

Singita



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

Temperature

Average minimum: 12.4°C (54.3°F)
Minimum recorded: 04.0°C (39.2°F)
Average maximum: 27.7°C (81.9°F)
Maximum recorded: 34.0°C (93.2°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 0.0 mm
Season to date: 457.8 mm

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 06:38
Sunset: 17:22

The dry season is an exciting time to be out on safari in the Sabi Sand Nature Reserve, South Africa, and this year, as expected, has not let us down. In true wilderness exploring style, there have been many surprises, though not all of these have brought on joyful emotions – some have displayed the rawness of the reality we are a part of. However, these trials they have been outnumbered by the incredible sightings our guests have witnessed. We have experienced cold mornings and in the same breath felt the temperatures soar to those like a summer's day. This has brought on remarkable changes, from fairy flycatchers and blue-mantled crested flycatchers in our own Ebony Lodge gardens - birds that spend a lot of their winters in high altitudes have

shifted lower in altitude due to the cold. We also witnessed deaths of large sharp-toothed catfish in the Sand River, while many other species survived. We suspect sharp temperature variations had a major role to play for the unfortunate bottom-dwelling fish. Lions, wild dogs, leopards and cheetahs have allowed us to witness some of the most intimate moments between mother and their young which have stolen the hearts of many of our guests.

Here is a closer look at some of the highlights for July:

Cheetahs

- We had suspected in the previous months that a female cheetah that has been spending a lot of time in the vicinity may well be close to giving birth and our suspicions were verified when we followed her back to her litter of four cubs which were seen for the first time. The cubs estimated to be close to four weeks of age showed positive signs around the vehicle when first observed. We remain hopeful that she will manage to raise these cubs in this challenging environment.

Leopards

- At the start of the month, we had superb viewing of the Tiyisela female leopard and her two cubs on Makubela koppies. The rocky outcrop provided the perfect viewing point to watch these busy little cubs chasing and playing with each other in an undisturbed manner.
- The Ntoma female and Thamba male were seen mating in a feisty affair in the early evening not far from Ebony and Boulders Lodges, and for three more days until they went their separate ways.
- There has been a shift in home range of the Nkuwa female as we have seen her hunting in the south west and all the way further east close to Triangle Pan. This is mainly due to the absence of the Ximobanyana female who we presume has moved out of the area. We most recently saw Nkuwa hunt a warthog piglet and was accompanied by one of her young male offspring who she did not want around. We assume her two youngsters are still adapting to life on their own and still see her as mom. She was seen trying to mate with the Ntomi male a few weeks back which is often an indicator that it is their time to be independent.
- Other leopards viewed include the Hlambela male in the north hunting warthogs close to Luca's Dam on a hot winter's afternoon. A new face to the area, the Tumbela female, a two-year-old that is recently independent and is trying to establish herself in the reserve. The Mwelawela male, son of the Ntoma female has been viewed in the far south of our traversing area.

Lions

- The lion sightings have been phenomenal and a lot of it has been close to Ebony and Boulders Lodges, where the Tsalala lioness has been hunting prey that seeks the green vegetation and water in the Sand River valley. Her three cubs are growing and are comfortable with the vehicles viewing them. We have observed them on three separate kills over a few days which has allowed for ideal exposure to vehicles.
- The Mhangeni Pride have been setting their sights on the numerous herds of buffalo that have been feeding right from the south all the way north through the wooded savanna. The growing cubs' dietary demands are higher than ever and are always seeking another opportunity to feed. They have had the unwanted attention of the last of the Tumbela male lions who, although not showing any aggression toward the cubs, has been following the pride and feeding with them on kills.
- Along the river we have seen the young Othawa lionesses and the young Nkuhuma breakaway lion and lioness on separate occasions.

African wild dogs

- We always knew wild dogs were complex in their social behaviour but being able to witness new behaviour is absolutely astonishing. The pack of three which originated from Satara, in the National

Park, had their three pups abducted by a pack, which is split from the Toulon pack, of six female dogs. Math Durell writes more on this in his article found further down the journal.

- Much of the wild dog viewing has been taking place around Castleton Camp and surrounds, this wooded habitat has always been one of the best places to search for these marvelled canines.

Elephants

- The Sand River in the afternoon has been a hotspot for elephant herds as they quench their thirst and feed. In other parts of the reserve, we see herds feeding on leaved teak and last stands of dry grass growing in the hard-to-reach places like the base of buffalo thorn and spike thorn thickets. The tough trunk of the elephant is able to go where other animals would not.

Buffaloes

- We are seeing buffalo dung scattered all over Singita currently with many herds traversing to the last remaining waterholes in the region. Their movements are crucial to the ecosystem on so many levels. Their dung is essential nutrients for the soil and food or feeding areas for insects and birds. The abundance of both red-billed and yellow-billed oxpeckers number almost as many buffaloes that can be found in the herd. They have also been trailed by the many lions in the reserve currently.

Unusual sightings

- On a cold windy morning an aardvark was seen scampering across the road across the Sand River in the north. This is just the second sighting of one this year. These cooler days seems to provide one with the best chance of seeing one.
- We have also seen more honey badgers and serval sightings during the daylight hours. One of the sightings Luke witnessed was of a white rhino bull giving chase to a honey badger!
- One sighting that really had us amazed was watching a yellow-billed hornbill trying to hunt a flap-necked chameleon. The reptile proved too large for the bird to grab and hold onto as it managed to climb away from the hornbill.

Bird list

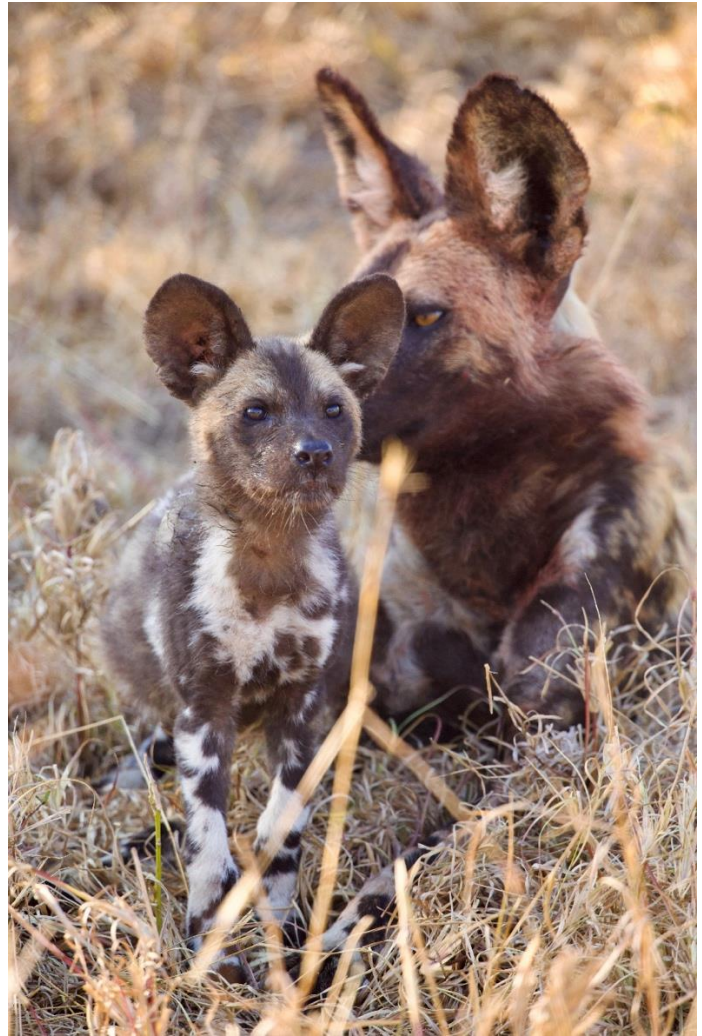
- The bird list for July includes four new species, bringing our bird list for the year up to 285 birds. Specials for the month included a single osprey in the southern parts of the reserve as well as an amethyst sunbird at Ebony Villa.

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

In the heart of the Sabi Sand Game Reserve, a gripping drama of survival and dominance is unfolding. A pack of seven wild dogs, known for their coordinated hunting techniques and strategic prowess, executed a daring raid on a smaller pack of just three wild dogs, resulting in the abduction of three puppies. This event highlights the intricate social dynamics and fierce competition among these apex predators.

Wild dogs, also known as African painted dogs, are renowned for their complex social structures and cooperative behaviours. Packs are typically led by an alpha pair, and their social cohesion is critical for hunting and survival. In this case, the larger pack of seven, likely driven by the need to ensure their genetic legacy and expand their dominance, targeted the vulnerable puppies of the smaller pack.

The smaller pack, despite their bravery and determination, were outmatched by the larger group's numbers and strategic advantage. The raid was swift and decisive. The larger pack, utilizing their superior coordination, surrounded the den where the puppies were kept. The adult members of the smaller pack, despite their best efforts to defend their young, were quickly overwhelmed and had to submit to save their own lives.



This incident is not just a tale of theft but a stark reminder of the harsh realities of life in the wild. For the larger pack, acquiring additional puppies can mean increasing their pack size and, consequently, their hunting efficiency and territorial control. For the smaller pack, the loss is devastating, not only emotionally but also in terms of their future survival prospects. Puppies represent the future of any pack, and losing them can significantly impact their chances of maintaining their territory and their existence in a competitive ecosystem.

Wild dog populations are under constant threat from human activities, habitat loss, and diseases. Such inter-pack conflicts, while natural, add another layer of challenge to their survival. Conservation efforts aim to protect these magnificent creatures and their habitats, but the complexities of their social interactions and survival strategies remind us that nature is both beautiful and brutal.

In conclusion, the raid by the pack of seven wild dogs on their smaller rivals is a vivid example of the intricate and often harsh realities of wild dog life. It underscores the importance of numbers, strategy, and cooperation in the animal kingdom, while also highlighting the perpetual struggle for survival that defines the lives of these remarkable animals.

We will try to keep you updated on the outcome of this highly unusual development.

This morning the Mhangeni Pride and the Tumbela male lion were found west of Jim's Dam, close to the airstrip. Although they were resting at first, they eventually ended up getting up and trailing the herd of buffaloes, while two of the Singita vehicles followed them throughout the sighting.



We saw that the Tumbela male did not receive a warm welcome from three Mhangeni lionesses when he walked over to them. They are wary of this unrelated male being around their sub-adult offspring.

After almost an hour we left the sighting of the lions and went to follow up on the herd of buffaloes that were heading towards Pam Pam Dam to drink. After that we went to July Dam for a brief coffee break and then we decided to go back to the lions to see if there had been any further progress on the buffalo hunt.

We found them on the move south west still behind the buffalo. They ended up the herd throughout the day and eventually bringing down a buffalo cow and calf. The Tumbela male joined them feeding on both kills.

Thanks to the lionesses hunting prowess two buffalo carcasses will feed this growing pride and the Tumbela male for a good few days. There's no such thing as a day off for a lioness, and it's good to see them doing so well.

Temperatures for the afternoon game drives in the winter months are known to be deceiving-twenties in the day to losing almost twenty degrees Celsius as soon as the sun sets. But on this particular afternoon it was particularly cold and I didn't hold much hope of finding an exciting sighting.

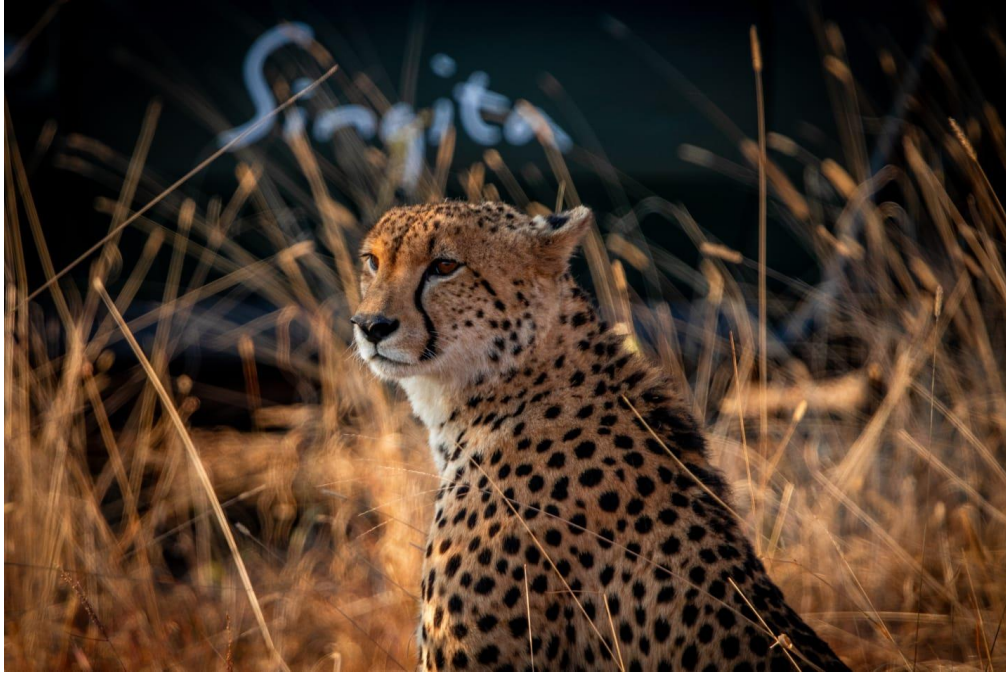
So, I thought the best thing was to tell stories to keep everyone entertained... Mid yarn my attention was diverted by a group of zebras that appeared out of a thicket being chased by what looked like a lioness from a distance of about 200 metres! And the zebras were taking turns at kicking the lion repeatedly!

Storytelling became a thing of the past as we pursued what promised to be an exciting interaction and maybe the rare chance to see a kill. So, off we went and as we got closer to the action, it turned out that our "lioness" was indeed a wildebeest calf being kicked by the zebras. But, in actual fact, what was really happening was there was a jackal, that from the distance we could not see, and the jackal was trying to hunt the wildebeest calf! The calf appeared to have separated from his kind and followed the escaping zebras. In the dead run for survival the zebras were trying to kick the jackal who was running side by side with the calf trying to bring it down while trying to avoid a deadly kick from a zebra. The calf found itself on the receiving end of both the aggression of jackal's bite and the kicks from multiple zebras.

There were so many mixed emotions - some thought the jackal was mean, but the jackal was hungry and needed a solution to that problem, and the solution was the calf which was now protected by these very unhappy zebras.

The zebras did manage to drive the jackal away, but the calf was still not with its mother and we were left with a question of how the story was going to end with the calf, as we decided we had seen enough. Who knows how it ended, but sometimes it's better not to know.

July Gallery



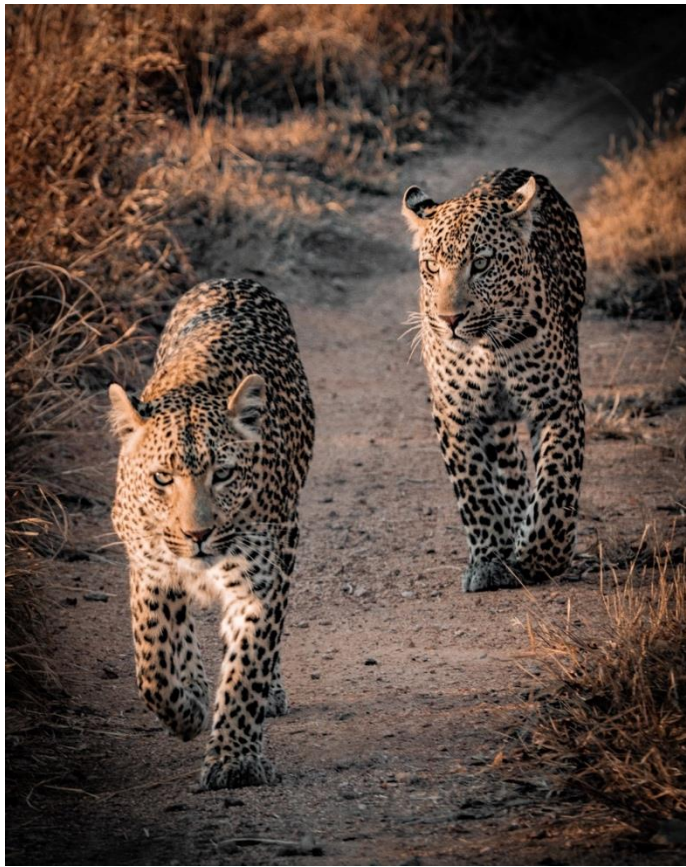
A male cheetah providing us with a great view of this elegant cat. Image by Jono Harper.



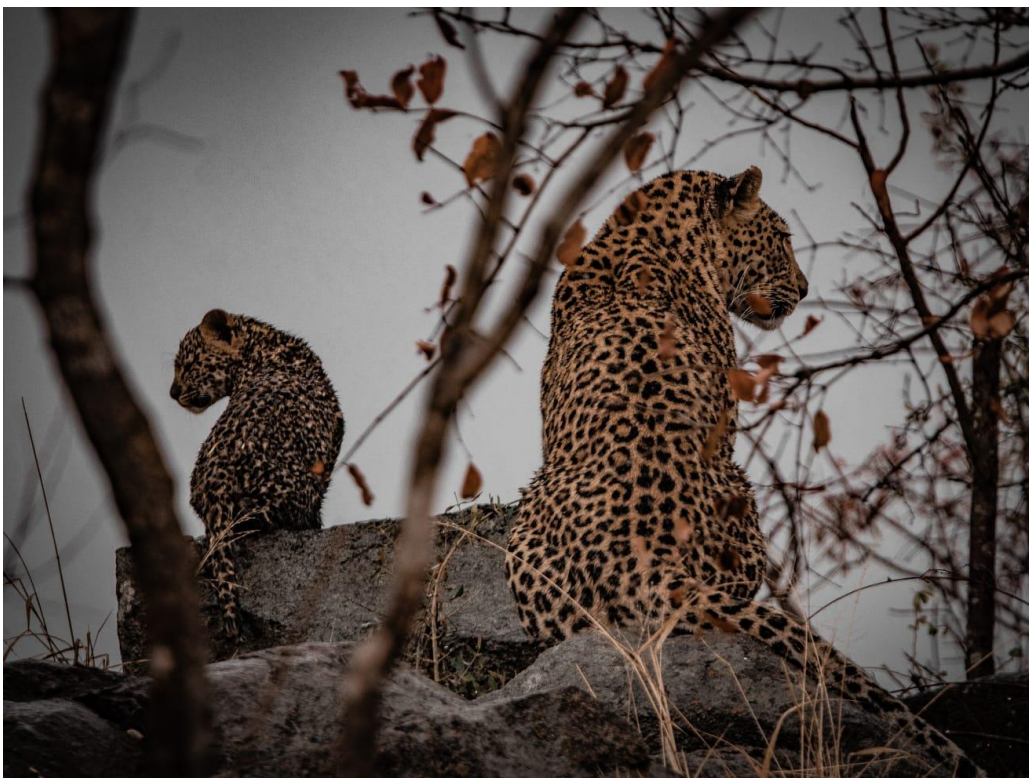
A female bateleur waiting for temperatures to rise before flying off in search of food. Image by Coleman Mnisi.



A dreamy late afternoon scene in the Sabi Sand as a leopard plans its next move from the bare branches of a marula tree. Image by Matt Durell.



The Nkuwa female and one of her young male offspring steadily moving away from where they had a carcass robbed from them by a clan of three spotted hyena. Image by Jono Harper.



The Tiyisela female and cub on Makubela Koppies. Image by Jono Harper.



You just never know what you may find around the next corner. Image by Kayla McClelland.



A precious moment as a young white rhino calmly follows mom from a watering hole. Image by Matt Durell.