

# Singita



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

**Temperature**

Average minimum: 20.6°C (69.1°F)

Average maximum: 30.0°C (86.1°F)

Minimum recorded: 17.0°C (62.6°F)

Maximum recorded: 40.0°C (104.0°F)

**Rainfall Recorded**

For the month: 72.5 mm

Season to date: 499 mm

**Sunrise & Sunset**

Sunrise: 05:55

Sunset: 18:09

As the evenings linger longer and the days cool, the month of March has carried a gentle pace and rhythm this year. Rain has graced the reserve softly, allowing birds and insects to go about their final preparations for winter. It has awakened the dung beetles from their subterranean slumber while birds enjoy the small pools formed on the edge of the dirt tracks to bath and clean their feathers. A distant lion calling signals his presence to those that may only know him through his scent and sound. These are just some of the moments we have experienced while exploring the rich diversity that is found in the Sabi Sand Nature Reserve.

### **African wild dogs**

- The pack of three has been seen most days out on safari this month, a privilege that doesn't come around all that often, meaning we have been allowed to view all sorts of behaviour. One such example was witnessing them mating! Considering they only have one litter of pups a year this is rare behaviour. This pack consists of two males and a female, one male is collared which allows for detailed data to be collected relating to their movements throughout the entire Kruger Park ecosystem. At Singita we play a role in relaying information relating to behaviour like mating, prey species etc. to those organisations studying them, like the Endangered Wildlife Trust and Panthera.
- The pack of nine which have been seen to the north of our lodges in the last week has meant wild dogs have featured on most of our guests lists of 'seen at Singita Sabi Sands'.

### **Cheetahs**

- There have been sightings of the territorial male as well as a female cheetah of late. It is uncertain whether this is the female that had the three cubs but there is a high probability it is her. She was last seen with just one cub in the grasslands and with the high density of lions at the moment the odds are stacked against her.
- As the grasses begin to thin out so our chances of seeing a cheetah at rest begins to increase. It was for this very reason that one morning a cheetah was seen by a dazzle of zebra which helped us locate him from the vehicle. The zebra all came to a complete stand still and focused in on the feline lying at the base of a marula tree, and eventually approached as a group driving the cheetah out. A remarkable scene to witness for our guests as the tables are turned on the predator.

### **Leopards**

- The Senegal Bush male keeps pushing further west, gradually taking chunks of territory from the younger Xipuko male whom has been more scarce than usual this month. The Senegal Bush male now patrols as far as Castleton Camp and further north to the famous drinks spot area, Mveve lookout.
- With the bouts of inclement weather lately, this has aided the Nkuwa female in her efforts to hunt for her two growing male cubs. Some fine-tuned tracking thanks to Martin and Reazert lead their guests to a sighting of the three leopards on an impala kill in a wooded area that would not have been possible to spot without the dedicated efforts of these two experienced trackers.
- The Thamba male has been making the most of the cool weather and has been covering massive pieces of ground day and night. He has been seen all over the central and western parts of Singita. One afternoon a report came in of a male leopard crossing into Singita, so Marc E, Musa and their guests headed off to find the leopard. Musa was quick to notice a disturbance on the track which on closer inspection indicated a leopard dragging its kill to a riverbed. It was the Thamba male who had made the kill and stashed it in an ebony tree.

### **Lions**

- The Tsalala lioness seems to be nearing the time where she is due to give birth to her first little of cubs and grow her pride to what it once was. Her movement in the eastern parts of the reserve presents many opportunities for her to safely den with her cubs. The gabbro rocky valleys have for many centuries been a favoured area for new mothers.
- The Ntsevu males are lions which would be a threat to the Tsalala lioness and her cubs as their patrol route seems to be taking shape in and around this area. They have also been furthering their hunting grounds further south of the Sabi Sand. As they grow their demand for food does too. These expert buffalo hunters have had many opportunities lately as buffalo herds are in abundance.
- The Mhangeni Pride have their eyes set on the buffalo herds as well. The pressure of ten cubs, four of which are nearing one year of age, has these lionesses hunting every day until they catch large enough prey. Fifteen lions mean buffalo carcasses are finished in two days.

### Elephants

- We are seeing more and more elephants frequenting the Sand River valley as they seek out dense stands of grasses that are found here. The recent rains will encourage growth now throughout the reserve and this will mean elephants will be found throughout the area.

### Buffaloes

- Guests at Castleton Camp have been in the perfect position to watch herds come to drink in the late morning. There have been a number of herds moving in the south west and eastern areas of Singita. On one particular afternoon during a K9 demonstration we had a herd come through and steal the show as they traversed to the open areas further south of us.

### Unusual sightings

- A sighting that may only come around once in a lifetime, and guide Dan testifies to it, an aardvark during daylight! Dan, Christopher and their guests could not believe their luck when they saw one trotting along back to its burrow just after sunrise. This was everyone's first sighting of this shy nocturnal mammal, including guide and tracker.
- There have been good sightings of African wildcat in the woodlands south of Castleton Access. These diminutive cats are slowly getting accustomed to the vehicles as they learn to trust them.
- Every so often an abnormality appears in a population due to genetic mutations. These individuals have a slim chance of survival for a number of reasons and therefore are not seen all that often for very long. In the beginning of the month there was a sighting of a leucistic buffalo calf. The calf must have been just days or even hours old as the rest of the herd persistently followed it around smelling and showing hostility. It has not been seen again, and in all likelihood was driven out of the herd due to its odd appearance.



### Bird list

- An exciting month with some great birding. Specials included a flock of nine fulvous whistling ducks close to Ebony Lodge, a black sparrowhawk and more recently a booted eagle perched in a marula tree. We saw 23 new species bringing our total to 265.

**Some bush reflections to follow, as well as the March Gallery of images.**

Today I want to talk about marula trees and their benefits to the living beings, as we all know that the game drive is not only all about the big game, such as the Big Five (elephants, buffalos, rhinos, lions and leopards) but also other aspects of the bush that are equally important.

Marula trees are probably best known for the delicious fruits they produce during the later summer months between January and March, when the plum-sized fruits fall off the tree unripe and ripen to yellow on the ground where all different kinds of mammals, including human beings, feast on them. The fruits have a lovely citrus flavour and have been used by us to make jellies, jam, ports, juice, beer and Amarula liqueur.

Marulas are many times richer in vitamin C than an orange, some suggestions have been made that elephant bulls tend to feast on marula fruits for the vitamin C to boost their immune systems before entering musth (reproductive status).



During marula season there is seldom a fruiting marula tree without elephants in attendance. Elephants are known to shake the tree to release more fruits from the canopy. It is not true that elephants become intoxicated from eating marula fruits as their digestion systems do not facilitate that kind of fermentation.

There is an exceptionally hard kernel inside the fruit that has two to three caps that enclose the nuts which are high in protein and oil, and they are collected by locals to be eaten fresh or roasted.

Elephants eat leaves and roots of marula trees pushing the trees over in times of food shortage to access these parts, they will strip the bark to access the cambium layer which comprises the vascular tissue, which is the part of the tree that transports water and other nutrients from the roots to the leaves and back - this is highly sought after by elephants.

The inner bark of the marula has antihistamine properties, therefore it is used successfully against the sting of hairy caterpillars. A pink dye can be extracted from the inner bark and is general used to dye basketwork. The bark of marula tree is an excellent remedy of haemorrhoids, and the roots and bark are also used as a laxative.

It really is such a beautiful and incredibly useful tree to all.

Nestled within the captivating landscapes of the Lowveld and on Singita, a tiny but charismatic creature thrives: the dwarf mongoose (*Helogale parvula*). Despite their diminutive size, these sociable mammals play an outsized role in the ecosystem and captivate the hearts of many who encounter them.

Dwarf mongooses, with their distinctive reddish-brown fur and long tails, form tight-knit family groups known as businesses, consisting of up to 20 individuals. Their communal lifestyle fosters strong bonds, crucial for survival in the often-harsh African savannah.



One of the most remarkable aspects of these pint-sized predators is their cooperative behaviour. When foraging for insects, small reptiles, and even small mammals, they employ a division of labour, with sentries stationed atop termite mounds or rocks, keeping a vigilant watch for potential threats. This sophisticated social structure not only enhances their hunting success but also ensures the safety of the business.

Despite their prowess as hunters, dwarf mongooses are not immune to danger. They must remain vigilant against formidable predators such as birds of prey, snakes, and larger carnivores like jackals and leopards. Constant communication through a range of vocalizations helps them coordinate defensive strategies and alert others to potential danger.

Beyond their ecological significance, dwarf mongooses offer valuable insights into the intricacies of social behaviour among mammals. Their cooperative breeding system, where dominant individuals monopolize reproduction while subordinate members assist in rearing young, provides a fascinating glimpse into the dynamics of family life in the animal kingdom.

For visitors to the Lowveld, witnessing these diminutive creatures in action is a memorable experience. Observing their playful antics, intricate social interactions, and unwavering unity serves as a poignant reminder of the interconnectedness of all life forms within the ecosystem.

However, as with many species, dwarf mongooses face numerous threats to their survival, including habitat loss, fragmentation, and human encroachment. Conservation efforts aimed at preserving the natural habitats of the Lowveld are therefore crucial in ensuring the continued existence of these captivating creatures.

Here at Singita Sabi Sands, amidst the swaying grasslands and sprawling trees, the dwarf mongoose thrives as a symbol of resilience, cooperation, and the enduring beauty of Africa's wilderness. Protecting their habitat not only safeguards a species but also preserves a vital thread in the intricate tapestry of life in this remarkable region.

The relationship between natural and urban environments with regards to one's wellbeing and mental peace-of-mind are endless. Not only in the influence of our day-to-day existence but the attracted thoroughfare toward the unknown, and arguably 'primitive' draw toward wildlife and safari, are perhaps best substantiated through the popularity of modern-day safari.

From every angle, spot, culture, position and background of the globe, people are drawn to a sense of 'home' and wellness, a place where the aggregate of life seems to make sense on a level playing field.



There's not much that beats the privilege and feeling of the humbling, yet safe, vulnerability and beauty that we experience whilst driving amongst the alluring creatures that most only dream of being this close to. That being said, there is an aspect that extends beyond that, an experience that we guides often refer to as being a "participator rather than an observer", where we are placed in the footprints of elephants, lions, dung beetles and everything in between.

Whether its walking through the banks of the untouched Xmobonyana riverbed (home to our resident pride of lions and all their cubs), or interpreting the story of a dung beetles' journey, there's something unique about walking in their story. It's a story that our trackers often silently navigate whilst working in this indescribable place we call home.

So, when you visit next, take a step into the world of those we so love to observe, enlighten the senses, feel the Sand River sand beneath your feet and, in the words of the incredible tracker, Emmanuel:

"Nature is a newspaper, you have to read it every morning to figure out what happened yesterday".

## March Gallery



A unique capture by Andrew Taylor as a white-fronted bee-eater catches an African queen or monarch butterfly, which are poisonous to eat. The butterfly was swiftly spat out by the insectivore!



Healthy herds of waterbuck grazing in front of Ebony Lodge. Image by Coleman Mnisi.

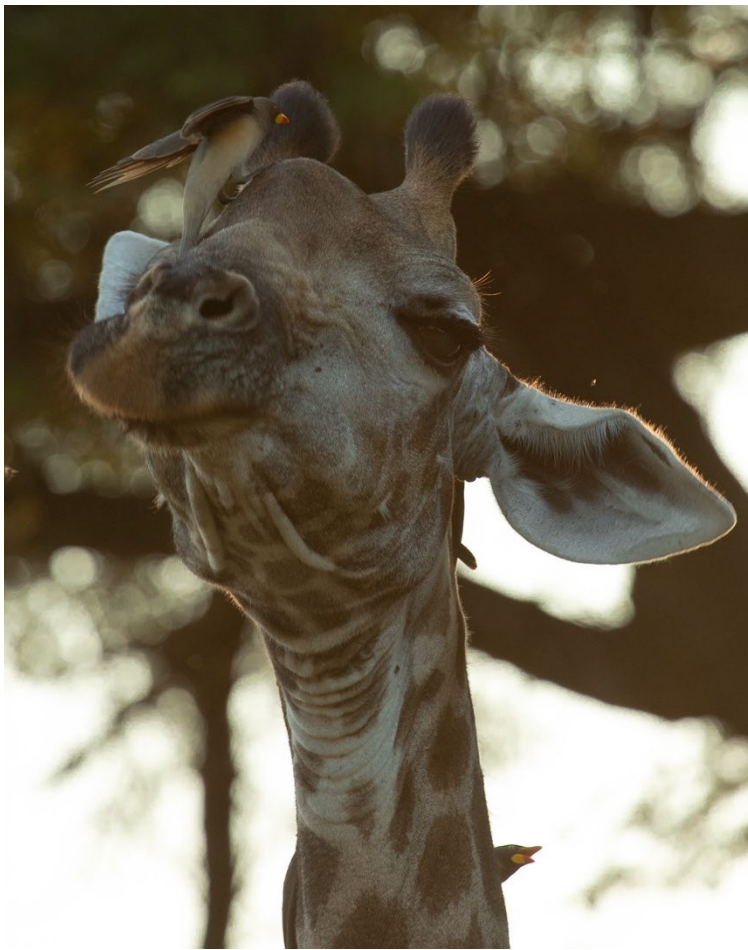


The Ntsevu lions finishing off a buffalo kill while a hooded vulture grows ever impatient for the leftovers. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.



The lion kill also got the attention of the White-headed vultures, a rare species with less than 500 pairs left in South Africa. Images by Marc Bowes-Taylor.





A giraffe cow and her band of yellow-billed oxpeckers, one of many examples of symbiosis in nature.  
The Thamba male amazing guests with his relaxed demeanour. Images by Marc Bowes-Taylor.





The strong Tslala lioness eyeing out a hunting opportunity on an overcast day. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.



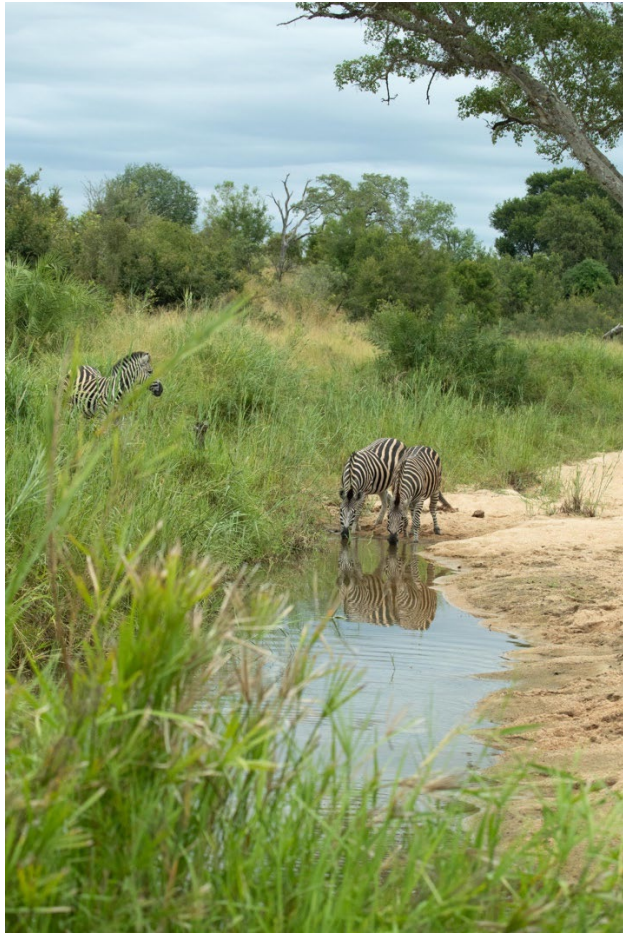
A buffalo bull eyeing out the photographer! Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.



A pinch yourself moment as you approach the fastest animal on earth, perched on a small termite mound.  
Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.



Two spotted hyenas use their keen sense of smell to paint a better picture of who has been moving through their territory. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.



Zebras make the most of fresh rainwater in the Sand River valley. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.



Wild dogs relax in the midday sun.