

# Singita



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

**Temperature**

Average minimum: 19.0°C (66.1°F)  
Average maximum: 31.0 °C (87.8°F)  
Minimum recorded: 12.0°C (53.6°F)  
Maximum recorded: 39.0°C (102.2°F)

**Rainfall Recorded**

For the month: 58.5 mm  
Season\* to date: 109.5 mm  
(\*Season = Oct to Sep)

**Sunrise & Sunset**

Sunrise: 04:59  
Sunset: 18:18

What has been one of the most memorable months of wildlife viewing and interactions can be best described in three words: diverse, rich and fulfilling. From blossoming hibiscus buds to feasting feline feuds, the Sabi Sand has put it all on display this November. We have experienced record-breaking temperatures in South Africa but this has not slowed nor fatigued our sense of adventure as the wildlife experiences keep delivering on a daily basis. As dawn breaks the calls of the woodland kingfisher, red-chested cuckoo and bleating impala lambs chime through the morning air, and as the day goes on leopard tortoises find their favoured flowers to feed on. The summer heat encourages moments of rest before the golden glow of the late afternoon illuminates the amber eyes of a cheetah on the prowl. A final send-off after sunset by a choir of frogs gathered around a seasonal pan concludes our safari adventure for the day, and we do it all again the next.

## Here's a roundup of the month's sightings:

### Leopards

This month the Sabi Sand displayed some of its finest leopard viewing in recent times with no fewer, but not limited to, 14 different leopards seen by our guests and guiding / tracking team. Here is a brief summary of some those interactions

- The Thamba male leopard had been busy as usual as he was seen mating with the Boulders female who followed him deep into her daughter's territory, the Tisela female. Later on in the month he and the Hlambela male squared off to the north of the Sand River over territory. The larger Thamba male delivered his message loud and clear as he pushed Hlambela back further north vocalising as he trotted after the younger tom.
- Hlambela and the Nkangala female were also doing their part contributing to the gene pool as the shy female flirtatiously enticed the new male in the area to mate with her.
- With the recent passing of the Schotia female leopard her territory has been hotly contested by the Tisela female and the Ntoma female, both of whom seemed to have claimed small portions of the legendary female's prized possession.
- The Senegal Bush male leopard has been frequently viewed in the eastern parts of the reserve all the way to Treehouse Road.
- The Nkuwa female and her two cubs have been doing well and thriving in the rocky valleys in the eastern areas as her cubs gained more confidence around vehicles.
- Other leopards viewed include the Serengeti female, Kangela male leopard, Mobeni female, her daughter the Ximobanyana female and the Xipuko male.

### Lions

- After many months with no sightings the lone Tsalala lionesses hunted her way along the Sand River close to Boulders Lodge. Despite having no pride, she is looking in superb condition.
- The Ntsevu males and their sister have, once again, been showcasing how to hunt buffalo. This time they have taken up position around Giraffe Pan hunting successfully on two occasions. There also seems to be a change within the Breakaway Pride as the lionesses seems to be coming into heat which has got the attention of all the males, a potentially dangerous situation for this female that may get caught in the cross-fire of these testosterone-fuelled lions.
- With the temperatures soaring this month hunting for the Mhangene Pride seemed to be a difficult task as they struggled for over a week to catch a prey item substantial enough to feed all members sufficiently. This pride generally thrives in cooler conditions as seen in the earlier part of the month with a buffalo kill not even a few hundred yards from Boulders Lodge. In recent days their overall condition has improved as we have watched them lounge about with plump bellies.

### Elephants

- Consistent viewing of some large breeding herds of elephants, and a number of impressively tusked bulls who have made their way through the reserve. A lot of their feeding routine is based in the grasslands as it provides dense stands of grass and seasonal herbs. Many of the bulls have been in musth which has led to some colossal encounters between males as their testosterone levels climb.

### Cheetahs

- An exciting discovery was made this month of a mother cheetah and three brand new cubs in the southern reaches of our traversing. It is estimated that these cubs are no older than ten days old as their eyes are just opening. It has been decided that this area where the cubs are kept will be limited to driving on roads and avoiding following wildlife off-road, to give these cubs the best chance of survival. What this may also indicate is that these cubs could possibly be the offspring of the male cheetah that

has set up territory in this area. A male cheetah will not tolerate cubs in his territory that he has not fathered. Time will tell regarding their future.

### Wild Dogs

- A new wild dog pack to the Sabi Sand made an appearance in the north, the Mbali Pack, originating from the eastern part of the Kruger Park close to the Singita Lebombo and Sweni Lodges. This pack consists of seven adults and eight pups.
- The Othawa Pack has provided regular viewing in November and seven of their pups now follow the adults learning what it takes to survive in such a competitive environment.

### Grassland species

- With water and green grass a plenty, the south has been teeming with wildlife, most noticeably healthy herds of buffalo and dazzles of zebra scattered throughout this area.
- Towards the area of 40km Pan a pair of black-backed jackals are raising two young pups in the abandoned burrows dug by aardvark.
- Over the last few years, the population of ostriches has been growing in leaps and bounds. Not only is there a pair with a few chicks, but also a nest with well over 15 eggs were found.

### Bird List

- The bird list for November includes 11 new species, bringing our yearly total to 284. Specials this month includes: peregrine falcon, yellow-billed egret, Cape sparrow as well as an immature gorgeous bushshrike calling and being seen close to Boulders Lodge, a first confirmed record for us here.

### Wellness moments

- Some memorable moments include a soccer game in the river valley to sunrise walks around Tavangumi rocks. With such long days the opportunities are endless.
- One particularly adventurous family enjoyed getting their hands dirty and were shown how to make clay from the earth and then moulded their own animal sculptures from the refined clay.
- Fire-making and walks in the Sand River for morning coffee have been a popular break away from the vehicle and experience the grounding effect.



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



A Jacobin cuckoo. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.

At this time of the year, we are experiencing a huge number of changes to everything around us. Rains bring an abundance of life and colour to the bush that surrounds us and sounds and scents fill all of our senses as we traverse through the different landscapes here in the Sabi Sand Nature Reserve.

While Singita is very well known for bird watching all year round as there is a wide variety of species to find, it is at its best for birdwatching from November through to April (wet summer season) when all the migratory birds from the northern hemisphere are present.

A few species to look out for at this time of the year are: Wahlberg's eagle, woodland kingfisher, diderik cuckoo and red-chested cuckoo.

In winter the landscape is more barren with many of the trees losing their leaves which will only return in the summer months, this means that in summer there are many photographic opportunities with vibrant green backgrounds and foregrounds with wild flowers scattered across the landscape and hues of blues and greens and reds all attracting a multitude of insect life including, but not limited to, butterflies, beetles and bees.

Earth's spin axis is tilted with respect to its orbital plane and that is why we experience the different seasons throughout the year as we do. When the Earth's axis points towards the sun, it is summer for that hemisphere; and when the Earth's axis points away, it is winter in that hemisphere.

Also during this time is the impala lambing season which attracts a plethora of predators that take advantage of these vulnerable animals as they try to find their feet in this new world. I would like to share a quick story on one experience we had last week involving one of these situations. We were stopped for a sundowner which happens on every afternoon safari and includes setting up some snacks and drinks on a pop-up table attached to our vehicle.

While taking photographs of the sunset a herd of impala erupted with loud snorts telling us straight away that there was some sort of predator in the area. We quickly packed up and raced over there to find impalas staring at the ground and snorting loudly. Louis and I knew instantly what had happened, it was a southern African python that had just caught an impala lamb. We did not stick around long and went back in the direction of the lodge in awe of what we had just seen.

## The birth of the impala lambs

Article by Coman Mnisi

It is every field guide's expectation that each and every year in our summer season impalas will give birth specifically from early November to mid-December after a seven-month gestation period.

Around the month of April and May it's the impala rutting season whereby impala rams aggressively fight against each other competing for mating opportunities. Therefore that's when the ewes fall pregnant and the pregnancy anticipates the rainy season for them to give birth in suitable conditions in terms of food, shelter and water to drink.

When the lambing season arrives, we always think it's taking time for them to actually start dropping babies because of the excitement we have as guides to see babies after seven to eight months of waiting. No sooner has the first lamb been spotted when we start seeing them everywhere!

When the lambing season comes it changes the whole hunting behaviour of predators as baby impala becomes an easy catch in most cases. This whole situation also increases sighting records of predators that we don't see very often such as serval, wild dogs and cheetah as they move from clearing to clearing chasing after impala herds to hunt the lambs..

During the birth times each herd of impalas is almost multiplied by two and that soon changes due to predators bringing down the number to a more sustainable size, in line with the carrying capacity for the environment.

As you just read in Andrew Taylor's story a southern African python was seen constricting an impala lamb.



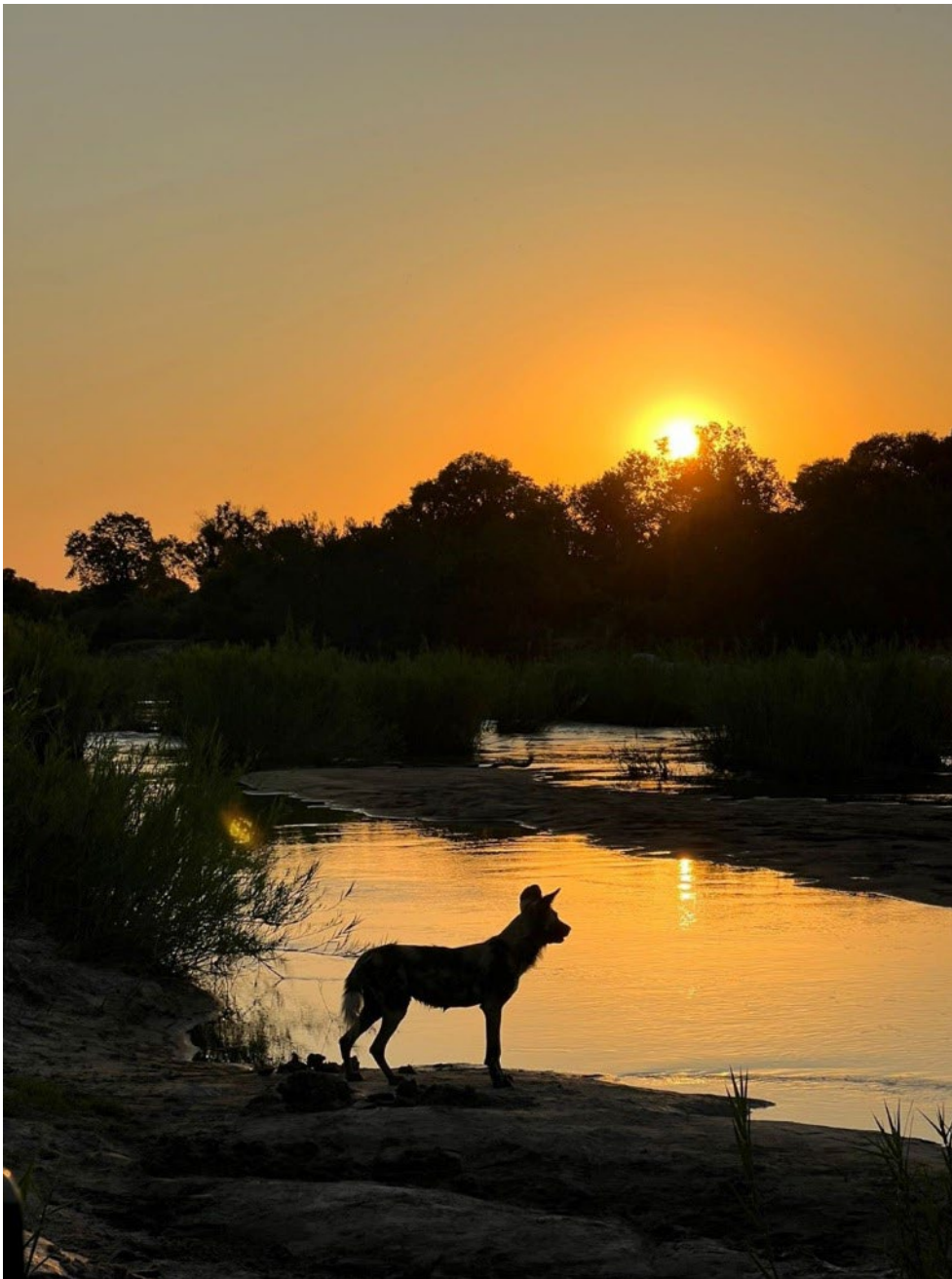
Image by Andrew Taylor.

## An afternoon spent with wild dogs

Article by Quentin Swanevelder

A while back we had one of those days where all the elements of the bush came together for us at the same time on an afternoon game drive.

We set out and decided to follow up on the last position of a pack of wild dogs that had been seen in the morning. Our first stroke of good luck, they had decided to only move about 100 metres from their original position into some shade. We decided to settle and wait to see if they decided to go hunting. As it was still late winter the temperature dropped as soon as the sun started getting a bit lower, and the pack started moving, second stroke of good luck! We had noticed some impala not too far from where they were starting to move and the pack picked up their scent and started to trot in that direction. We managed to move around towards



an open area, our third stroke of good luck was that the impala, wild dogs and us were now in the same area! The chase was on and we managed to see the pack bring down an impala in now a slightly denser part of the clearing. We managed to get into position as they were finishing off the remaining bits of the kill (something that I don't really enjoy!).

Our last bit of good luck came when the pack decided to go for a drink in the Sand River and I decided to move towards an area where, with some more luck, they might move to drink which should give us some amazing photographic opportunities. They did exactly that!

As a guide and tracker, we always do our best to get the best possible views of animals, but it surely does help when Mother Nature behaves like Lady Luck and helps!

## November Gallery

These are images captured by Marc Bowes-Taylor of the diverse birdlife on the reserve at the moment.



Left, a family of white-crested helmetshrike mob a Wahlberg's eagle with a dwarf mongoose in its talons.  
Right, a saddle-billed stork settles down for the day as the sun sets.



Above, male striated heron takes guard over its nest. During the breeding season the male of the species has orange legs and cere. Below, a male thick-billed weaver gular flutters in an attempt to cool down.







Success! A white-breasted cormorant with a catfish for prey, at Pios Crossing.



A female giant kingfisher at her favourite fishing hole, on the Sand River. Image by Matt Durell.



A pair of white-backed vultures, in conversation. Image by Andrew Taylor.



A squabble over the last remains of a wildebeest carcass in a waterhole. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.



With the hot daily temperatures there has a been a variety of reptiles out basking in order to function effectively. Above, a pair of giant plated lizards bask not far from the safety of their rocky lair. Below, the inconspicuous vine snake looks for chameleons and frogs to hunt. Images by Marc Bowes-Taylor.





Andrew Taylor capturing the intensity in the eyes of one of the Ntsevu males in the rain.



The ever-alert waterbuck is a reactive mother. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.

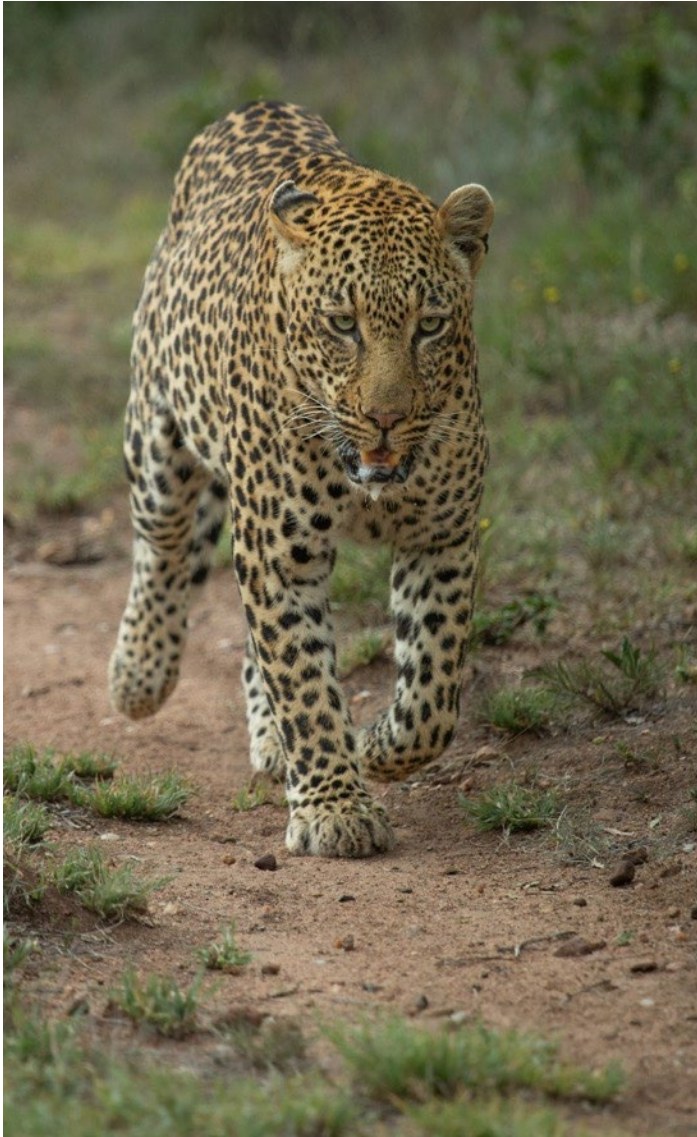


Any day now the warthog sows will give birth to their precious litter of piglets in the safety of abandoned aardvark burrows. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.

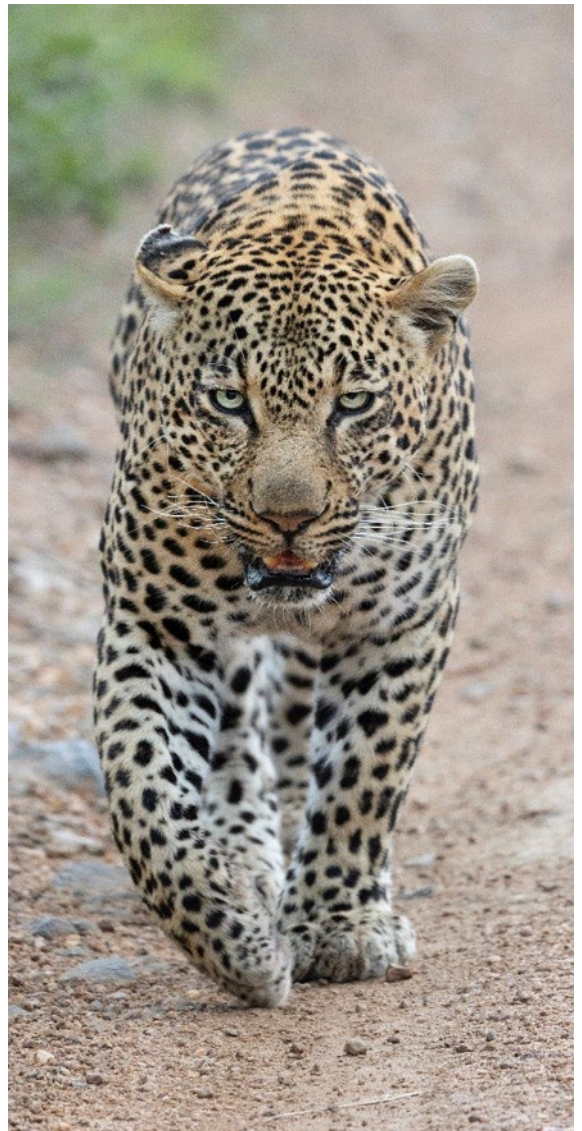


The Nkuwa female and her two cubs drinking at Mhlwareni Pan. Captured by Matt Durell.





The Thamba male (left) chases down the Hlambela male.



Right, the Thamba male having delivered the message, clearly. Images by Marc Bowes-Taylor and Andrew Taylor.



Sunsets and silhouettes. Image by Matt Durell.



A breeding herd of elephants enjoying the grassland.





Playful cubs from the Mhangene pride compete for their prize, a stick. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.



A cub looking worse for wear over a feasting feline feud.



A male cheetah finds some respite in the shade on a summer's afternoon. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.



The race is on for the hare...