

# Singita



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

**Temperature**

Average minimum: 13.2°C (55.7°F)  
Average maximum: 26.4°C (79.5°F)  
Minimum recorded: 09.0°C (48.2°F)  
Maximum recorded: 35.0°C (95.0°F)

**Rainfall Recorded**

For the month: 0.3 mm  
Season to date: 649.7 mm

**Sunrise & Sunset**

Sunrise: 06:22  
Sunset: 17:35

The winds of change are upon us! Days are getting a little longer and new colours are starting to burst - from vibrant yellows of the sjambok pod tree to electric greens of new grass shoots, it has a been a perfect build-up to spring. Familiar calls can be heard once again adding to the dawn chorus which begins earlier and earlier each morning, like that of the Wahlberg's eagle as they diligently stay true to their breeding routine as per years before. As we near summer each day offers the opportunity for change in many different aspects of our surroundings, and, being immersed in nature, it affords us the chance to slow down and appreciate this transition.

Here's a wildlife overview for August:

### Lions

- In the months leading up to August the Mhangene Pride had stolen the show but this month the Nsevu breakaway sub-adults have been an exciting group of five lions to follow.
- The Mhangene lioness that had been denning with her cub at Tavangumi Koppies has introduced her cub to the rest of the pride making the total ten cubs from four females! This pride is looking in superb condition and it has been a pleasure watching them thrive at Singita Sabi Sand.
- The Nkhumu lioness and her two offspring now occupy the area to the north of Ebony Lodge and has even been sighted hunting in the riverbed from the Ebony suites. August is Women's Month in South Africa and this lioness is an icon for women in Africa as she endures the hardship of raising cubs by herself and does it so gracefully.

### Cheetahs

- Viewing of cheetahs has continued where it left off from in July. There was a sighting of a male and female together. There was no confirmed view of them mating but this is a promising sign for the population of cheetahs in the Greater Kruger.
- There are now at least, but not limited to, six cheetahs in the area of Singita Sabi Sand.

### Wild dogs

- The consistent viewing of the wild dog pack with so many pups has been a major highlight for many guests this month. From not only spending time in intimate settings near the secluded safe havens of the various dens, but the game drive to get there has been an adventure in itself. The pack regularly moved dens and now, at over three months of age, the pups are finding their feet and moving with the adults.

### Buffalos

- The dry season can be an enthralling time to watch wildlife, and buffalos in large numbers on their way to drink water are the perfect candidates to set the scene. Dust can be seen from miles away as hundreds of hooves pelt the ground. Flocks of oxpeckers bicker among themselves for the best perch on their tick-infested hosts which now start trotting and then galloping on their way to quench their thirst. These are scenes which have been common during the month of August with a herd of over a thousand buffalo frequenting the south at the moment.

### Leopards

- A highlight for this month was the Thamba male leopard mating with the Tisela female for the first time. The four-year-old female flirtatiously followed the male right into the heart of the Schotia female's territory. Driven by instinct alone she ignored the territorial markings of the older female in pursuit of Thamba, and at one stage were seen outside the bush suites of Boulders suites 11 and 12.
- On the same day the Schotia female was seen not far at suite 6. She would have definitely heard the two mating but chose the safer option and avoided them. The Schotia female has been in great condition despite the state of her tick-infested ears. She has been making frequent kills. Perhaps she will welcome spring by coming into oestrus once again?
- The Xipuku male leopard had everyone overjoyed when George spotted him with an impala ram kill hoisted in the only marula tree for miles near Triangle Pan. Approaching the sighting we could see the remains of the kill dangling in the tree some distance off. We exercised a lot of patience in hope he would ascend the tree in the afternoon. There was not much left of the kill but we knew he would still return to finish off the last one third that remained of the carcass. Eventually, after the sun dipped behind the Drakensburg escarpment, he leapt up the tree leaving our guests gasping at the bulky leopard moving so swiftly up the tree.

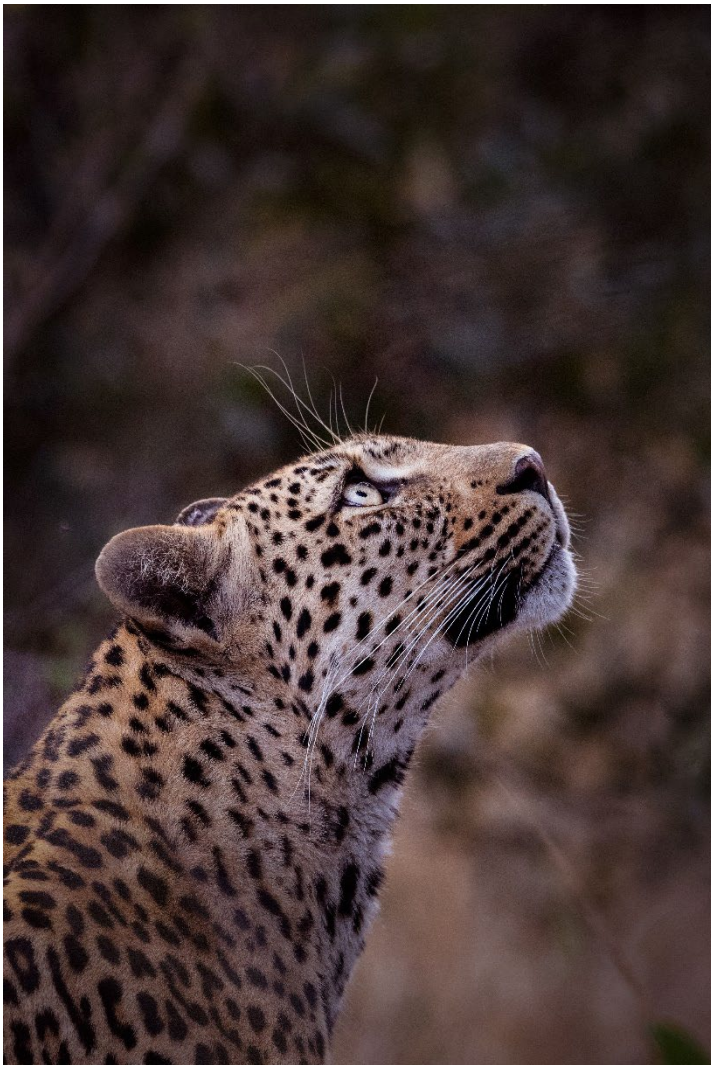
- As the Mobeni female's territory gradually shrinks there have been a few more sightings of her older daughter, the Ntoma female leopard, who occupies the Xmobanyana riverbed in the central western part of Singita. Sightings of her can be unpredictable, either choosing to accept our presence or move off earlier than we liked. This is what makes leopard viewing so addictive.

### Elephants

- Elephant sightings are prolific, especially of relaxed breeding herds.
- Large game paths which are now covered in round and oval shaped tracks cross the combretum woodlands as the majority of the elephants' diet is now roots, leave and bark. Often while watching wildlife, we can hear the crack of the elephants feeding in the distance.

### Unusual sightings

- This month is always a promising time to catch a glimpse of a honey badger. We have recorded almost ten sightings of this feisty carnivore, many of them on the burnt areas. Over time we are also noticing that certain individuals are building a tolerance to the vehicles and are allowing us to view them for relatively lengthy periods of time.



- Another nocturnal species which had guides and trackers giddy was a discovery of a pangolin at the start of an afternoon drive. For many experienced safari goers this is considered the holy grail of mammals. The diminutive size and nocturnal habitats make them difficult to actively track down.

### Bird list

- The bird list for August includes two new species, bringing our yearly total to 264.
- Migrants have started to return; we have seen several Wahlberg's eagles return to their nests, and on the 13<sup>th</sup> of August three yellow-billed kites were seen.

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

## **A wild dog hunt and so much more**

**Article by Andries Mohlala**

It was a morning game drive with temperatures fairly low on the new day. We'd had great sightings over the past three days with the same guests, so the plan was to just take it easy, enjoy nature and see if we could come across anything interesting as we explored the wilderness.

We got a glimpse of a hyena that seemed to be in a big hurry and that was the beginning of an exciting interaction which involved a dead bushbuck in a dam, a hippo that was alarmed when he saw a pack of African wild dogs in his watering hole, a clan of hyenas circling the water and there was a crocodile in the mix as well!

We arrived at the watering hole to find one pack member in the middle of the water and we soon learned that there was a drowned animal that the dog was going after, and the hippo did not like what he was seeing! The hippo charged full speed towards the dog who also didn't like a real big sausage running at an alarming speed towards it. All the wild dogs prudently jumped to safety. Two seconds later more dogs were back in the water and this time they were able to claim the kill which they dragged towards dry land. But then there was a crocodile trying to drag the kill the other way! The dogs had the upper hand on the crocodile but as the kill was dragged on dry land, the taxmen of the bush were waiting. Hyenas! The spotted scavengers wasted no time in taking the kill from the dogs, and even devouring the carcass in front of them.

The hippo was still grunting to try and convince all to stay out of his dam as the hyenas and the dogs started to move off as they all had no more reason to be at the water, To the dogs it was time to try for another kill, while the hyenas moved off looking a lot fatter than when they arrived!

## **The up and coming Nsevu breakaway lions**

**By Marc Bowes-Taylor**

They Nsevu lions have shown promising signs for their future as they have now honed their hunting skills to expert levels. Buffalos form a regular part of their diet as they consistently trail a herd that moves from the Sand River in the east all the way to Giraffe Pan and further.

Patience paid off one afternoon as Johan, Ruel and their guests spent the whole day and into the evening in anticipation of the lions making an attempt on the herd. What followed was a dramatic ending as lions captured a buffalo bull. The buffalo herd returned to hopefully rescue their fallen comrade but it was too late for the bovine.

The Nsevu breakaways lions have not limited their hunts to buffalos but made a remarkable kill of a giraffe calf and cow.

Lion hunts are most successful as collaborative efforts, and depending on the prey species hunting strategies are adjusted. For example to hunt buffaloes as a pride it is best to stalk them in darkness and make a short swift charge before pouncing on the target, bringing it to ground, and one lion clamping its jaws around the buffalos throat to kill it. Whereas to hunt a giraffe lions tend to chase it into an area of uneven terrain until it trips and falls and then they can dispatch it.

These Nsevu breakaway lions are worth spending time with if you want experience the thrill of the hunt.



The tawny eagle (*Aquila rapax*) meaning rapacious eagle.

It is a bird of prey belonging to the family Accipitridae.

This majestic raptor is widely distributed across the vast landscapes of Africa, ranging from the southern tip to the northern most reaches of the continent. Its presence in various habitats, from open savannas to arid deserts, makes it a true symbol of adaptability and survival. Here at Singita Sabi Sand the environmental conditions are optimal, allowing more than one pair to nest on the property.

With a wingspan that can reach up to 2.3 metres (7.5 feet), the tawny eagle is an impressive predator of the skies. Its plumage varies from light to dark brown, providing excellent camouflage in its natural habitats. The distinctive feature that sets it apart is its light-coloured nape, which resembles a tawny crown, hence its name. These eagles are sexually monomorphic, meaning both males and females share similar physical characteristics.

Tawny eagles are apex predators and are well-equipped for their role in the ecosystem. Their keen eyesight allows them to spot prey from great distances, making them effective hunters. Their diet is diverse, including small mammals like rodents, hares, and small antelopes. They are also known to scavenge and will feed on



carrion when the opportunity arises. This adaptability in diet is one of the reasons for their widespread distribution. They are found often with vultures and the short-tailed eagle.

Breeding behaviour of these eagles is fascinating and exhibits a strong bond between mates. These eagles are known for their elaborate aerial courtship displays, where they perform acrobatic manoeuvres together. Once a pair has formed a bond, they build large nests high in trees or on cliffs, using sticks and other materials. The female typically lays one to three eggs, which are incubated by both parents. The eaglets are born blind and completely dependent on their parents for survival.



One of the most notable aspects of tawny eagles is their ecological significance. As top predators, they play a crucial role in controlling the populations of their prey species, thus maintaining a balance in their ecosystems. Their scavenging behaviour also helps prevent the spread of diseases by removing carcasses from the environment. In this way, tawny eagles contribute to the overall health and stability of their habitats.

Conservation efforts are crucial to ensure the continued existence of tawnys and the ecosystems they inhabit.

In conclusion this eagle with its commanding presence and vital ecological role, is a true icon of the African skies. Its adaptability, hunting prowess, and complex breeding behaviour make it a species worthy of admiration and protection. Through concerted conservation efforts, we can ensure that this majestic predator continues to grace our world and contribute to the delicate balance of nature.

August Gallery



One of the Nsevu young male lions watching a vulture as it circles in for a better look. Image by Matt Durell.



A lioness not wanting distraction from a buffalo carcass.





Chaos erupts as a herd of buffalo burst into the watering hole on a hot August day. Image by Matt Durell.



One of the cheetahs we are so fortunate to view at Singita Sabi Sand.





As the temperatures warm up viewing of rhino has picked up as well. Image by Matt Durell.



A well-timed snap of the Schotia female leopard captures her intense focus, the details in her whiskers and her rough tongue. Image by Andrew Taylor.