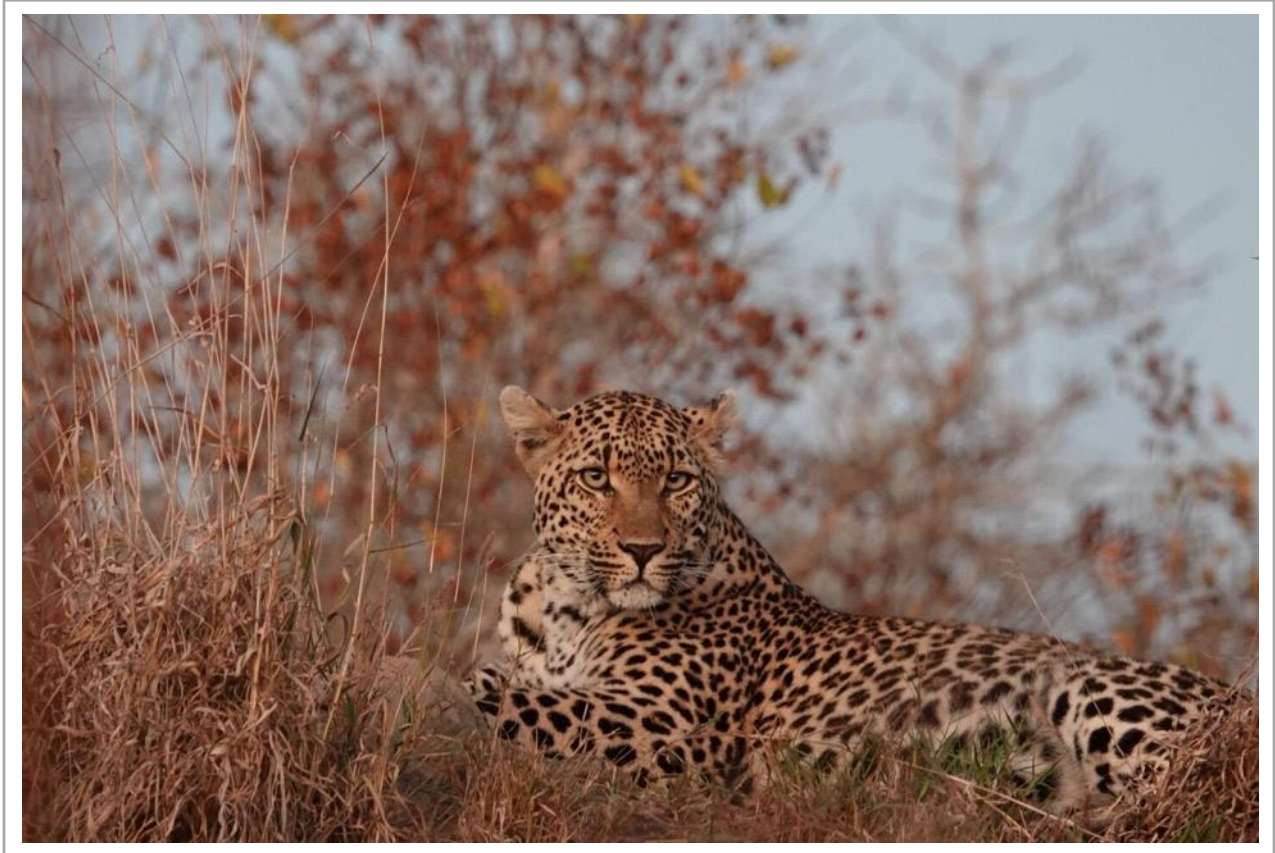


Singita



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

Temperature

Average minimum: 11.8°C (53.3°F)
Minimum recorded: 07.0°C (44.6°F)
Average maximum: 24.7°C (76.4°F)
Maximum recorded: 32.0°C (89.6°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 6.0 mm
Season to date: 457.8 mm

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 06:36
Sunset: 17:13

The dry season has been fantastic for wildlife viewing! There have been plenty of sightings starting in the early, chilly mornings when birds rise to the top of the canopy eagerly awaiting the first rays of sun to warm them up. With the cool weather being experienced it means that lions, leopards and cheetahs can be seen during any part of the day. This cooler dry weather also means spending time exploring the reserve on foot - a popular activity either during or after morning game drive. By the time the giant orange sun gently disappears behind the horizon our hearts are full with the sense of accomplishment and contentment.

The first viewing of the Tsalala lioness's cubs, three of them, was a major highlight for all of us. We've been able to watch her closely over the past two months as she so dedicatedly hunted for and protected her new litter - and this is exactly the way we wanted her story to unfold.

Here are some of this month's wildlife highlights – a Sightings Snapshot for June:

Elephants

- The dry season is elephant season. Herds continue to flock into the Sabi Sand Nature Reserve where the abundance of water sources keep them in the area during the most difficult times of the year. Animals pathways, now well-worn, are dominated by the oval and round spoor in the sand. The still weather conditions mean the spoor holds the fine details like cracks on the soles of their feet, while their trumpeting carries further on these crispy cold mornings. Elephants have been a massive attraction and will be for the next few months to come.

Buffaloes

- We have mainly been seeing smaller herds in different parts of Singita. To the west of Ebony Lodge, there has been regular viewing of a herd of close to a hundred, while the much larger herd has been seen in the gabbro grasslands in the southern parts of our traversing.

Wild dogs

- The Othawa Pack are denning west of Singita and are periodically moving into our area to hunt before returning to feed the pack. It will still be a few more weeks if not months before they start getting mobile with the adults.
- The pack of three are denning in the south and the den has been recently opened to viewing. The south has been productive for wild dogs as the Toulon Pack has also been seen hunting in this area.

Lions

- The Mhangeni Pride are exploring more with their now almost sub-adult youngsters. From the south along to the old railway and all the way through to Boulders Lodge, they are searching far and wide to find adequate prey for their growing pride. The second eldest lioness has sadly passed away and her remains were found close to Castleton Dam, a fitting resting place for her as this was the birth place of Singita.
- The young Nkuhuma lions are showing their resilience and managing to survive in a lion-rich area. A standout sighting was finding them feeding on a zebra carcass east of Boulders Lodge. This meal will go a long way in building strength and confidence.
- The Plains Camp lions are spending much of their time defending the north-eastern boundary of their territory. They have made the occasional venture south of the river to ensure their presence is known through sound and scent.
- The Tsalala lioness and her three new cubs have been seen using Tavangumi koppies as their place of safety. Greg, Lawrence and their guests had a first glimpse of them being moved from one rocky outcrop to the next as the sun came up. We are thrilled to have them within just two minutes of Boulders Lodge.

Leopards

- It appears that the Nkuwa female has separated from her two sub-adult cubs. The two young leopards have been exploring the surrounds of their mother's territory from the southern grasslands all the way north towards the drainage close to the Sand River.
- It has been a while since we saw the Senegal Bush male leopard. He was last seen in the middle of the month with a warthog piglet stashed up in a large ebony tree. What was so odd about this was he did

not feed on the piglet. Eventually the Ntomi male moved in and ate the carcass. Although too soon to say for definite what has happened to the older male, it does not look promising.

- The Thamba male continues to be a major attraction for our guests as he offers amazing viewing as he confidently struts right down the middle of the road. One sighting which stunned our guests was of him stealing a kill from the Ntoma female. We watched as he devoured the hoisted impala carcass in a bare marula tree, at sunset, with four hyenas waiting in anticipation at the base of the tree.
- Lucy, Johnson and their guests found the Xinzele female leopard vocalising late one afternoon close to Tom's Dam. This older female has been seen more and more in this area over the past few months. The dense wooded surroundings of this part of the reserve is ideal for these secretive cats.

Cheetah

- We have been seeing the female cheetah more and more on the south west of Singita. Although we have not confirmed it there is a high probability this cheetah may have given birth, or be close to doing so, as she has been spending much of her time in this area where usually female cheetah cover vast distances hunting.

Bird list

- The bird list for June includes four new species, bringing our bird list for the year up to 274 birds. Specials for the month included a fairy flycatcher, a first official record for the Sabi Sand Nature Reserve, as well as a female blue-mantled crested flycatcher viewed in the staff village and close to Ebony Villa for over two weeks.



Fairy flycatcher, a hyperactive and spectacular bird for us to see at Singita Sabi Sand.
Image by Marc Eschenlohr.

Some exciting and informative Bush Stories follow, as well as the June Gallery of images.

An unexpected encounter

Article by Marc Eschenlohr

Crossing the Sand River early on a crisp winter morning always holds lots of excitement and uncertainty. The northern reaches of Singita consist of dense thickets, sparse marula groves and wide stretches of river. The beauty of this area lies in its sense of true wilderness. Due to very few game viewers moving here, you never know what to expect, which makes it both exciting and challenging at times.

This particular morning, we crossed in hopes of finding a pack of wild dogs. We were the only vehicle in the north, looking for any signs of the pack reported there the day before. After searching for three hours to no avail, it seemed likely that we weren't going to be successful in our search for Africa's second most endangered carnivore.

We were just about to close down for a break and enjoy a lovely cup of coffee at a beautiful lookout over the river, when we noticed a herd of impala nearby. They were all looking in the same direction - quiet but very focused. Then they started alarm-calling and Musa and I knew it wouldn't be for the pack, as impalas don't usually alarm for wild dogs. They were almost certainly alarming for another predator.

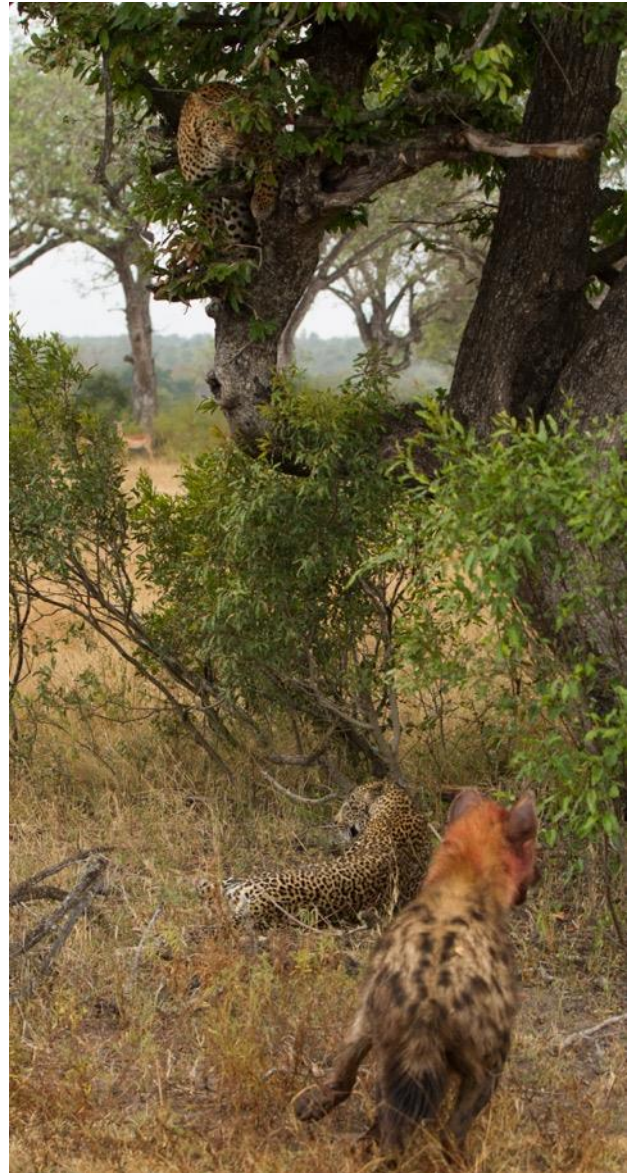
As we got closer to the now frantic herd of impala, we saw a young male leopard suffocating a female impala. We recognised him as the Kangela male. He had her pinned on the ground at the base of a jackalberry tree. She was still alive but fading quickly. The rest of the herd were all now a mere 30 meters from him snorting wildly. The sound they made was phenomenal, and would certainly alert any scavengers in the area of the presence of both a predator and a potential carcass!



As he dragged his kill up the tree, a clan of two hyenas ran towards the snorting impalas and jumped at the dangling feet of the impala. But, just in the nick of time, he managed to secure his kill up the tree! As he

dragged the carcass higher up into a more secure position another two hyenas joined frantically on the ground. And if that was not enough excitement happening in front of us, Musa (who I have been working with for seven years) shouted, "Leopard, leopard, leopard!"

A much bigger male leopard, known as Hlambela male, ran past the four hyenas and up the tree towards Kangela - who still had no idea of his presence. After a short but violent tussle, the leopards and the dead impala came tumbling out the tree, right in the middle of an excited clan of hyenas, who couldn't believe their luck! While Kangela ran back up the tree to gather his wits, the older Hlambela went towards a termite mound. All the while the four hyenas tucked into a free meal!



Another couple of minutes passed by when Hlambela decided that the first attack was not sufficient. He ran back towards the younger male who was now high up in the tree, and another short battle ensued! The younger Kangela male fell out of the tree a second time amongst the feeding hyenas! He proceeded to run back up the tree and was attacked for a third time! He then lay motionless on the ground.

After 10 more minutes passed by the hyenas finished feeding and the Hlambela male launched a final attack that was brief and brutal. The fight attracted the hyenas and all we could see was fur, furry and claws!



On a morning game drive we spent over an hour watching a troop of baboons playing. Baboons are the most entertaining African animals to observe – so often their playful antics, expressive faces, and social interactions resemble our human behaviour!

Troops here typically number between 20 and 40 individuals, though larger aggregations of over 100 members are not uncommon. Troops consist of several kinship groups of adult females and their offspring, as well as a number of mature, sexually active males.

There is a strict hierarchy among both the females and the males, with individual males generally having exclusive mating rights to certain kinship groups. Immature males are tolerated within the troops until they are about five years old.



Individual male baboons are formidable animals, armed with large canine teeth and fearing only lions and leopards. When two or more male baboons are together, even their predators usually give them a wide berth. This partial immunity from predators has allowed baboons to develop a terrestrial lifestyle, although constant vigilance is required to keep the young out of danger. Baboons frequently forage alongside antelope, as the acute hearing of these herbivores provides an early warning against predators. Like other primates, baboons are omnivores.

Dry season hardships

Article by Sipho Sibuye

As June is our winter time, lots of creatures are looking for food and water. Some species, totally unrelated by DNA, are associated and dependent on each other in order to find food. Ants, honeyguide birds and honey badgers specialise in collecting delicious sweet treats from the bush.

There is a species of ant that has a fascinating friendship with the larval stage (caterpillars) of the little blue butterfly. The caterpillars excrete a substance called honeydew, which is rich in sugar and nutrients on which the ants feed. In return for this sweet treat, ants will take the caterpillars to their nest, protecting it from predators such as birds. This wonderfully beneficial form of relationship is called symbiotic.

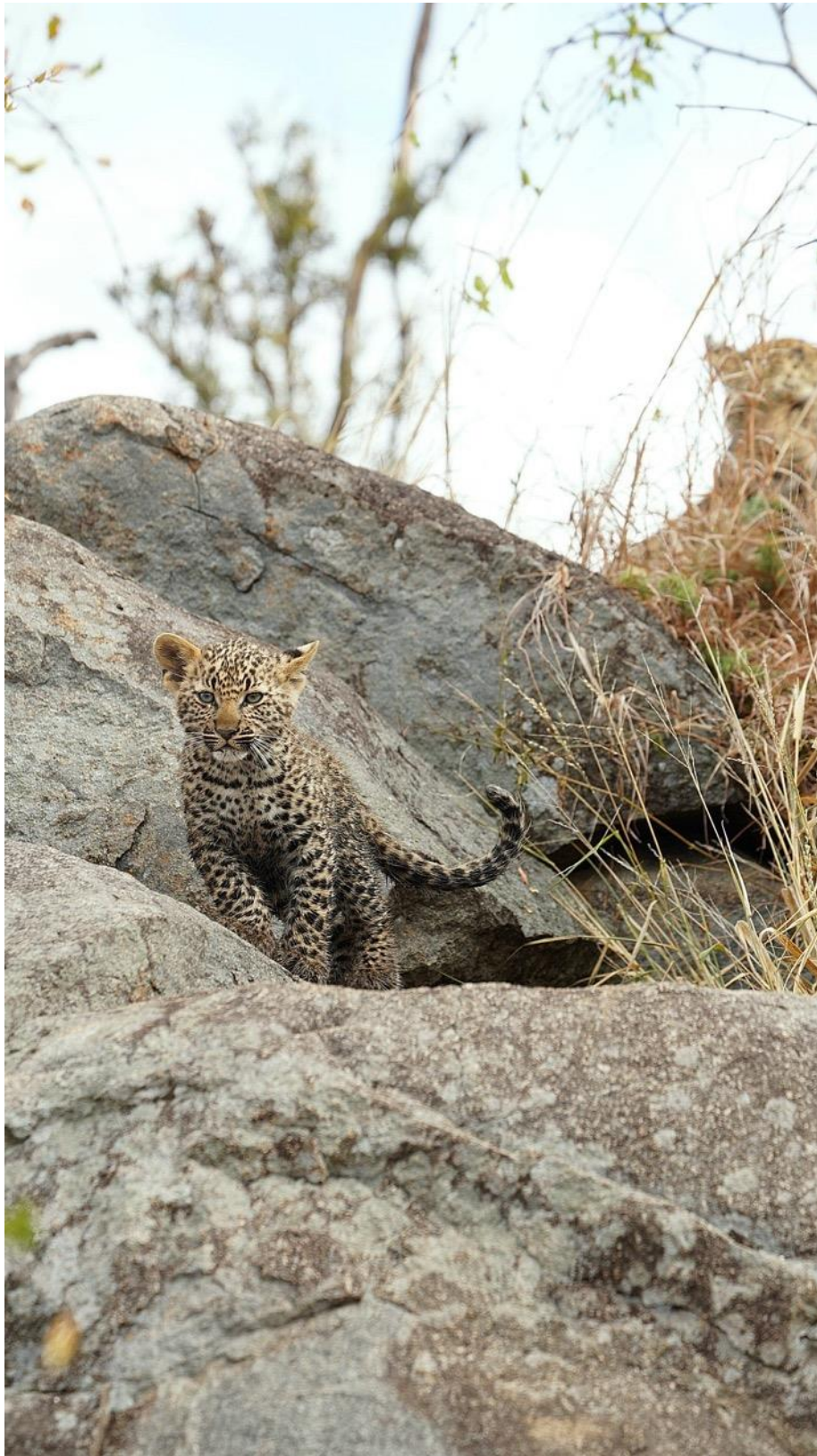
June Gallery



Matt Durell perfectly capturing the environment during the month of June, when the aloes prefer to flower.



There's always time to sit back and relax while at Singita. Image by Marc Eschenlohr.



The Tisela female leopard's first litter of cubs that were seen on Makubela koppies. They are estimated to be three months of age. Image by Dan Hartman.



A young steenbok ram exposed during the dry season as vegetation starts to thin out. Shortly after the click of the shutter this antelope dashed off in typical steenbok fashion. Image by Lucy Stofberg.



A back-lighting exhibition demonstrated by Matt Durell as the low light conditions this time of year offer a variety of opportunities for those photographically-minded guests and guides.



A guest being shown first-hand the art of tracking by legendary tracker, Ruel, in the Sand River valley.
Image by Lucy Stofberg.



A dwarf mongoose appreciating the first rays of sun on a cold winter's morning. Image by Lucy Stofberg.



The Mhangeni cubs patiently waiting for their mothers to return. Image by Marc Eschenlohr.



The Nkuwa female poised in a leadwood tree, oblivious to those around her. Image by Lucy Stofberg.



An infrequent visitor to the riverine forests of the Sabi Sand, a yellow-rumped tinkerbird.
Can you spot the African scops owl below? Images by Marc Eschenlohr.

