

# Singita



**WILDLIFE JOURNAL**  
**SINGITA SABI SAND, SOUTH AFRICA**  
**For the month of May, Two Thousand and Twenty-Four**

**Temperature**

Average minimum: 15.4°C (59.6°F)  
Minimum recorded: 12.0°C (53.6°F)  
Average maximum: 27.6°C (81.8°F)  
Maximum recorded: 33.0°C (91.4°F)

**Rainfall Recorded**

For the month: 1.8mm  
Season to date: 451.8 mm

**Sunrise & Sunset**

Sunrise: 06:23  
Sunset: 17:17

The month of May can typically be summed up by the stillness of the late afternoon and the calmness of the star-filled night skies. However, this month while this atmosphere certainly was present, the wildlife took on a different approach with spectacular scenes unfolding in front of our guests that brought a heart-racing energy on the reserve. The multitude of interspecific competition - interaction between two different species, was quite remarkable and had us all on the edge of our seats. The Mhangeni Pride was viewed 14 days in a row as they scavenged off a dead hippo. Leopard viewing has been of superb quality and there have been numerous sightings daily of these graceful cats. The reserve is littered with massive herds of elephants and dazzles of

zebras are penetrating right into the heart of Singita as they move to the Sabi Sand for the dry season. Each day has provided us with extraordinary opportunities to witness some of nature's greatest displays and keeps us exploring for more.

### Here's a sightings snapshot for May:

#### Lions

- Fortune has been on the side of the Mhangeni Pride this month as they have managed to come across three easy meals in the form of two buffaloes that were found deceased in two different watering holes, as well as a hippo. This provided stable lion viewing throughout the month of May. The condition of the 15-year-old lioness has not improved as her muscles are starting to breakdown. Although difficult to see her in such a state she has had a successful life and her legacy speaks for itself.
- The Tsalala lioness has her first litter of cubs somewhere close to Millennium koppies. The prominent suckle marks that are now visible on the lioness are a sure sign of new lion cubs. Let's hope they survive and grow this pride which has been on the Sabi Sand since 1998.
- In the western part of Singita we have had viewing of the two young Othawa lionesses. One such sighting we watched in amazement as a clan of five hyena cornered them in a riverbed where they then decided to climb a tree to get out of reach from the hyenas.
- The Plains Camp lions have been causing quite a stir in the northern parts of Singita and surrounds as they have been driving out young males from the Nkuhuma and Talamati Prides.

#### Cheetah

- The female cheetah that has been seen for the past two months throughout Singita looks to be pregnant. The southern grasslands have been a chosen denning area for female cheetahs before and there is good chance she will choose this area. If she does, it may indicate that the male that patrols the south is likely to be the father.

#### Leopards

- The south-eastern part of Singita has seen seven different leopards moving through that area of the reserve. One of many highlights relating to leopards in that area was when the Nlanguleni female scavenged a kill from the Ntomi male and then proceeded to follow him around for a few days while trying to entice him to mate with her. On this day the Nkuwa female, the Nlanguleni female's daughter, was sighted with her two older cubs. The Senegal Bush male was also in the area meaning the whole family tree for those three generations were viewed just a few miles apart.
- The Xipuko male had a hoisted impala kill off of 40 km Pan as he now moves much further south and west as the older Senegal Bush male has pushed him out of the area surrounding Castleton. This has resulted in the increase of leopards moving about in this area as the unrelated male, Xipuko, is pushed out.
- To the west of Ebony Lodge, the Thamba male has been a frequent presence in the riverine forest. Like many of the other leopard sightings this month he too was seen feeding on an impala ram which he had stashed in a low branch of a russet bushwillow tree in a dry riverbed. Merely five minutes from camp this was a fantastic find for our guests.
- The Kangela male leopard has made brief appearances as he avoids the larger males that have a stronghold on most of Singita's section of the Sabi Sand. He was reminded of his place in the hierarchy when shortly after making a kill and dragging it up a tree the Hlambela male burst onto the scene, fought with the younger male and accidentally dislodged the impala carcass from the tree to the hyenas waiting below.

### **Wild dogs**

- The pack of three are denning with their pups in the southern parts of our traversing area. The pups are still too young to be viewed by vehicles and a five-week period of no viewing at the den has been put in place. According to research pups that are only viewed after the first five weeks have a far greater survival rate as the pups stay in the one den for longer.
- The Toulon pack of 11 wild dogs have been seen hunting to the north and south of the Sand River. One afternoon the valiantly defended their grey duiker kill from a clan of seven spotted hyenas.
- The Othawa pack of seven has one female that is close to giving birth. Last year they denned to the north of our lodges and had a total of twenty-four pups where both the beta and alpha females' pups were raised in one den. Will history repeat itself once again for this pack?

### **Elephants**

- For many of our guests of late the elephants have been a firm favourite as they are always a welcome sight, no matter how many times we find them on a safari. In the wooded areas of Singita a snapping branch is never too far away as the elephants supplement their diet with cambium and roots of trees. We have enjoyed mild to warm temperatures by midday meaning the elephants are never far from the Sand River.

### **Buffaloes**

- As the dry season is well and truly underway the daily pilgrimage to big bodies of water by the buffalo herds are captivating to say the least. As the herd approaches the water's edge so the pace picks up and one can hear the thudding of hooves in the surrounds. Dust and oxpeckers fill the sky as the head of the herd finally reaches the watering hole, a feast for the senses.

### **Unusual Sightings**

- Andries and Howard had a special sighting of an African clawless otter at Pios Crossing, hunting for crabs and other molluscs in the rapid. Sightings of these shy creatures are always treasured for guides and guests alike.
- We have seen a pair of secretary birds that on a few occasions have been seen inspecting large thorny trees for possible nesting sites. This would be a fantastic addition to the reserve if they do breed here.
- In the north Andrew and Louis found a hyena den while looking for wild dogs, at least three cubs from two litters have been seen at the entrance to the den. The clan of adults is well over ten in this area.

### **Bird List**

- The bird list for May includes four new species, bringing our bird list for the year up to 270 birds. Specials for the month included a pair of secretary birds, a glossy ibis and a couple of sightings of a half-collared kingfisher along the Sand River.

**Some exciting and informative Bush Stories follow, as well as a May Gallery of images.**

The thrill of exploring the unknown and spending quality time with friends in nature creates a buzz of excitement. These were the feelings we had when I recently invited some of my friends from the city to come and visit for a few days.

The bush offers a chance to immerse yourself in natural beauty, from lush greenery and diverse wildlife to stunning landscapes. The serene environment provides a break from urban life. This is what most people need every now and then to come and reconnect with nature.

Having been to the bush regularly my friends were well accustomed to seeing wild animals, but never with the luxury of getting up close to them. With a buzz of excitement, we set off on our first afternoon safari and the bush did not disappoint. We had lovely views of elephants and buffalos along the Sand River bathed in the beautiful golden light before sunset.

Our resident pride of lions was located not far from where we were doing some birding and we decided to go have a look. They were fast asleep and not bothered by us at all. It's always amazing to see a pride of 15 lions fast asleep all around the vehicle.



We saved the best for last when we found a large male leopard stalking a herd of impala. We sat patiently for about an hour watching as he planned his next move. Unfortunately, it became dark and we decided to leave him to continue his quest.

As a guide we do not often get to share our wonderful world with friends and family, so it's always special, especially when Mother Nature plays along!

## **A serpentine surprise**

**Article by Andrew Taylor**

Winter is one of my favourite seasons for safari even though at any time of the year there is something incredible happening on our beautiful concession. We have had some incredible sightings over the past few weeks but there has been one that has really stood out amongst the rest, and I would like to share a story on how this sighting took place, and for you to get the full picture, I will start at the beginning:

At this time of the year a lot of our trees begin to lose their leaves and the bare branches begin to stick out like fingers, the grass also begins to disappear as it is fed on by the plethora of animals that we have here on our concession. With that being said, there is still so much natural beauty to see in our winter season and landscapes that make for incredible backdrops and stunning photographs for our guests to take away.

On this day we drove out in search of a pride of lions that had been spending a lot of time feeding off a very large hippo bull carcass that had unfortunately died of natural causes. The lions had followed vultures flying overhead until they managed to find it and had been spending time feeding on it and lying around very close to a waterhole.

As we were approaching this area with excited guests on the vehicle, Louis and I heard a small flock of birds going crazy with alarms calls on the other side of the dam and we knew something was up, we rushed across to the other side and located the noisy birds which were mobbing a southern African python that was searching for its next meal in an iconic dead tree that all the guides know so well.

We were all so surprised by what we had found, and the snake slowly as ever started to move down the main trunk of the tree towards the ground and we all got to witness the incredible beauty of this massive reptile we were lucky enough to find.

We are often asked whether we will encounter snakes while we are out in the field and it is not as common as one may think, so this was a truly spectacular sighting, after we had viewed this incredible snake, we continued with our plan and got an interactive sighting of the lions we initially set out to find.

It just shows that we never know what could be around any corner out here!

## **A tale of two prides**

**Article by Marc Bowes-Taylor**

The lion viewing lately has been dominated by mainly the Mhangeni Pride - five adults and ten cubs of four litters; and the lone lioness of the Tsalala Pride.

Although these two prides seem so vastly different at first glance, they in fact both share the same origin and are related. In 1998 the Tsalala Pride was formed and flourished over the years and in 2013 four sisters left the pride which then became known as the Mhangeni Pride.

In 2020 it was just the Tsalala lioness and her daughter that had been ousted by the Ntsevu lionesses and two years later the oldest lioness of the pride was killed by the Nkuhuma breakaway lionesses.

Life as a lone lioness has many challenges but yet the Tsalala lioness is making it look easy. Her condition is impeccable and she always seems so composed. Perhaps learning to survive without much assistance has brought on some sense of maturity and responsibility that lions of that age wouldn't normally need? She has her first litter of cubs stashed somewhere around Tavangumi and Millennium Koppies.

The last one left of the old Tsalala sisters, now the oldest Mhangeni female, finds herself in the last days of her life. The month of May has been hugely beneficial to her and the pride with three scavenged carcasses. After the 15 day all-you-can eat hippo meal the pride moved north.

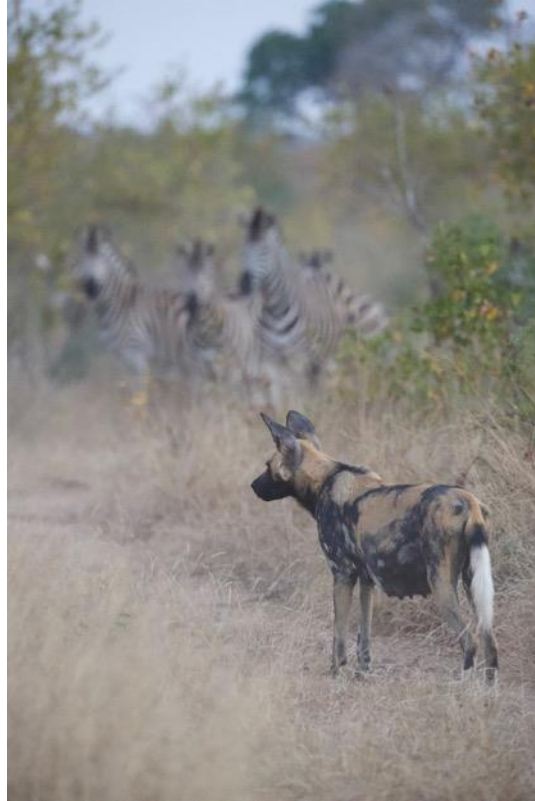
One morning they were seen resting between Tavangumi Koppies and the river but only four adults were present and all the cubs. The oldest lioness was missing. Not for long though as she was spotted a few hundred yards back on the edge of the river course. It was obvious she no longer had it in her to keep up with the pride, and the pride knew she could not hold them back as this goes against the greater good of all the other lions. She was not alone though.

Peering from across the crystal clear Sand River the Tsalala lioness watched the desperate Mhangeni lioness struggling to even lift her head. We knew her days were numbered but we did not expect this would be the last time we would see the Mhangeni lioness.

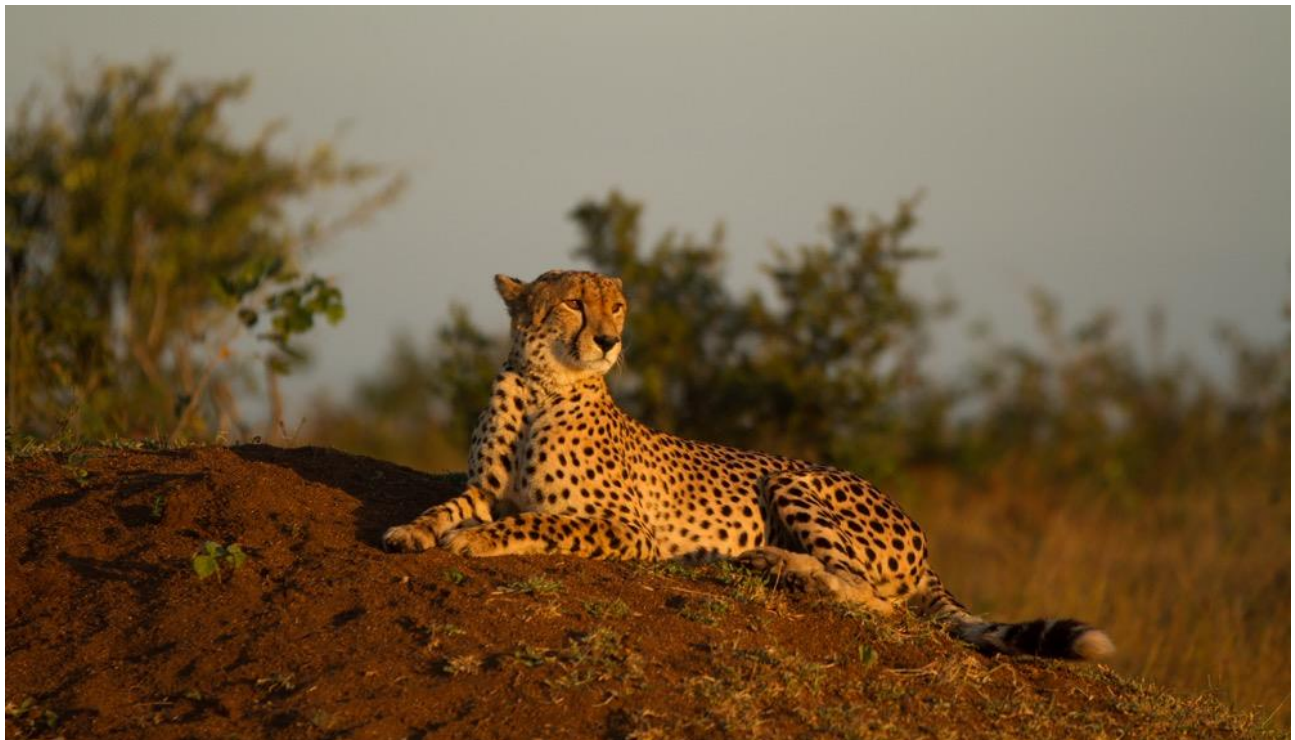
Looking back at it now, although probably circumstantial, it was as if these two lionesses were coming together one last time, a send-off by a distant relative. For these two females, and their prides, they are both experiencing a significant moment of change. Motherhood and a life now without the guidance of their eldest female. One can't help but feel some relatedness to situations like this. These sorts of stories are one of the reasons wildlife connects with so many people from all corners of the globe, and so it should continue to do so for the rest of time.



May Gallery



The alpha female wild dog from the Othawa pack sizing up a herd of zebra. Image by Matt Durell.



The ideal setting for photographing a cheetah: a termite mound bathed in golden light.  
Image by Marc Eschenlohr.



May has offered us the opportunity to find shy creatures like this vine snake. Image by Andrew Taylor.



A dazzle of zebra checking the area carefully before drinking at the grassland watering hole.  
Image by Marc Eschenlohr.





A dwarf mongoose slowly gains our trust after sitting outside its place of refuge, silently.  
Image by Marc Eschenlohr.



An elephant calf having some fun on the banks of the Sand River. Image by Marc Eschenlohr.



A male cheetah on the prowl. Image by Andrew Taylor.



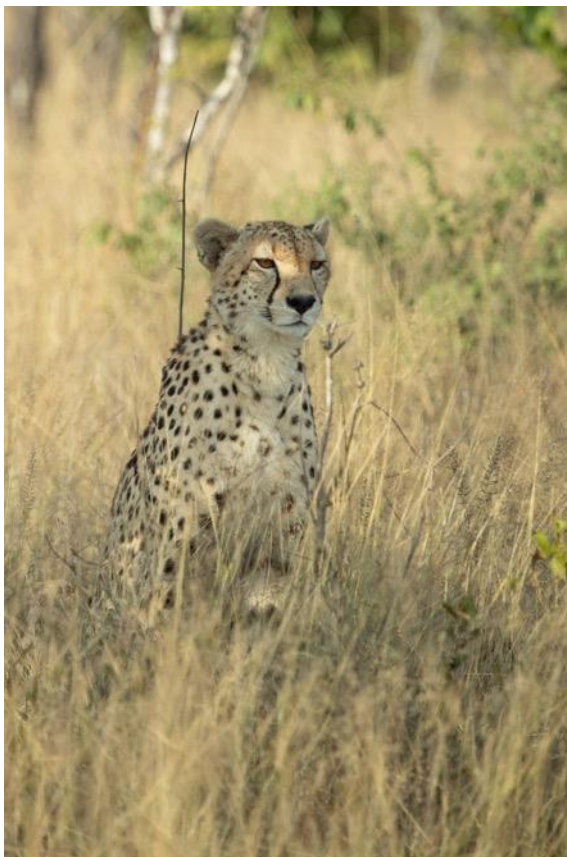
The setting sun, rolling grasslands and a male ostrich. Image by Quentin Swanevelder.  
A well-composed image by Andrew Taylor of an elephant and her calves drinking.



A leopard using the vegetated rocky outcrops (koppies) to view her surroundings. Image by Marc Eschenlohr.



An immature bateleur offering a unique pose as it listens carefully to the clicking of the camera.  
Image by Marc Eschenlohr.



The Plains camp lions have had their work cut-out for them over the past month, mostly occupying the northern reaches of Singita Sabi Sand and surrounds. Image by Matt Durell.

The Thamba male leopard perched on Tavangumi Koppies. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.

A cheetah among the golden grass, no easy task to spot. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.