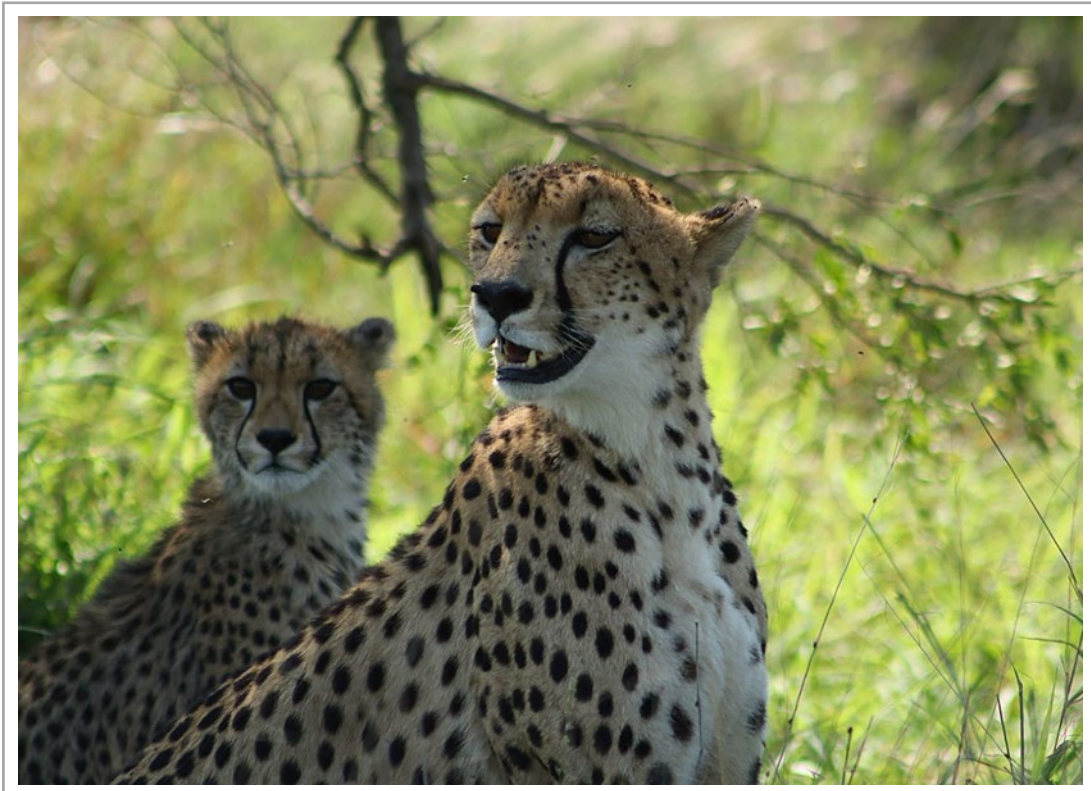


# Singita



Female cheetah with cub – photo by Bill Drew

**WILDLIFE JOURNAL**  
**SINGITA KRUGER NATIONAL PARK, SOUTH AFRICA**  
**For October, Two Thousand and Twenty-three**

**Temperature**

Average Minimum: 17.9°C (65.6°F)

Minimum recorded: 13.0°C (51.8°F)

Average maximum: 30.6°C (91.0°F)

Maximum recorded: 39.0°C (107.6°F)

**Rainfall Recorded**

For the month: 22 mm

Season to date: 330.5 mm

**Sunrise & Sunset**

Sunrise: 05:02

Sunset: 18:10

What a change we have experienced over this past month! From the dry and dull yellow of September, the bush is now bright green and lush. The majority of the trees that had lost their leaves during the dry season, now are full of foliage and the grasses are starting to grow in length for their imminent flowering. Certain wildflowers have already erupted, their tiny splashes of colour catching your eye here and there from amongst the green undergrowth. We have already had two rains, once at the end of September and again in mid-October, and the landscape in certain areas is holding onto that water in the form of the once dried-up little pans and wallows that are now full. Every elephant you see, of which there have been many, has a fresh coat of mud from cooling off during the hot days.

## Here's a Sightings Snapshot for October:

### Lions

- Lion dynamics have been somewhat confusing in the past few months, since the demise of the Shish male by the two Trichardt males, there seems to be a rift that needs filling. The Trichardt males, although most often seen in the southern regions of the reserve have been seen expanding their reach much further north. Often now being seen as far north and west as Gudzane Dam, and actively mating with a few of the Mananga lionesses while in the area.
- The Mananga Pride has been seen a handful of times, once being on a giraffe kill on Park Road, in the presence of the remaining Shish male, all feeding together. However, some females have been seen mating with the Trichardt males, and yet the pride as a whole has not been seen in the presence of these males, except for one sighting most recently at the giraffe carcass.
- The giraffe carcass attracted a few other male lions, possibly from the N'wanetsi coalition.
- The Shishangaan Pride have been setting all their focus on their cubs, of which there are now 15 in total that we know of. Of the seven powerful females, six of them have successfully brought their cubs from the den-sites and they are now mobile and covering more ground with their mothers. However, two of the females, who have had their cubs most recently have been separated often from the rest of the pride as their cubs are much younger and unable to keep up with the movements of the others. But these two females seem to be coping just fine together, having most recently been seen close to the N'wanetsi River with very full bellies and cubs with equally full bellies after suckling.
- The Maputo male coalition has been seen in the northern areas several times, once even in the presence of the old Sweni male while feeding on a kill. However, all of these males disappeared from the area when the two Trichardt males appeared and feasted in this area much further north than we have ever seen them.
- The same kill attracted a young male lion which had been seen a few times during October, once on a young buffalo kill. There is a possibility that this may be one of the Mananga pride's young males who is going through a tough time of independence, but it has been difficult to confirm his identification.

### Leopards

- The Dumbana female was seen eight times during October, within a similar area, and although she was only seen with a kill once, an impala ewe, she was looking healthy and some believe she may be pregnant again, which would make sense after she had been seen mating a few months ago.
- Mhlangulene female has been more scarce this month, with only three reported sightings, one of which the female was seen to be stalking the young Dumbana 3:3 male as he re-entered his old stomping ground after a hiatus of a few weeks. Although no contact was made before she slunk off in the opposite direction, leaving him completely oblivious to her presence, the concerned female was investigating the young male's scent very intently.
- Dumbana 3:3 young male has been seen several times since he was first seen back in the area on 5 October, with a few cuts and scratches possibly obtained during his ventures into other, unknown territories.
- A young female Leopard has been seen a number of times around the area of Gudzane Dam in the western portion of the reserve, and although she has not yet been identified, she does seem to be quite relaxed with the vehicles and we have been lucky enough to have some beautiful sightings of her.
- Another young female has been seen a few times further south in the reserve, much closer to the lodge itself, although she seems to be slightly more reluctant to show herself, but with time she does gradually seem to be becoming more accustomed to our safari vehicles.
- In a similar area, a new young male which is also slightly less comfortable with the vehicle has been glimpsed a few times, moving through the territorial area of the Lebombo and Mondzo males but being sure to avoid contact with either, it seems.

- Mondzo male leopard was sighted multiple times during October, in his usual stomping ground and performing his regular territorial patrols, but he has also been seen on a few impala kills, often feeding on the ground in some thick vegetation, keeping cool.
- Pelajambu male and Mbiri Mbiri male have both been seen this month after not having seen either for a while, it is great to know they are still in the area.

### **Cheetahs**

- This month has been very productive when it comes to cheetah sightings, and the guests and guides alike have been ecstatic to have seen not only a single female, but also a female with three young cubs as well as a female with a single sub-adult cub moving through the concession area.

### **Wild dogs**

- October has had a number of great wild dog sightings, sometimes a pack of only four individuals, but there has been a large pack with a number of adults and including seven young pups also seen.
- The pack with pups have been doing very well, moving through the area and keeping their pups healthy and safe in a challenging and competitive environment.

### **Spotted hyenas**

- There have been many hyena sightings reported for October, most often just one or two together, but with lions feeding on carcasses, there have been hyenas seen together in a group, patiently waiting for their opportunity to feed.

### **Buffalos**

- A large herd of buffalos has been seen quite regularly around the north-western portion of the reserve area, originally thought to be two separate herds which were already of a large size, they appeared to merge into one massive herd and enjoyed the spoils of the fresh green grass emerging after the mid-October rains.
- Although most sightings this month have been of the big herd, there have also been a few isolated bulls moving around the drainage lines and prominent wallowing areas where they would be attempting to stay cool in the thicker vegetation and muddy patches where they can cover themselves with a thick layer for 'sunscreen'.

### **Elephants**

- The reserve has been teeming with elephants over the last few weeks, breeding herds of females with some tiny little babies at their heels as well as a number of large bulls dotted in between the rest.
- A number of sightings of elephant bulls have been in the presence of female breeding herds, often making the cows with calves noticeably uncomfortable, trying to keep their calves protected from the big, lumbering males that often are following the herd in search of females, and so have little patience for youngsters.
- With the rains at the end of September and mid-October, there is plenty of water around, not only for drinking but also for wallowing and cooling off during the heat of the day, which these elephants can often be seen doing on our way back to the lodges at the end of our morning safaris.

### **Plains game**

- The rains have brought with them lush green grasses in all the areas of the reserve, the plains game such as zebras and wildebeest have been numerous and making use of this fresh growth.
- There have been many giraffe around the reserve as of late, and many females have youngsters with them. The trees are sending out fresh leaves and with an abundance of food, and they appear to be thriving.

- The impala ewes are all looking plump and ready for lambing. The season is almost upon us, with wagers going between the team as to when the first impala lamb will be seen. The synchronised breeding of this species is one of the features which makes them so successful as a species, that and the fact that they are mixed feeders, meaning they can alternate their diet between grazing and browsing, depending on which holds the best quality at the time.

#### **Rare animals and other sightings**

- There have been a number of black-backed jackals seen within the reserve, generally within the central depression and most sightings have been in relation to some or other form of carcass or kill in the area.
- African wild cats have been sighted a few times during October, generally in the same area so possibly the same individual which is less nervous around the safari vehicles and allows for a good view.
- Not a common sight, and to everyone's disbelief, an eland was seen on the reserve this month. The animal was seen moving swiftly through the open grasslands of the western reaches of the reserve, clearly unnerved and understandably so as there were some lions in the area.

#### **Birds**

- As we move from a very short spring into summer, some of the summer migrants are already here and some of the birdsong has already changed.
- Rattling cisticolas, which are here throughout the year, have changed their vocalisations from their winter 'phishing' to their summer call and the yellow-bellied greenbuls in the undergrowth surrounding the Lebombo Lodge have been using their chattering associated with October.
- There have been sightings of broad-billed rollers, European bee-eaters and barn swallows, all of which have been spending our winter months further north where food is plentiful.
- There have been a number of vultures seen, with all the kills that have been recorded recently, many of which the vultures have helped us to find. Lapped-faced, white-headed and hooded vultures have all been reported amongst the ranks of the often more common white-backed vultures.
- An unexpected sighting of a grey-headed gull flying along the N'wanetsi was also had this month, although only once so far.

**Some articles and stories follow, as well as the October Gallery.**

Over the last few seasons, we have received above average rainfall on our concession in the Kruger National Park, which has filled up the rivers and streams that feed this magnificent area. However, most weather predictions indicate a possibility of low rainfall linked with the El Nino weather phenomenon. Due to the rivers being full, there is an abundance of water lilies especially in the N'wanetsi River. They provide food and shelter for both aquatic and non-aquatic life which will change if we receive the lower predicted rainfall in the coming seasons. This has made me appreciate how the pools in the river look at this moment in time, it could be many seasons until these incredible flowers establish themselves again.



The blue waterlily (*Nymphaea nouchali*)

The blue water lily, most often referred to as the blue lotus, scientifically as *Nymphaea nouchali*, is a stunning aquatic flower that holds immense significance in ancient Egyptian mythology. Known for its mesmerizing beauty and profound symbolism, the blue lotus is a captivating botanical specimen that intertwines nature, spirituality, and cultural heritage. It has a fascinating connection to ancient Egyptian mythology, which gives us a glimpse into the rich tapestry of beliefs and practices surrounding this extraordinary plant.

It is renowned for its unparalleled beauty, captivating people with its vibrant blue colour, and exquisite fragrance. Its luminescent blue ranges from pale sky blue to deep azure and has long been associated with serenity, purity, and enlightenment. The flower emerges from the water, representing the union of earth and water, the spiritual and the material.

In ancient Egypt, the blue lotus was often depicted in art, adorning murals, jewellery, and sacred objects. Its aesthetic appeal transcended time, symbolising eternal beauty and mysticism. The petals of the lotus elegantly unfurl in the morning, basking in the sunlight, and then closing at dusk, symbolizing the cycle of life and death. Its ephemeral nature only heightens its allure, emphasizing the transient beauty that exists within the natural world.

In ancient Egyptian mythology, the blue lotus held significant religious and spiritual symbolism. It was associated with rebirth, creation, and the afterlife. It was believed to be the sacred flower of Nefertem, the goddess of beauty and healing. According to legends, the sun god, Ra, arose from the blue lotus each morning, representing the rising sun and the beginning of a new day.

Moreover, the lotus was associated with the god Osiris, the ruler of the underworld, and was believed to bring resurrection and eternal life. Ancient Egyptians often placed the lotus in the coffins of deceased pharaohs to guide them through the afterlife. It was believed that it possessed powerful spiritual properties, fostering a divine connection between humans and the gods.

It was also used in religious ceremonies and was believed to have hallucinogenic properties. It was consumed as a sacrament during rituals and was thought to induce a heightened state of consciousness, aiding in spiritual visions and divine communion. The intoxicating effects of the blue lotus further contributed to its mystique and reverence in ancient Egyptian culture.

In recent times, the lotus has experienced a resurgence in popularity due to its rich historical and cultural significance. It continues to captivate people with its beauty and continues to be used in aromatherapy, herbal remedies, and relaxation practices. The flower has become a symbol of tranquility and inner peace in an increasingly fast-paced and chaotic world. Its association with meditation and spiritual transcendence resonates with individuals seeking solace and connection with nature.

This flower reminds us of the interconnectedness between humanity and the natural world, allowing us to appreciate the wisdom embedded in the past while appreciating the beauty and spirituality in the present.

### The return of the spotted sprinters

Article by Monika Malewski

It seems as though the first rains have not only brought back a brilliant green flush of grass and array of wild flowers, but also our beloved spotted sprinters; the shy, yet striking cheetah. From the middle of October, we were treated to 12 sightings of this magnificent cat over a mere 13 days, almost one a day!

Below is a table charting our cheetah sightings of this year so far. As you will notice, the last time we had so many sightings was in January, and I personally had not seen a cheetah since June, that's more than three months ago.

### Cheetah sightings for the 2023 year to date

JANUARY	13 (of which two were outside of concession)
FEBRUARY	9 (of which three were outside our concession)
MARCH	1 (outside our concession)
APRIL	1
MAY	1 (outside our concession)
JUNE	8
JULY	0
AUGUST	1
SEPTEMBER	1
OCTOBER	12 (of which one was outside our concession)



Above: A female cheetah uses a natural scratching post. Below: A mother and cubs.



It all began one morning drive, we had had substantial rain the previous day and the concession was fairly wet, but that day the sun was out and along with it, all the animals wanted to dry their coats. The air was thick with petrichor, a pleasant smell that frequently accompanies the first rain after a long period of warm, dry weather. We were on our way back to the lodge after an already successful morning, having spotted our resident female leopard, Dumbana, who we can confirm is looking very pregnant.

In the deep blue sky, a kettle of vultures diving caught our attention, we looked around to see more than 30 perched in a large dead leadwood about 100 metres away. I stopped the cruiser and peered through my binoculars to look for any signs of predators. After a few minutes of desperate searching (I was now standing on my seat) my tracker, Sunday, shouted "Cheetah! Cheetah!"

And there, tucked away between a dense thicket of guarri bushes were at least two cheetahs. They were glancing around in their typical paranoid fashion as more and more vultures descended, until finally they took off running in the opposite direction. I knew there were some guides driving on the road near to where the cheetahs were headed and radioed them to be on the lookout. Not even five minutes later the cheetah were relocated, but instead of just two, to our delight, it was now a mother with three cubs. We quickly made our way, and spent the next few minutes in awe of this almost mystical creature and her cubs which I estimated to be between seven and eight months old.

They were seen again near the western boundary of our concession for a few days and then disappeared as quickly as they had arrived.



Female with sub-adult cub.

Two days later a single female was seen in the same area, and we followed her over the next few days as she moved north through our concession. That same day another female with a single sub-adult was found near



the Gudzane Dam in an open clearing we know as the N4. Towards the end of the month the wind picked up and on a particularly blustery and rainy morning drive, one of our guides found another female feeding on an impala. She had taken advantage of the windy weather conditions obstructing the impalas usually keen senses.

I believe the new green grass that is still short enough for the cheetahs liking but nutritious enough for prey densities to increase, is one of the main reasons we see more cheetah from October through to February, after which the tall grass is not ideal habitat for cheetahs wanting to avoid their main threat, lions. Kruger National Park is, according to the IUCN Red List, considered a “well-managed, productive, protected area (Pas)” and even so, the density of cheetah was estimated at 1.3 – 2.5 individuals per 100 km<sup>2</sup>. They are categorized as vulnerable, with the global population estimated at 6 517 mature individuals. The main threats are habitat loss and fragmentation, widespread human wildlife conflict, prey loss resulting from overhunting and harvesting of bushmeat, as well as illegal trade.



Female cheetah with impala carcass.

Throughout Africa, an organisation known as African Range-Wide Cheetah Conservation Initiative (CCI) is protecting and supporting the development of conservation strategies and plans. There are also a number of different projects and/or NGOs established across southern and eastern Africa that are either dedicated specifically to the conservation and research of cheetahs, or to all large carnivores. Many of these projects carry out important site-based conservation activities that benefit the cheetah. One of the organisations that work with cheetahs in the Kruger National Park is Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) who, in 2011, launched the “Cheetah Range Expansion Project” with 217 cheetahs on 41 reserves in South Africa, and, as of June 2022, the project includes 470 cheetahs on 65 reserves covering 2 million ha of safe cheetah space throughout southern Africa. According to the last census, there are about 400 individuals in the Kruger National Park, making it a stronghold for the cheetahs of southern Africa.

October Gallery



A coalition of male lions drinking – Photo by Bill Drew.



Lilac-breasted roller – Photo by Amy Roberts.



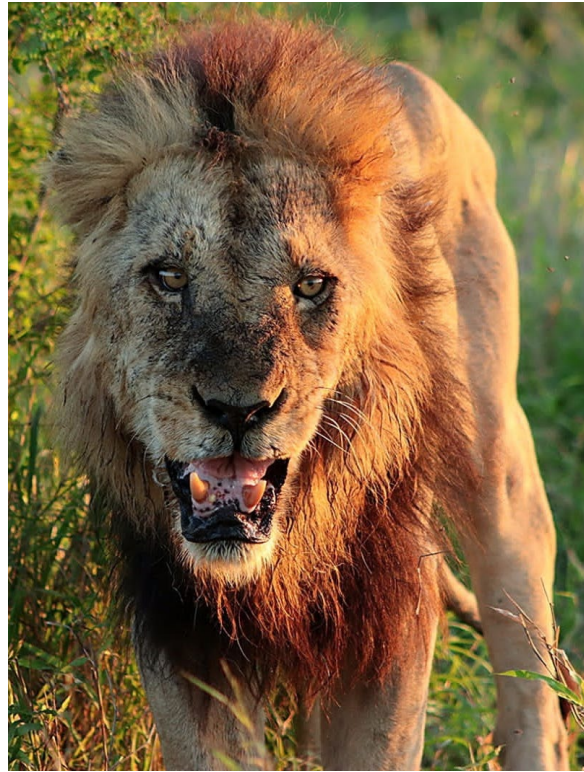
Dumbana 3:3 male leopard – Photo by Bill Drew.



Buffalo herd – Photo by Amy Roberts.



Saddle-billed stork – Photo by Amy Roberts.



Shish male lion – Photo by Bill Drew.



Pelajambu male leopard – Photo by Bill Drew.



Pied kingfisher – Photo by Bill Drew.



Mondzo male Leopard – Photo by Bill Drew.



Zebra herd – Photo by Amy Roberts.



Shish pride cub – Photo by Bill Drew.