

# Singita



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

**Temperature**

Average minimum: 11.5°C (52.73°F)

Average maximum: 23.5°C (74.33°F)

Minimum recorded: 06.0°C (42.80°F)

Maximum recorded: 28.0°C (82.40°F)

**Rainfall Recorded**

For the month: 8mm

For the season to date: 781.8mm

**Sunrise & Sunset**

Sunrise: 06:38

Sunset: 17:22

A gentle mist floods the lower valleys as a soft scent of smoke drifts through the air. With some late rains this month, the burning season shifted ever so slightly. We are beginning to see the signs of the earth becoming drier and drier with each and every leaf falling to the ground. However, there is nothing more beautiful than waking up on a winter's morning to the most spectacular sunrise which, in turn, brings an energy of warmth and excitement to every species who felt the cold during the night. The winds have begun to blow, telling us that August awaits and that summer is only just around the next corner...

## Here's a Sightings Snapshot for July:

### Lions

- The Nkuhuma females and their two cubs are still doing incredibly well under the protection of the two Plains Camp males. The six lions together have created some amazing lion viewing opportunities this past month, having caught a number of different species and thus a lot of activity has been seen around feeding. The two cubs are looking very healthy and so too are the lionesses who have done an excellent job in keeping them safe and in good condition. The amber-eyed female is truly a great aunt to the cubs.
- With a solid territory already established, the two Plains Camp males have been looking to increase the number of females with which to mate. This has meant that they have spent a little more time moving into the western part of the reserve in pursuit of the Othawa lionesses, who have been seen moving onto the property a few times this month.
- It was always a gamble to wonder what the outcome of the single Birmingham male and his son the Nkuhuma male was going to be when the two of them got together, however it seems as if they are thriving to our west and have even been seen mating with the Ximungwe lioness further north west.
- Another interesting turn of events toward the end of the month was the finding of the young Tsalala lioness with one of the older Mhangene lionesses (the older female who had been seen mating with a Plains Camp male earlier in the year). We hope this duo stays together and forms a pride of their own.

### Elephants

- With later rains the bush has been kept much greener than usual and with this there has been an abundance of food for the elephants. Larger herds of 20 or more have often been viewed across the property with the most entertaining youngsters who always make the hearts of our guests warm and put huge smiles on our faces. To the south we have also viewed a number of larger bull elephants with some magnificently large tusks.

### Wild dogs

- The Othawa Pack, who were doing extremely well as a unit of ten, unfortunately had a run in with some lions (Talamati Pride) in the northern parts of the reserve and our beloved Pungwe alpha female with the exposed canine as well as the pregnant beta female were very sadly killed. It will be interesting to see in the year ahead who will become the new alpha female and whether or not their den-site in the following year will shift with those changes. Only time will tell.

### Leopards

- It has been an interesting month in terms of our leopard viewing with a shift in our most seen leopards.
- The Mobeni female, who most know as a very shy and temperamental leopard was the most viewed female this past month, showing very relaxed behaviour toward our presence and allowing for some incredible observations of her in different trees with impala kills as well as her catching vervet monkeys on two different occasions. We hope that in the weeks to come we will continue viewing her as we have during July.
- It is with a lot of sadness that we share the news of the Nkuwa female leopard having now lost both her cubs. We had seen her on her own on a number of occasions, hoping that her remaining cub was still surviving, however when we learnt of the news to our east that she is being viewed mating with the Senegal Bush male, the realisation set in. We can only hope that by mating with the dominant males around her territory that she will be successful with her second litter.

### Cheetah

- We have had some awesome cheetah viewing this month, now with multiple different individuals moving through the area. We continue to see the single male cheetah with his

shorter tail and his territory seems to remain along the southern boundary. We also saw the arrival of a new coalition of three young male cheetahs who were seen to the south east and the single female cheetah and her ever growing young male cub continue to move throughout the reserve. It would seem as if the cheetah viewing here is slowly picking up again with the lower numbers of lions in the area.

#### **Bird List**

- The bird list for July includes six new bird species, bringing our bird list for the year up to 270 birds. Specials for the month included violet-eared waxbills and cut-throat finches.



Nkuhuma lioness and cub – image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.

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

## Undeniably a once-in-a-lifetime sighting

Article by Marc Bowes-Taylor

When we speak about a “once-in-a-lifetime” sighting some scenes come to mind like an elephant giving birth, or a pride of lions successfully hunting a giraffe, whatever it may be, it often involves a big animal. Well, we were treated to what is undeniably, for a few reasons, what will truly be a “once-in-a-lifetime” sighting. Would you believe it involved a flock of various bird species, a bush squirrel and a large spotted genet? Let me explain, and relay the details which sets this sighting aside from the thousands of others.

We were meandering back to the lodge one morning, about 09:30, when we noticed the frantic calls of a few birds on a marula tree. Birds can be some of the best sentry guards due to their excellent eyesight and the fact that they can get really close to the threat knowing that they can quickly fly off if the threat is in striking range.

Initially I was hoping it may be a large snake soaking up the sun on one of the branches. We stopped, picked up our binoculars and waited. Something dashed across the side of the large tree trunk. “I’m pretty sure that was a genet,” I said surprisingly. I was a little uncertain as a genet should be fast asleep now, four or so hours after sunrise. They are a nocturnal mammal.

Then, we noticed something else small scampering around the tree. It was a bush squirrel. The genet was busy hunting the squirrel! The two were playing out a game of cat and mouse. As soon as the genet would approach the squirrel, the squirrel would rush to the opposite side of the trunk. I was amazed at the speed and agility the two arboreal specialists boasted. From what I’ve read, large spotted genets feed mainly on invertebrates, fruits and rodents. A squirrel was definitely pushing the limits, and what was uncommon was that this nocturnal hunter was hunting during mid-morning!

The chase went on for a couple of minutes, just enough time to snap a few photos with one being of decent quality. By the looks of it the squirrel did get away and left all of us rather amazed by what we had witnessed. I don’t think I will see such a scene again in my life!



## Hiss of death

Article by Matt Durell

Guiding is an amazing lifestyle, and we are really spoiled to call this place home. Much like office life, we go through ups and downs but in a totally different way. Coming from Johannesburg originally, an area like many others in the world with its dangers, I always keep my wits about me, even on game drive. One afternoon, quite recently I got the fright of my life!

We set out a little later this particular afternoon, our aim was to find a special spot to watch the sun go down and enjoy a drink, which we did do - it was amazing. From there we were just going to amble back to the lodge, as once the sun sets in winter it quickly gets particularly chilly. On a long, flat section of the road, while turning chatting to the guests, I glanced forward briefly, saw a flash of white out the corner of my eye which was followed by a terrifying scream from one of the guests! I immediately stopped the car, hissing, growling honey badgers! A mom and her youngster who were busy foraging close to the road when we happened upon them! The mom then ran to the other side of the road so now we were getting hissed at from either side, so I reversed, allowing mom to get back to her youngster. They reunited and ran off giving us time to catch our breath and allow the heart rates to return to normal too!



We laughed the rest of the way home! A couple of nervous laughs in the mix as well! Day in and day out working in a Big 5 reserve, of all the things to have given us such a big fright, a honey badger! Needless to say, that day bumped them up on the list of things of which to be wary!

## Skill or behaviour?

Article by Andries Mohlala

I sometimes like to think that I have seen it all, not once but many times, and maybe more. I have been guiding for over twenty years, hence the attitude! But Nature is a great leveller and always ready to teach me a lesson, no matter my experience and knowledge. Here is a short story I'd like to share with you:

It is a story of a very beautiful animal that has caught the interest of most people that care for nature. No one knows where she was born, when she was born, who her parents are, or exactly how old she is. Sometimes she is relaxed when located but she can turn on you in a split second and that makes her unpredictable: The Mobeni female leopard.

A leopard, being a cat, intentionally walking into water looking to hunt a water monitor lizard is kind of pushing boundaries that I struggle to understand. The Mobeni female decided to perform this stunt on a morning game drive in our winter season, and the water temperature must have been close to zero if not less. But she was either very hungry or the lizard meat has got to be worth the trouble of submerging completely and walking out empty-handed. The determination she had, showed that she really wanted to chew that lizard, she applied all the skill that most prey fall victim to, and yet this time the prey took advantage of the muddy waters and disappeared.

In my opinion, this is not normal leopard behaviour, but something tells me that she has done this before and maybe successfully so, and she wants more of those lizards so much so that she will probably do it again. It was truly eye-opening to watch and learn, and to understand that the only guarantee in the bush is that there are no guarantees. You live and learn!



The Mobeni female leopard, in drier times – image by Ross Couper.

## Birding mega alert

Article by Paul Josop

The southern African birding community is extremely lucky to have had a rare bird appear and stay around for about a month in the Limpopo province. The bird that has generated flocks of local birders to travel to the north-eastern province, is known as a wood warbler (*Phylloscopus sibilatrix*). A small passerine bird that breeds in most of Europe, into Siberia, and migrates southwards to tropical Africa, where they stay for winter.



The bird was identified by British birder Nick Addey, who was on a tour whilst staying at a lodge in Phalaborwa, and spotted the bird whilst birding in the lodge gardens. It's a new species for the southern African bird list and one that has obliged! The bird had made itself 'at home' around the other resident bird species, feeding in the upper and mi- canopy of the broad-leaved and thorn trees (wild mango and fever trees) and generally would've gone unnoticed.



My colleague, Marc Eschenlohr, and I followed the updates closely for about a week before engaging in any discussion to make the mission northwards! Eventually we committed to the cause and made our way to Phalaborwa. A quick two-and-a-half-hours around the Sabi Sand Game Reserve, through Hoedspruit town we found ourselves connecting with the wood warbler in less than ten minutes after arriving at Sefapane Lodge!



We spent some time discussing this ‘twitch’ with a friendly couple from Zululand, snapping photographs and appreciated watching the warbler feeding above us. Tick tick!



July Gallery



Male kudu below Ebony Lodge – image by Chene Wales-Baillie.



One of the many cheetah viewed this month – Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor



The beautiful Nkuwa female leopard – image by Nick Du Plessis.



A business of dwarf mongooses – Image by Chene Wales-Baillie.



A young male waterbuck – image by Nick Du Plessis.