

Singita



A muddy Mananga Pride – Photo by Monika Malewski

WILDLIFE JOURNAL
SINGITA KRUGER NATIONAL PARK, SOUTH AFRICA
For the month of October, Two Thousand and Twenty-Four

Temperature

Average minimum: 18°C (64°F)
Minimum recorded: 14°C (57°F)
Average maximum: 33°C (91°F)
Maximum recorded: 40°C (104°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 20.5mm
Season to date: 20.5mm
(*Season = Oct to Sep)

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 05h10
Sunset: 18h00

After almost blowing away due to brief intense winds, we were blessed with the first rains that have transformed the bushveld overnight. The golden yellow mopane pomegranate trees stand out amongst the green and brown grass. Many migrant birds have returned and the fresh morning air is bursting with their sweet calls. In the hot afternoons the cicadas buzz in the background while the heavily pregnant impala graze on the new green grass. Even the elephants have an extra spring in their stride.

A Sightings Snapshot for October follows:

Lions

- The Shish Pride was last seen at the end of September and then decided to go west out of our concession and into the Kruger National Park, where we occasionally see them on the H6 in the evenings. Due to the presence of unknown male lions exploring the now available territory of the late Trichardt males, the Shish Pride are not following their regular patterns and are spending a lot of time west of our concession. The one female with a limp was seen near Maputo pan, contact calling, most likely looking for the rest of the pride. Because of her limp, it is not uncommon to see her alone now and again. Fortunately, she always finds her sisters after a few days. At the end of the month they caught a female giraffe which they fed on for two days before heading back west.
- The Mananga Pride have been seen intermittently this month, averaging one sighting a week. The rest of their time seems to be spent west of our concession near where the N'wanetsi River flows over the S41 and into Singita. All 11 cubs are alive and well, and interestingly the old, "ousted" female is keeping up with the pride. Although some of the larger (and more dominant) females still growl, they are not chasing her away and we have even witnessed the cubs showing affection by rubbing their miniature faces against hers. Near the end of the month, after our first rains, they managed to steal an impala from a leopard. While an impala is more than enough to satisfy a solitary leopard, it is merely an appetiser for a large pride of lions with 11 growing cubs. The growling was intense, as even the smallest of the cubs fought for their share. The next day we found them west of the S41, less than a kilometre away from where the Sonop males and Chava Pride were resting for the day. Just after the sunset one of our guides saw the Mananga Pride heading back east, straight towards the Chava Pride. When they were only a few hundred metres away they managed to spot the other pride and quickly turned back around. If the Sonop males had seen the Mananga Pride with their cubs, it would have potentially been devastating as male lions are known to kill cubs they did not sire in order to get the females into oestrous sooner.
- The shy Chava female and her two cubs caught a young zebra foal near Gudzane Dam. The cubs seem to be a lot more relaxed than their mother, who hopefully over time will get used to the presence of the game drive vehicles.
- The Sonop males were hanging around the Gudzane Dam for first half of the month. One of them was mating with a Chava lioness, as another fed on a kudu while two of the other females waited patiently with the cubs. Later in the month the males caught a young waterbuck and lazed around for a few days before they were seen again on the S41 contact calling and heading west across our boundary.

Leopards

- Once again, the urge to disperse returned to our young male leopard, Khalanga. He was last seen on our concession on September 23rd and was photographed on the 28th near Phelwana Bridge on the H7, one of the main roads in Kruger National Park, and about 40km away from his home base! Then on the 8th of this month he was back next to the N'wanetsi River near the large rock-fig. This will be the third time he has wandered such incredible distances and come straight back to his natal territory. He has since then dominated our leopard sightings.
- Nhlangueni female caught an impala in the first week of this month near her "old stomping grounds" just east of the area we named her after. Nhlangueni translates to "place of guarri-bushes". A few weeks later she was all the way in the western part of our concession near the boundary with Kruger, showing just how large and fluid a leopard's territory can be, especially when it is so dry.
- Nhlangueni's previous cub, Nungu, has been moving through her mother's territory, but most sightings of her are around the last two water sources, Xinenene Poort and Pony Pan.
- Masiya male was found resting in the burnt areas in the north, the first time he has been seen since August. Near the end of the month we found him on an impala carcass in the Xinkelegane drainage.

- Mondzo male appears to have shifted his territory more west this month, being seen on the S41 near the sticky thorns and again heading west following the N'wanetsi River out of our concession.
- Lebombo male caught an impala near the end of the month near the N'wanetsi. During the night a crocodile snuck in and grabbed a small piece and Lebombo quickly snatched it back and dragged the carcass across the river where he stashed it in the sedges.
- The Dumbana leap have been more elusive this month. They spent a few days around Xingwenyana crossing and then were seen again in the mountains around the Nstibitsane drainage, one of her favourite areas when she has cubs.
- The Zamani male surprised us one morning while we were tracking lions. He came over a small ridge and strolled down the road, intermittently marking his territory by spraying urine on a few prominent guarri bushes. A few days later he managed to successfully hunt an impala which he hoisted in a tree.
- A new young female was seen briefly near the Gudzane Dam with an impala carcass in a tree.

Cheetahs

- A single female was found on the 9th feeding on an impala north of the sticky thorn thickets in the west. We were spoilt with many more sightings of her for just over a week before she headed back west into the Kruger Park.
- A young female was spotted far in the north on the S41, drinking out of a puddle in the road from the recent rains. She was unfortunately chased off by an inquisitive hyena.

African wild dogs

- A pack of five successfully brought down an impala in the northern areas known as "golf-course clearings" before returning north into the burnt areas.
- Two individuals were seen running towards the mountains in the east. We know that some years the packs den in the game reserve neighbouring us so it might be two of them. They will often hunt on our concession and then run back east to feed their pups.
- A pack of 15 including nine pups were found on golf course clearings. We believe it to be the same five adults seen at the beginning of the month but now with their pups. On first seeing them the pups were slightly nervous and one ran off with the remains of an impala leg, but after a while they settled down in the shade of a Delagoa thorn.

Spotted hyenas

- At the beginning of the month a clan was seen finishing off the remains of a large buffalo bull that had been killed by the N'wanetsi, S90 and Chava male lions. They had fed on it for a few days, and once all three of their stomachs were almost bursting, they finally let the hyenas scavenge. All that was left afterwards was the skull, pelvis and a small portion of the ribcage, showcasing the essential clean up service provided by these predators.
- A clan of four had a quick drink from Pony Pan before skulking off together. Another two were seen in the central depression later leaving us suspicious of their activities.
- A clan of five, possibly the same group as the ones seen at Pony Pan, were found the next day resting near an old impala carcass that had been hoisted into the fork of a large apple-leaf tree.
- The den-site on Nyokene is active with at least three to four members being seen lying around the small rocky outcrop.
- A few individuals have been seen far in the north near golf course clearings.

Elephants

- On the hottest afternoons, there have been hundreds of elephants along the N'wanetsi River all the way from the lodges in the south up to where the river bends west out of our concession. There are

old, wise females and boisterous young males flaring their ears and challenging us with their bravado (until you get too close, then they lift their tail and run back to mom). Young infants scurry around underneath their moms' bellies and many individuals are in the river itself, feeding on the last sedges.

- There have been quite a few really large bulls with impressive tusks around the concession.

Buffalos

- Due to the still very dry conditions, the large herds of buffalo need to move great distances in order to obtain sufficient water and nutrients from the grass they feed on. This means they are incredibly nomadic and this month a large herd was seen west of the S41 near the Gudzane Dam. The large herd spent about a week in our concession moving back and forth from Gudzane Dam to the grassy plains east of that.
- Towards month-end a herd of about 1 000 moved across the central depression before splitting up into smaller groups, one moving east into the Lebombo mountains and the other going north.

Plains game

- The impala ewes are really beginning to show as their pregnancy nears the end. We can expect the first impala lambs anywhere from the beginning of November.
- After a few dry months, the browsers are enjoying the first green leaves on the knobthorns and a few other species as we're coming into the middle of spring. The grazers will need to wait another week or two for the rain we had mid-month to cause the green flush of grass.

Rare animals and other sightings

- A herd of eight sable antelope, including a few calves, were seen moving towards Xinenene Poort midway through the month and then again near sisal line.
- An aardvark created a lot of excitement one late evening as staff going back to the staff village saw one on the H6.
- The leucistic kudu is still around our concession. She is almost fully grown, which is impressive since the white colour on her coat stands out amongst the neutral colours in the bush.

Birds

- A buff-spotted flufftail was seen on a hot afternoon at the staff village. A first for Singita Kruger National Park, and potentially only the fourth sighting in Kruger. They typically are found in more forested areas with thick undergrowth for example up on the Drakensberg mountains around Mariepskop and in some of the forests in Kwa-Zulu Natal.
- The long-legged and beautifully feathered secretarybird was seen on the basalt plains near the central and northern reaches of our concession.
- One of the SKNP birding guides, found a black-throated wattle eye while on a walk near the permanent stream that trickles all year long into the N'wanetsi River near the border with Mozambique. This bird is typically found in Afromontane and coastal plain forests, with a small part of its distribution in the northern part of Kruger National Park, and on the north-eastern coast near Sodwana and Kosi Bay.
- The Eurasian golden oriole was spotted along the N'wanetsi. They breed in Europe, northwest Africa and western Asia and then migrate south, arriving in South Africa by mid-October.
- All the cuckoos are also back after spending the winter months in equatorial and western Africa.

Some Bush Stories follow, as well as the October Gallery of images.

There are so many reasons to visit us, tucked away in our corner of the far eastern Kruger National Park. The wildlife is incredible, the landscapes are stunning, and there's a diverse array of birds and other life. But what I love most is how remote the area feels. The clear skies and lack of light pollution makes stargazing an awe-inspiring experience, almost like traveling through time!

People have always looked up at the sky, creating stories about stars and constellations that have been passed down through generations. While many guests know the ancient Greek myths, I especially enjoy African folklore.

The Milky Way spans beautifully across the night sky. In the southern hemisphere, particularly during winter, we can see the centre of our galaxy, and the view on those dark nights is breathtaking. Some of the darkest skies I've seen are here at Singita. Looking up connects us to our ancestors, allowing us to share in the same light they once saw.

The San people, native to this area, have a fascinating story about the Milky Way. They tell of a young girl who danced around a fire and tossed embers into the night sky, creating a blaze of light from horizon to horizon, a permanent fire in the sky.

According to the San, the Moon represents the sandal of a trickster god named !Kaggen. He was trapped in a local waterhole and thrown into the sky to light up the night. The Sun, not happy about sharing the sky with the Moon, chases it each night, taking pieces away until it almost vanishes. Just before it disappears, the Moon asks for forgiveness, and the Sun lets it recover until it becomes whole again, only for the chase to start all over.

The Southern Cross, or Crux, is the smallest but most famous constellation in the southern sky. It points south and is crucial for navigation. Many people in southern Africa see the four brightest stars of Crux as female giraffes, while the two Pointer Stars (Alpha and Beta Centauri) represent two giraffe bulls pursuing them. Another interpretation sees the Cross as the head of a giant giraffe, with the Pointers as its neck. The San believe the stars of the Cross represent a pride of lionesses and their cub, with the Pointers as their two male companions.

One San story tells of a god from the East who went hunting for three zebras in Orion's belt, thinking they lived only in the sky. When he missed, his arrow fell short, represented by Orion's sword and the Great Orion Nebula. He couldn't retrieve the arrow because of a great lion symbolized by the giant red star, Betelgeuse. To honour the escaping zebras, the god sent them to Earth to live in peace.

These are just a few of my favourite stories to share with guests. They are steeped in history and add depth to the stargazing experience.

Stargazing has a way of calming our minds and lifting our spirits. If you're looking for peace and purpose, studies link stargazing to improved mental well-being. Plus, spending time in nature significantly benefits mental health.

For thousands of years, our ancestors have looked up at the sky, and this connection has helped shape our modern lives. The sky gave them their first means of navigation, allowing them to find direction based on nature's cycles. They learned to tell time, predict seasons, and anticipate animal migrations and plant growth after rain. This knowledge was essential for starting agriculture and raising livestock. The stars have always held a special place in our daily lives.

By looking beyond our earthly existence and witnessing the vastness of the sky, we remind ourselves that we are part of something greater. We are part of something magical and awe-inspiring. All we need to do is look up, even just a few minutes of stargazing can nourish the soul. While this experience can happen anywhere, it's particularly refreshing here in Africa, at Singita in the Kruger National Park.



It's the middle of the month, and the lion dynamics at Singita Kruger National Park have taken an unexpected turn. Over two months have passed since the last sighting of the Trichardt males in our concession, with the most recent one being mid-August, when one was seen with the Mananga Pride. The Maputo male vanished from sight even earlier, on 1 August. The Sonop males appeared in the north of our territory around mid-August, and it seems their arrival was enough to push out our previous dominant males. It's likely that, as so often happens, the Trichardt males found themselves in fights for survival and may have ultimately succumbed to their injuries.

Since then, the Sonop males have taken up residence on our concession, having discovered the Chava Pride. At least two of these new males have already begun mating with some of the pride's females. Remarkably, the timing worked out for one Chava female with two young cubs. She was carrying them from either Xai-Xai or Maputo males, but by mating with the Sonop males, she created the impression that her cubs were theirs. This fortunate timing likely saved her offspring, as the males would see no reason to kill what they believe to be their own young, in hopes the mother would enter oestrus again.

Early in September, the one-eyed Chava male, the S90 male and the N'wanetsi male were found together near the very old large-leafed rock-fig with full bellies. They hung around for most of the month in the southern half of the concession. They were successful in catching (or stealing) a kudu bull, impala ewe, and then took down a large buffalo bull, which they fed on for almost a week, chasing off opportunistic hyenas. After a week's absence, we found the one-eyed Chava male alone in the far south in early October, nursing fresh wounds along his spine, rump, and groin from a recent fight. Meanwhile, the S90 and N'wanetsi males ventured further south, and haven't been seen since. The Chava male has since returned to the N'wanetsi river, where his injuries appear to be healing well.

The unfamiliarity keeps us on our toes. The movements of the resident prides have become erratic and unpredictable. Both the Mananga and Shish Prides have cubs between nine months and a year-and-a-half old. The cubs remain vulnerable to threats from any roaming male lions until they reach two years. Male lions, bound by limited prime years, doesn't waste time raising other males' offspring. Instead, they often kill existing cubs to hasten a female's return to oestrus, enabling them to sire their own.



The Shish member, having experienced this harsh reality before, are no strangers to upheaval. The Trichardt males overthrew the Kumana male back in 2021, and it took the Shish females half a year to accept them. At that stage the “granny” had three cubs of about a year old. She sought refuge in the mountains, returning only once her daughters were older, while the rest of the pride kept the males preoccupied with mating attempts.

Seeking a larger territory, the Trichardt males eventually found Xihamham at the end of March last year, who was weakened by a hip injury, and in a final clash witnessed by one of our guides early one morning, was defeated. With this victory, the Trichardt males took over the territory, and that was the end of the reign of the Shish males. By the end of September last year, the Trichardt males finally caught up with the Mananga Pride and chased away the two young males, sending its two young males into exile. Their two younger sisters went with them and for a few months after that they were alone, having to learn how to hunt quickly without the help of their mothers. We found the young males hunting wildebeest on the H6 and that was the last time we saw them.

By April this year, the Mananga Pride and Trichardt males had united, and their first cubs were born, with another three joining in July, bringing the count to 11. These young cubs, now between five and ten months old, find themselves in peril. With no dominant male to protect them, the Mananga Pride has been moving from area to area, constantly wanting to avoid the Sonop males.

Late in the month, while the Mananga Pride was approaching Xinenene Poort to drink, they stumbled upon a herd of zebras with similar intentions. Slipping on the algae covered rocks, a young foal was tackled into the muddy puddles around the main pool and the Mananga Pride wasted no time; all 18 members dived in, each vying for a piece. The fierce growls intensified as smaller cubs were pushed aside, some scrambling up the ridge.

A large female left the feeding party and went to lie in the shade. She spotted the two cubs, now completely black from the mud, and for a second must have thought they were hyenas as she growled and charged at them. Thankfully, the cubs’ panicked cries were heard, halting her advance.



One by one, each mud-caked lion retreated from the carcass. They desperately tried to groom each other, stopping after one taste of the muck. The greatest mystery of all was how the Mananga Pride shed their muddy coats, as just four days later, they stole an impala carcass from a leopard, with no signs they had even been in the mud. Contrary to popular belief, lions tend to avoid water as fervently as any house cat. For now, the secret remains buried, a mystery of the African bush that only the pride knows... and they're not telling. As soon as I uncover this mystery, I'll let you know.



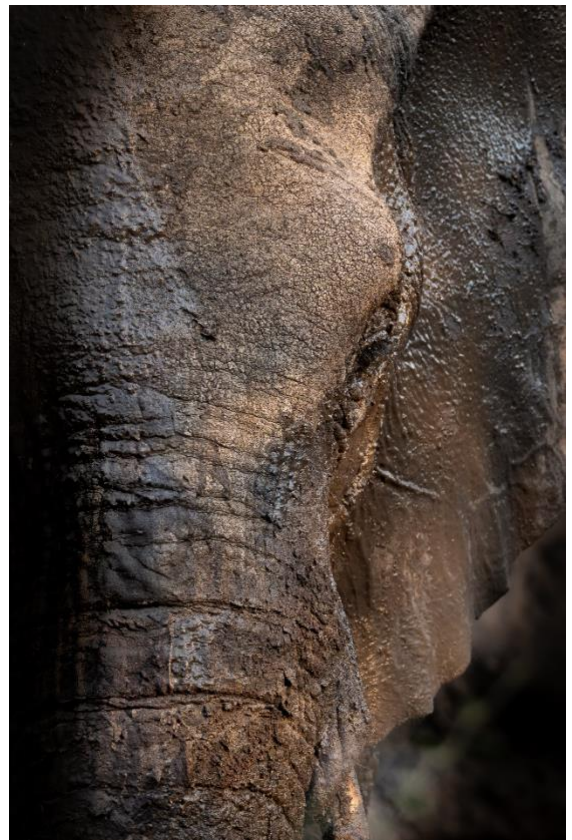
October Gallery



African buffalo – Photo by Monika Malewski



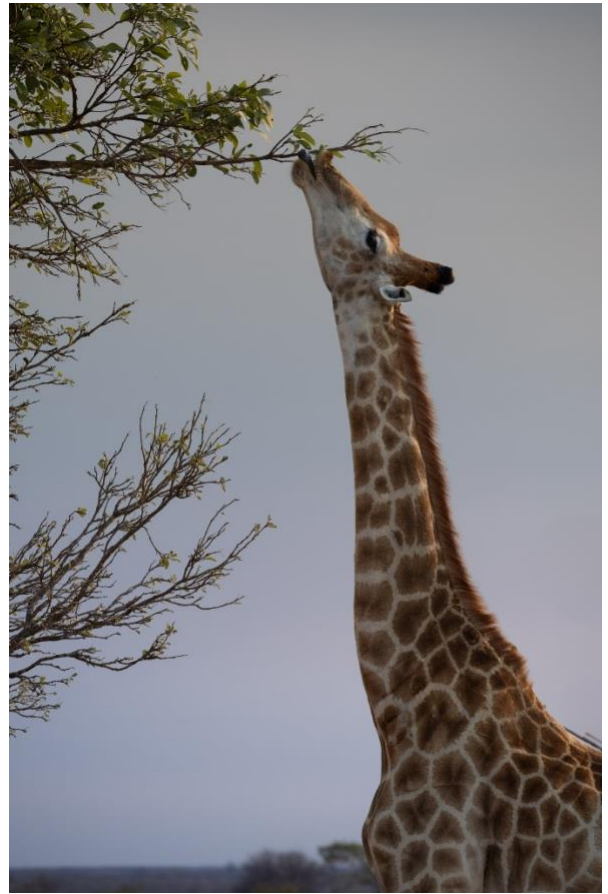
Zebra foal – Photo by Monika Malewski



Elephant – Photo by Monika Malewski



Shish lioness – Photo by Monika Malewski



Giraffe feeding – Photo by Monika Malewski



African wild dog pups – Photo by Monika Malewski



Spotted hyenas – Photo by Monika Malewski



Chava Pride cubs feeding on zebra foal – Photo by Monika Malewski



Elephant mud wallowing – Photo by Monika Malewski



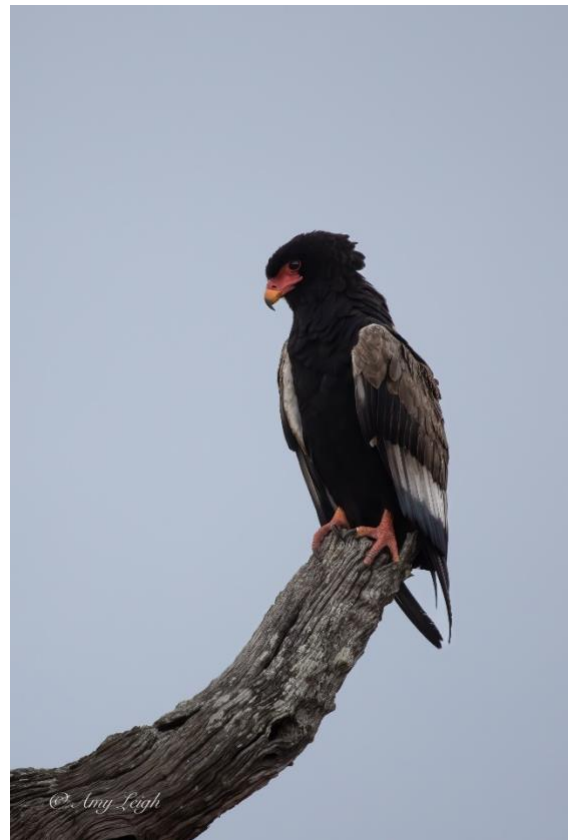
Zebra – Photo by Monika Malewski



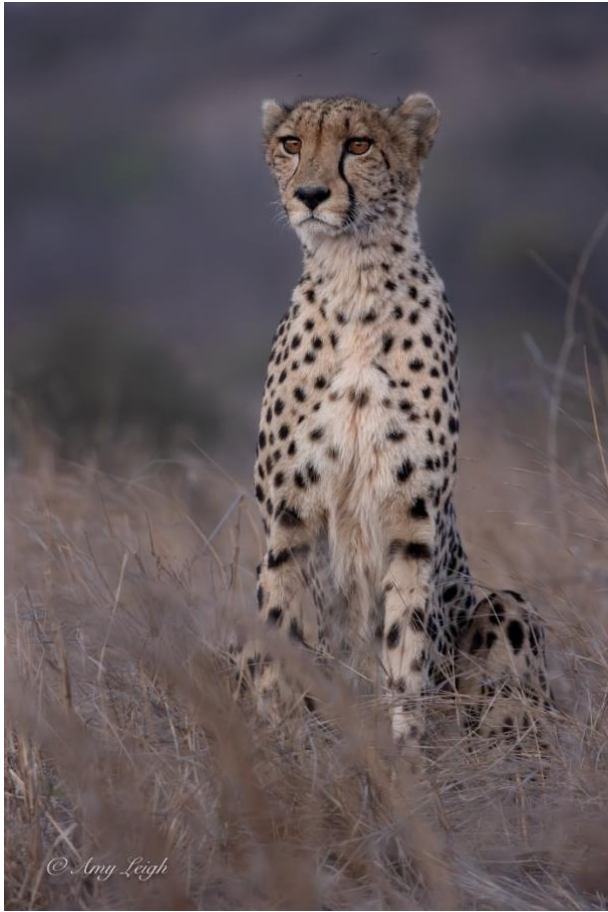
Male Leopard – Photo by Amy Roberts



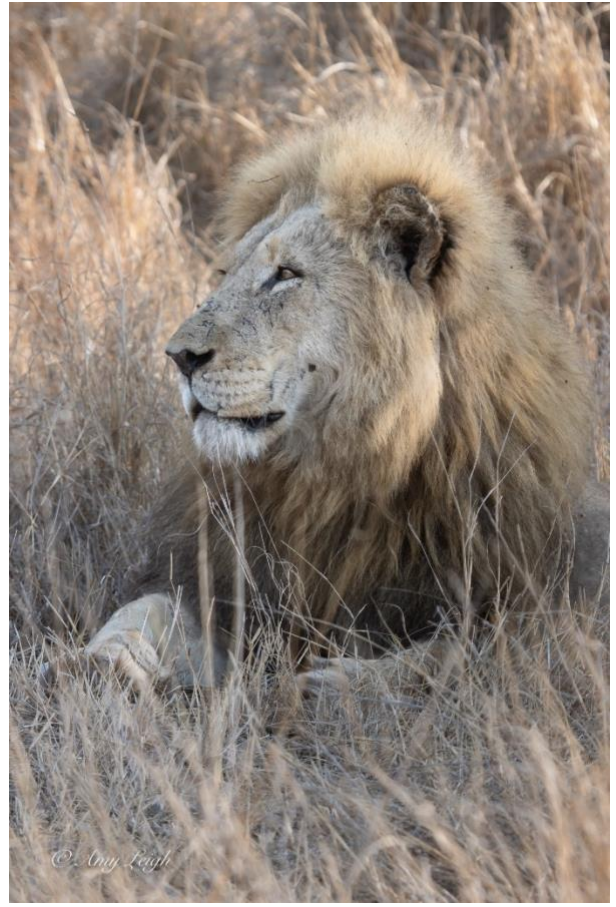
Vervet monkeys – Photo by Amy Roberts



Bateleur – Photo by Amy Roberts



Female cheetah— Photo by Amy Roberts



Sonop male – Photo by Amy Roberts



Nile crocodile— Photo by Amy Roberts