

Singita



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

Temperature

Average minimum: 21.3°C (70.3°F)

Average maximum: 29.4°C (84.9°F)

Minimum recorded: 17.0°C (62.6°F)

Maximum recorded: 35.0°C (95.0°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 144.7 mm

For the season to date: 783.15 mm

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 05:42

Sunset: 18:36

Daggers of lightning stab through the stormy sky, illuminating the rain-soaked bush for a heartbeat. The deep call of a lion's roar rumbles with supreme power and confidence, asserting governance and authority for all ears listening.

On the 21st February, four new lions walked onto our property – The N'waswitshaka lions. The sighting started when we located two of the six Mhangene lionesses at the far south-eastern waterhole in the reserve. As we

stopped the vehicle, it was clear that these lionesses were highly distressed, glancing back every few seconds and then stumbling forward in a panicked dash. Confused anxiety whirled around us like a thick smoky cloud only to be abruptly broken by the loud, unmistakable gut-wrenching roar of mature male lions. Fleeting paws ran past us and we continued to the source of the chaos. As we rounded the corner onto our main road, we were met by the four N'waswitshaka lions. Projecting a dominance and supremacy with every step, puzzle pieces began to fall together and the shock and fear resonating from the lionesses began to make sense. Could this be the dawn of a new era of lions at Singita Sabi Sand?

Here's a Sightings Snapshot for February:

Lions

- At the beginning of the month the Mhangene pride were comprised of six females, three cubs and the Othawa male. This changed on the morning of the 21st February with the arrival of the four N'waswitshaka lions. The Mhangene pride scattered, and the event left us with great concern regarding the wellbeing of the pride and cubs. In the week that followed, the pride slowly re-grouped, but with a chilling discovery... only one cub seems to have survived, and the Othawa male is limping. The four males have returned back to southern Sabi Sand, but will they be back?
- The Othawa sub-adults (one female and three males) were viewed a few times this month in the western parts of the property.
- The Styx and Nkuhuma coalition have been found throughout the north and central parts of the property, still nomadic and not marking a territory.

Elephants

- The elephants are plucking small marula fruit from the ground with the tips of their trunk and throwing them into their mouths. It's a wonderful month for the world's largest land mammal. A salad bowl of green grass, berries, fruit and leaves, mixed with waterholes around every corner, is an elephant's absolute haven.
- Many small herds of elephants have strolled through the reserve during February, enjoying nature's summer treats. We've also seen quite a number of solitary bulls roaming the thick, lush land.

Wild dogs



The Othawa pack (15 individuals in total) were seen briefly in the north and then in the centre of the reserve at the end of February. We've noticed that the Pungwe female has joined this pack and we hope to see more of them during next month, however at this time of year these animals tend to cover vast distances and to see them is an extra special event.

Leopards



- The Shangwa male leopard (pictured above, photographed by Nick Du Plessis) is often found sprawled in one of the marula trees in the west of our property. A beautiful young male identified by his rosy, pink nose, we enjoy viewing his curious and confident nature as he explores the terrain and practices his stalking.
- The Scotia female leopard has been seen almost every few days, mostly with her son, who is approaching 14 months. A very playful pair, we've watched them both fight, stalk and jump on each other in the tall wet grass. Time together will soon become less and less though, as this experienced mother knows it's time for her son to become increasingly independent, spending less and less time with her.
- Sightings of the Mobeni female leopard have been quite infrequent this month and this elusive leopard continues to remain within the central regions of our property.
- The Nyeleti male leopard patrols his territory after the rains. We've frequently seen and heard him moving close to the lodges and along the river. Approaching twelve this year, we wonder if his vast territory will be shifting to accommodate the younger bold individuals pushing through.

Cheetah

- This month we've been very fortunate to view several different male cheetahs as well as a female with two adolescents.

Bird List

- The bird list for February includes 18 new bird species, bringing our yearly total to 253 so far.
- Special bird species include: White-browed sparrow weaver and an African pygmy-kingfisher.



Our morning couldn't have started any better, our plan was to look for and follow up on any sign of leopards. We were a minute out of camp when Vusi spotted the Schotia female and her young male cub playfully interacting on the road. At this point knowing that Lady Luck was definitely on our side we decided to make the most of the sighting and attempt to stay with them as long as we could, without interfering.

To say it was an unbelievable sighting would be an understatement of note, with the two leopards giving us incredible interaction and amazing photographic opportunities. With countless stalks and play fighting along the road, all the while Schotia was busy with her territorial patrol into the west.

During this time another guide on drive located the Shangwa male with a hoisted carcass not far away from us and pretty much on our trajectory. It eventually got to a point where the vegetation was so thick, we couldn't follow our two any further without disturbing them, so we decided to leave and head to the Shangwa male in the hope the two sightings may merge. Unfortunately, during this time Shangwa had dropped and lost his carcass to a hyena and, with that, retreated to the shade in the drainage line.

The monkeys, noticing the brief movement in the open, went crazy doing their best as the neighbourhood watch to let everyone know there was danger in the area. After a while, and noticing the leopard was paying no attention to the monkeys, it all calmed down. We knew it was worth a bit of time and patience, so we got comfortable and sat it out. It wasn't long when the monkeys started alarming again and, with no movement from Shangwa, we knew there was a high chance of another leopard, no doubt Schotia, and the chance for a bit of interaction. After following up on the monkeys they led us straight to Schotia who was now alone and heading directly towards the young Shangwa male. I knew there would be some interaction but wasn't sure what would happen next!





It is very rare to witness two leopards fighting and generally fights between members of the same sex are the norm. Instinctively as a territorial leopard, Schotia very cautiously approached the young male. Shangwa, upon noticing her, tried his best to be as submissive as possible but Schotia wasn't having any of it (I believe in an attempt to push him away and in turn further away from her own young male.) Although very brief, a very intense scuffle ensued. There was a ball of fury as the two cats came together, made even more dramatic by the combination of sand, water and tails flying in every direction. There was a short standoff following the coming together, mainly instigated by the Schotia female who was salivating and growling at even the slightest of movements. There was no doubt about who was the "winner" with Schotia then forcibly pushing him out and further away from her own young male. This is such a rare sighting and what privilege to watch such incredible behaviour and interaction! (No serious injuries were noted during this intense altercation.)

Walking in the wild

Article by Andries Mohlala

The month we've had plenty of water coming from the skies - everywhere you go it's just seep lines and very lush green surroundings. We've been doing some walks instead of morning game drives while the temperatures are still reasonable, and everything is clear and crisp.

For me as the guide, guiding the walk, I must strive to see before we get seen, and to extract before interactions develop. The activity needs to appear safe, informative and peaceful, but my senses are all on high alert. You do not get to dictate what you encounter on a walk, but you can decide what to do with the situation you find yourself in.

For instance, on one out of the six days' walks we embarked on, we encountered a breeding herd of elephants which we managed to safely avoid, only to find ourselves rather close to a sleeping male leopard who ignored us completely! In backtracking away from the leopard, we encountered another herd of elephants, and this time we really needed our wits about us... First a very small elephant of about three months stepped out of the thickets, about five metres in front of us. I immediately knew mom was not far behind and I quickly got every walker doing a hard reverse while trying to get the attention of the elephants that were now clearly starting to show their displeasure at having aliens in their paradise. They were surprised and we were surprised, but we had the upper hand because we saw them first and we were already showing a defensive stance by shouting and tossing sticks in their general direction. They took-off but as our adrenalin sky-rocketed – and then later we laughed about it and made arrangements for the next morning's walk!

What does it mean to be well? What does it mean to be able to ground yourself? How could being on safari bring you back to nature? Back to your roots? Back to a place of 'being'?

There has never been such a time as now, where we have come to realise how fragile life is and how much we take this expanse of a world around us for granted. We rely on technology to make our lives simpler and yet all we have done is wrap ourselves up in a world of busyness! The essence of simplicity has become a craving yearned for by so many and yet it is so close - within our reach.



Breaking away from the safari culture of racing around for the big five has been something my tracker, Ruel, and I have been working on for some time now and in doing so we have realised the importance of bringing our guests back to a place of wonder, a place rooted in nature and one in which they can leave with a new perspective.



Wellness is something a lot of people may think of as simply doing yoga, playing with some crystals or eating salads every day. However, wellness here in the bush means so much more than that! Game drives are not only about chasing the larger animals, they are also a time to let go of the bustle, the noise and the worries. A time to take a big breath of much needed fresh air and to step into a world where things are simple and free.

Climbing off the vehicle is one of the first steps. Using the ancient art of tracking, we are able to set our feet on the ground and use our imaginations to understand how our wildlife go about their daily lives. There is something so primitive in following in the footsteps of an animal, allowing yourself to form an idea of what it is like to live in the wilderness and begin to recognise the skills used to find an animal on the ground.

Many of the trackers at Singita lived alongside wildlife and have grown to know the bush in a completely different way to many of us. This adds a unique experience to the safari when we are able to learn bushcraft from these wise humans who allow us to open our eyes to the ways Shangaan people survived living in nature. If you were left out in the bush for a few days, would you be able to survive?

Learning the uses of plant species both in food and medicine has brought about new creations and allowed us to be able to connect with nature. Picking wild spring onions to be used in a breakfast omelette, creating fever tea and Schotia nectar cordials for our guests to use in a sunset gin & tonic as well as tasting wild pomegranates, sour plums and other edible plants have all been a huge shift in the way we appreciate our natural world.

At the end of the day, being at Singita is not only about spending time with the magnificent creatures who roam this land, but also about being still, using your senses, breathing in fresh air and reminding yourself that life can be most exquisite in its simplicity.





The great flightless ostrich is the largest living bird species in the entire world. This bird was given the scientific name *Struthio camelus*, which refers to its long neck. The ostrich is native to Africa yet one may find them in zoos throughout the world.

The ostrich, though flightless, makes up on speed. Their large legs are able to kill a man and predators, and they have strong thighs. It straightens its neck for aerodynamics and opens its wings for balance as rudders/flaps.

Males can grow up to 2.75 m and weigh about 120 to 150 kg. The female is relatively smaller. The ostrich, as mentioned, is the largest and heaviest bird in the world. It spends more time in the savanna open grassland where it requires certain adaptations to survive.

It has great eyesight helping it see predators from far. It has large eyes and they also need protection; therefore, they have large eyelashes which protect their eyes from sandstorms. They have short wings which they do not use for flight but for balance and for courtship. The ostrich has a long neck which helps it to scan for potential predators.

Since they are flightless and rely on their speed, they cannot survive in heavily dense forest ecosystems. With their need to be able to see potential predators and be able to escape they need to stay in open

plains. The South African ostriches can be found in the western areas mostly, in the savanna and grasslands. Ostriches are omnivores, this means they eat both vegetation and meat.



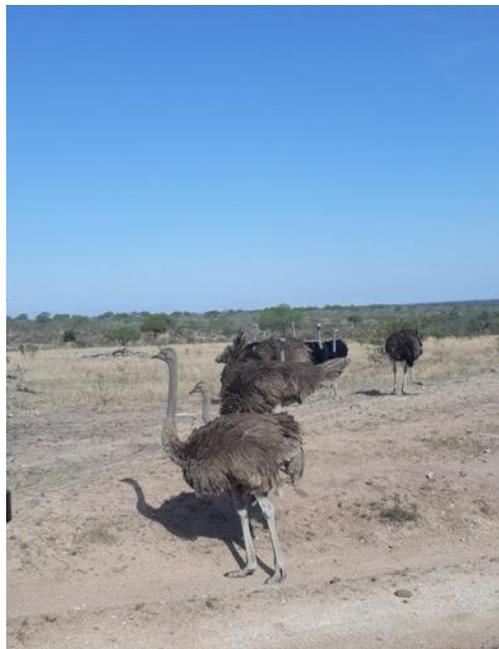
Ostriches love to eat roots, seeds and plant leaves, as well as locusts, snakes and lizards. They are known to eat sand and pebbles, and this helps with digestion by grinding food in the gizzards.

Ostriches are normally found in flocks of around ten birds. These flocks are typically led by an alpha male, and he mates with the dominant female of the group. We can find males which free roam and mate with lesser hens. When laying their eggs, the lesser hens will place their eggs in the dominant hen's nest.

Ostriches are listed as "Least Concern" though their numbers are decreasing.

There is a distinctive difference between male and female ostriches. Males have black feathers with white endings which they use to impress females during courtship.

The difference in colour helps in incubation of their massive eggs as they share the workload - with their dark colour the males sit on the eggs at night while the females, and the females with the lighter feathers incubate during the day while the male feeds.



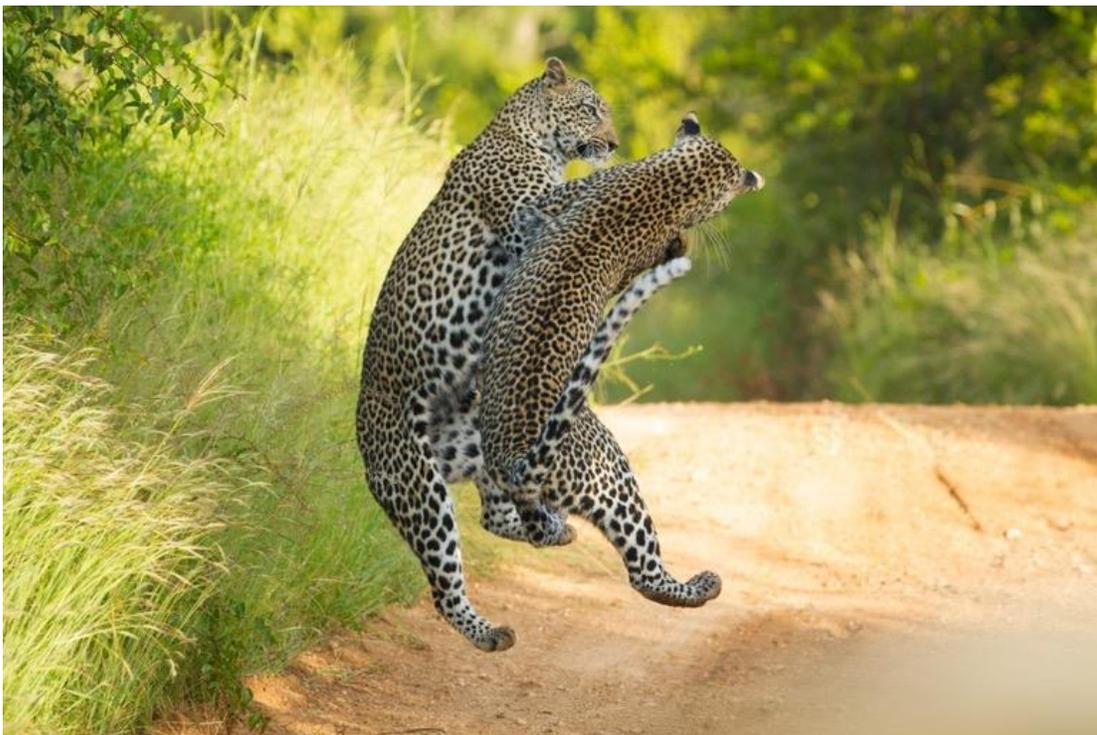
Quite recently we were blessed with a surprise guest arriving on the property - a single mature female ostrich. It was a spectacular sight! There were many questions we tried to find answers to, as to where this hen was from and where her flock was.

Just as she came, she left, without a trace, only to again return but this time with a mature male ostrich, a possible mate. After some time both individuals disappeared again, and the last return was of them and six chicks. From a single visitor, we are now enjoying a number of ostrich sightings thanks to our brave exploring hen!

Gallery for February



Yellow-billed oxpeckers landing on the Singita Game Viewer whilst viewing a large herd of buffalo -
Photographed by Quentin Swanevelder



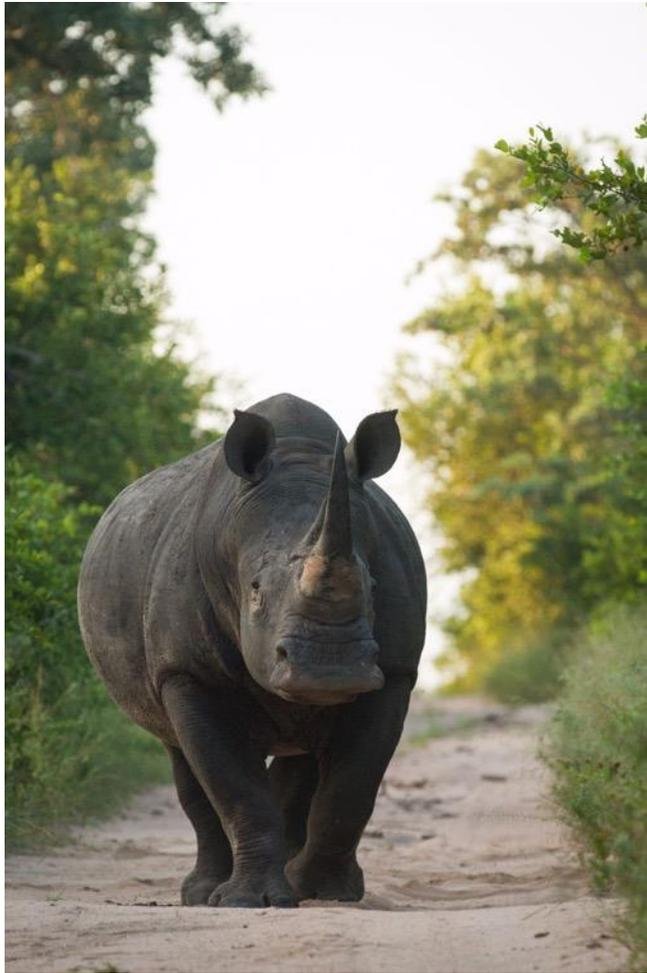
Leopard tango...



Dazzled by a zebra in the grass - Photographed by Nick Du Plessis



Black-bellied bustard vocalizing - Photographed by Nick Du Plessis



White rhino getting up, photographed by Nick Du Plessis.