

Singita



Male Lion – Photo by Evidence Nkuna

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

Temperature

Average minimum: 19.9°C (67.8°F)
Minimum recorded: 15°C (59°F)
Average maximum: 32.8°C (91°F)
Maximum recorded: 41°C (105°F)

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 04h55
Sunset : 18h20

Rainfall Record

For the month: 53mm
Season to date: 73.5mm
(*Season = Oct to Sept)

November in the Kruger National Park has unfolded as a month of striking contrasts. What began as a cool, rainy start has swiftly transformed into the sweltering heat of the savannah's summer. The muddy wallows have become bustling hubs of activity, offering a fleeting respite from the oppressive, stifling air. In the midst of this, the woodland kingfishers and red-chested cuckoos fill the air with their calls, their voices punctuating the stillness of the heat. When the temperatures climb even higher, the cicadas

take over, their incessant buzzing the soundtrack of the midday lull. The world seems to slow down under the weight of the heat, and even the impala ewes seem to find solace in the shade. But amid the heat and stillness, there is new life. The lambing season is in full swing, and the sight of hundreds of wide-eyed, wobbly-legged lambs taking their first steps brings a sense of joy to the land. Life continues, even in the heart of the furnace-like summer, and the cycle of nature marches on.

A Sightings Snapshot for November follows:

Lions

- Since arriving on our concession, the Sonop males have dominated our lion sightings, particularly throughout November. They have mostly been moving around the Gudzane Dam area but have also ventured as far east as Double Crossing.
- The Shish pride returned on the 8th and was found in an area of the mountains that seems to be their favoured spot. This location is well-shaded and offers an excellent vantage point, ideal for hunting the abundant zebra and waterbuck moving through the area. They disappeared into the mountains for a few weeks before they were found again late in the month near the Mozambican border in the east.
- The Mananga pride also returned to our concession around the same time as the Shish pride, after being spotted on the S100 near the S41. One morning, they were seen trailing a herd of buffalo and managed to chase them into the Xinkelegane drainage. However, as soon as we caught up with them, the buffalo turned and began chasing the lions. The scene quickly became chaotic, with even the cubs running after the herd at one point. The pride managed to catch a small calf, but the herd, moving as one solid mass, turned, and charged at the lionesses, rescuing the stunned calf. Despite this, the Manangas must have succeeded later in the day, as they were found feeding on a large bull near the Sticky thorns that afternoon. Just a few days later, they were quenching their thirst in Xineneni Poort when they heard buffalo bellowing to the south. They quickly headed in that direction and were found the next day with visibly fuller bellies, likely having caught another buffalo or a large animal the previous evening.
- Towards the end of the month, the Mananga pride was seen almost daily, including one occasion when a single lioness was mating with the N'wanetsi male.
- The Maputo male is still alive! The last sighting we had of him was on the 1st of August, but this month has brought surprises in the northeast. This area appears to be his refuge when strange males enter our concession from the Kruger National Park. With the Sonop males preoccupied with mating with the Chava pride in the northwest, Maputo has ventured even further south to his old stomping grounds, where he and the Kumana male were the dominant coalition back in 2021.

Leopards

- In the beginning of the month, the Lebombo male was found dragging his impala carcass back towards the N'wanetsi river, away from a large Nile crocodile that had smelt the dead impala and attempted to steal it. The leopard stashed it in a clump of sedges and found a shaded area to rest and digest. From there he headed into the Lebombo mountains and has been seen moving along the river below the lodge, as well as in the Granophyre's, a dike of intrusive

igneous rocks formed about 150 million years ago when magma filled a crack formed under the surface of the earth.

- Nhlangueni female was sighted a couple times this month, once with a shy male in the basalt plains. Unfortunately, she was injured on the inside of her back legs, and she appeared to have a bite mark on her shoulder. Being such hardy creatures, she was still walking fine and will most likely recover.
- The Dumbana leap are still in the Lebombo mountains, around an area known as waterfall crossing.
- The Zamani male has been mating with the shy female around Gudzane dam. After which they both ascended a beautiful Weeping Boer-bean and laying in the branches, left our guests in awe at the beautiful scene.

Cheetahs

- A solitary female has been wondering around the northwestern grasslands. The area was burnt at the end of our winter and after the brief rains has had a sudden green flush, luring impala, zebra, and wildebeest into the area.
- Another ventured onto our concession south of the N'wanetsi river and was found a few days later near the central areas.

African wild dogs

- After the successful collaring of two adult members of the pack of 15, we have had the privilege of finding them fairly regularly in the central to northern regions of our concession. All nine pups are still alive, and they have been thriving on the pregnant (and as a result, slower) impala ewes.
- Mid-month the pack was hanging around the Ntsimbitsane drainage where after racing over the mountains, successfully took down a juvenile waterbuck, which they devoured in minutes, leaving nothing for the single hyena that was lurking in the background.
- A different, and uncollared pack of five were also seen this month in the mountains in the southeast.
- Since the birth of the impala ewes, there has been a definite increase in wild dog sightings, of which three involved them successfully hunting impala.

Spotted hyenas

- These spotted predators were frequently observed this month at their den site in the Nyokeni Valley, where at least two pups, around four months old, were seen. The absence of large termite mounds, due to the clay-rich soils, forces the hyenas to seek alternative den sites. The caves and rocky outcrops formed in the Lebombo Mountains and Granophyre Ridge provide an ideal solution.

Elephants

- After the rains, it is evident that the elephants have split into smaller herds and dispersed across the concession, but even so, we are still seeing them every day. Many have taken on a dark grey charcoal colour as a result of the frequent mud bathing and wallowing in an effort to ease the sting of the summer sun.
- A highlight this month was sitting barefoot on the volcanic rocks that form a line across the N'wanetsi River. These rocks bear signs of millions of years of water swirling smaller boulders, creating smooth, almost perfect holes in the surface. As we dipped our toes in the river, taking a

moment to appreciate the perfection of the present, our attention was suddenly drawn downstream, where a herd of elephants noisily splashed into the middle of the river. Some flopped onto their sides, while others dove headfirst, their large rumps sticking out of the water. If you've ever witnessed children in a swimming pool or at the beach, you'll know the pure joy expressed—it was the same with the elephants. Trunks slapped the water, and young males playfully mounted each other. Very young calves stayed close to their mothers, occasionally letting out a short, excited trumpet as they splashed through the shallow water toward the deeper pools. In just half an hour, there were more than 40 elephants, some still swimming and others slowly feeding. Now sufficiently cooled down, water soaked into their wrinkled skin, helping to keep them cool for the rest of the day's intense heat.

Buffalos

- Buffalo were seen almost every day this month. Most of the sightings have been of groups of 100 to 300 animals, as well as a small bachelor herd on our western boundary road. Luckily for them only one old bull, and single smaller calf were taken by the lions.

Plains game

- The first impala lamb to be seen on our concession was spotted on the 6th of November by our guide and tracker team, David and Given. As small and delicate as the newborns are, the birth of all prey species often leads to a wave of carnage, as predators take advantage of this vulnerability. The nyala and bushbuck have also given birth, many of them near the lodges, much to the delight of our guests.

Rare animals and other sightings

- The stocky yet small caracal was seen near Gudzane Dam. Due to the still-barren areas, we have been able to spot more of these elusive small cats compared to the summer months, when the long, lush grass makes them harder to find.
- The Leucistic female Kudu has been moving through the southern section of our concession again. It has been a privilege to see her grow up, and she is almost fully grown now. A miracle that she has survived, as her white coat really does stand out against the neutral greens and browns.

Birds

- An immature crowned eagle was sighted just south of Euphorbia crossing along the N'wanetsi river. This is the first time it has been sighted on our concession.
- Most large eagles' nest in winter, ensuring that their young hatch in spring, when food is more abundant, and the chances of mortality are reduced. Most chicks fledge at 11 to 12 weeks, so we are currently seeing many juvenile eagles around our concession. Since the same nests are used year after year, we have become familiar with where to find specific eagles. The tawny eagle chick, in particular, has provided unique sightings as it calls for food and exercises its wings.
- As the lesser-masked weavers energetically build their nests on the branches of a dead tree over hanging Gudzane dam, a pair of Deadrick's cuckoos wait patiently for the perfect time to sneak into an unattended nest to lay their eggs. This is known as brood parasitism and benefits typically revolve around reproductive success and energy conservation. By laying its eggs in another bird's nest, the parasitic bird avoids the energy and time spent on incubating its eggs

and caring for its chicks. This allows the parasitic bird to invest more time in finding mates, laying more eggs, or engaging in other reproductive activities.

Some Bush Stories follow, as well as the November Gallery

Birds of a feather flock together

Article by Otto Scribante

The last year has been a stark contrast to the one before in terms of the local weather. The past summer of 2022/2023 brought a lot of rain that was topped up by the cyclones that rolled through Mozambique as late as March. This meant that there was an abundance of water throughout the year that managed to last until the rains came again in November 2023.

The 2023/2024 summer was a lot drier however and regardless of some rain falling as late as the end of April, the little surface water we had quickly dried up leaving the N'wanetsi river as only a mere trickle, and the Sweni stopped flowing altogether. This extremely wet summer followed immediately by the dry spell did mean that the bird population demographics were changed in a very short time bringing some interesting visitors to the Lowveld and surrounds including on Singita Kruger National Park and in the Sabi Sands.

Generally speaking, there are three types of migration that we associate with birds. These are typically referred to as Palearctic, Intra-African, and Altitudinal migration. All of these categories refer to birds moving seasonally from one location to another when resources like food or nesting sites become scarce in a particular area.

Palearctic migrants refer to birds migrating between breeding grounds in Europe to feeding grounds in Southern Africa during the Summer Hemisphere Summer when food becomes scarce in their breeding areas.

Intra-African migrants do the same but move from North- and Central African feeding grounds to Southern African breeding grounds for Southern Hemisphere Summers.

Altitudinal migrants tend to spend the summers high up in mountains where they breed and disperse to lower altitudes and into new habitats during the winters when temperatures plummet higher up, and resources become scarcer. All these migrants are typically insectivores, and the availability of insects is what drives the seasonal movements.

Usually, during a good and wet year, bird populations increase dramatically due to the successful breeding season during a time of abundant resources. An exceptionally dry season then means that the normal habitat of these birds become overpopulated and this, along with a scarcity of resources, causes individuals to turn elsewhere to look for suitable and habitable environments with less competition.

Most notably as the driest time of the season started in July, arid species which are usually rare in the lowveld started to become locally abundant. Species like Lark-like Buntings, Chestnut-vented Warbler and Grey-backed Sparrow larks became locally quite common in some areas of the Lowveld. Early in August, excitement spiked as a Fairy Flycatcher, the smallest bird in Southern Africa, and a South African endemic usually restricted to the interior and West Coast of the country showed up and made itself home behind Boulders Lodge for a few weeks. As far as research can tell, this was the first record for the Sabi Sands.

In August, a Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher was alongside the Fairy Flycatcher at Boulders lodge, as well as a small group of Purple-banded Sunbirds that were recorded for the first time on the property. This was quite a spectacle as all three species are to some extent altitudinal migrants, but very rarely if ever venture as far North and West, but the Fairy Flycatcher typically prefer semi-arid habitat compared to the other two which prefer dense thicket bordering on forests. A single Black-throated Wattle-Eye has settled temporarily on the Sweni River, which was also the first confirmed record for the Lebombo concession.

Several juvenile Gorgeous Bush shrikes were observed a few times across the Lebombo concession. This is a bird which is only seen here once every few years, and the sudden apparent abundance also supports a great previous breeding season resulting in further than usual dispersal.

Lebombo chimed in with some amazing raptor sightings including at least two African Cuckoo-hawks as well as an Ovambo Sparrowhawk and the concession's first Crowned Eagle.

All the above sightings come down to the abovementioned phenomenon where birds seek out new habitats when competition drives them out of their parent territories and when resources become scarce. Birds like these often hang around in the areas where they are found for a while.

The record of the season so far has to be that of a Buff-spotted Flufftail that was seen in the staff village of Lebombo in September when it was drinking water from an air conditioner outlet at one of the rooms. This is a notoriously skulk member of the Rallied family and is usually only heard from very dense undergrowth in forests. It is confirmed to one of fewer than five ever seen in Kruger National Park. The appearance of the Flufftail boils down to the time of year for Passage Migrants. What this refers to is a bird which is on its way to its breeding or feeding ground and just so happens to pass by a particular area where it usually does not occur. Buff-spotted Flufftails are intra-African migrants and this one was probably on its way down South for the summer when it stopped off for a quick drink.

So far it has been a very exciting time for passage migrants and many new species have been observed for the Lebombo concession in particular. Sand Martins as well as Banded Martins were seen for the first time ever passing by on their way to their usual breeding grounds further to the South of the country.

The season ahead is going to be an interesting one that all is excited about. The Greater Kruger has already had first-time records of very much out-of-range Olive Bee-eaters as well as South Africa's second ever Spur-winged Lapwing further North and who knows what will pop up next! The days are already filled with the familiar calls of the summer visitors that have arrived in full force from various destinations in the North. European Bee-eaters fly over while the Woodland Kingfishers and all the different cuckoos fill the air with their calls. Summer is here and its great!



Blue Water lily– Photo by Monika Malewski

Summer has arrived, bringing with it our first rains. The bush is now lush and vibrant, and the animals and birds are thriving as there is plenty of food and water for everyone. Bush activities at Singita Kruger National Park become even more captivating during this time. Heading out on a morning game drive, the fresh air and the sweet scent of flowers from various trees, like the ‘purple pod cluster leaf’, create a unique experience that is different from the excitement of chasing the Big Five.

Although the N’wanetsi River has yet to start flowing, this makes it easier for us to access the entire concession through the crossing points. One of my favourite spots is Dave’s Crossing, where I love to get out of the vehicle with guests and enjoy the panoramic view of the river from the concrete slab. There is so much to see when we stop there—crocodiles, a variety of water birds, mammals, and a range of plants, all accompanied by the soothing sound of running water, which adds to the charm of the experience.

One morning, we stopped at Dave’s Crossing with a lovely elderly couple staying at Lebombo Lodge. Having already seen everything they hoped to during their visit, we decided to enhance their experience with some birdwatching and a bit of meditation by the crossing. We observed different birds fishing and searching for food, while a crocodile sunbathed in the distance. The couple was so engaged that they even took time to admire the blue water-lilies as they began to open.

The blue water-lily is a well-known and cherished wildflower, valued not only for its beauty but also for its numerous medicinal properties. It is used as an antiseptic and to treat bladder and kidney issues, chest complaints, diabetes, diarrhea, skin problems, and infertility. Many animals depend on the water-lily for survival. The African jacana, for example, uses its long toes to traverse the lily pads in search of food, earning it the nickname "lily-trotter." Bees and other insects gather nectar and pollen from the flowers, sometimes becoming temporarily trapped in the plant's clever mechanism, which ensures cross-pollination. The female part of the flower matures first, releasing a sticky substance to attract insects. Once an insect lands, it becomes entangled, wiggling to free itself while inadvertently transferring pollen. After a few days, the stickiness dries, and the male part of the flower matures, dusting the insect with fresh pollen before it flies away.

The water-lily's benefits extend beyond animals. Humans harvest its fruit, which can be eaten or dried and milled into flour. The rhizome can be roasted for a nutritious, though bland, meal, and the roots are used for dye. The lily pads are also applied to treat sunburn, providing relief from blistering, and the sap from the stems and roots serves as a natural sunblock.



Night-lily – Photo by Evidence Nkuna

A water-lily bud, much like its leaves, starts underwater and gradually rises to the surface as it matures. The flower blooms only during the day, lasting for five days. After pollination, it sinks back underwater, where the fruit develops. The fruit eventually bursts, releasing buoyant seeds that begin the cycle once again.

It was a truly special experience to watch the flowers open and observe the insects pollinating them. For our guests, it became the highlight of their entire stay.

November Gallery

Female Cheetah – Photo by Evidence Nkuna



Hippopotamus – Photo by Evidence Nkuna





Impala ewe right after giving birth— Photo by Brian Rode



First steps of newborn impala— Photo by Brian Rode



New unidentified female leopard– Photo by Rudi Hulshoff



Male Giant Kingfisher – Photo by Brian Rode



Cream-striped Owl moth – Photo by Brian Rode



Curious male giraffe – Photo by Evidence Nkuna



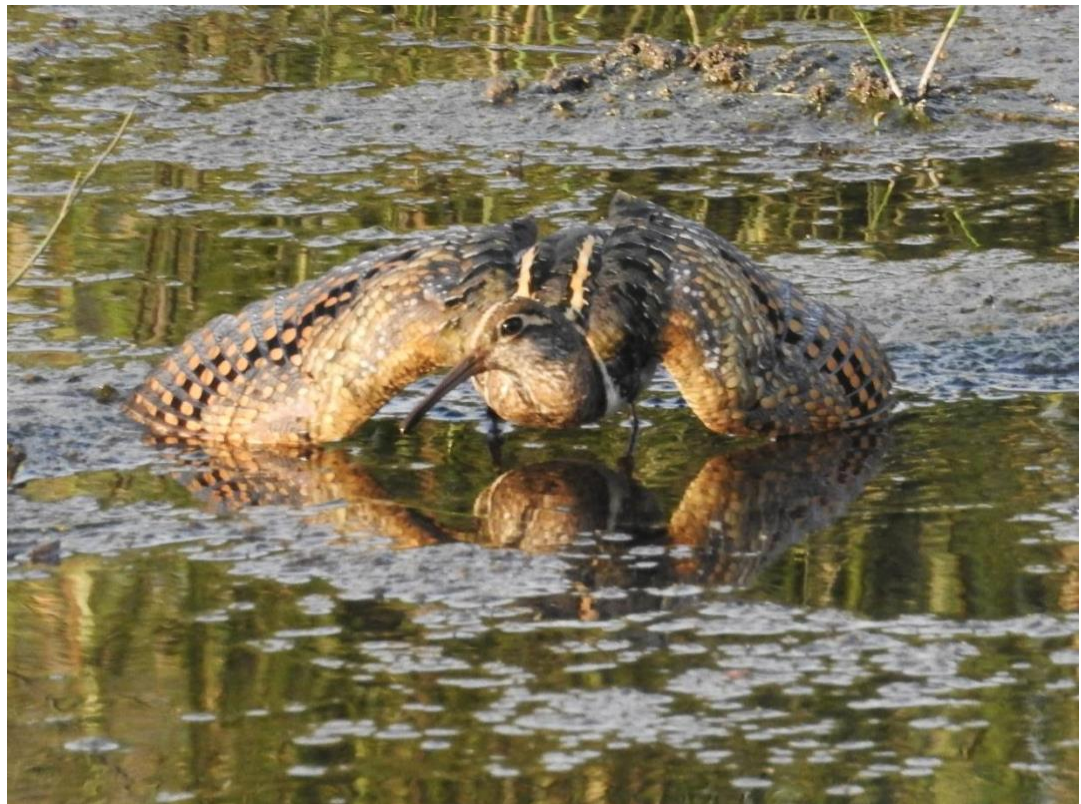
Cream-striped Owl moth – Photo by Brian Rod

Nhlanguleni female leopard – Photo by Rudi Hulshoff





White-faced Whistling duck – Photo by Evidence Nkuna



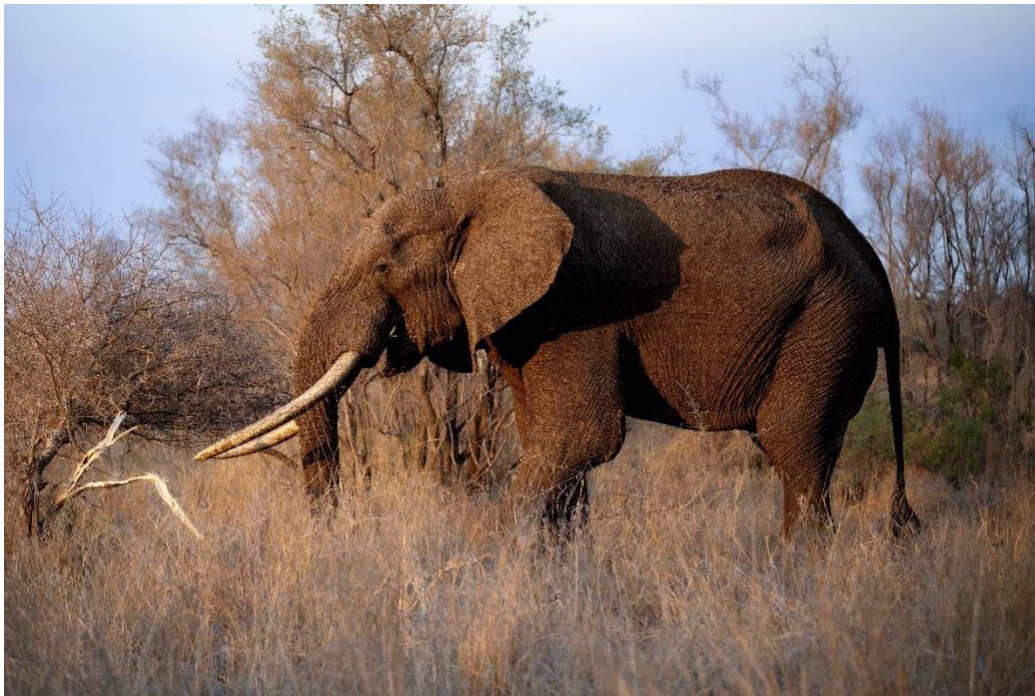
Displaying male Greater Painted-snipe – Photo by Brian Rode



Great Egret – Photo by Monika Malewski



Mopane Pomegranate –Photo by Monika Malewski



African Elephant – Photo by Monika Malewski



Kalanga Male leopard – Photo by Rudi Hulshoff



African Wild dog puppies – Photo by Monika Malewski