

Singita



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

Temperature

Average minimum: 20.7°C (69.2°F)

Average maximum: 28.1°C (82.6°F)

Minimum recorded: 18.0°C (64.4°F)

Maximum recorded: 35.0°C (95.0°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 418.0mm

For the season to date: 566.2mm

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 05:40

Sunset: 18:36

As if a switch were flipped, February announced itself with some of the most unforgettable downpours of rain. What an incredible display of power from Mother Nature, as we have already received over half our annual rainfall in the shortest month of the year! The Sand River has swollen to its full capacity and can even be heard rushing down the river valley while the small seasonal tributaries gently feed the mighty river. The rains have revived our energy for the journey that lies ahead. Our wild counterparts are also appreciating the welcome relief after a hot and tiring January, and wet paws and muddy hooves are accepted as the norm while going about their daily routine. The sounds of the cycads are now drowned out by the chorus of frogs as seasonal pans are overflowing with life. Rain is truly the lifeblood of the natural world.

Here's a snapshot of the month's sightings:

Elephants

- Marula fruits are becoming very difficult to find as they are eaten up as quickly as they hit the ground. The fruiting season has come to an end but the smooth transition in feeding behaviour from the sweet fruits to the fibrous, palatable grasses has kept large herds of elephants within our traversing area of the Sabi Sand Game Reserve. Their diet will consist mostly of grass from now and for the next few months as we expect persistent rain to fall up until early winter.

Buffalos

- Over the last year we have certainly had some of the best quality and regular viewing of healthy numbers of buffalos in the south. This month was no different with numerous sightings of herds close to a thousand. Their presence is evident as deep hoof prints can be seen throughout the grasslands in the soft, black cotton soil and the grasses have been eaten down to carpet length. For many species of grasses regular grazing promotes growth of the leaves while the large amounts of dung is valuable fertiliser. However, so many bellowing bovines does not go unnoticed and has captured the attention of a few lion prides. Moving in big numbers has proved very effective in protecting the weak and vulnerable but on a few occasions the lions have come away with their desired reward.

Lions

- The Mhangene Pride has slowly been pushing north and has been sighted as far up as our airstrip. As the members grow in confidence so they expand their territory. We have had it on a few occasions where some members have been seen by themselves, possibly scoping out suitable denning areas as we expect a number of lionesses to give birth soon.
- The Talamati Pride have had great success close to Ebony and Boulders Lodges with them using the rainy conditions to hunt a young wildebeest and an adult waterbuck bull that was caught right outside the shop between the two lodges. The five adult lionesses finished off the four-hundred-pound antelope within the night.
- With the abundance of buffalo in the south the lions are not having to go too far to find a hunting opportunity. The Plains Camp male lions were viewed successfully hunting a buffalo calf just after dusk. Out of desperation the herd came back to drive off the predators, but unfortunately the calf did not manage to survive and fell to the ground. A truly emotional sighting.
- The Nkuhuma breakaway lioness and her two sub-adults have been doing their best to avoid conflict with the bigger prides in the area. On one afternoon the two youngsters were chased by the Mhangene females while their mother was off hunting. Luckily, no lions were harmed in the process. She managed to bring down a kudu bull along the river that fed them for a few days and gave our guests fantastic viewing in a beautiful setting.

Leopards

- With every sighting of the Nkuwa female we eagerly await the first appearance of her cubs. With so much dense vegetation growth the conditions are ideal for keeping her cubs concealed.
- It looks like the Tsutsuma female is finding a small area she can call her own. She is proving to be a regularly viewed leopard, going against her name, which means to "run", as she has settled down in the presence of vehicles. Being sensitive in how we view leopards and all wildlife has a positive long-term impact on game viewing in our area.
- On one particularly rainy day the Ntoma female was sighted off the old railway in the south with a hoisted kill. This leopard, daughter of the Mobeni female, is best viewed from a distance as she is nervous of vehicles at close quarters. This approach meant we could view her without disturbing her. Another sighting revealed that she too has suckle marks, this is exciting news and we look forward to bringing you further updates on her and her offspring.

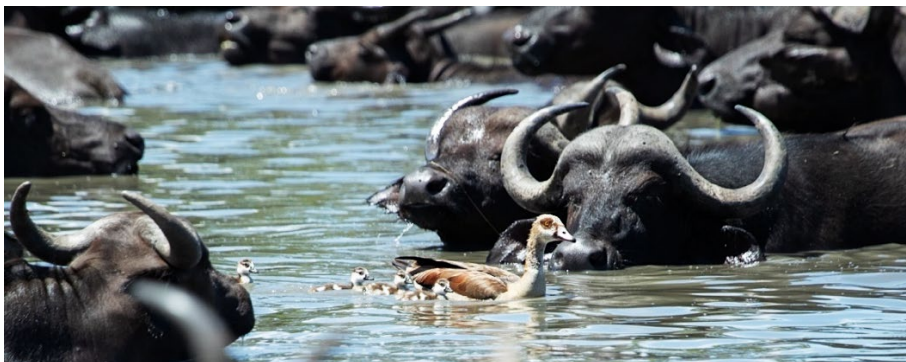
- The Schotia female is favouring the woodlands in the west of our traversing area and with all the rain she has been taking to the trees to rest out of the wet grass. A leopard in a tree is a sighting synonymous with Sabi Sand.

Wild dogs

- Finally, after a few weeks without a pack being sighted we have had multiple sightings of a pack of eight on Singita. Cool days are great conditions to watch wild dogs as they usually stay active for longer. This offers a chance for our guests to observe them interacting with one another and then as they set off on their daily hunt. After long periods of not seeing them, we really appreciate our time with these endangered predators.

Special sightings

- The hyena den off July East Road has been active after several months of no activity. Hyenas will move between different dens in their territory to raise their cubs. At this den we have seen four cubs of two different ages. This is an ideal opportunity to introduce our guests to hyenas which get an undeserved negative reputation because of some films. Their comical antics at the den often puts a smile on our faces and the cubs are just so cute!
- We witnessed something that may only happen every two to three years for an individual which is that of giraffe mating. This can be a long process as the female steadies herself for the mounting of the male, which does not always happen successfully first time. Even for some of the most seasoned safari goers this is something not often seen.
- At Giraffe Pan, in the south, a pair of Egyptian geese have been raising their goslings. What makes this so amazing is the lengths the parents have gone to in order to keep the little ones safe. We have seen the mother with her goslings in the pan while large numbers of buffalo bath and drink.



The Egyptian goose family among the buffalo. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.

- Although not witnessed by our guests in the flesh, we recorded an extraordinary capture on one of our motion sensitive trail cameras of a striped pole-cat. This is only the second record of this secretive, nocturnal insectivore on Singita Sabi Sand. Weighing only about two-pounds this busy, skunk-like mammal is extremely elusive. Another fascinating trail camera record was that of a small-spotted genet, distinguished by its white tipped tail. This was a great sight as large-spotted genets make up the majority of our nocturnal sightings.

Bird list

The bird list for February includes 48 new species, bringing our yearly total to 225. Special bird species: purple heron, black-crowned night heron, white-backed duck, marsh sandpiper, dusky lark, icterine warbler, Eurasian hobby and African pygmy kingfisher.

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

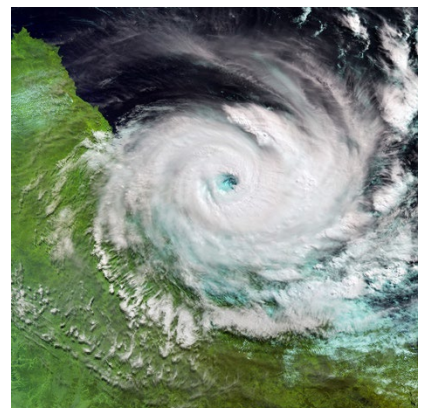
As we end what has been the wettest February in many years, the question came up on what the difference is between cyclones and hurricanes. The answer is fortunately that they are very similar and that the only real difference is, is that cyclones are found or originate in the southern hemisphere and hurricanes in the northern hemisphere. The name cyclone is derived from the Greek word cyclos, which means “coiled snake”.

This does however not mean the one is less or more destructive than the other. Cyclones are formed when there is a disruption of air as it warms close to the surface of the warmer tropical oceans and it rises and spirals towards low pressure systems due to the Coriolis force. As this continues the spiralling moist wet air intensifies creating a tropical cyclone. (This is a very basic description of how it is formed.)



As these storms move and intensify, they create winds in excess of 160km and extremely high rainfall, when they make landfall. This is unfortunately where the damage starts with intense flooding and gale-force winds. Fortunately, they also start losing strength because they are no longer over the ocean.

Cyclones are also given names and categories of strength with a category 1 being the safest and 5 the most intense. The names are given by the meteorological areas of where the storm originates from, usually in some form of alphabetical code, generally switching between male and female names after each storm.



As the end of our wet season approaches, we are constantly monitoring weather stations for any sign of cyclones that might form and be heading our way.



Hunting leopard

Article by Andries Mohlala

In the month of February 2023, I had the privilege of going to Sweni, which is our Singita sister lodge in the Kruger National Park concession, for four nights to explore a different area.

I found myself in a very beautiful mountainous biome with a completely different landscape than I am used to. It was so inspiring to guide there because I was as awestruck as my guests!

We were driving through a beautiful river when my tracker spotted a young male leopard that appeared to be moving away from us. I quickly turned off the engine as I thought the animal was running from us. After he disappeared we went around the bushes and tried to relocate him on the other side.

He was stalking a vervet monkey, so we took position to see if he would reappear. All monkeys went crazy as they spotted the leopard just before he could pounce. Monkeys just exploded into a frenzy, climbing trees, some leaving their babies behind! It was every monkey for themselves for a moment as mothers looked for babies but from a safe spot. The leopard tried to climb after the monkeys but there was no success for him.

Shortly after that, the hyenas showed up due to the commotion, trying to see if they could scavenge anything, but there was no luck for them either.

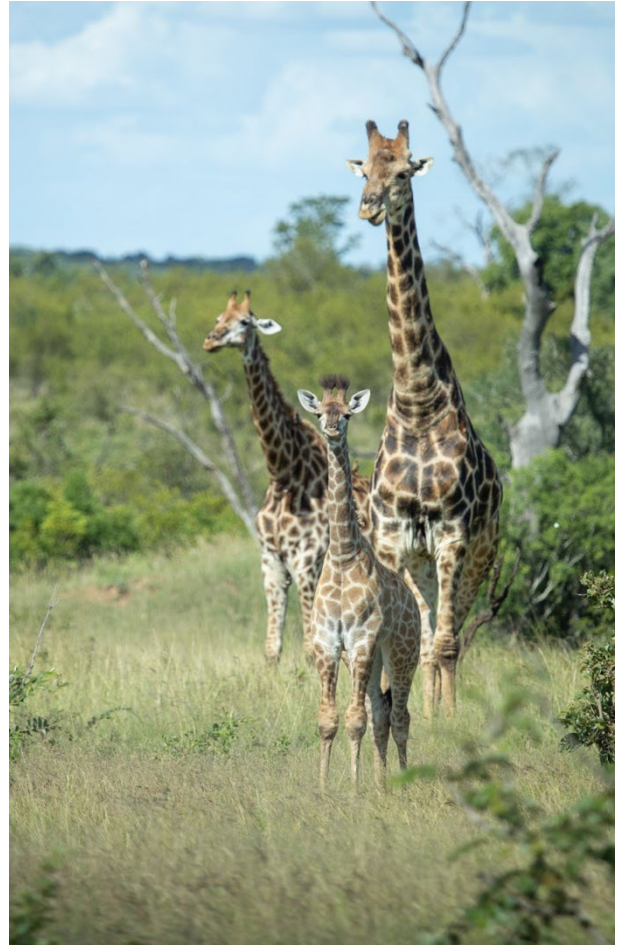
That was my first sighting in the world renowned Kruger National Park. What an exhilarating experience it was!

February Gallery



A woodland kingfisher with a solifugae on a hot summer's day. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.
A wildebeest nurses her youngster. Image by Andrew Taylor.



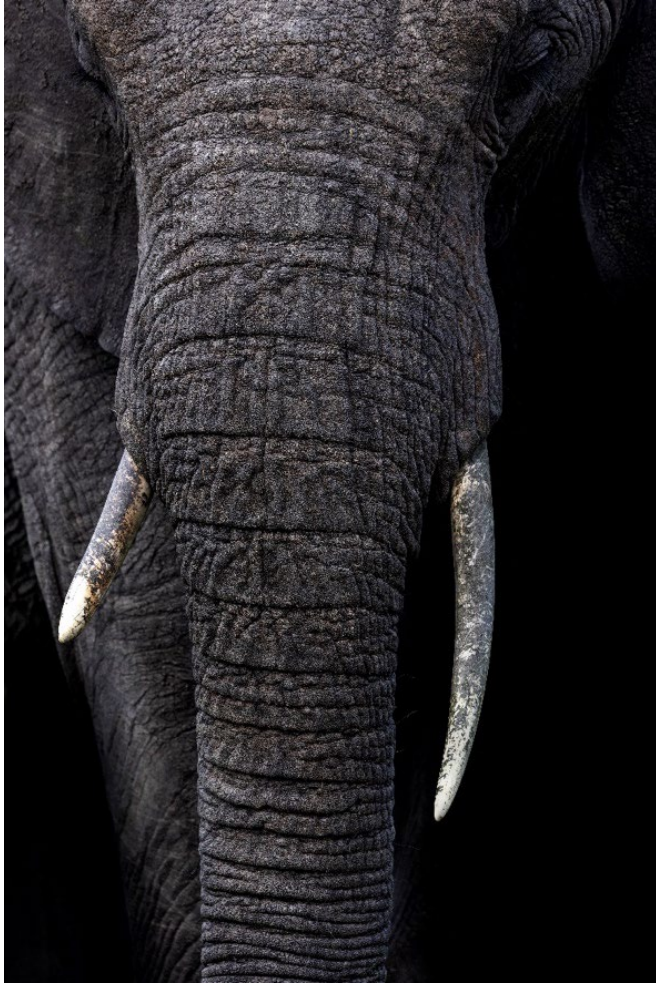


A Plains Camp male lion watching a storm brewing to the west.
Giraffes of all shapes and sizes, female to the left, bull to the right and a calf in the middle.
Images by Marc Bowes-Taylor.

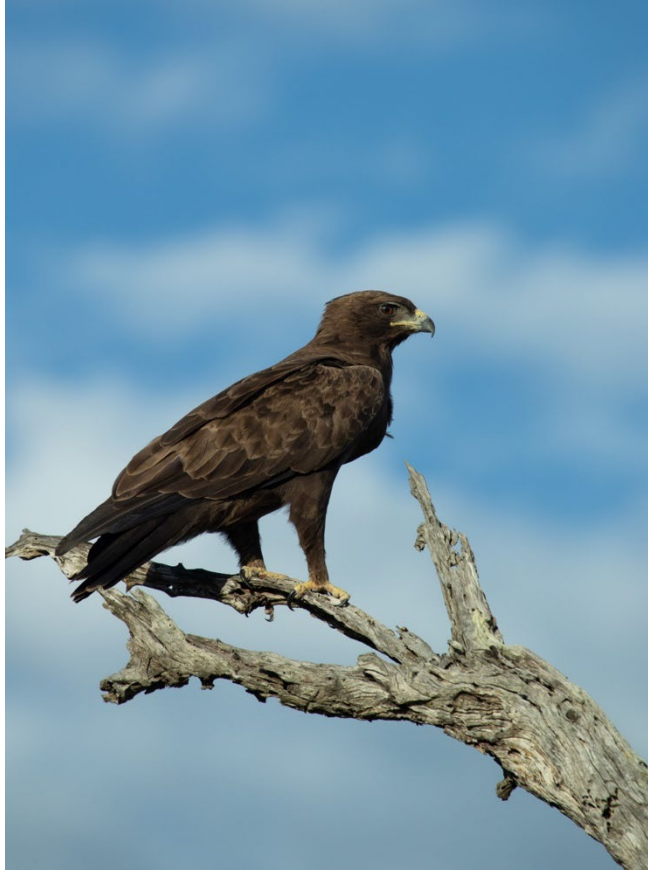


The Nkuwa female leopard posed in a marula tree.
Large numbers of wattled starlings can be seen following grazing animals as they wait for flushed insects.
Images by Marc Bowes-Taylor.





Tusks of an elephant cow.
A Plains Camp lion mating with a Mhangene lioness.
Images by Andrew Taylor.



A Wahlberg's eagle in the late afternoon light, one of the many migratory birds currently visiting.
Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.

The photogenic white-fronted bee-eater having a bad hair day. Image by Andrew Taylor.