. One lucky guide and her guests were fortunate enough to witness four separate herds congregate into one massive herd of over a hundred elephants and mud wallow "on the go" through Pony Pan, like a conveyor belt, which at that time was one of the last muddy pans available to ease the heat from the sun. Now that the vegetation is once again lush and green after our late rains, these large pachyderms seem to have spread out once again. We are however noticing a change in their diet from the now-drying grass to the nutritious inner bark and moisture-rich roots as they rip up and push over more and more trees.

Buffalos

- A large herd of buffalo were seen moving out of the northwestern region of our concession early this month, as well as another herd of about 200 strong, moving back and forth across the H6, seen on a few occasions on the way to the Satara airstrip. It is one old “Dagga Boy” (the local name for the old bulls) though, that has dominated our sightings this month. Determined to live another day, he still moves between the N’wanetsi River and its smaller tributaries cutting through the Lebombo mountains.

Plains game

- The basalt plains through which the H6 winds from the Satara airstrip to Singita is an awe-inspiring scene, often with over one hundred zebras congregated together. The wildebeest and impala come in a close second place as they dart across the grassland with their young at their side.
- Kudu and waterbuck area plentiful along the river, and with the grasses becoming noticeably shorter, even the tiny steenbuck and duiker are being seen more frequently now.

Rare animals and other sightings:

- A side-striped jackal was heard calling from the Shishangaan staff village.
- A lucky guide and tracker spotted a serval hunting on their way back to the lodge one evening.
- A shy, unnamed leopard was seen stalking a honey badger, completely unaware of the leopard’s presence, only to shuffle away with a confident swagger a few moments later.
- Midway through the month, one of our senior trackers, spotted a pair of Temminck’s pangolin tracks near Pony Pan as well as on Ntsimbisane. Being predominantly nocturnal, small, and the same colour as the soil makes these elusive animals a rare sighting, and just seeing their footprints brings a sense of satisfaction, keeping the hope alive that you may one day see a pangolin.
- Jonathan Leeming joined the guiding team for a few days of scorpion and spider training and we were able to find every species of scorpion present in this area, learning the ways of these taxonomically ancient and often misunderstood creatures.

Birds

- Many migrants, including the woodland kingfisher, red-backed shrike, blue-cheeked bee-eaters and European swallows are still present but have begun gathering in numbers in preparation for their northward-bound flight as we draw nearer to winter. The last rains and subsequent insect emergence are a huge advantage as they need to bulk up as much as possible to cope with the demands of their long journey. It can take the European swallows six weeks to fly an average of 200 miles per day only stopping briefly to feed and rest in large flocks.
- The rare bird for this month was a single Caspian tern seen flying over the weir by one of our lucky guides. According to the bird books, this is not supposed to occur here and was probably blown in ahead of the tropical cyclone.
- Ostriches have been seen around Kori Clearings, and the Western osprey was still in the area of Gudzane Dam at the beginning of this month.

Some bush stories follow, as well as a March Gallery of images.

Rivers of Kruger National Park

Article by Walter Mabilane

Kruger National Park is a sanctuary for an array of wildlife and its rivers are the lifeblood that sustains this rich biodiversity. Spanning over 350km from north to south, the park is home to six major rivers, each with its unique role in the ecosystem.

Crocodile River: The Southern Sentinel

Crocodile River forms the southern boundary of the park, offering spectacular wildlife sightings. As a tributary of the Komati River, it flows into the Indian Ocean at Maputu Bay in Mozambique. While the river is a haven for animals, its proximity to agriculture on the southern side can affect the wilderness experience.

Sabie River: The Sand River Journey

Rising from the Drakensberg mountains, the Sabie River traverses through Mpumalanga before entering the park. Near Skukuza and Lower Sabi rest camps, it provides some of the parks' best game viewing opportunities. Sabie River eventually joins the Komati River on its way to the Indian Ocean.



Shingwedzi River – Photo by Monika Malewski



Letaba River – Photo by Monika Malewski

Letaba and Olifants River

The central regions of Kruger are nourished by the Letaba and Olifants rivers. Despite their importance to wildlife, these rivers are among the most polluted in South Africa, carrying the burden of industrial and residential runoff. The impact of this pollution on the park's ecosystem is a growing concern.

Limpopo River: The Northern Boundary

The Limpopo River marks the northern edge of Kruger, flowing as one of the longest rivers in southern Africa. It supports a diverse range of wildlife and is a key feature of the park's northernmost landscapes.

Luvuvhu River: The Scenic North

In the scenic northern reaches of Kruger, the Luvuvhu River flows as a tributary of the Limpopo River. This area, known as Crooks Corner, has an ecological history of outlaws who exploited the region's geography to evade authorities.

Conservation Challenges

The rivers of Kruger National Park face numerous threats, primarily from pollution due to overpopulated villages and settlements upstream. Protecting these vital waterways is essential for the continued survival of the park's flora and fauna.

Kruger's rivers are more than just bodies of water, they are corridors of life that connect different habitats and support an incredible diversity of species. As we look to the future, the conservation of the rivers is paramount to ensuring that Kruger remains a beacon of natural beauty and ecological significance.



Olifants River – Photo by Monika Malewski

A Pictorial Introduction Guide to the Female Leopards of Singita Kruger National Park

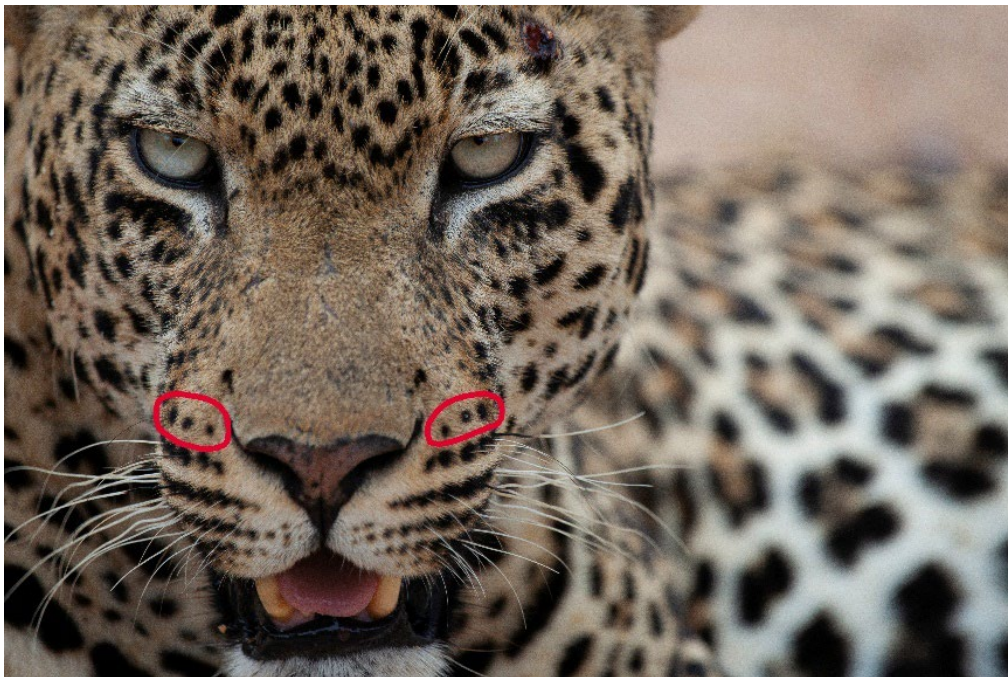
The Guide and Tracker team at Singita Kruger National Park recently held a poll where various un-named leopards were given their “names”.

This is done for several reasons, but primarily to assist the teams to positively identify individuals over the radio whilst on game drive, and after safaris in the office, allowing us to visualize various territories, and hopefully be able to understand individual movement patterns and behaviours. By doing this, we are better prepared and able to predict with greater confidence where to go searching for particular leopards.

When we name animals, we do not do so based on familiarity, and regular names such as Peter, Sally Jacob etc. are not used, as this creates a level of anthropomorphism which as guides, we try our best to avoid. The naming of leopards is done by considering several factors, be they spot patterns, eyebrow patterns, territories, or unique traits displayed by the leopards, like preferred prey items targeted.

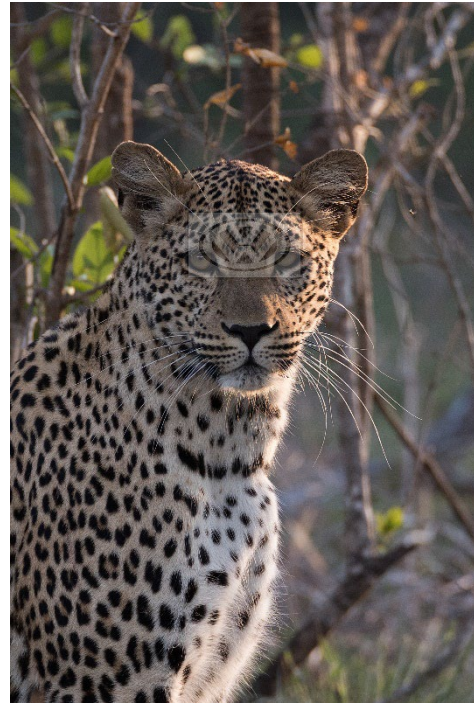
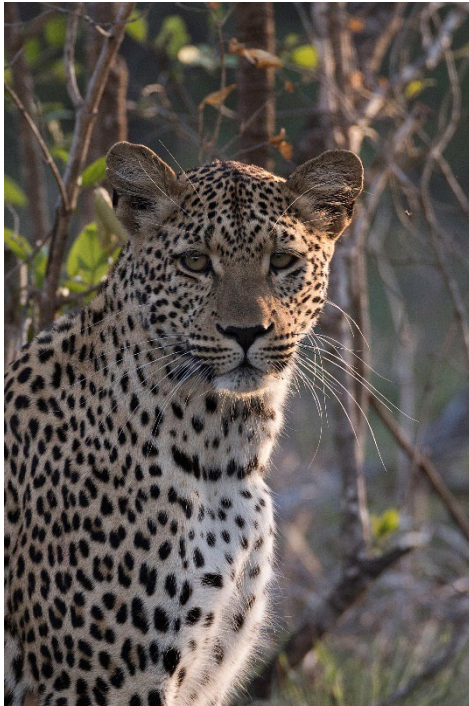
When we identify leopards, we usually use the spot pattern method first, which may need a brief explanation.

1. A spot pattern refers to the uppermost row of spots on the leopard's cheeks. These are the spots above the upper line of whiskers.
2. The spot pattern is made up of the number of spots first on the right cheek and then on the left cheek.
3. The number of spots on respective cheeks varies from leopard to leopard.



Spot pattern of a leopard – Photo by Rudi Hulshof

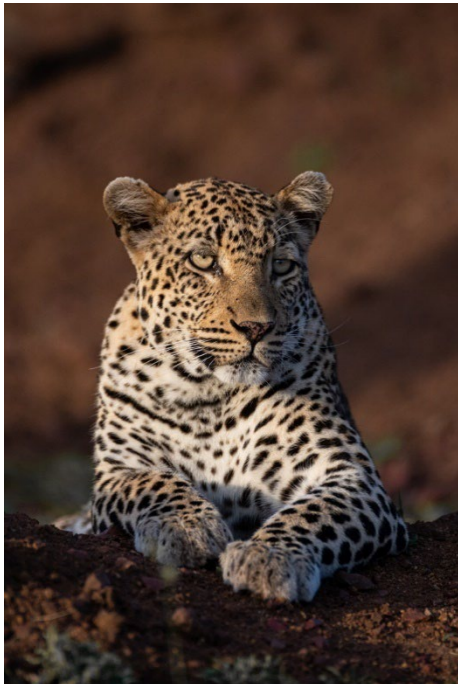
Some leopards will have the same spot pattern numbers. At this point, we will look for other identifiable features to confirm the identity, which is often used to name the leopard.



Example of unique identifiable patterns – Photo by Rudi Hulshof

Reading the monthly summaries in our wildlife reports, there have been several different leopard individuals mentioned, some being seen more than others which varies on a month-to-month basis.

I thought it best to actually “put a name to the face,” so to say, and introduce our friends, followers and ‘past, present and future’ guests to the female leopards we have been able to view over the past year here at Singita Kruger National Park.



Dumbana female:

A very relaxed female leopard, the Dumbana female, has been seen for several years now on the concession. No exact record of her age is known, as she started being seen on safari after arriving as an adult-sized leopard from the adjacent wilderness areas to the east of Singita.

At a guess, we believe her to be an older female, already past 10 years old. Dumbana currently has two cubs aged around 6 months and has managed in the past to raise several cubs to adulthood successfully, most recently two sons that are now just over three years old.

Dumbana female has a name that refers to a particular stream known as the Dumbana drainage line, which runs into the N’wanetsi River at a place called Dumbana Pools. Because this area falls in the core part of her territory, and she has often been seen here, she was given a geographical name according to the area she is frequently found in. Her territory extends from our eastern boundary to the western boundary in the more southern parts of the concession.

Nhlanguleni female:

The second of our adult mature females, who occupies a territory in the central portions of the concession, the Nhlanguleni female, is an extremely relaxed female and has been named after a geographical area too. We have a portion of the reserve that includes a pan known as Nhlanguleni Pan, as well as roads by the same name. The area is called Nhlanguleni because of the prevalence of magic guarri trees in the territory, called nhlanguleni, in the locally spoken Shangaan language.

Nhlanguleni has recently lost a litter of cubs that were younger than four months old and should be mating again in the coming weeks and months and could produce a new litter soon.

She has an obvious notch bitten out of her right ear which makes her easy to identify.



Nungu and Madaka females:

These two females are newly named leopards that are the two twin daughters born to Nhlanguleni female in the beginning of 2022. Now aged just over two years old, both of them have reached the age of independence and are currently forging territories for themselves respectively, near, and bordering on their maternal territory.

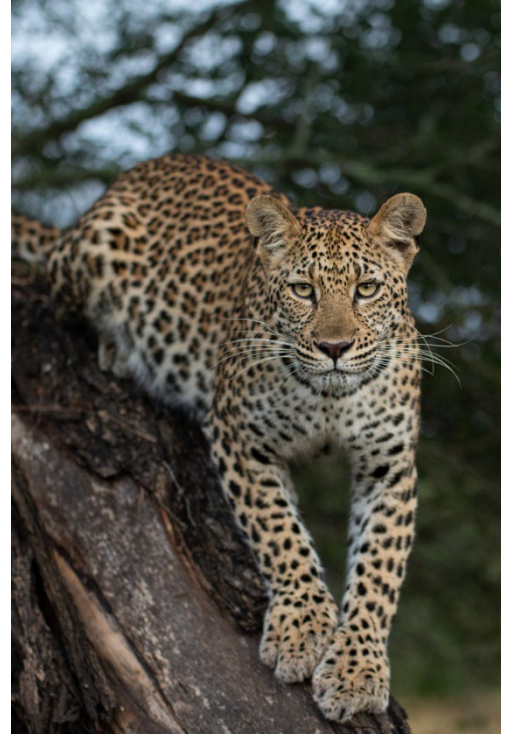
If they keep surviving like they have to this point, these young females will reach sexual maturity within the next year and a half. All guides and trackers are rooting for them to become established territorial females in the concession because of their relaxed nature. Any time we have a relaxed female, we anticipate growing the number of relaxed leopards to view because of the knock-on effect of their cubs' trust and not being too cautious of the safari vehicles.

Nungu female has a spot pattern of 4:4. The Shangaan word for 8 (4 plus 4) is Nungu, hence the origin of her name.

Madaka (pronounced Madaga) female has a different spot pattern, 4:3, but rather than calling her the Nkombo female, (seven in Shangaan), we voted on the name Madaka referencing a river crossing in the central parts of the reserve that she spent much of her time growing up in.



Nungu female – Photo by Rudi Hulshof



Madaka female – Photo by Rudi Hulshof

Nyala female and Nyala female's mother:

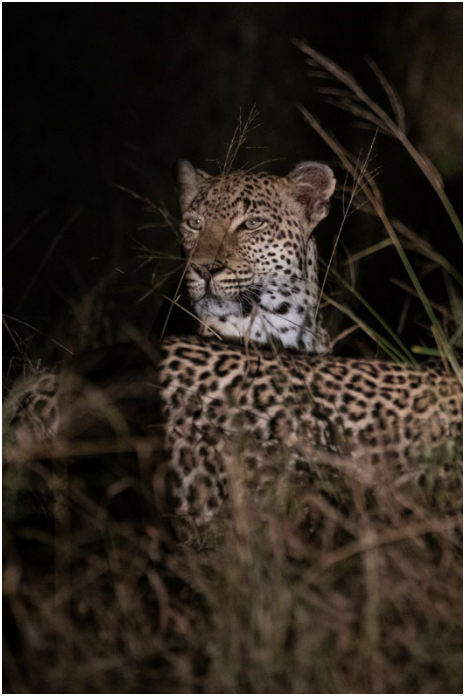
Fairly close to the lodges here on the concession is a road called Nyala Road. This young female, also around two years old and recently independent, spent much of her infancy to the west of the concession, before reaching adulthood and spending her days near the above-mentioned road.

Over the past year, we have been seeing her establish herself in a territory around the Nyala Ridge and along Nyala Road. Although she does venture further, her core territory at present is in the far southwestern areas surrounding the lodges.

If found with a kill, this female could not be bothered to look up at the vehicles and has a relaxed nature. When she is moving around patrolling her territory though, we take care not to have a high vehicle presence at any one time, as she seems to rather try to avoid the vehicles as soon as there is more than one near her.

Over time and with continued exposure she will relax further and once the trust between her and us has been established we look forward to many rewarding sightings of her near the lodges.

Her mother has not been named as she is seldom seen, and when we do get to view her, it's only glimpses as she darts off to avoid the safari vehicles. Her territory is predominantly to the west of the concession where we do not spend any time and thus cannot spend time with her to calm her down.



Nyala mom – Photo by Rudi Hulshof



Nyala female - Photo by Rudi Hulshof

Sekele female:

Quite possibly the sister of the Nyala female, but without any confirmation, this young female has also become independent at the start of 2023 and ventured to the north once she left her mother. An incredibly relaxed female, this leopard is now seen around the Gudzane Dam areas from time to time. It seems she has chosen a high-density female leopard territory, and we have to check carefully when she is found to make sure we have not confused her with either the Gudzane female or a newly named shy female called – Xindzhuti.



Sekele is a word used in Shangaan to represent a sickle, which is a shape formed between her brows above the eye line.

Xindzhuti Female:

Poetic license has been used in naming this older mature female. In Shangaan, xindzhuti is the word for shadow, which is often all we see of this female as she slinks away from the vehicles.

A typical nervous leopard, she runs or hides and we do not see her regularly. At times when she has a hoisted kill or is mating with a relaxed male, (as was the case a month ago) we get the rare opportunity to see her skulking in the grass trying to remain invisible.

She has a very symmetrical circular pattern created by the spots between her eyes above the brow line which can be used to identify her.

Her territory is in the central and western parts of the concession, typically found around the plains surrounding Gudzane Dam.



Xindzhuti female – Photo by Rudi Hulshof



Gudzane female – Photo by Rudi Hulshof

Gudzane female:

One of our temperamental and less frequently seen adult female leopards. The Gudzane female occupies a territory to the north of the Gudzane Dam. Due to the distance and time it takes to get to the northern areas of the concession, she is infrequently found, due to the limited time we usually have to track her down. Before we even get to her territory, it is bound to happen that a leopard is located nearer the central regions of the concession, and most guides would rather opt for a guaranteed sighting than venture far away in the hope of managing to locate her.

At times this female is super relaxed, and at other times will briskly move away to a safe distance of about 50m before relaxing and continuing with her activity, not paying us any attention whatsoever.



N'wanetsi female:

Over the past five months, an unidentified nervous female has been seen more regularly along the N'wanetsi River to the north and south of the lodge. This female is not relaxed and prefers space between us and her, often trotting off at the first sign of an approaching vehicle.

The handful of sightings we have managed to get of her is usually when she is at a safe distance away from the safari vehicles, posing on the cliffs that tower above the N'wanetsi River that flows past Lebombo Lodge.

This female is the mother of a newly named young male leopard that has been called the Confluence male.

Granophyre female:

This female is rarely seen because of her extremely shy nature. She has only been seen a couple of times and tends to use her territory, along the intrusive granophyre ridge boulders, as perfect hiding places when we happen to drive by. Her territory extends to the east of the lodges in the southern portions of the concession.



Granophyre female – Photo by Rudi Hulshof

By spatial distribution, it can confidently be deduced that there is enough vacant land where we do not get to traverse frequently enough, to easily accommodate at least three more adult female leopards. These leopards leave only their tracks for us to find here at Singita Kruger National Park.

To find out about all our male leopards here at Singita Kruger National Park, you will have to vow to return to our Wildlife Reports in the coming months to catch the sequel, where I will introduce you all to the males we have seen and see regularly.

March Gallery



Zamani Male – Photo by Rudi Hulshof



Tree squirrel – Photo by Rudi Hulshof



Waterbuck family – Photo by Monika Malewski



Malachite kingfisher – Photo by Monika Malewski



Baby Nile crocodile – Photo by Monika Malewski



African wild dogs – Photo by Evidence Nkuna



Spotted hyena – Photo by Rudi Hulshof



Elephant calf – Photo by Rudi Hulshof



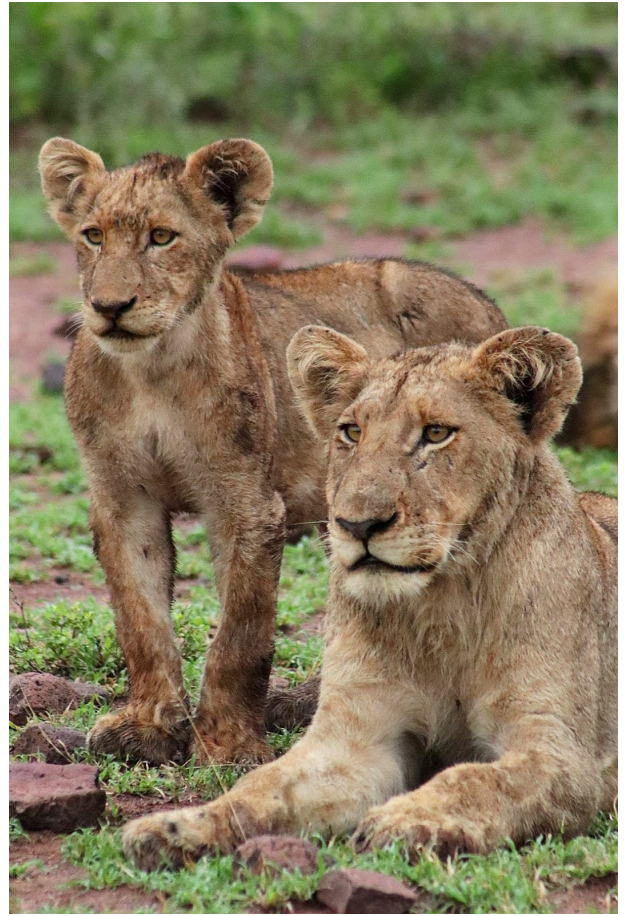
Kalanga male – Photo by Rudi Hulshof



Zebra – Photo by Rudi Hulshof



Verreaux's eagle-owl – Photo by Monika Malewski



Shishangaan cubs – Photo by Bill Drew



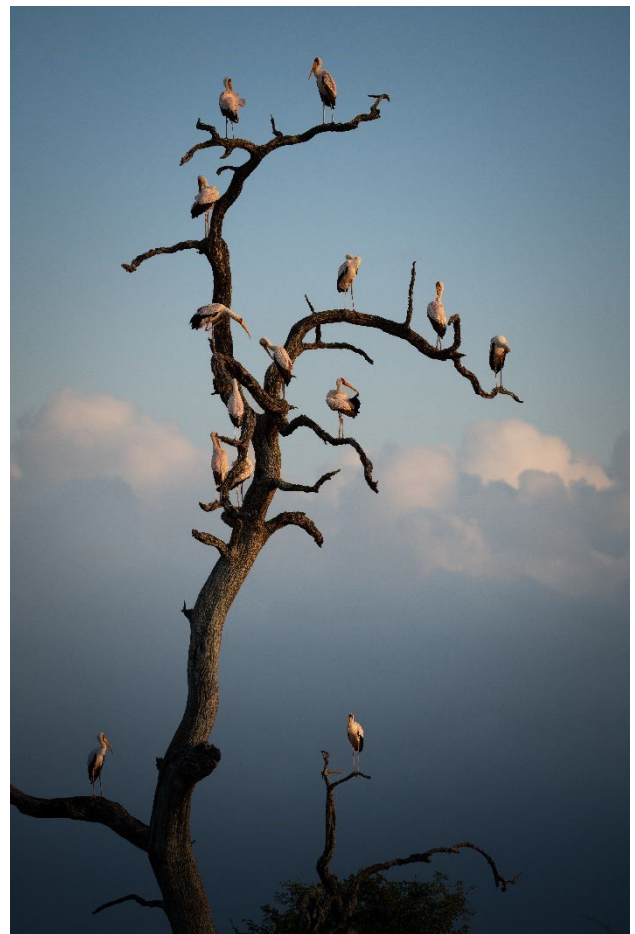
Nungu female – Photo by Graeme Stuart



Giraffe and oxpecker – Photo by Evidence Nkuna



Maputo male – Photo by Rudi Hulshof



Yellow-billed storks – Photo by Monika Malewski



Lebombo euphorbias – Photo by Brian Rode



Elephant wallowing – Photo by Monika Malewski



African buffalo – Photo by Rudi Hulshof