

# Singita



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

**Temperature**

Average minimum: 11.1°C (51.9°F)  
Average maximum: 23.1°C (73.5°F)  
Minimum recorded: 07.0°C (44.6°F)  
Maximum recorded: 35.0°C (95.0°F)

**Rainfall Recorded**

For the month: 41 mm  
Season to date: 690.7 mm

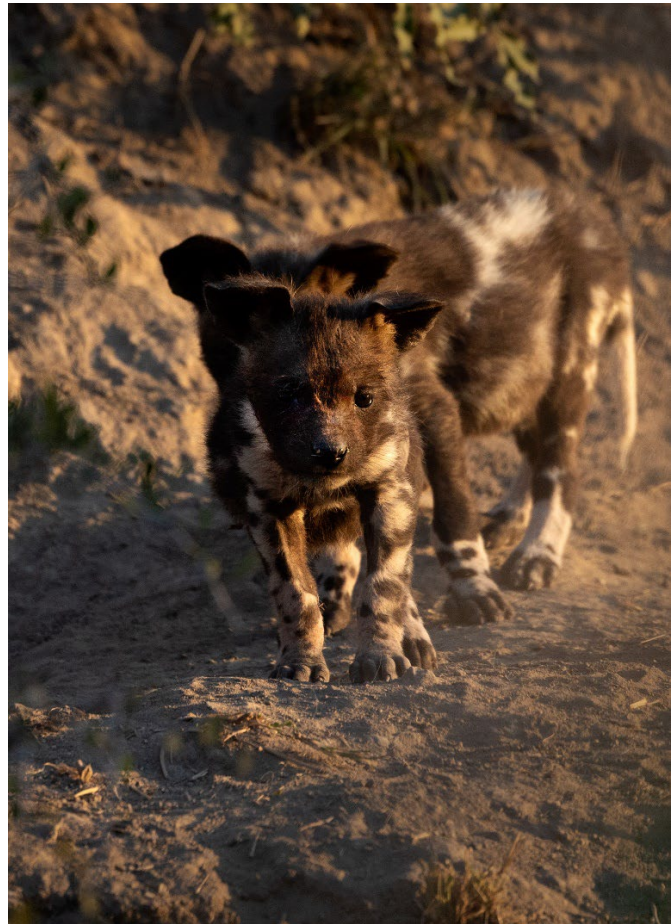
**Sunrise & Sunset**

Sunrise: 06:38  
Sunset: 17:22

As we sit and observe our surroundings, gazing into the vast wilderness, our view is filled with a kaleidoscope of hues. From oranges to greens which are met by massive shades of blue, this July our environment is different to ones we have experienced before. Two inches of rain have surprised us and brought an early onset of new growth. Regenerative controlled burns paint strips with warm reds and charcoal. The unpredictable nature of wilderness exploring was not limited to wildlife encounters but also seen in weather patterns this month, from snow-capped peaks to blustery hot winter days.

### Wild dogs

- Wild dogs deserve to take the top spot on our overview this month. After two years the Othawa Pack has returned to once again den in the secluded woodlands to the north of the Sand River. It appears that two females have given birth, the alpha and beta females, 24 pups in total! This is not only a major moment for this pack but wild dog numbers in the park. The adults have been highly successful in hunting and providing for the pack over the last two months and have left all guests smiling from ear to ear. Let's hope they can continue to thrive over the next crucial weeks of their life.



### Elephants

- With the dry season well under way herds have been feeding mainly in the wooded sections of the reserve. Here they target roots of the trees where nutrient reserves are kept. A meander through this habitat often shows evidence of their presence where broken branches and uprooted trees litter the track. In some parts of the reserve there are still some stands of grass which never go unnoticed and are swiftly collected and then devoured.

### Cheetahs

- Cheetah sightings have been hard earned but provide a fantastic experience for guests as with time and dedication our guide and tracker teams have managed to find what is considered the most scarce of the three big cats in the Sabi Sand. It appears there are two different male cheetahs in our region. Both are still in their early stages of independence and seem to be figuring out a territory for themselves. The open areas in the south and scattered throughout the reserve have been first choice for them. On one occasion one of them has been seen as far north as Makalashi Clearing to the north of the Sand River.

### Lions

- The Mhangene Pride has two new members. One of the older lionesses has been seen with cubs on Tuvangumi koppies. We estimate them to be not even one month of age. It will be at least another month until they are introduced to the rest of the pride which has been doing well over recent weeks, with numerous substantial prey items hunted.
- While the Mhangene lionesses have secured central Singita as their own, the Nkukuma lioness and her two sub-adults have had to shift further east along the Sand River, close to the Mobeni confluence. They had a close run in with the larger Mhangene pride one morning, fortunately managing to dash to cover and escape. The sub-adults are approaching two years of age and for the young male time is ticking ever near to his day of independence. This is the true test for any young male lion.
- To the west the Ximungwe lionesses have been with both the Plains Camp male lions as well as the lone Tumbela male. This is a clear strategic move from these two females as they have mated with

both Plains Camp males. By spending time with the Tumbela male he may be under the impression he is the father of the future cubs and will therefore ensure their protection.

- The Plains Camp lions have been spending lots of time to the west of Singita in a bid to oust the last remaining male in that area. The Nkuhuma male is now far south of Singita trailing herds of buffalo. In this same area the five Ntsevu breakaway lions, four males and one female, which have been focused mainly on the buffalo herds.

### Leopards

- It is now clear that the Schotia female has lost her cub. We have seen her feeding by herself a number of times. We suspect that hyenas may have been responsible for the cub's early demise as Schotia was seen with a kill and her cub some distance away trying its best to join up with its mother. We expect her to come into heat again in the next few weeks, hopefully she will have a turn of good fortune with her next litter.
- The Mobeni female has made a number of appearances just after sunset, close to Boulders Lodge. This can be a thrilling way to end off a drive by rounding the corner to see her silhouette in the spotlight.
- In the eastern parts of the reserve the Nkuwa female has been hard at work putting everything she has into raising her two cubs. She has been keeping them in the river valley, choosing one of the densest areas for this time of year, a wise choice from this young mother. It seems both cubs have become well accustomed to vehicles which is a major positive from a wildlife viewing point of view.
- There is a new cat on the block! To the west of our lodges along the scenic Sand River, a new female leopard has been seen a few times. Shy at first, she soon settles down with some sensitive guiding. It is unclear exactly who this leopard is but exciting to have her around. Although this part of the reserve is claimed by the Schotia female, to the north of the river there is very little evidence of much female activity - perhaps this may be her future territory?

### Unusual sightings

- With the sun rising a little later this time of year getting to the deck before daybreak is more achievable, and can be rewarding. Sitting at the fire bowl at Boulders Lodge we were treated to a special sighting of a Cape clawless otter fishing among the rapids. The gentle clear waters this time of year means prey items such as fish and molluscs are all on the menu.
- Night time viewing can have its challenges but with recent controlled burns taking place it has meant greater visibility in what is usually a denser area. We have recorded civets and many large spotted genets taking advantage of these feeding opportunities in these areas.
- The alarm call of monkeys often gets us thinking of leopards on the prowl but on one such occasion they alerted us to another predator. On closer inspection Louis spotted a giant eagle owl with a freshly captured vervet monkey! This certainly was a rare sighting. Typically, their diet would consist of birds, so a monkey is definitely on the large end of the scale of its diet.  
The Sand River near Pios Crossing has harboured a number of large Nile crocodiles making the most of what may be the deepest section of the river for some distance. There have been two different sightings of crocodiles with impala kills. Guests witnessed a massive individual, over 12 foot in length, swim right past the Ebony deck with its prized kill in its jaws. The action does not stop once you're out the vehicle. The elevated suites of Ebony Lodge are perfect for midday viewing between drives.

### Bird List

- The bird list for July includes five new species, bringing our yearly total to 262. A special sighting was a flock of 23 greater white pelicans flying towards the Kruger National Park, on the 24<sup>th</sup> July.

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



## One for the books!

Article by Marc Bowes-Taylor

The Sabi Sand is world renowned for its leopard viewing with one of the densest populations of these secretive cats that has been recorded. It is no wonder this can be one of the best places to not only view leopards in an undisturbed manner but more importantly to do in-depth research too. As guides here we are the primary source of this research data collection and capture. From individual identification to how many scavengers are present at a leopard kill, and everything in between we take a close look at their lives, with great enthusiasm. Looking back at articles on our website and images on our social media platforms these rosette-patterned beauties feature frequently. With all this attention you would expect that almost every possible behaviour has been witnessed or even photographed. Well, I was proved wrong not too long ago...

A few months ago there was a morning radio report of the Schotia female leopard with a fresh impala kill. She had not managed to hoist it up a tree and a hyena arriving on the scene was imminent. I thought to myself, "Man, I've made the wrong move here" as I stuck to my initial plan heading south in search of cheetahs, in the opposite direction of where Schotia was. What made this sighting even more tempting was that she had a cub. Maybe, just maybe, she could salvage a piece of the kill, take it up a tree and then fetch her cub and lead it to the kill. I thought that could be a good starting point for our afternoon drive, if it materialised.

The morning went by and my drive in search of a cheetah was fruitless. We stopped for our morning coffee in the central part of the reserve. I held my cards close to my chest regarding a "plan B" seeing that our "plan A" didn't work at all. "Stations getting mobile after 20 minutes, any updates?" I announced over the radio, hoping to hear something relating to the female leopard. The only report was that the Schotia female had lost her kill and was lying in long grass, offering poor visibility. I decided to swing past the sighting all the same.

Fifteen minutes later we were in the right area. My tracker, Golden, turned to our guests and said, "Okay, we in the zone here folks, keep a lookout for a leopard". Knowing where she was last seen, I was planning on driving to the temporary track made by the other vehicles that moved through the sighting earlier. Golden hadn't even turned around to face the front when we rounded the corner and there she was!

The plan had worked better than we expected! But something about her appearance seemed different. She had something in her jaws. It was a large chunk of the kill!

What was her plan here? Click! She was taking it back to her cub! Incredible! This is not something I had ever read in a book before, let alone witnessed. It was a calculated risk she was taking; on one end the scent could quite easily lure a hyena to her and where she was stashing her cub but on the other end she would ensure some sustenance for her cub.

She made a beeline straight for where she was keeping her cub. Interestingly enough this area used to be a previous den for spotted hyenas and their cubs. The dry riverbed was surrounded by dense bushwillow trees and various sized granite rocks providing ample hiding places for the cub.







She eventually arrived at the den. She called her cub which didn't hesitate to scale down a tree and along the rocky wall to its mother. We were all left in complete awe of the scene that had played out in front of us. These moments are why we keep coming back for more!



## Ostriches fly at night!

Article by Matt Durell

A rather unusual title for this month's article, something to make you smile and pearls of wisdom from tracker Sydwell whose wicked sense of humour often gets guests chatting.

We form amazing friendships with the colleagues we are paired up with as guides and trackers. As luck would have it, when I joined Singita, Sydwell was needing a guide partner. We hit it off straight away! Before game drive plans, during drive and even post game drive we find ourselves in stitches over whatever it may be that made us laugh that day or a while ago if something reminds us of an event that happened previously. Every so often his witty comments of ostriches only flying at night or zebra stallions being white with black stripes and mares black with white stripes gets everyone grinning. Syd picks his times for jokes carefully, when the safari needs a bit of a lift if maybe we are going through a quiet patch on drive.

As a tracker Sydwell is phenomenal. He has been with Singita now for 16 years, starting out at Lebombo for four years before moving to the Sabi Sand Game Reserve. His knowledge of the road network in both concessions and in most of the Sabi Sand is astounding. When it comes to the art of tracking, I have personally never worked with someone so in tune and committed to finding something we set our sights on. I'll tell you of one particular story:

We ventured quite far south one morning to look for lions which hadn't been seen for a while. With no one else in the area we eventually stumbled on faint tracks which Syd said were our best bet. We drove around the block to make sure no tracks ventured out, which they hadn't, so we went back to the last tracks. Syd, very happy to walk on his own asked for the hand-held radio and set off. He said not to get hold of him, he'd get hold of me, and to maybe stop for coffee because it was starting to get late in the morning. So we stopped and had coffee, listening out for his call. We finished up and packed up and, as if to say perfect timing, Syd called us to say he had found the lions!

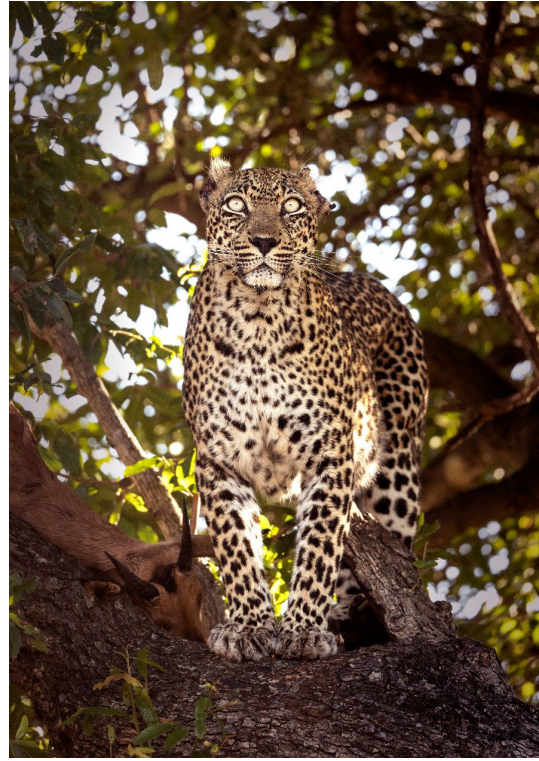
His perseverance is unmatched, if he sets his mind to something he won't be disappointed and that for me is remarkable. He is a father of two - his daughter a teacher and his son at university. I can see why his daughter went the route she did as Syd has a remarkable way of teaching, especially for me, when it comes to tracking. His intuition when tracking is special. His ability to almost predict exact movements and the behaviour of animals is amazing and more often than not results in very happy guests!

I consider myself extremely lucky to work with someone of his calibre. I've started teaching Syd a bit about photography when the opportunity arises and in return he's teaching me some of his jaw-dropping dance moves in the boma!

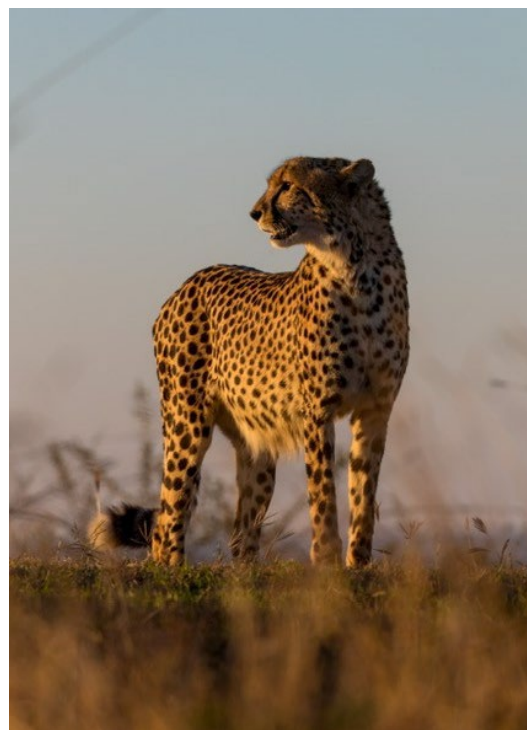
Here's to many more happy drives with Sydwell!



July Gallery

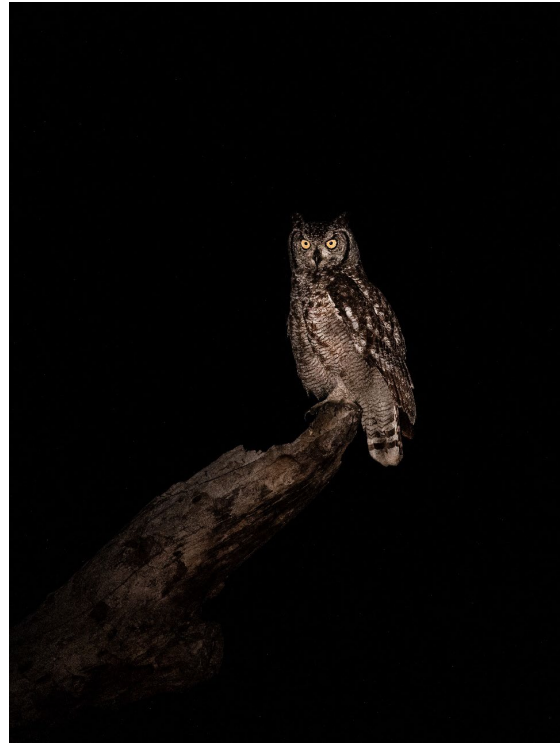


An elephant calf rubs its nose on a tree trunk. Image by Andrew Taylor.  
The Schotia female leopard with a kill which was hoisted in front of us. Image by Andrew Taylor.



Three is the perfect crowd. Image by Matt Durell.  
The golden hour with the golden-eyed cat. Image by Matt Durell.





Beautiful still morning allows for reflection opportunities like this waterbuck drinking. Image by Matt Durell.  
An excellent capture by Andrew Taylor of a spotted eagle owl.



In preparation for the hunt the ritual yawning is essential. Image by Andrew Taylor.





A rare sight as a flock of great white pelicans soar overhead. Image by Andrew Taylor.