

Singita



Young Dumbana leopard – Photo by Graeme Stewart

WILDLIFE JOURNAL

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

Temperature

Average minimum: 15.4°C (59.7°F)
Minimum recorded: 11.0°C (51.8°F)
Average maximum: 30.5°C (86.9°F)
Maximum recorded: 42.0°C (107.6°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 0 mm
Season to date: 452 mm

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 06:06
Sunset: 17:39

August has come and gone in the blink of an eye. The dry conditions have left a great concentration of animal activity around the now sparse water sources, being the N'wanetsi River in the south and the Gudzane stream and dam on the western edge of the Singita Kruger National Park concession. The golden grasslands are starting to show the wear of prominent pathways from hundreds of animals moving from areas of grazing to the few areas of drinking, and the predators are enjoying the spoils that come with spending time around that all-too-tempting riverine vegetation.

A Sightings Snapshot for August follows:

Lions

- The Shish Pride is under pressure with so many growing cubs, and the loss of the oldest lioness. There is clearly competition for food amongst the members leaving some of the smaller cubs looking a bit gaunt, but the females have been hunting regularly and if they can keep up the stamina and continue, they should start to gain some condition as there are a few less mouths to feed.
- Chava Pride have been seen frequently in the company of one or all four of the Sonop/H6 males. From the previous month being associated with the Maputo males, tables have turned, and as Graeme explains in his write up, a few weeks has seen a big change in the lion dynamics. There has even been mating observed between one of the males and one of the Chava females in the days leading up to the end of August, so this is a clear sign of a new coalition in the territory.
- The H6/Sonop have become a much more frequent sighting, although not often on their own, most often in the company of some of the Chava females, keeping them very close as they assert their claim over the area.
- Maputo male has been seen once, on the morning of 1 August and then not again. His position was further east than has been the norm over the last few months, and he was alone, with no sightings of the other Maputo (Xai Xai) male since July.
- The Mananga Pride have been teasing the team this month, often coming into the concession from the western boundary at the N'wanetsi River and exiting by the time the sun rises the next morning, although we were lucky enough to have a number of sightings of the whole family, still proudly leading the eight older cubs and three younger cubs from one kill to the next, with all of the members appearing to be in very good condition.
- The old Mananga lioness was found on a giraffe cow carcass alone, and so it is not certain how the giraffe actually died, but she was enjoying having the carcass all to herself. Within a day she was joined by the remaining young Mananga male, looking rather skinny from the stress of living under the radar. He, like the older lioness, enjoyed the spoils of the giraffe carcass, waiting patiently for the Trichardt male to also have a feast midway through and soon to lose half the carcass to a clan of about fifteen spotted hyenas.
- The Trichardt male has not been seen very often this month, with the absence of his coalition mate to assist in holding the territory he is probably under immense pressure as the water sources slowly dry up and the focus of many predators in the vicinity turn to his portion of river as a lifeline. He was seen once in the presence of the Mananga Pride. They were thought to have had a kill but by the time they were found in the morning, they were on the move already with the Trichardt male trailing behind.
- A new, unidentified pride has been seen far on the eastern boundary, with about 15 members comprising of nine females and six young males. They could be moving into the area attracted by the prospect of water and potential prey also in vicinity of the water.

Leopards

- Dumbana female has had a very successful month with regards to her hunting. For the first few days of August we found her cubs left in the same place for a few days, staying put and very well behaved while mom went out and attempted to hunt. They are still too young to be involved, but old enough for her to take them along for journies between hunting excursions.
- Nyala female had a kill stolen by the Mondzo male mid-August. Luckily she had been with the carcass for a few days already by the time the male made his way into the leadwood tree to extract her food, so she did not lose much to him.
- The Nhlangueni female has not been seen very often this month, but one of the three times she was seen, she was quite far south within her territory, the other two sightings were more within her usual range.

- Nhlangueni's previous female cub, now known as Nungu female has been sighted regularly this month, hunting along the Xinkelegane drainage down to the stickythorn thickets.
- The Mondzo male had an interesting experience at the start of the month, having been seen drenched from what appears to have been a swift crossing of the river to avoid contact with a few members of the Mananga Pride, he then disappeared into the thickets along the river as the heat of the day set in. A mere 24 hours later, while viewing the Mananga Pride on the banks of the N'wanetsi River, lo and behold, Mondzo is lounging in the branches of an apple leaf tree with the entire Mananga Pride sprawled out on the ground below him, with the cubs regularly looking up at him inquisitively. As the pride got up and moved away, the male leopard could finally slink out of the tree and go off in the opposite direction.
- Lebombo male was seen only once in August, walking north along the N'wanetsi River and settling in the dense vegetation at the base of a large sycamore fig for the day, and yet not to be found that afternoon.
- The Kalanga male has been living up to his mother's success in terms of feeding, with two reported sightings of him with kills hoisted in trees this month. Unfortunately, although he seems to have recovered nicely from the gashes on his back legs, he is limping now with a wound visible on his front left leg, but it doesn't seem to be slowing him down too much, and he is still covering ground.
- Mbiri Mbiri male was seen more recently, in the last few days of August posing beautifully in the branches of a fig tree in the drainage line, far north in the reserve.
- The Confluence male has been seen less regularly this month, possibly experiencing pressure from the two larger and more mature males on either side of his apparent range, being the Mondzo male (from the north and west) and the Lebombo male (from the east and south), However, that being said this beautiful young male has been seen in the presence of a skittish young female, potentially forming a mating pair, although she was very nervous of the vehicles and as much as she tried to remain within view of the male, no mating activity was observed.
- The beautiful young male with dark rings around his eyes giving him a distinct appearance has become a more regular sighting in the far northern grasslands around the Xingkelengane drainage, he has thus been named the Masia male, inspired by the name of the Shangaan Clan which resided in the area he has seemed to settled in.
- A skittish female leopard has been seen recently around the N'wanetsi, north of Lebombo Lodge and although it has been impossible to get a good look at her, we believe it is the same female who has been seen multiple times within the same section of the river. Interestingly, she was seen following the Confluence male, and although no actual mating was seen, the fact that she was persistently staying in such close proximity to the male despite wanting to move away from the vehicles could be an indication of her being interested in mating.
- A female leopard has also been seen in the area around Gudzane Dam, but she has also been quite uncertain of the game viewers, so she is only seen very briefly before disappearing.

Cheetahs

- A single sighting of two male cheetahs together in the far northern reaches of the reserve was reported in August, but what a sighting it was. Seeing a cheetah is already an incredibly rare sighting and very special, but a few guests were lucky enough to watch this coalition of males work together to chase a few impala and miss, only to have a young zebra foal get caught up in the confusion of the hunt and become the new target for the hungry pair. They were able to successfully bring down the zebra foal, and with a constant chorus of zebra alarm calls, took some time to cool off and drag the carcass into the shade before starting to feed.

African wild dogs

- A pack of nine individuals was seen on the first day of August, found in the morning feeding on an impala, and then seen again in the same area that afternoon, sleeping off their meal. They got up from where they had rested during the heat of the day, and then disappeared back in the direction they had come from.
- A pack of three females was also seen moving twice during mid-August, once on the boundary of the Singita concession and again in the central areas of the reserve, where they successfully managed to kill an impala. Unfortunately, as is the nature of being a highly efficient predator, they were being trailed by a large female spotted hyena who wasted no time in stealing their kill and, being only three individuals, they were forced to watch with watering mouths, as their hard-earned meal was devoured right in front of them. What was not eaten was picked up by the hyena and carried off towards her den.

Spotted hyenas

- A clan of ten hyenas was seen moving through the sticky-thorns early in August, possibly there may have been a carcass in the area. With the incredibly dense thickets of thorn trees we were unable to tell what had attracted these scavengers to the area.
- A number of small groups or single spotted hyenas have been seen, most often appearing in the early evening as they start to forage and early morning before they settle in a cool spot for the day.
- At least 15 hyenas were patiently waiting in the vicinity of the young Mananga male lion which was feeding on the giraffe carcass which was now a few days old. Normally having the utmost respect for male lions, the hyena had managed to go from circling the area the night before, to having gained access to about half the carcass in the night, which is what they were found feeding on the following morning. The young male lion still had a big portion which he was sleeping next to, but there must have been a tug-of-war at some point for the hyena to have their share, realizing that in numbers they had the upper hand against this single young male.

Elephants

- As you drive out of the lodges at Singita Kruger National Park you cannot help but notice the tattered and torn vegetation all along the edge of the roadways. Especially in close proximity to the river system, the elephant herds are clearly having a marked effect on the raisin bushes as they chew the bark and cambium from the slender branches. Bark is being torn from the knob-thorns and even the apple leaves are no longer safe.
- There has not been a day in August where multiple elephant herds haven't been reported across the reserve, often around the rivers during the heat of the day and seeking the warmth of the higher ridges at night when the temperatures drop.
- Amongst the more regular sightings of the breeding herds there have also been a number of beautiful big elephant bulls with impressive tusks and a swagger that lets you know they have many years under their belt and plan to rule these plains for many years to come.

Buffalos

- Early and late August has seen a few huge herds of buffalo coming down to the N'wanetsi River to drink as the heat of the day sets in at mid-morning. The herds have been easily a few hundred head of buffalo, leaving plumes of dust as they move steadily from their grazing areas to the river to wallow in the mud, and drink.

Plains game

- The open areas of the central reserve are alive with plenty of plains game.

- Large herds of zebra can often be seen moving through from grazing to water, some of the culprits for the pathways set so deeply and clearly in the grasslands.
- Lots of little warthog families are also spread out across the open areas, nuzzling at the ground to dig up the small tufts of grass, including their little roots where much of the nutrients are being stored.

Rare animals and other sightings

- A herd of sable has been seen a few times this month, although on the Mozambique side of the border. It has been an exciting view for a few guests and guides alike.
- A special sighting for Sean this month, was that of a Cape clawless otter swimming in the waters of the N'wanetsi at the confluence with the Sweni River. Unfortunately, only one was seen but it is quite possible where there is one there may be others in the area, although they do tend to live a more solitary existence.
- The small cats have been scarce this month with a single sighting of a serval and a single sighting of an African wild cat having been reported. Now, as the grass starts to drop and there is less cover, you hope to see more of these elusive smaller nocturnal animals, but it still relies on being in the right place at the right time.
- A number of Sharpe's grysbok have also been seen, in places all across the reserve, so clearly different individuals. These shy little antelope are similar to steenbok in behaviour, often freezing when first sighted, but dash off quickly if they feel they are receiving too much attention.

Birds

- A rare sighting of an African cuckoo-hawk was reported twice this month, seen very briefly but what an exciting find!
- Lesser swamp warblers have been frequenting the reeds along the N'wanetsi, if you sit long enough to see them.
- Southern ground hornbills are one of our most endangered species of bird, so even one sighting is worth mentioning and a great thing for guests to be able to see.

Some Bush Stories follow, as well as the August Gallery of images.

As the seasons change so do the dynamics of the animals, in this case the lions.

Over the last few months, we have the Maputo coalitions ruling the northern sections of the Singita concession which has been promising, with the very relaxed Maputo male joining up with a more shy, older male who has come across from Mozambique. With time spent in the presence of the confident resident male, the new male grew more relaxed with our presence with each sighting we had of him.



Maputo male – Photo by Rudi Hulshof

With these two males taking charge of the western territories, this meant the gradual settling down of the Chava Pride of females. Named with the Shangaan word for “fearful or scared” the pride was still a bit nervous around the vehicles but started to move further and further east into our concession from the Kruger National Park. In the presence of the two big Maputo males and with more exposure to the vehicles, not only were they settling more within the Singita area, but they grew more accustomed to being viewed in the game viewers, and were no longer running away as their confidence grew quickly, and soon it seemed their pride would grow too. The region of the concession that the pride has moved into has shown a low density of lions recently, so it was great for us as their occurrence in the area increases our chance of potentially view more lion prides.

This was all so exciting for a short while until the arrival of the Sonop / H6 males threw a spanner in the works. In the first week of August 2024 there was a report of four big male lions making their way down the border of our concession and the Kruger National Park. At this time of the year its incredibly dry and water is very scarce so the brief visual of new lions is not uncommon, but what happened next was a bit of a shock...

For the last three weeks these males have made their way further and further east into the concession pushing away any other male lion anywhere close to where they are. Almost overnight these males have taken over, vocalizing and scent marking with every step further east.



H6/Sonop Male – Photo by Rudi Hulshof

With no recent sign of either of the Maputo males we can only assume that they have either been killed in combat or chased away by these strong, young males which would not only out-compete but also out-number the smaller Maputo coalition. What makes it strange is that there have been no signs of the Maputo males at all for the last few weeks, almost as if they knew that their reign was over and for their own safety moved as far away as they could, as quickly as possible.



H6/Sonop Male – Photo by Monika Malewski



H6/Sonop Male – Photo by Graeme Stewart

As intimidating as these lions are, it's a blessing in disguise for us. With the presence and the power that a coalition of four male lions brings with them, it could mean that there is a chance for a stable dominant coalition in the northern section of the concession allowing the prides of females, especially the Chava Pride, to truly settle down, have cubs and establish the northern sector as their territory. These new males could potentially allow them to establish a huge area as their territory which will allow for their strong genetics to spread as far as they can, strengthening the prides of the Singita Kruger National Park.



H6/Sonop Male with Chava female – Photo by Rudi Hulshof

The Dumbana female leopard has, in the last few years, managed to raise two beautiful sons to independence, one of which we are still very grateful to see within the reserve today. Kalanga male has thrived, and is in very good condition, despite having had a few serious injuries along the way. He has seemingly dispersed twice, having made an appearance in the far western reaches of the Greater Kruger, and then reappearing at Singita within a few weeks. So, it seems, there is something about this place which draws him back, whether there is less pressure from other males, or an abundance of prey, or a combination of factors, this is obviously a place where he feels he should stay. It is interesting too, to see him use the same tree to hoist two separate kills, a few months apart, a tree which his mother, had also used to hoist a few kills when he was still a cub and dependant on her. Whether coincidence, or strategy, there is something to be said about the importance of location.



Dumbana cub – Photo by Rudi Hulshof

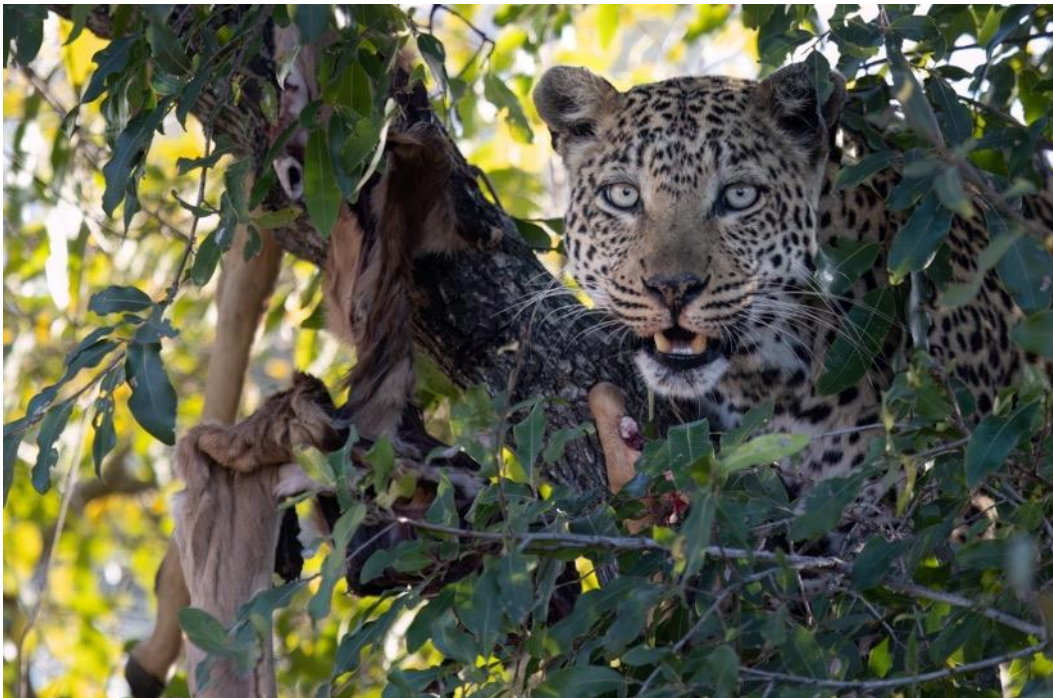
In the early months of her most recent litter, the Dumbana female has been very good at keeping her cubs well hidden. Utilizing the rocky ridges of the Lebombo mountain range to keep her young safe when they were young and immobile, and even as they grew and were strong enough to follow her on her excursions, but still needed to be safe when she needed to leave them to hunt. This female skilfully conceals them, not only from potential predators but also from us, leaving sightings of the family few and far between, and very special.

As they continue to grow, so too does their confidence as we start to see them more regularly as they move along with their mother, learning from her, as her previous litter has done. Learning about the importance of location, not only for safety but also for hunting. With the water sources becoming more scarce as we near the end of winter, our dry season, location becomes everything. At a prominent drinking point, where the slopes of the banks are gradual and open and the rocky riverbed forms a shallow crossing point, animals feel more comfortable to drink with better visibility to watch for crocodiles lurking in the water. These drinking spots are frequented by antelope and elephant and even the leopard and lion, all feeling more secure. But the traffic in and out of these sections of river became the focus of this skilled hunter.



Dumbana cub – Photo by Rudi Hulshof

After seemingly having been separated and hungry for a few days, we were all happy to see the little family with an impala carcass hoisted in a tree on the banks of the river, which they managed to feed on for two days, resting in amongst the rocks and dense riverine vegetation between meals. Possibly as they fed, the dregs were dropped onto the floor, and soon found out and stolen by hyenas. With full bellies, they rested in a massive *Schotia* tree watching the hyenas scrounging for scraps, not too perturbed as there was not much in the way of scraps left anyway.



Dumbana female – Photo by Amy Roberts

The following afternoon, in a neighbouring tree, a new impala was strung up, and the same process ensued, with each leopard taking their turn to feed and then moving down to rest contentedly amongst the cool rocks in the riverbed. By the following day all of them, and the carcass, were gone, and after some searching found with a bushbuck kill in another tree further downstream.



Dumbana female and cub – Photo by Amy Roberts

Showcasing her expertise and determination as a skilled mother in this harsh environment, the Dumbana female gave a perfect example of how being in the right location can bring your prey to you while you sleep off your last meal. Four days and three kills, all within the same area, and yet the one thing they all had in common was the constant presence of hyenas, which could explain why after losing their last kill, she decided to lead her cubs up into the safety of the rocky ridges once again.

August Gallery



Nungu female – Photo by Graeme Stewart



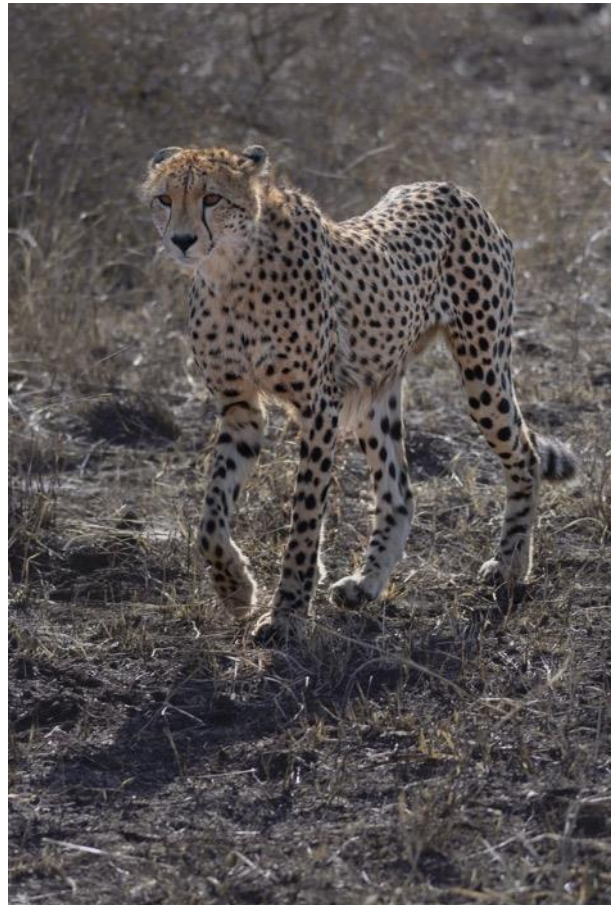
Mananga cub – Photo by Rudi Hulshof



Hippo with African jacana – Photo by Monika Malewski



Buffalo bull – Photo by Rudi Hulshof



Male cheetah – Photo by Monika Malewski



Trichardt male – Photo by Rudi Hulshof



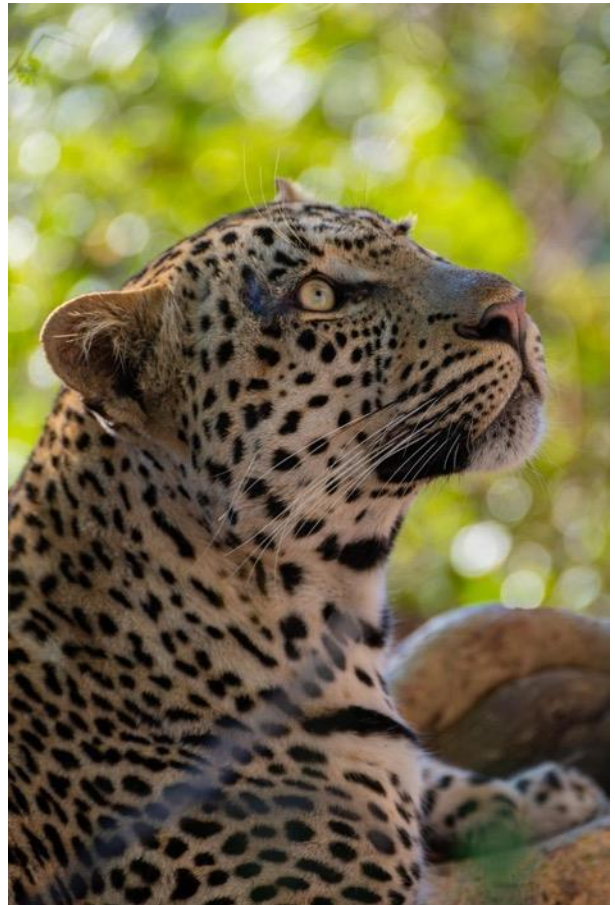
Zebra – Photo by Amy Roberts



Shish cub – Photo by Rudi Hulshof



Pied kingfisher – Photo by Amy Roberts



Male leopard – Photo by Rudi Hulshof



Masia male – Photo by Monika Malewski



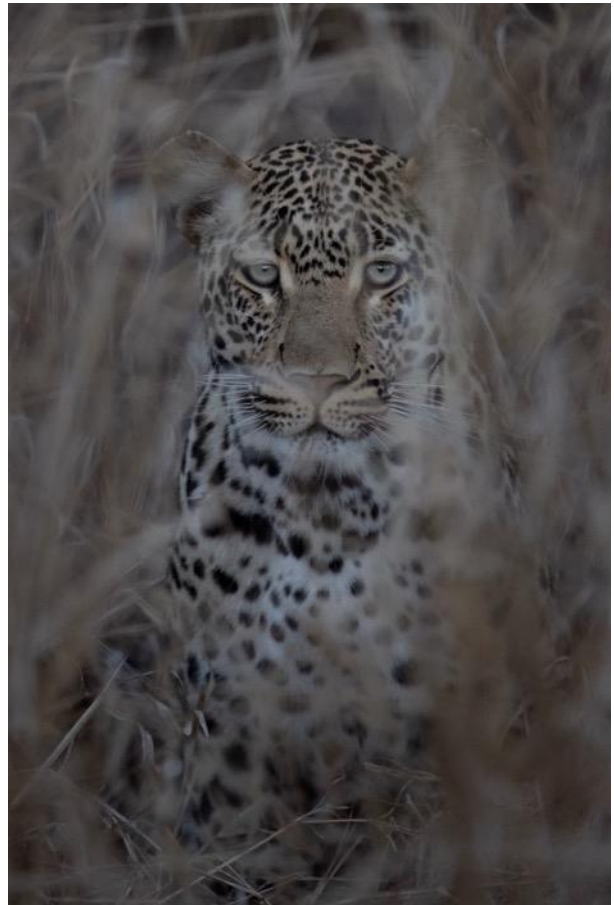
Maputo male – Photo by Rudi Hulshof



Mananga lioness with cubs – Photo by Rudi Hulshof



H6/Sonop male – Photo by Rudi Hulshof



Kalanga male – Photo by Amy Roberts



Young Mananga male – Photo by Amy Roberts



Trichardt male – Photo by Rudi Hulshof