

# Singita



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

**Temperature**

Average minimum: 17.4°C (63.32°F)  
Average maximum: 28.3°C (82.94°F)  
Minimum recorded: 12.0°C (53.60°F)  
Maximum recorded: 38.0°C (100.40°F)

**Rainfall Recorded**

For the month: 51 mm  
Season to date: 752 mm

**Sunrise & Sunset**

Sunrise: 05:20  
Sunset: 17:59

This month the landscape is a striking canvas of colour and wildlife activity. Lush greenery and delicate wildflowers adorn the scenery, creating a picturesque backdrop for our safari adventures. The reserve is not only a haven for wildlife but also boasts a rich diversity of plant life and the return of the summer birds at this time of year. There's a captivating synergy in October - the vibrant wildflowers add an extra layer of colour to the landscape, and provide the most perfect setting to spend large chunks of the day looking for wildlife, making each game drive a visual feast for the senses.

A wildlife sightings snapshot follows:

## Lions

- The journey of the Mhangene Pride has been a rollercoaster, marked by occasional challenges, but the exhilarating highs far outweigh the tough moments. There were days when the lionesses appeared gaunt and weary, but their determination shone as they successfully hunted under the cover of a moonless, gusty night. A heart-warming highlight was the long-awaited reunion of two cubs, absent from sight for nearly a week, with their life supporting pride.
- Down in the southern reaches, nomadic male lions hailing from the Talamati Pride have graced us with their majestic presence. What truly intrigues is the newfound alliance formed as the Nkuhuma male joined forces with these wandering males, marking the third instance of such cooperation with unrelated pride members.
- In the northern wilderness, the breakaway Nkuhuma Pride, comprising a lioness and her young male and female offspring, has demonstrated resilience. They've been spotted gallantly prowling the landscape around Boulders Lodge, a captivating sight during our safaris.

## Leopards

- The Nkuwa female and her two cubs have graced us with their elusive presence, breaking their prolonged absence as they were spotted near an impala kill in the picturesque setting of the Ximobanyana drainage along Treehouse Road. This month, her sightings have surged, indicating a shift in her territorial core to the west.
- In the western part of the reserve, a territorial battle unfolds between the Tisela female and Schotia female. Presently, the winds seem to favour the youthful Tisela female, with Schotia's absence from our sights extending to two weeks. While it may be premature to write off Schotia's claim, her condition is a concern, raising the question of whether it's time to pass the torch to the next generation.
- In the central and southern regions, the Mobeni female continues to exude vitality, with many promising years ahead. Meanwhile, her daughter, the Ximobanyana female, has become a cherished sight, comfortably adapting to the presence of our safari vehicles.

## Cheetahs

- A male cheetah in the south has been on an epic odyssey, covering vast expanses of land, ranging from the Sand River's northern banks to the remote western corners of the Sabi Sand Nature Reserve.
- On one awe-inspiring evening, we shadowed him in the soft glow of sunset, as he stealthily sought hunting opportunities in the diminishing light. However, the tables turned as a wildebeest herd spotted him, boldly confronting and driving the cheetah from his resting grounds. It was a breathtaking spectacle, witnessing the predator becoming the prey.

## Wild Dogs

- The Othawa Pack has achieved a remarkable feat by successfully nurturing 13 energetic pups to this stage, an extraordinary accomplishment amidst the heightened presence of predators on the reserve. As these young pups become more mobile, we eagerly anticipate their increased activity and the chance to witness their playful adventures.

## Elephants

- With the arrival of substantial rains this month, the grasslands have burst into life, casting a magnetic spell that draws numerous breeding herds of elephants. These newfound lush pastures have transformed once dusty patches into well-trodden mud baths, providing unforgettable moments for us to cherish. It won't be long before the eastern Kruger becomes a magnetic pull for a multitude of elephants, beckoned by its sweet veld grasslands.

## Buffalos

- Buffaloes have been an enduring spectacle this month, with herds gracing both the northern and southern regions. Observing the larger, battle-scarred bulls along the banks of the Sand River reminds us of the harsh and unforgiving reality these bovines face. As the rainy season unfolds, competition among herd members intensifies, shedding light on the demanding nature of their lives.

## Bird List

- The bird list for October includes six new species, bringing our yearly total to 273.
- Specials this month includes an immature crowned eagle, a pair of crowned hornbills, a female mocking cliff chat and a yellow-bellied greenbul.

**Some bush reflections follow, as well as the October Gallery.**

### Just when you think you have seen it all...

Article by Coleman Mnisi

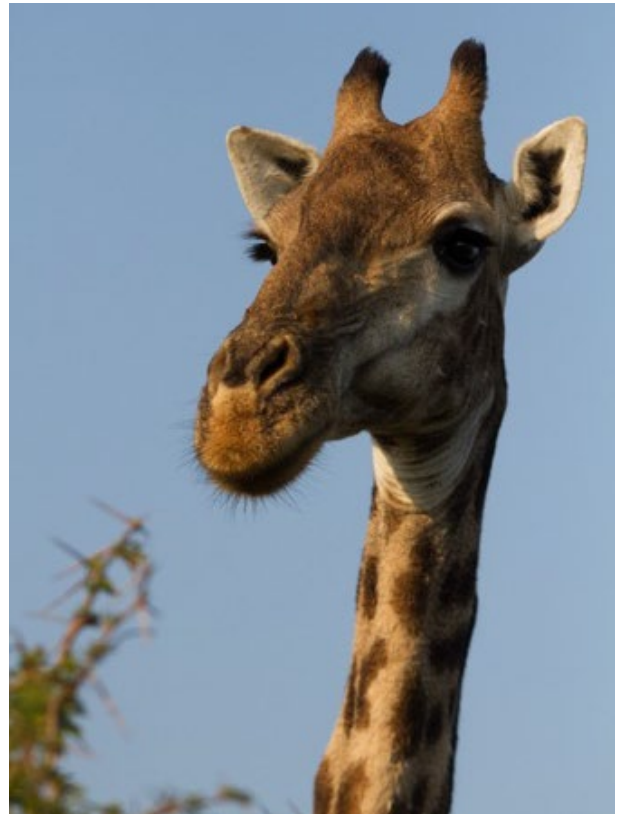
In the afternoon, during our game drive, we headed south along the southern end of the airstrip to follow up on a male leopard sighting reported earlier in the day. As we passed by Jim's Dam we spotted a lone female giraffe in the open clearing. She was in the midst of gracefully bending down to the ground. It piqued my curiosity, and I couldn't help but wonder what she was munching on.

Our pursuit of the elusive leopard came to a temporary halt as we parked to observe this unusual behaviour. I speculated that she might be trying to pick up an old bone, a common giraffe behaviour used to extract calcium and phosphorus from the remains of dead animals. But to my surprise, this was not the case.

I turned to Peter, our seasoned tracker, and inquired, "Do you think she's grazing on grass?" His response was a confirming nod, and I couldn't believe my eyes. Everything I've ever read or seen indicates that giraffes are browsers that feed on the leaves, flowers, fruits and shoots of woody plants.

Driven by sheer fascination, I decided to step out of the vehicle and cautiously approach the giraffe. What I discovered left me in awe; she was indeed nibbling on grass. It was my first time witnessing a giraffe grazing, and even today, it's a memory that's hard to believe.

This experience taught me a valuable lesson. Not everything can be found in books or learned from human knowledge. Sometimes, we need to turn to the animals and observe their unique behaviours, as they often hold secrets and wisdom that can't be found elsewhere. They do things in their own time and in their own way, reminding us of the beauty and complexity of the natural world.



It was in the fleeting embrace of the late afternoon, that marked the beginning of our truly unforgettable experience. The southern plains of Singita, bathed in golden sunlight, resonated with songs of distant birds carried by the wind, each chirp and trill a testament to nature's undying rhythm.

Lost in the rhythm, lost in the resonance, our journey shifted with the first sign of tracks. Not just any tracks, but the unmistakably large footprints of the Mhangeni lioness, distinctive and as broad as those of a sub-adult male lion. These tracks beckoned, urging us deeper into the mysteries of the African bushveld.



Big paws of a young Mhangeni cub. Image by Jenny Hishin

The Mhangeni Pride, with their ten playful cubs, commands a presence that instils itself deep within the observer. Each member is a symbol of the raw, untamed spirit of the wilderness. However, that day, the tracks indicated intent rather than playfulness.

As the sun continued its slow descent, we ventured south, enveloped by the vast bushveld. The rangers worked together, combining our insights to understand the story the sands revealed beneath our feet. Then, a clue: the alarming sight of a lioness, fur stained with fresh blood, her determined pace taking her towards the Mobeni River. The sharp yet languid presence of hooded vultures overhead hinted at a fresh kill. And soon, the low, rumbling growls of a feast reached our ears, intermingled with the distant contact calls of separated pride members.

Our vehicles moved cautiously, one at a time, as we navigated the rugged terrain. We could glimpse tails flicking, the rustling of bodies, and the sharp tug-of-war over the spoils of nature's cycle: a zebra, its fate sealed by the fierce prowess of the Mhangeni Pride. The scene was as raw as it was beautiful. The ferocity of survival, the clamour of feeding, and the undercurrent of tension as the lions vied for their share – every growl, every snarl, was a testament to the cycle of life in the African bushveld.

It was a rare privilege, a glimpse into the heart of Africa's rhythm – a day that began with the simple tracing of tracks and culminated in witnessing the age-old drama of predator and prey. The untamed heartland of Singita shared a tale with us, a tale unforgettable, a tale unpredictable, a tale of nature's dance.

Spring is a magical season in the Sabi Sand Nature Reserve, located in the heart of the Lowveld in South Africa. As the winter chill gives way to warmer temperatures, this pristine wilderness awakens with vibrant displays of flora and fauna. Among the many natural wonders that grace the landscape during this time, the flowering of tree wisterias, weeping boer-beans, and bushveld gardenias and many more blooming species takes centre stage, painting the reserve with an enchanting palette of colours and fragrances.



Tree wisterias: Purple cascades of beauty

One of the first signs that spring has arrived in Sabi Sand is the blossoming of tree wisterias (*Bolusanthus speciosus*). These trees, with their striking purple blooms, create a breath-taking spectacle against the backdrop of the African savanna. The flowers hang in pendulous clusters, resembling cascades of lavender-hued elegance. As they sway gently in the breeze, they provide a vital source of nectar for bees, butterflies, and other pollinators, contributing to the delicate balance of the ecosystem.

The weeping boer-bean (*Schotia brachypetala*) is another star of the Sabi Sand springtime. These trees, adorned with glossy green leaves, produce clusters of brilliant crimson flowers that resemble droplets of blood. The sight of weeping boer-beans in full bloom is not only a visual delight but also a sensory treat. Their sweet nectar attracts a myriad of bird species, including sunbirds and hornbills, making them a hub of avian activity and an essential part of the reserve's biodiversity.

As the tree wisterias and weeping boer-beans dominate the canopy, the bushveld gardenias (*Gardenia volkensii*) carpet the savanna floor with their exquisite white and yellow blossoms. These aromatic flowers perfume the air with their sweet scent, creating an intoxicating atmosphere that beckons visitors and wildlife alike. Interestingly, some bushveld gardenias display a dual-colour phenomenon, with both white and yellow flowers on the same plant—a botanical mystery that adds intrigue to their beauty. One of the leading theories

behind the dual-coloured flowers in the bushveld gardenia revolves around its pollination strategy. The plant attracts a variety of pollinators, including bees, butterflies, and moths. By offering two distinct flower colours, it may increase its chances of attracting a broader range of pollinators, thereby ensuring successful cross-pollination and reproductive success.

Beyond their aesthetic charm, the flowering of these tree species plays a crucial role in the ecosystem. The nectar-rich blooms attract pollinators, including bees, butterflies, and birds, which, in turn, facilitate cross-pollination among various plant species. This interplay of flora and fauna is the heartbeat of the Sabi Sand Nature Reserve, sustaining the biodiversity that calls this place home.

Preserving the Sabi Sand Nature Reserve and its stunning springtime displays is of utmost importance to us at Singita. Conservation initiatives and responsible tourism practices help protect this unique ecosystem, ensuring that future generations can continue to witness the beauty of tree wisterias, weeping boer-beans, and bushveld gardenias and all the other wonderful flora and fauna that this ecosystem has to offer, in all its glory!

Spring in the Sabi Sand Nature Reserve is a testament to the wondrous cycles of nature. The blossoms and flowers transform this wilderness into a living masterpiece of colours and fragrances. As you walk through this enchanted landscape, it becomes abundantly clear that nature's artistry knows no bounds, and the Sabi Sand Reserve is a canvas where the most exquisite of floral palettes come to life.



A fireball lily (*Scadoxus multiflorus*) and *Rhigozum* blossoms.

October Gallery





The Sand River providing some phenomenal leopard viewing in October with the Hlambela male leopard (above image by Matt Durell) being chased by a bull hippo at Pios Crossing, and the Thamba male leopard (below image by Marc Bowes-Taylor) on patrol to the south.







Taking time to stop and appreciate the sunset is a safari necessity. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.



A spotted hyena takes a break close to a zebra foal carcass that it has stashed in a water hole for safe keeping. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.



A female giant kingfisher patiently waits for her next prey item to be swept down the rapids, within striking distance. Image by Matt Durell.



Buffalo bulls battle for dominance.



A brief moment where this yellow-bellied greenbul allowed us to photograph it. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor



An unusual visitor this month, a pair of crowned hornbills feeding on the fruiting star chestnut tree. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.