

Singita



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

Temperature

Average minimum: 19°C (66.2°F)
Minimum recorded: 16°C (60.8°F)
Average maximum: 31.7°C (89°F)
Maximum recorded: 40°C (104°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 81 mm
Season to date: 92.5 mm
(*Season = Oct to Sep)

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 04:59
Sunset: 18:18

Leading up to the month of November the Sand River was a major focal point but this month the grasslands have taken centre stage. With over 80 mm of rain falling during two isolated thunderstorms the reserve has gone through its seasonal makeover, like it has done for millennia. There's a feast for the senses about that has been felt not only out on safari but within our lodge environment too. The dawn chorus starts earlier each day as the birds wake the Sun, impala ewes add their soft bleating contact calls and sharp-nosed grass frogs frantically croak to gain advantage for a chance to copulate. The abundance of life that is now present at Singita Sabi Sand fills us with hope as we look to nature to inspire and calm our souls.

Here's a sightings recap for November:

Elephants

- At the start of the month the attraction of the new sweet grass growing on the basalt-rich soils on the eastern side of the Greater Kruger, near our sister lodges Singita Lebombo and Sweni, proved too tempting for the mega herbivores, which saw a major localised movement toward that area. Once we finally received rains, we welcomed the return of herds of elephants back to the Sabi Sand. With the high volume of grass all over the reserve herds are made up of small groups of closely related elephants numbering about six in a herd.

Buffaloes

- Much like their pachyderm counterparts there has been an increase in herds of buffalo in the south. The megafauna presence in this area is crucial to the success of the grassland ecosystem.

Lions

- Sadly it has been confirmed that the Tsalala lioness, the lioness who gave birth and did her utmost to raise her three cubs close to our camps has been unsuccessful in her first attempt at raising her litter. It is not clear what/which predators killed them but the fact that they have not been seen in over a month and she has been mating again with the Plains Camp lions confirms their fate.
- The rise of the Ximungwe Pride, two lioness and two female almost sub-adult offspring could possibly be responsible for the Tsalala cubs demise, as they seemed to have laid claim to the Tsalala lioness' rocky kingdom which is Tavangumi koppies. They push further east now which has forced the Tsalala lioness to occupy the area around Taylor's Crossing and beyond.
- The Mhangeni Pride are looking strong as they have been securing regular large prey items like buffalo and zebra.
- We had a sighting of the Kambula Pride, which is a breakaway of the Mhangeni Pride from many years back. The pride is 17 members strong, and they have been searching for the buffalo herds that now are feeding in the southern grasslands.
- The Plains Camp males have been providing great viewing this month and have been sighted many times on Singita, some of these sightings have been from the decks of Ebony and Boulders Lodge respectively.

Leopards

- At the start of the month the Nkuwa female leopard and Thamba male were mating, and again in the last week of the month. This is the first time these two have mated. She may mate with him numerous times before falling pregnant as this is to make certain he is the dominant male within her vicinity.
- Ntomi male is a regular feature in our sightings report as he ritually patrols along the Mobeni River and around Castleton Camp.
- We have had more sightings and signs of the Tiyisela female and her two cubs to the west of Ebony Lodge. Two factors influencing this are the cubs are now getting older and learning their mother's territory, and the Ravenscourt male pushing Thamba, who is their father, further east.
- In the north the Xinzele female was spooked by a pack of wild dogs as they went hunting in search of impala in the woodlands. She took refuge in a marula tree which made for phenomenal viewing.
- The Hlambela male has favoured the waterholes across the river on the hot summer afternoons. Often the hippos which are resident there are what draw our safaris vehicles to the area, and a leopard is the added bonus.

Cheetah

- This time of year, is crucial for mothers of cubs as the abundance of young herbivores can provide excellent hunting subjects for young ones starting to learn that essential survival skill. Although we are

yet to witness it happen thus far there is a strong possibility this has happened with the Makatini female cheetah and her three cubs. Up until recently they have been covering much of the south preying on wildebeest calves and impala, they have only lately moved south out of Singita.

- The male cheetah has been sighted patrolling his vast territory on a weekly basis.

African wild dogs

- We have had sightings of four different packs on Singita this month. This time of year, with so many impala lambs, there is plenty to go around and packs do not have to wander far to find a hunting opportunity.

Unusual sightings

- Like so much else, the rain has influenced the insect life which gets the attention of so many smaller creatures that have waited so long for this season. The first nuptial flight of the wet season has taken place which have filled the stomachs of birds, reptiles, mammals and so many more.
- On one particularly humid evening Luke, Israel and their guests saw six snake species on just one road! They were feeding on the many frogs that had come out to forage on the termite alates and everything else associated with this significant emergence.
- There have been a few sightings of honey badgers as they go searching for underground hives of mopane bees and the variety of grubs now waiting below the surface to metamorphosize to adult form.
- It's been a pleasure to see so many leopard tortoises feeding on wild flowers and fresh vegetation.

Bird list

- We have clocked the magic 300 with red-winged starling and common house martin!

Some Bush Stories follow, as well as the November Gallery of images.

The cheetah chase

Article by Andrew Taylor

This is a very special time of the year for me as things are starting to change all around us and we are starting to see the signs of summer setting in here at Singita Sabi Sand. We are finally starting to see rain falling and the trees and grass are starting to turn that beautiful emerald colour all around us. We get to see beautiful birds that have now returned from their winter migration and are now calling in chorus all around us, such as the woodland kingfisher and many more.

With all the above mentioned we are also starting to see a number of newborn animals at this time of the year and it's always a pleasure to witness an animal taking its first few steps or seeing the nurseries of young impala around every corner. With that being said there are also a number of predators that become extremely opportunistic at this time of year.

I would like to share a recent sighting with all of you that I was lucky enough to witness, with a lovely family that were on their first safari in South Africa.



The guests had just travelled in from one of our other properties, Singita Lebombo in the Kruger National Park, and had a multitude of incredible sightings there - but one animal that was still high on their list was seeing a cheetah. Not only was seeing a cheetah high on their list of animals but they had expressed a huge amount of interest in seeing any sort of predator taking part in a successful hunt.

We set out in search of this incredible predator early one morning and the excitement was absolutely unmatched as we were lucky enough to spot exactly what we were looking for in the distance up ahead of us, after about an hour of searching. The individual that we managed to find was a female that we have become acquainted with over the last year here at Singita Sabi Sand, as she has been raising a litter of three cubs in the area and we have been spoilt with incredible sightings of them. There was no sign of the cubs but Louis, my trusty tracker, and I were absolutely sure they must have been hiding somewhere close by. We noticed

instantly that she was stalking something up ahead of where she was. When we managed to get closer, we realised it was a lone blue wildebeest with a newborn calf that had separated from the others not too far away. Within what felt like just one minute the chase was on and she darted in the direction of the wildebeest. With her speed she managed to catch up in just a few moments and brought down the wildebeest calf in the presence of awestruck guests sitting behind me in the safari vehicle.

She then dragged the carcass away from the now panicked other wildebeest that had all noticed the commotion, and dragged it towards a nearby area with some shade and cover from prying eyes. After this she proceeded to let out a few very high-pitched calls that were aimed in the direction of where she had left the cubs. Within about a minute we noticed the three cubs running in our direction at full speed to get to where their mother was with the meal.



After an absolutely incredible sighting we then left the mother cheetah and her now very excited cubs to enjoy their breakfast and we headed off in the direction of a shady spot to recount our sighting with some delicious coffee in hand.

All the guests were blown away by the speed and agility of the cheetah as she closed in on her target, definitely a sighting that will not be forgotten very soon. Dreams, high hopes and wishes do come true!



One morning no later than 07:30, across the river opposite Ebony and Boulders Lodge, the Hlambela male leopard was walking along the road in a westerly direction calling and scent marking. This male leopard, most of the time, is found more in the north of Singita but now is starting to push further down south to challenge the Thamba male as the dominant male. Hlambela is a large male, and I think in about a year's time he may take over this portion of territory from Thamba, as Thamba is getting old.

When a male leopard challenges a dominant male for territory, it often leads to intense confrontations that can include vocal displays, scent marking, and physical fights. The dominant leopard defends his range fiercely, using strength and experience to assert dominance. If the challenger wins, it may claim the territory, while the defeated leopard is forced to retreat and search for a new range.

Yesterday afternoon Hlambela male was opposite 'the beach', a popular open area along the Sand River, up a tree enjoying the shade, and waiting for the opportunity to hunt anything walking by – he had the perfect ambush position.

Interesting times lie ahead with the leopard dynamics, and we'll be sure to report on the goings on in these journals.

A dream realized: gorilla trekking in Rwanda

Article by Quentin Swanevelder

Recently, I had the immense privilege of traveling to Rwanda with guests who have experienced many of the Singita properties. This journey was a dream come true, one I will forever treasure.

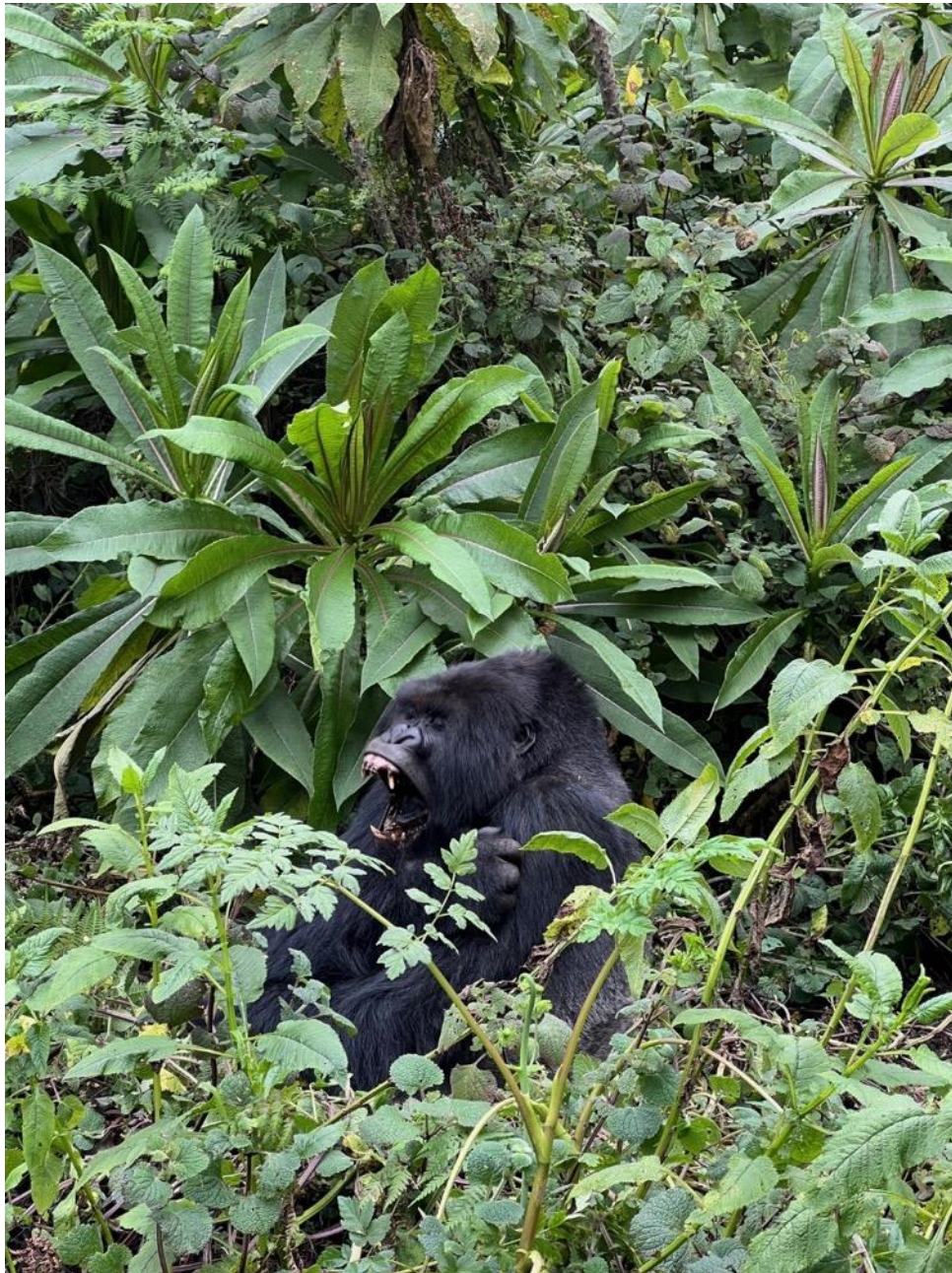
We landed in Kigali early in the morning and began our adventure with a fascinating tour of this vibrant and beautiful city. The energy of Kigali, its history, and its culture set the perfect tone for what lay ahead. By midday, we made our way to Singita Kwitonda Lodge, nestled on the edge of Volcanoes National Park. Upon arrival, we were warmly welcomed and briefed on the programme for the next morning: our highly anticipated gorilla trekking adventure.

The next day, we set off early to the park entrance to meet the guides and trackers who would lead us into the forest. The day was warm, and the hike proved challenging, but every step brought us closer to one of the most extraordinary wildlife encounters in the world. After about three hours of trekking, we received word from our guides that we were near. They gathered us to review the protocols for observing the gorillas—moments of anticipation and excitement coursed through our group.

Suddenly, we stepped into a clearing, and there they were. Nothing could have prepared me for the overwhelming awe of finally seeing these magnificent creatures after 23 years as a guide. The mountain gorillas moved with grace and strength, completely at ease in their natural environment. For an entire hour, we observed them - the silverbacks, the juveniles, the mothers with their infants. Each interaction an intimate glimpse into their world.



The experience was emotionally profound, a moment of connection with nature that left me humbled. All too soon, it was time to leave, and though the hike out of the forest was much shorter, it was accompanied by a simultaneously happy heavy heart. As we returned to the lodge, the conversation among our group was animated, everyone eager to relive and share the wonder of what we had just witnessed.



For me, as a guide, being part of an organization like Singita that contributes so much to the protection of Rwanda's mountain gorillas is deeply fulfilling. Witnessing these incredible animals and knowing that our presence directly supports their conservation fills me with gratitude.

This journey to Rwanda has been a reminder of the magic of the natural world and the vital importance of preserving it for future generations. The memories of this trek, of standing in the presence of these gentle giants, will stay with me forever.

November Gallery



It's that time of year again! Impala lambing season. Image by Jono Harper.



The Nkuwa female watching a lone wildebeest bull moments before her cover was blown by the large antelope. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.



The Mhangeni Pride reaping the spoils of a tough dry season for the herbivores. Image by Jono Harper.



A herd of waterbuck take refuge in Castleton Dam from the Othawa Pack. Image by Lucy Stoffberg.



A female cheetah doing her best to search for prey and predator, to keep her cubs alive.
Image by Lucy Stoffberg.



Another seasonal breeder on Singita, the blue wildebeest. Image by Jono Harper.



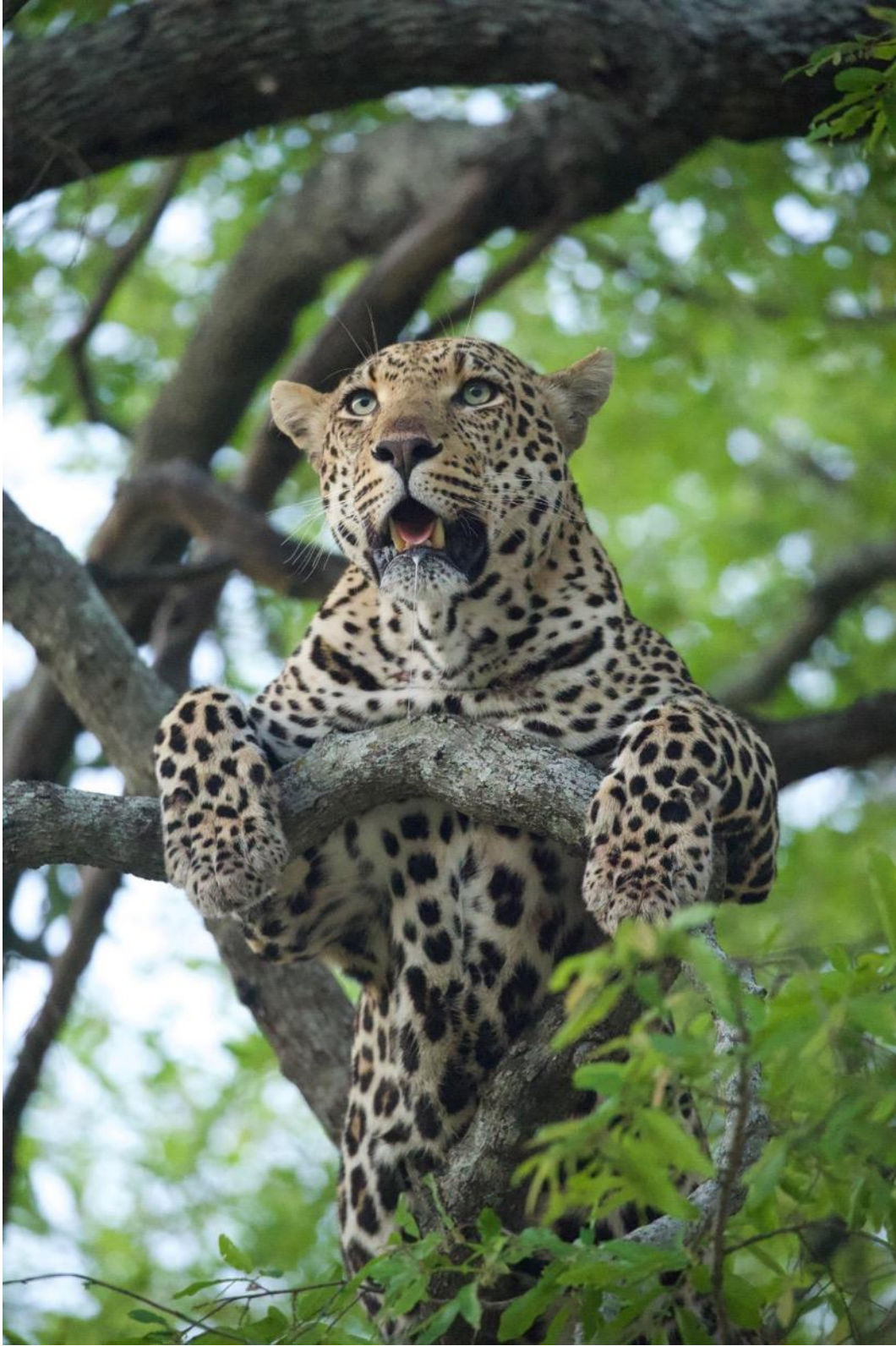
The sounds of summer, a woodland kingfisher, which hunts anything it's beak can grab! Image by Jono Harper.



Marc going through the social dynamics of a wild dog pack, not as easy as it may seem. Image by Matt Durell.



The Plains Camp male making a march back east through an area known as Serengeti clearings, with Ebony Lodge in the background. Image by Matt Durell.



It's been mouth-watering stuff this November! The Ntomi male leopard in the branches of an ebony tree.
Image by Matt Durell.



A herd of buffalo find their space at Giraffe Pan. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.



A lilac-breasted roller showing off its darker side as it puts a scorpion out of its misery before being eaten. Image by Matt Durell.