Singita

Photo by Brian Rode

WILDLIFE JOURNAL
SINGITA KRUGER NATIONAL PARK, SOUTH AFRICA
For the month of June, Two Thousand and Twenty-one

Temperature
Average minimum: 13˚C (55.4˚F)
Minimum recorded: 10˚C (50˚F)
Average maximum: 26˚C (78.8˚F)
Maximum recorded: 33˚C (91.4˚F)

Rainfall Recorded
for the month: 14 mm
Season to date: 753 mm

Sunrise & Sunset
Sunrise: 06:37
Sunset: 17:15

The second month of winter is upon us and the trees are still transitioning into the various magnificent shades of gold. A large majority of them have dropped their leaves and are bare, increasing the visibility from the road and allowing us to peek at the four-legged hidden treasures within the vegetation. The grass is still reasonably high in most areas but has started to be fed on by most grazers. Larger herds of elephants and buffalos have

also begun walking around the concession flattening out the high raised grass in some areas. The good condition of the grasses, shrubs and trees can be attributed to the great rains we received in the beginning of the year, which also ensured that most large water bodies that usually dry up by now or that would have dramatically decreased during this time are still gently cradling the rainwater that were birthed by the skies in the beginning of the year.

As the month progressed the cold winter conditions that caused an icy chill in the mornings on game drive have started to warm up considerably. This month has warmed up 4˚C more than last year June 2020.

Here's a Sightings Snapshot for June:

Lions

- The unknown male lion who was fondly known as "The Beast from the East" had, in the beginning of the month been christened with his official name, which is the Maputo male, in honour of the country he crossed into the concession from, which is Mozambique. He has been seen on a number of occasions wandering the southern parts of the concession, scent marking and roaring.
- The Maputo male and Kumana male have again been seen fighting on numerous occasions in the concession and it seems in most cases that the Maputo male is the victor of these fights.
- The arrival of the Maputo male into the concession has caused a bit of chaos amongst the Shish pride who have, for the last three years, pledged their allegiance to the Kumana male who looks like he may be losing parts of his territory to this intruding male. On one occasion the Maputo male was seen chasing the lionesses and cubs of the Shish pride, which caused the pride to split and to this day have not managed to get back together.
- The Mountain pride has been seen on a number of occasions in the northern parts of the concession. On one occasion they attempted to hunt two porcupines but the porcupine quills proved to be a great armour as the lions were unable to kill them, and this was not from a lack of trying as the quills caused many casualties.
- Two unknown males have been seen moving into the northern parts of the concession, in what is believed to be the Shish male's territory.
- The Shish males have been seen on a few occasions in the Northern parts of the concession. A Shish male was seen with an unidentified lionesses and subadult male, and on another occasion Xihamham was seen with his 'brother' defending their territory by making their presence in the north known by roaring and scent marking.
- A lioness from the Mananga pride was seen east of Gudzane Dam.
- Three members of the Northern pride who are rarely seen were spotted catching some sleep in the cool cover of a tree's shadow.

Photo by: Wessel Booysen

Leopards

- A young male leopard who is just gaining independence has been seen on several occasions on the concession around the Euphorbia thickets, and he has now gained the name, “Euphorbia male”. This young male has successfully hunted an impala and a helmeted guinea fowl in the presence of our vehicles.
- The Mbiri Mbiri male has also been seen on two separate occasions feeding on an impala. This male is slowly establishing himself in the central parts of our concession.
- An unknown female leopard was seen around Gudzane Dam with three of her young cubs marching behind her.
- The Mhlanguleni female was seen in the hills of Pelajumbo with her cub, and on another occasion wandering the concession alone.
- An impressively large unknown male leopard was seen on a few occasions on the western part of our concession, he was very relaxed around the vehicles.
- There were a few more unknown leopards of all differently ages and sizes prowling the concession. With the grass cover slowly diminishing finding their tracks and trailing them has proven to be a little less challenging than in the thick summer months.

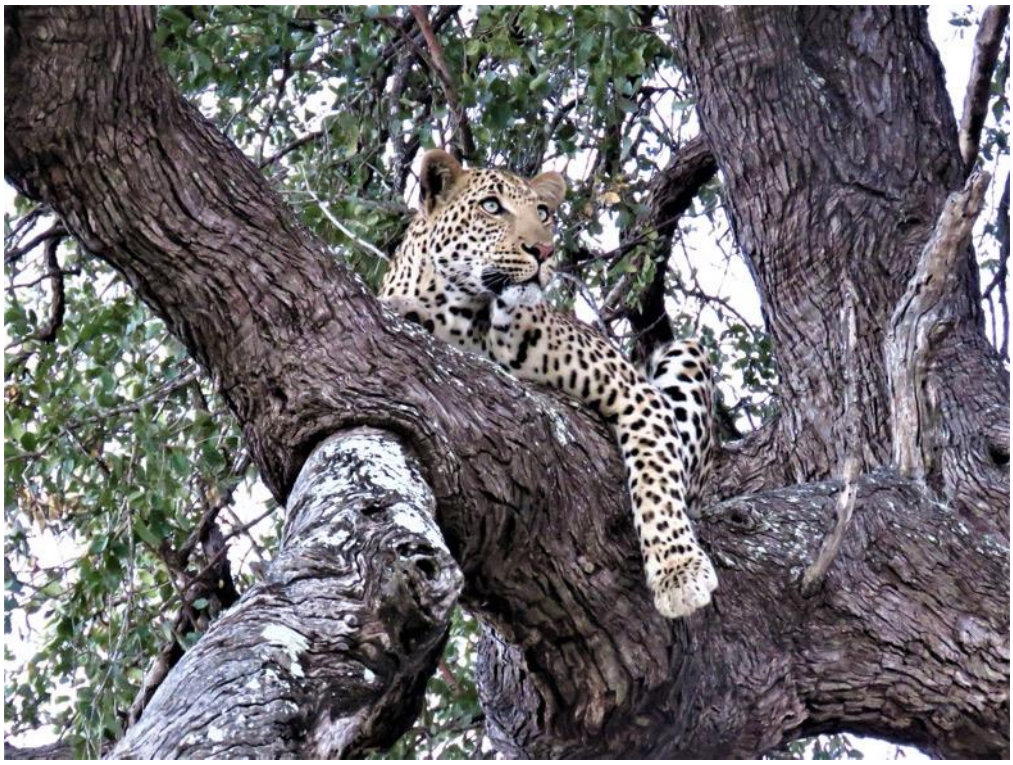


Photo by Garry Bruce

Spotted hyenas

- With the sightings of leopards on kills on a rise, we have had many hyena sightings, where they have been eagerly waiting for pieces of the carcass to fall from the trees where these leopards have hoisted their kills.
- A few clans with some subadults have also been spotted roaming the concession.
- A large female hyena was seen feeding on a female kudu. There was no evidence of other predators in the area - just her and her prize.
- There have been a number of solo travelling hyenas spotted in and around the concession wandering alone looking for opportunities to hunt or possible to scavenge. One hyena trailed the Euphorbia male

leopard for a while until he successfully brought down an impala, but the leopard managed to hoist it up in a leadwood before the hyena got to it.

Cheetahs

- With the grass cover reducing to below knee-high length, the cheetahs are slowly making their return into the concession. On one specific day a beautiful female was seen scanning the plains around Sticky Thorn Quarry.

Photo by Brian Rode

Elephants

- Sightings of elephants have been quite scarce over the last month with a few bulls spread across the concession. In the later parts of the month the breeding herds are slowly making their way back into the concession. One particular herd boasts a very newly born elephant calf who sticks to his mom like glue!

Buffalos

- The large herds of buffalo are slowly returning into the concession with the biggest herd consisting of about 300 individuals who were scattered across Fig Tree Link like a sea of blackness.
- A number of dagga boys have also been seen on the concession varying from ten bulls together to single individuals on their own.

Plains game

- The plains game viewing has been good with scattered herds of zebra, wildebeest and waterbuck.

Rare animals and other sightings

- A single sable was seen roaming around the eastern part of our concession.
- Wild dogs were sighted up in the mountains as far east as the Poort. They were trying to locate other members of the pack and they eventually got across the river and reunited.
- A number of klipspringers have been sighted on the beautiful rocky outcrops spread across the concession.

- Black-backed jackals have been spotted in several open clearings.
- A number of Sharpe's grysbok and steenbok have been seen on the concession trying to remain undetected in the grasses, shrubs and general vegetation.

Birds

- This month we recorded 157 different bird species across the concession.
- A European roller, which is a common sighting in our summer season, was seen this month which tells us that it is either extremely early for the migration or it decided not to leave when the rest of the European rollers headed back north, which is the more plausible.
- A palm-nut vulture was seen perched on a dead leadwood overlooking the skies and the river. This was the first time this vulture has ever been recorded in this part of Kruger National Park, and it was a first for many guides and trackers.

European roller

Palm-nut vulture

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

Patience pays off **Article by Wessel Booysen**

Leopard viewing on the Singita concession in the Kruger National Park has been nothing short of incredible over the past few weeks. In the absence of the larger lion prides who usually dominate the area as the apex predator, it has given the smaller, more elusive and secretive of the big cats the position of centre stage.

Regular sightings of the recently named Euphorbia and Mbiri Mbiri male leopards have been highlights of many a guest stay. Hoisted kills in the tallest and skinniest of apple-leaf trees and funny interactions with giraffe and the notoriously grumpy buffalo bulls have had us as guides and trackers in absolute stitches.

The highlight for me was when the newly independent Euphorbia male made a kill a few mornings ago. Our guiding team of Garry Bruce and the larger-than-life personality of Solly Ndlovu, noticed some giraffe staring into the grass one misty winter's morning. After some very efficient scanning of the area in question, a beautiful young male leopard was discovered. One of my guests was celebrating their birthday and a leopard in the golden morning light was definitely going to be the cherry on the birthday cake. We joined the sighting as quickly as possible and, to our delight, discovered that he had set his eyes on some impala that were within striking distance.

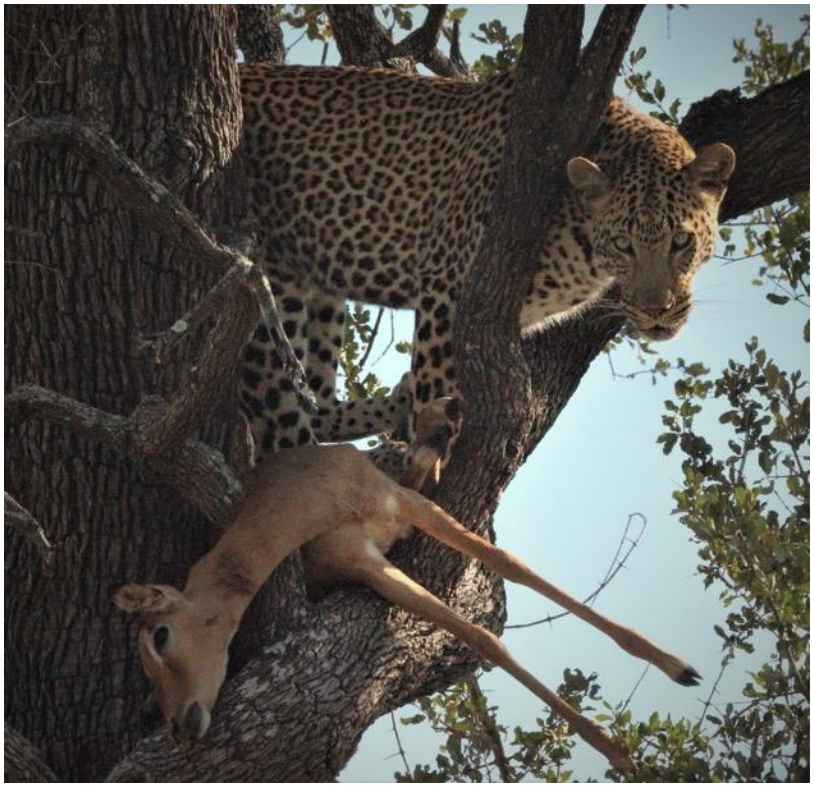


Photo by Solomon Ndlovu

Due to the patience and skill beyond this young cat's years, we witnessed something that not too many safari goers get to experience… a leopard hunt and kill from start to finish! We dropped back and kept a good distance from the event that was unfolding in front of us as to not affect the chances of the predator making a successful hunt or that of the prey to escape and live another day. The Safari Gods were on our side! Sneaking between the tall grasses, silently approaching and avoiding the ever-aware impala herd, this leopard got closer and closer. Just when we thought he was close enough, the impala would move away and out of range. He then tried again, dropping onto his belly and crawling into a new position, knowing all too well that if even one impala saw him, the hunt would be over.

We all knew as well as he did that he must keep the element of surprise on his side if he was to succeed. Closer and closer he stalked, freezing dead in his stride when impala eyes stared in his general area. You could literally hear a pin drop as we were all holding our breath, waiting for the burst of speed that would surely bring a quick death… but again the impala moved away. A nosey spotted hyena grabbed the attention of the impala and they made a small dash even further away from the stalking leopard. Surely the opportunity was gone now but we were again amazed at the patience and resilience of this leopard.

During the small scatter caused by the hyena, we noticed a female impala struggling to keep up with the rest of the herd. We weren't the only one who noticed and the leopard quickly found new inspiration to keep on the trail of these impala and we all sensed that it was not over yet! As we were repositioning our vehicle, we missed the fact that the limping impala had taken some shelter in a thicket as she could not keep up with the rest of the herd. The leopard hadn't noticed it either, but due to his incredible patience and calculated approach, he became aware of her position when she flicked her ear to chase away a pesky fly that was buzzing around her head. In an approach that was perfectly executed, the leopard got within five metres of the completely unaware impala, paused for what seemed like an eternity, and then exploded into action. The impala reacted and jumped in an attempt to evade the charging cat but was too slow. He caught her mid-air with his front left paw, razor-sharp claws fully exposed, catapulting his body around hers and pinning her down. In the split second that followed he clamped down with a powerful bite into the back of her neck, severing the spinal column almost instantly. There was only a small bleat and then silence…

In absolute disbelief of what we had just seen, the leopard dragged his limp prize to a very large leadwood tree and in yet another display of power and grace, hoisted the impala and wedged it between the branches. Content in his performance for the morning, he climbed further up into the tree and found a comfortable branch to straddle and rest.

A birthday surprise to never forget.

Touched by the Gods **Article by Tovhi Mudau**

On a cold winter morning, one of our guides, Wessel Booysen, was out on safari with guests when he came across a young kudu calf who was spotted not far from the road that runs parallel with the Nwanetsi River. What stood out with this kudu was not only its huge ears like satellite dishes trying to catch any audio signals, but it looked like when the Creator was drawing the impeccable white lines that run vertically on the body of the kudus the whole painting tray spilled over onto the back of this calf.

Partially leucistic kudu calf Photo by Wessel Booysen

These white irregularly shaped splashes across it are caused by a condition called leucism, which is a loss of pigmentation on an animal's skin, fur or feathers. Although this can often be mistaken for albinism, the two conditions are different.

Albinism being the absence of melanin, which is the pigment that gives colour to the skin, feathers, hair and eyes. Animals with albinism are not only whitish but they also have very pale eyes, often pink or red in colour as the blood vessels show through them, and could be the differentiating characteristic between an albino animal or a fully leucistic animal.

Fully leucistic animals have held a supernatural leading role in African folklore, especially white lions, like the young white male lion that was a part of the resident Shish pride who have a stronghold in our southern parts of the concession. It is believed that white lions were the sons and daughters of the Sun God and were gifted to man, and these white lions were said to have had supernatural powers. One such myth retells a story passed on by the elders of how, 400 years ago, Queen Numbi was gifted one white lion that arrived on a fallen star. To this day some of the local Tsonga beliefs are that white lions are the spirits incarnate of mighty kings.

The white male lion who was part of the Shish pride Photos by Wessel Booysen

This special young kudu is fortunate that the leucism only affected it partially on its back, and that could be the reason why this calf has survived the first months of its life, as most antelopes with complete leucism on their bodies rarely make it into adulthood. Early death rates in leucistic animals in the wild can be attributed to the fact that their reflective white colour of their fur sticks out in the earthy toned bush and if you can't blend in to the vegetation or hide amongst the cover of the shrubs then you become the number one target for predators in that area.

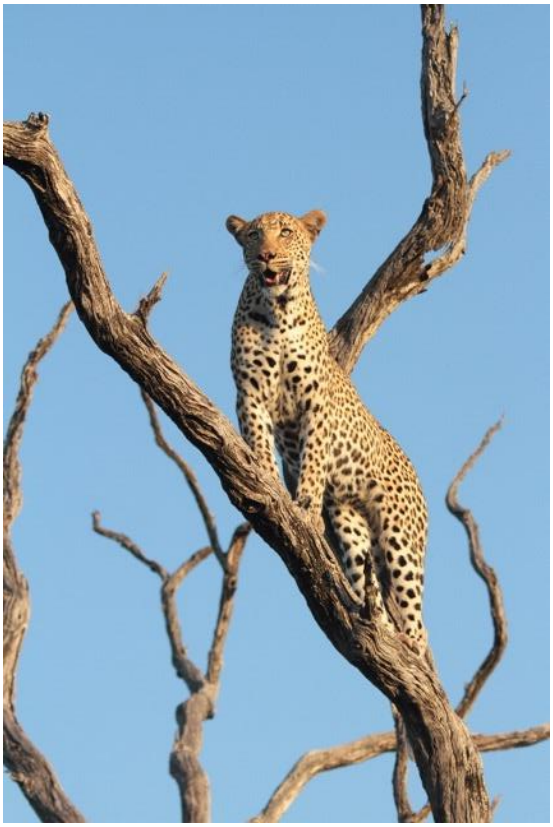
We wish this little calf all the best in its future.

June Gallery **Photos by Wessel Booysen, Garry Bruce and Brian Rode**

Maputo male being watched by a male giraffe

Monitor lizards mating

Young male leopard



Euphorbia male leopard

Lilac breasted roller

Maputo male and Kumana running each other down

Buffalo licking its nose

A male giraffe in front of Lebombo lodge

Members of the Shish pride

Euphorbia male descending