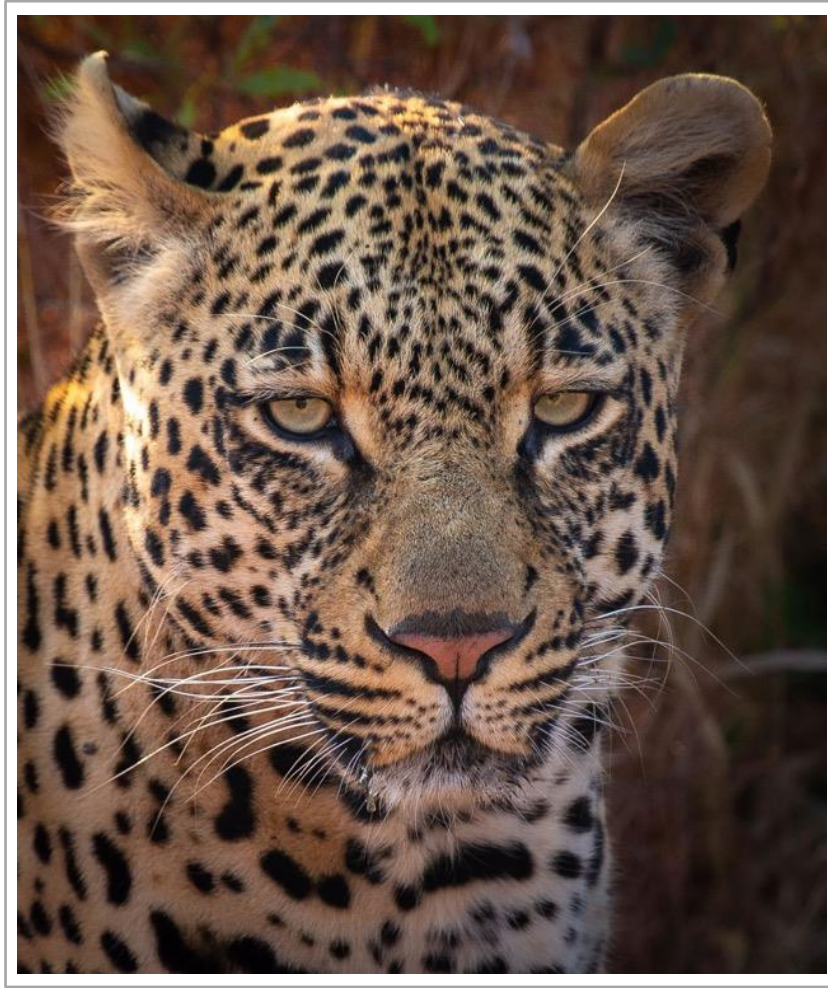


Singita



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

Temperature

Average minimum: 11.3°C (52.34°F)

Average maximum: 25.5°C (77.9°F)

Minimum recorded: 6.0°C (42.8°F)

Maximum recorded: 32.0°C (89.6°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 2mm

For the season to date: 874.95mm

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 06:38

Sunset: 17:23

Close your eyes and engage your senses. Allow the waves of sound to fill your ears, the crisp cool breeze to tingle your skin and the sweet winter sunrays to illuminate your soul. Each morning the sun pulls back her starry blanket, revealing a glassy ice-blue sky. Her rays are welcomed by the fork-tailed drongos and lilac-breasted rollers, who perch resolutely on well-lit branches. Tree squirrels huddle together in a bundle of golden

fur, lapping up the morning heater before they too start their day. Muddles of tall red grass and yellow thatching blanket the ground, attracting numerous elephants as they indulge in the nourishing winter cuisine.

Here's a Sightings Snapshot for July:

Lions

- The Styx and Nkhumama males have been given the name Nwalungu, meaning north/northern as they both originally come from the northern parts of the Sabi Sand reserve. This coalition have been heard a lot this month, vocalising throughout the property.
- Tracks for the Mhangeni pride weave around our southern grasslands. The pride composition has been sighted as: two younger cubs, one sub-adult female and six older lionesses, however with the impressive roars of the Nwalungu males, it's no surprise that viewings of this pride have been few and far between. Keeping their cubs safe from the threat of a new 'pride take-over', we've tracked their movements stretching from the far east to the far western areas. Interesting times lie ahead, with the new coalition starting to establish themselves and the prospect of them joining up with the Mhangeni pride...
- The two Plains Camp males have been seen in the north this month, however not as frequently as last month.

Elephants

- A front-line performance greets us as we watch these huge mammals enjoy a mid-morning drink in the Sand River. Watching from the lodge decking we view many different herds emerge at the water's edge, and delight in their movements as they excitedly dip their trunks into the cool flowing stream. Several herds, differing in numbers, accumulate to drink throughout the day. Some stay to feed on the reeds and riverine vegetation, whilst others continue on their venture into the winter bushveld.
- This month we've been very privileged to enjoy countless elephant sightings. Breeding herds merge at water reserves, large bulls joining them from time to time.

Wild dogs

- Close to our south-eastern grasslands lies a very special area where a pack of wild dogs have settled up in a den site. Occupying an abandoned termite mound, we have been honoured with some extremely special viewing, watching as the wild dog pups emerge from their sanctuary. At first these tiny creatures resemble bear cubs, being completely black and as time goes on, they lose this fur, revealing the gold and white individual paintings of their fur. An exciting time to watch their progress!

Leopards

- One of the most exciting sightings this month was with the Shangwa male leopard. One crisp misty morning, one of our guides headed towards the river, where she and her tracker located this male leopard. At first only a tail hanging from a large ebony tree and a spotted hyena at the base. After a few moments of establishing they came to realise that this young male had killed a fully grown nyala ewe but was unable to hoist this heavy carcass. Unfortunately for him, it seemed as though he'd lost this prize to a conniving confident clan member, although she too wasn't strong enough to drag this gift away. An exciting sighting to view, watching the determined leopard try to steal his meal away from the greedy hyena, and being chased away. After several attempts, he managed to tear away part of the prize, racing up the ebony tree once again to get away from the hyena's strong jaws. A relentless battle of wills that carried on for well over an hour, finally ending with an extremely full-bellied hyena dragging the remaining parts of the carcass away to a bush. The Shangwa male leopard managed to eat a small part of the kill and sniffed around for any remaining elements before retiring to a nearby thicket only to ponder on his escapades and clean his paws.
- We haven't seen too much of the Kangelma male leopard this month, however his movements have been mostly around the lodges and occupying areas when we have seen him.

- The Misava male was seen east of the lodges, but otherwise this more elusive male remains less viewed.
- The Hosana male had an interesting encounter with the Flat Rock male leopard. Both dominant males were in the same area, north of the Sand River within a few meters of each other at a dam, however both individuals did not see each other. It would be an interesting encounter to view if they did lock eyes and we wonder if there would be some hostility in their interaction.
- The Thamba male leopard has been seen further and further north and east of his territory, pushing into Nyeleti male leopard territory more and more. On one occasion, the Thamba male was seen close to July dam (a dam well within Nyeleti's area). Scent marking and wandering the area, the Thamba male came across the Nyeleti male leopard and began to chase him. No physical fight happened on this occasion, however some very hostile vocalisation and communication was seen between both individuals. The Thamba male ended up chasing the Nyeleti male far west where we lost visual of both individuals.
- The Scotia female has been seen in her usual territories and at the beginning of the month as had an impala ram kill close to our Singita airport terminal building. The kill however was stolen by a spotted hyena.

Cheetah

- A male cheetah has been seen several times this month and on a separate occasion a young female has also been sighted, never staying too long in one particular place.

Bird List

The bird list for July includes four new bird species, bringing our yearly total to 283 so far. Special bird species include: Orange-breasted waxbill.

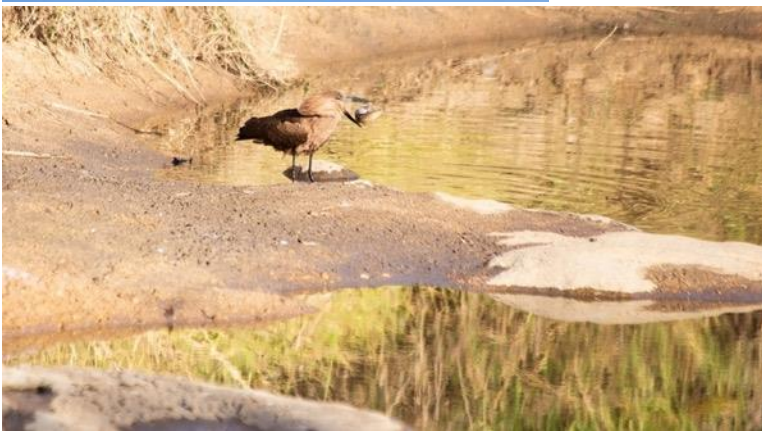
The African winter certainly comes with its hardships for many as water diminishes and greens turn to dull browns. For some, however, the opportunity is far greater than that of the summer months.



As waterways shrink, so the life that lurks within it are limited to where they can find food and shelter. For those birds that feed on fish, frogs and molluscs this is the time of plenty. Pools are separated from flowing channels creating ideal hunting traps as fish have nowhere to go and eventually are picked off by a variety of birds, from kingfishers, storks, herons and in this case hammerkops.



On this particular morning it was a group of five hammerkops that seemed to have lucked out by having a few still standing pools mostly to themselves. Pied kingfishers hovered above picking off mostly smaller fish, while hammerkops waded the shallows for anything that moved.



Hammerkops can be found somewhere close to the bottom of the pecking order when among herons, storks and even some egrets, but not today, the spoils were theirs! One bird grabbed my attention immediately as it flew from rock to rock with intent to find a meal. Suddenly he dashed to the bank and made a desperate lunge into the shallows. Success!

The hammerkop had done rather well for himself by securing a fairly large catfish in proportion to its body.

Now what?

Next was to kill it. The beak of the hammerkop is not designed for a swift death but rather more versatility in

its diet. They kill a fish by knocking it on a surface of a hard object like a rock or log.

The bird had to toss the fish in its beak to gain better grip and repeatedly use the rock as its killing aid.



The catfish had plenty of fight in it but the determination of the hungry hammerkop was too much for the bottom feeder. Eventually the bird swallowed the large meal. A days fishing dubbed a success.

Tracking the Nwalungu males

Article by Damin Dallas

Tracking is an incredible art form that requires a lot of knowledge and skill, skills that are usually passed on from generation to generation. This is why the incredible trackers at Singita are able to spot fractions of tracks like that of a toe of a leopard or predict where an animal will have moved to, based on a parted grass pathway. For many guides this is not a skill that was developed from a young age and is usually only practiced when qualified and working in the field. That being said, it is a skill that can be taught and through continuous learning and practice, many can become relatively good at the art of tracking.



A few mornings ago, a tracker and a small group of guides got together and we decided to put our tracking skills to the test. It was an extremely cool and crisp morning, probably one of the coldest mornings yet this year. We headed out before sunrise, armed with jackets, beanies, gloves and hot take-away mugs of coffee. The goal for the morning? To head out and find fresh tracks of one of the “Big 5” species and trail these tracks as a group until the animal is found.

We made our way into the western sections, having heard lions roaring in this area a few hours earlier, we knew this would be a great place to start our search. It wasn't long before we located tracks for two male lions along one of the river loops and after a brief inspection, we decided these would be the tracks we follow.

The tracks were fresh, the animals having walked through the area in the last hour and so we all hopped off the vehicle and began trailing. We would take turns leading the trail, following any tracks or signs left by the male lions. There is always a level of excitement when tracking, you never know when you will encounter the animal you're following, if you're even lucky to find it in the first place. With the tracks being as fresh as they were we were caught in two thought processes. We were either expecting to find them relatively quickly or the tracking exercise would turn into a very long one. Being male lions, they very well could've moved over a large distance, even within an hour and we soon started realizing this was the case. We would each track for a few hundred metres and then swap out with a guide behind us, each putting our knowledge and skills to the test. There would be no help from the others unless you specifically asked for it if the trail was lost and you were struggling to find tracks again. This is how we stayed on their trail as we crossed roads, moved through thick vegetation and followed the tracks to a dam where we could see where the males stopped for a drink. The trail was lost a few times but was very quickly found again through the collective effort of the team. We passed by elephants and even had to sneak around a very sleepy hippo bull in one of the seasonal drainage lines as we continued on with our mission. It was now five hours into the tracking and the day had warmed up a fair amount, we approached a very large termite mound with a jackalberry tree growing out the top of it. We wanted to climb the termite mound to get a better vantage point to scan the surrounding area but the obvious tawny colour of a lion caught our attention. There they were! Sleeping in the shade of the very tree we were going to stand under.

We moved to another termite mound to get a better look and we could now see the two Nwalungu male lions resting. One of the males lifted his head and took notice of us and we knew it was time to move off. After five hours of walking almost six kilometres through Singita Sabi Sand we had completed our mission! An incredible, fun and valuable team effort had paid off and we returned later that evening to watch as these males arose from their sleep and roared as the day drew to a close.

Kudu kill

Article by Coleman Mnisi



It was the last morning game drive for our guests staying at Ebony Lodge and we drove south looking for a cheetah, but failed. We decided to stop for morning coffee and after that the guests said they'd like to be back at the lodge around 10h30 as to have enough time to pack their bags. I asked them if they'd like to go past a small pride of lions that had been found, and they replied, "Of course! We can go to say goodbye!" So we went there and found the three young males and one young female all resting, doing nothing.

We left them sleeping and headed back to the lodge. On the way, on our left side of the road, tracker Reazert Mthabini said, "Stop - lion!" It was an adult lioness and she was looking at a group of impala and kudus behind

us. She got up and walked towards these animals. I checked with my guests if they still wanted to go back or to wait and see if something happens? Everyone said they'd we'd like to stay. I decided to give the hunting lioness some space as to not interfere or influence the hunt in any way. She got into the perfect ambush position from behind a termite mound.

The kudu unfortunately had no chance as she ran like lightning, and in the blink of an eye she jumped on his back and made the kill! We just saw dust! It was an incredible moment for us, even Reazert and I. It was so special to see this in front of us, in daylight, as lion usually hunt mostly at night. But when the opportunity comes, they will take it! It was around 11h30 in the morning when she caught the kudu.

The guests did some fast packing with their adrenalin still pounding when we got back to the lodge!

A safari tracking Hosana

Article by Paul Josop

Working in the north with the tracking team we located the Hosana male leopard feeding on a year-old impala lamb, perfectly hoisted in a marula tree. My fingers were crossed that he would not finish off his carcass and would remain in the area until the arrival of our in transit guests who were travelling with private guide, Tristan Dicks. They were desperately wanting to connect with the famed, now grown-up feline that they had been following on Wild Earth (live televised safari programme) as a cub!

On the morning of our guests' arrival, I heard over the radio that Hosana had scooped his kill earlier in the morning, descended the marula tree and was moving in a south westerly direction into an area where it was unlikely to follow him, let alone find him! As soon as the guests had settled into the lodge we headed out into the field in search of our target.

At his last position, his tracks confirmed that he had moved into the area we dreaded, and we could not follow up on him any further!

For the next four safari drives we searched the entirety of our northern traversing area known as Othawa, without finding Hosana. We checked all his favourite waterholes, roads where he patrols and territories of female leopards that he might have joined. Our search was not completely in vain, because we managed to find tracks of a female leopard who we believed belonged to the Nkangala female, and found a leopard cub close to Mzembe Dam, where I have seen Hosana on many occasions. With much discussion around mating, time of pregnancy and the size of the cub, we concluded that Hosana was now a father as we had seen him mating with the Nkangala female on two different occasions and that she was the only known dominant female in the area that overlaps within his territory.

On the morning of our fifth safari and driving the same roads we were confident that the time had come for Hosana to leave us a fresh sign and that our luck would turn... We found fresh tracks of a male leopard and fresher tracks of a female in the same area. Emmanuel was on foot tracking, Tristan was on the tracking seat and the guests and I were in the vehicle checking the roads where Hosana could have walked. After about two hours of searching thick vegetated blocks and driving many roads with Emmanuel now back on the vehicle, we found fresher tracks again of a male leopard and this time I joined Emmanuel on foot trying to find Hosana. By this time, the sun was a lot higher in the sky and we reckoned that the "The Little Chief" was lying down somewhere next to a waterhole. On route back to camp we checked one last waterhole before turning south to make our way to the Sand River. There he was, lying in the shade of a small guarri bush next to a large waterhole! On our approach his head left the ground for a few seconds to watch us and then he lay down again.



We sat with him admiring his coat, disposition, ability to move through the heat of the day when most large cats are resting, and were just ecstatic to have found him! After about ten minutes he yawned a few times and then got up and started moving in an easterly direction. Looping around onto the road we found him again as he popped out on the road off a game path and then he decided to make his way into a thick area. He went into hunting mode, stalking what we believed to be a grey duiker. Staying put for a few minutes he then shot off ahead of us chasing his prey but was unsuccessful in catching it! He then made his way to another waterhole where he had a drink and then lay down for another moment before running around the waterhole to what we think was a warthog coming for a drink.



With no success he came back to the waterhole, laid down in some shade where we could join him and watched him sleeping. By this time, it was midday and his body language suggested that he would not be lying down for too long. He got up after about twenty minutes and progressed through thickets of bushwillows, clusterleaf and black monkey orange trees that just became denser and denser as we tried to keep up with him!

Satisfied by a successful mission, we decided to leave “The Little Chief” to his antics and abandoned the task of following him through an exceedingly difficult area.

Hyena or wild dog?

Article by Andries Mohala

In the month of June, temperatures can be bitter, especially in the early mornings. We try to leave the lodges as early as possible to try and catch some early morning hunting activities or get tracks while they are fresh and easy to follow up on. It is easy to see the tracks before the sun is too bright. Morning drives also offer a long daylight period which allows ample opportunity to track without fear of losing light and visibility.

On this particular morning we just had a crazy plan, which was to try and get as many sightings as possible because it was our last drive with the guests we had before they departed later in the day. After twenty minutes of driving around it became clear that the plan of working without a plan was not going to be easy, but we stuck with the plan of working without a plan anyway...

Then a plan was presented to us in a form of a spotted hyena that came past us at full speed, heading in a south-easterly direction away from Castleton Dam. We pursued! These guys are the best at locating other predators and start challenging them for their hard-earned kills, which is why I sometimes refer to hyenas as the taxmen of the bush. We could not keep up with the animal, so we did the next best thing which was to switch off and listen.

Then we heard it! It sounded like hyenas fighting with wild dogs, which is quite common, what is not common though is a wild dog sighting, so off we went into the African woodland savanna towards the general direction of the commotion. Indeed, wild dogs were present and indeed the hyenas had stolen a whole impala ram which was being ripped apart messily by these scavengers, while wild dogs were just milling around trying to avoid any unnecessary interaction with the hyenas.

In the feeding frenzy you could clearly see that its everyone for their stomach and no mercy is shown. The hyenas were covered in blood and they seemed to want more even though their bellies did not look like they had any more space to spare.

It was an exciting morning, and I felt we really did see everything as we followed the wild dogs that were looking to try and make another kill. We watched them fail a couple of times. All the impalas in the area looked like they needed counselling after surviving wave after wave of these animals looking to get food for the morning. All I could say was, "Good luck impalas!" as we left the sighting to try for other animals.

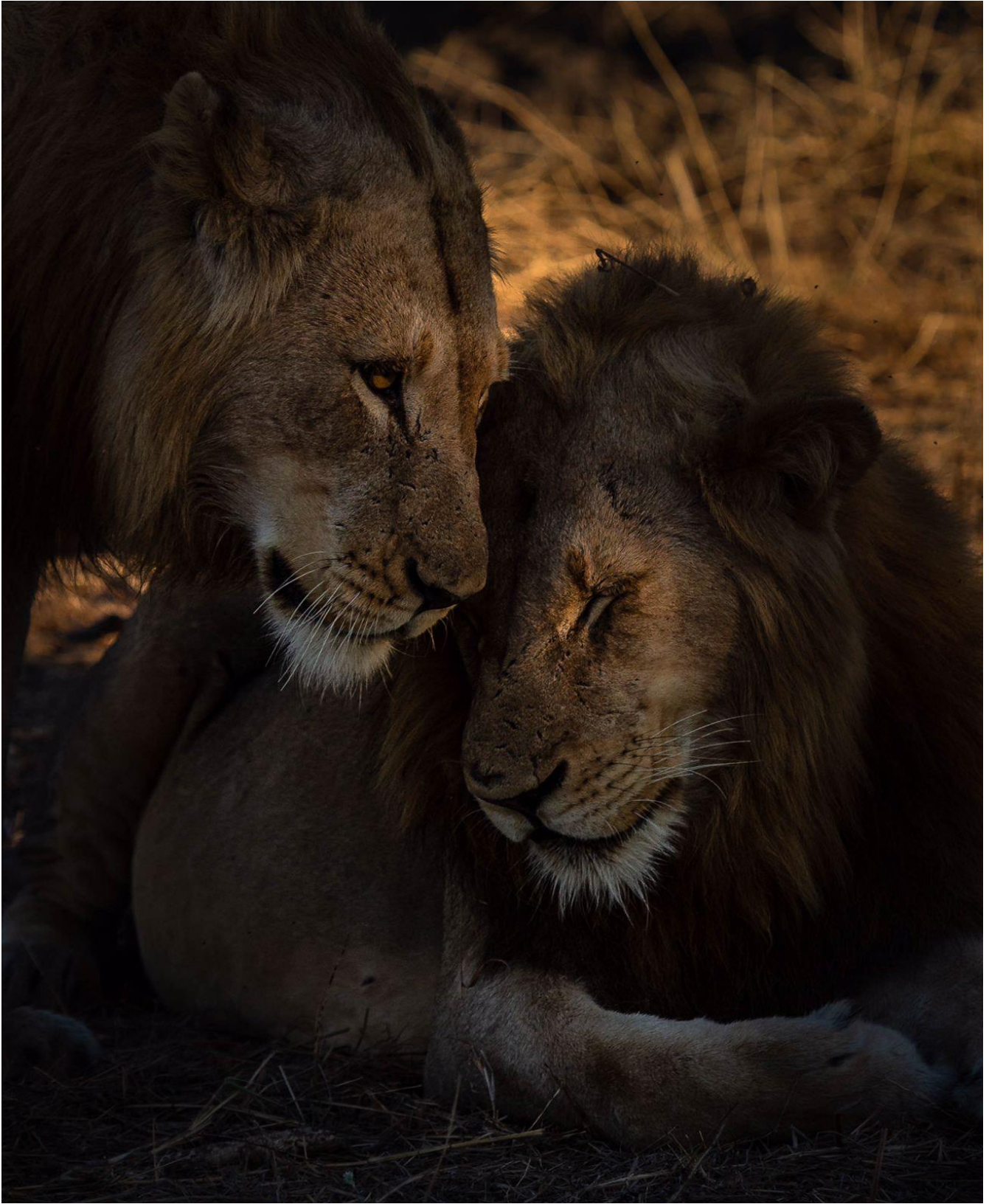
Gallery for July



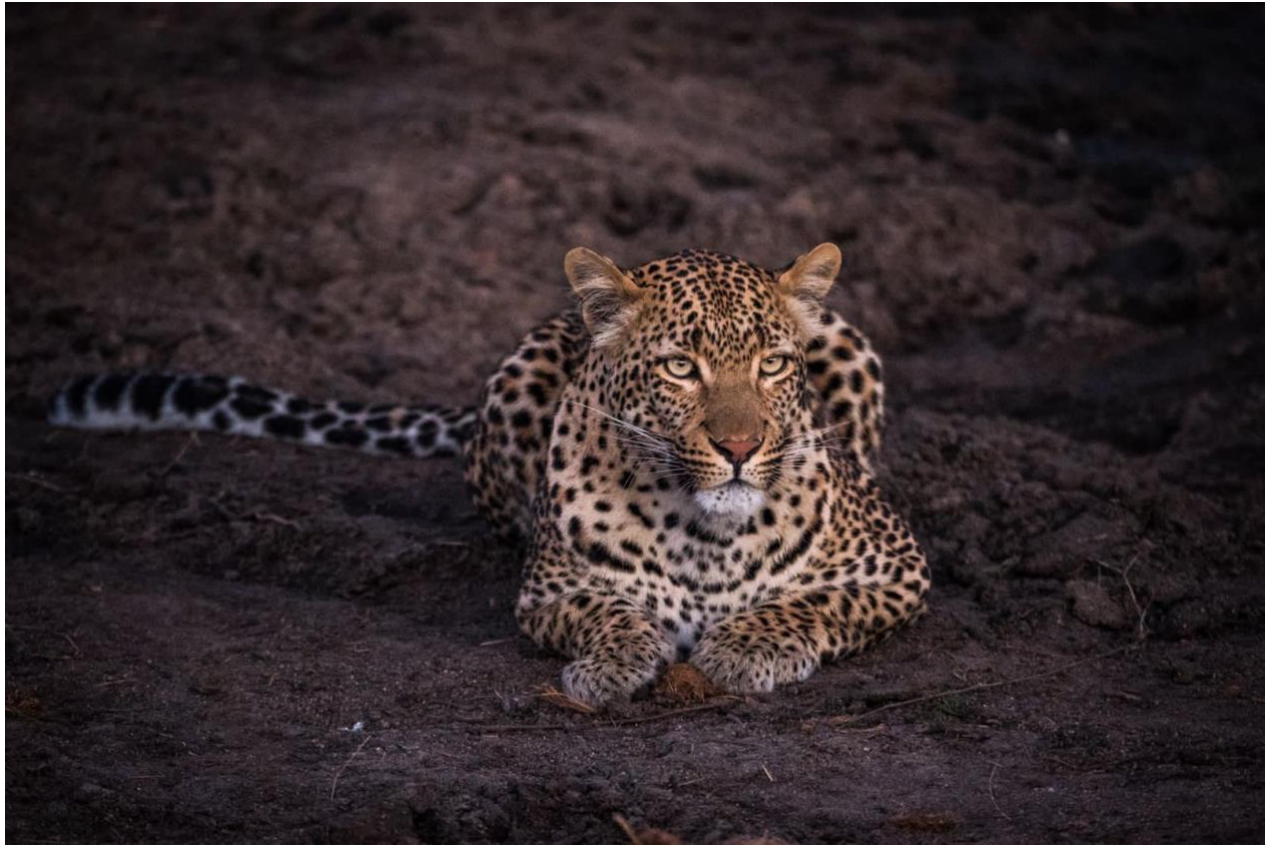
Painted wolves - image by Gareth Poole



Dusty elephant – image by Nick Du Plessis



Nwalungu male lions – image by Marc Bowes-Taylor



Nkuwa female leopard – image by Gareth Poole



Cape clawless otters – image by Gareth Poole



Cheetah at sunset – image by Nick Du Plessis