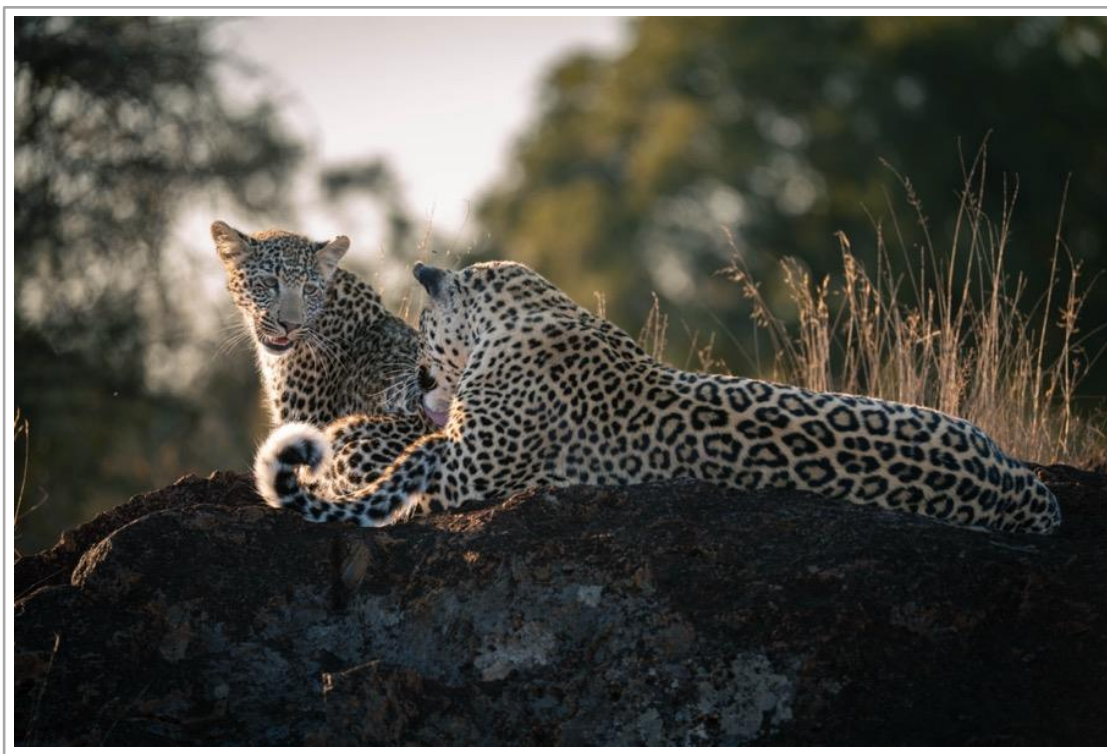


Singita



Dumbana and cub – Photo by Monika Dallas

WILDLIFE JOURNAL SINGITA KRUGER NATIONAL PARK, SOUTH AFRICA August 2026

Temperature

Average minimum: 14.0°C (57.2°F)
Minimum recorded: °09.0°C° (48.2°F)
Average maximum: °26.4°C° °(80.0°F)
Maximum recorded: 34.0°C° (93.2°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 38 mm
Season to date: 1 399 mm
(*Season = Oct to Sept)

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 06:10
Sunset: 17:40

August brought a dramatic shift in the Lowveld, with the bush steadily drying and thinning as winter progresses. The crisp, persistent August winds have been accompanied by cooler mornings, while temperatures are now slowly beginning to climb again during midday. A powerful cold front sweeping up from Cape Town brought snow to many areas of the Highveld, before unleashing two days of torrential rain and wild winds across the Lowveld. Yet, even amid these dramatic weather changes, there are signs of spring stirring: the first knobthorn trees are bursting into delicate bloom, and our elegant white Wahlberg's eagle has returned from its summer travels. With the vegetation becoming increasingly sparse, the bush is opening up beautifully, offering glimpses of wildlife that are often hidden during the lush summer months. This has

brought some wonderful and unexpected sightings, including the elusive honey badger, secretive porcupine and ghost-like caracal.

A Sightings Snapshot for August follows:

Lions

- Two young males, estimated to be around four years old (and potentially from the Shish Pride), were found feeding on a young giraffe carcass. More than 15 spotted hyenas were seen surrounding them. Despite the numbers, the hyenas remained hesitant to approach the young lions. Their cackles, low moans, and growls echoed around us as they waited for an opportunity. The lions had dragged the carcass beneath the shade of a small apple-leaf tree, leaving the stomach and intestines behind. Hooded vultures gathered around the remains, while one particularly bold hyena managed to grab a piece of stomach lining and ran off with it. His escape ended when he tripped, allowing another hyena to snatch the prize and swallow it in one gulp.
- The Mananga Pride remains divided. The three adult females have been staying in the central depression while the other ten pride members, mostly subadults, move as a separate group. The youngsters are growing quickly and are now almost as large as their mothers. The larger group was found feeding on the remains of a female kudu. They had left very little behind, much to the disappointment of the vultures patiently waiting in the nearby dead leadwoods.
- One of the three males that chased the Sonop males out last month has found a Mananga lioness, and the pair are now mating. The lioness is very comfortable around vehicles, much to the male's apparent dismay. Normally, these males are quick to disappear when vehicles approach, but his instinct to stay with the lioness seems to be overpowering his fear. Instead, he keeps a close eye on us, ducking his head into the grass as we drive past — a rather amusing compromise between wanting to run and wanting to stay with his new mate.
- The large, unknown male lion with his beautiful two-toned mane was found one morning. He had been roaring throughout the night and into the early hours of the morning. We had just got to the top of the ridge, and as I turned off the engine to view a group of giraffes, we heard the last low grunts and moaning sounds. My tracker immediately looked towards where the sound had come from and, in the distance, caught sight of his tail disappearing behind a large *Vachellia* tree. We turned off the road and headed towards where we thought he was, but he was already on the move and covering ground surprisingly quickly. We caught a brief glimpse of him in the valley below and quickly radioed our colleagues, directing them towards where we believed he was heading. With some perseverance, we eventually managed to find him. As if that wasn't enough, we were also rewarded with the sight of a herd of elephants nearby, including a tiny calf, a wonderful addition to an already memorable morning in the bush.
- Towards the end of the month, on one morning alone, we found three separate mating pairs spread across the northern/central concession. Two of the pairs were part of the coalition of three shy males in the north. It has been quite amusing to watch the conflict between instinct and opportunity: every instinct seems to urge these males to run, yet the irresistible draw of a female in oestrus keeps them close. The third mating pair was further south, with a big, beautiful, dark-maned male. By that afternoon, however, he had disappeared, and in his place were the N'wanetsi and the One-Eyed male. Both appeared to have a few fresh cuts and scrapes, leaving us to wonder whether they had chased the other male away from his females.
- Adding to the seemingly endless stream of new males, the Sweni males — four magnificent, powerful lions from south of the Sweni River — made their presence known during the final days of the month. They were observed mating with several of the Shish females and have been exceptionally vocal. Their behaviour suggests that they are determined to establish themselves and take control of the territory.

Leopards

- It has been an exciting month for leopard sightings, with some fascinating behaviour and interactions between individuals. One morning, the Lebombo male opportunistically stole a kill from a pack of wild dogs. The wild dogs, however, were not willing to surrender their meal without a fight. They chased the leopard towards a large leadwood tree, where he attempted to escape by climbing to safety. In his first attempt, the dogs managed to grab hold of his tail and began pulling him back down. Fortunately, he broke free at the last second and scrambled up the tree, narrowly escaping the determined pack below. What made the sighting even more unusual was the presence of another male leopard nearby. Leopards are highly territorial and, although we know there is considerable overlap between individual territories, they will generally avoid one another, particularly when feeding. The smaller male would normally be expected to keep his distance from another male, but with the commotion of the wild dogs and the excitement surrounding the kill, the opportunity to investigate may simply have been too tempting.
- On another afternoon, we excitedly followed the tracks of the Dumbana female, hoping to catch a glimpse of her moving through the area. We were ecstatic when we found her with her cub. The pair were heading directly back from the direction Dumbana's tracks had come, a strong indication that she had successfully made a kill and was now returning to collect her daughter. We followed their tracks for more than a kilometre. Just as the last light of the day was fading and the sun disappeared below the horizon, Dumbana and her cub turned off the road and into a dense thicket of guarri bushes. The pair immediately began feeding on a large impala carcass, hidden from view amongst the thick vegetation. With the darkness setting in, the only indication of their exact position was the unmistakable sound of bones being crunched. Around five minutes later, we spotted a hyena skulking towards us, its nose held high as it followed the scent on the breeze. The moment it picked up the sounds of the leopards feeding, it quickened its pace, almost running straight past them before making a sharp turn into the thicket. The sudden appearance of the hyena sent both Dumbana and her cub flying out of the bushes. The hyena wasted no time, immediately settling in and gulping down large pieces of the carcass as quickly as it could. Dumbana cautiously stalked closer, hoping to salvage a few scraps, but it soon became clear that her meal was lost. As a single mother with a young cub to protect, avoiding a potentially dangerous confrontation was the sensible choice. There would be other opportunities to hunt, and for Dumbana, living to hunt another day was far more important than risking herself or her cub over a meal.
- The Zamani male was spotted by one of our eagle-eyed trackers, expertly concealed among the branches of a tall leadwood tree. A few minutes later, an unsuspecting warthog approached. Although she was alert, she had no reason to suspect that danger was lurking above. Zamani silently climbed down from the tree and swiftly caught the large female. Warthogs are notoriously feisty, and she put up a determined fight before finally succumbing to the powerful male. It was certainly a substantial meal, and one that should keep Zamani well fed for the next few days.
- The Khandziya female was found sleeping on a small rocky outcrop when something in the grass below caught her attention. She slowly leopard-crawled down the slope, placing each paw carefully and stopping often to listen. Whatever it was had gone quiet, but she kept edging closer, sniffing the grass around her. Then she pushed her head into a thick clump and began pawing at it. We had no idea what she had found, but she kept jumping back each time it moved. A snake suddenly launched out at her and we realised she was hunting a puff adder. Anxiety crept over me, as a single bite from this venomous snake could have dire consequences. But this experienced young female seemed to know exactly what she was doing. Eventually, she subdued and killed the puff adder before settling down to enjoy her hard-earned meal.

Cheetahs

- We were extremely fortunate to see three male cheetahs on the concession this month.

African wild dogs

- The pack of seven African wild dogs has been consistently seen moving between the suspected den site in the Granophyre and the western boundary. Their movements continue to suggest that they are closely tied to the area, and we remain hopeful that the den site is still active.
- Despite several sightings of the adults, we have yet to catch a glimpse of the pups. As with wild dogs, the adults' movements and behaviour can often provide clues as to what is happening at the den, and their continued use of the area is certainly encouraging. For now, we remain patient and hopeful that, with a little luck, the pups will eventually make an appearance, and we will be rewarded with our first glimpse of the newest members of the pack.

Elephants

- Large tuskeders have been moving through the area, while breeding herds have become increasingly concentrated along the rivers and smaller streams, where the last pockets of green vegetation can still be found. Although there is still an abundance of groundwater available, the vegetation has visibly thinned out as the dry season progresses. With less fresh browse available, the elephants are making the most of what remains, and we are seeing increasing evidence of their feeding activity. More trees are being pushed over or completely uprooted, with the roots being dug out and devoured by these ever-hungry giants. The sight of a large elephant tearing into the roots of a fallen tree is a reminder of just how resourceful they are when food becomes scarce.

Spotted hyenas

- Most of our spotted hyena sightings this month have been of solitary individuals roaming "the streets" at dusk. As the light begins to fade and the bush comes alive with the sounds of the night, these opportunistic predators can often be seen moving purposefully along the roads, searching for any opportunity that may present itself.
- One particularly exciting sighting involved a clan of more than 15 spotted hyenas gathered around two young male lions that were feeding on a young giraffe. The interaction was a fascinating display of the complicated relationship between these two formidable predators. The fear that hyenas have of male lions can sometimes be almost comical to watch. Despite their numbers, the hyenas will often work together, forming a loose line and slowly edging closer to the lions, everyone seemingly testing just how far it can push its luck. They inch forward until one gets a little too close, at which point a lion suddenly charges. The entire line of hyenas immediately scatters in all directions, accompanied by a chorus of their bizarre, high-pitched whoops and yelps. Within moments, however, they regroup and begin the process all over again, waiting patiently for the lions to become distracted or move away from the carcass. It is a fascinating example of the constant balance between caution and opportunity that shapes the lives of these highly social and intelligent predators.

Buffalos

- Buffalo sightings this month have been relatively few and far between. During the dry season, large herds tend to congregate and become increasingly nomadic, covering considerable distances in search of sufficient grazing and the remaining areas of nutritious vegetation.
- This seasonal movement means that we often only catch brief glimpses of these impressive herds as they pass through the concession. One day they can be found grazing in an open area, and the next they may have moved several kilometres in search of better forage. Their movements are a good reminder of how closely wildlife patterns are tied to the availability of food and water, particularly as the dry season progresses.

Plains game

- The plains game continues to take full advantage of the abundance of fresh grazing following the recent burns. Large herds of zebra and wildebeest remain spread across the newly burnt grasslands, gathering in impressive numbers as they make the most of the tender green shoots emerging from the ash-rich soil. Among the impala, several ewes are beginning to show the first subtle signs of pregnancy, with small “baby bumps” becoming noticeable following the peak of the rut in May and June. It is an exciting time to watch these elegant antelope, as the promise of the next generation becomes increasingly evident. Meanwhile, the giraffes have been enjoying the seasonal flush of new growth, delicately picking their way through the fresh leaves and cream-white flowers appearing on the knobthorn trees.

Rare animals and other sightings

- Rare sightings have continued to provide some memorable moments this month, with a caracal making a welcome appearance. One individual was spotted one evening crouched low in the grass, watching the vehicle intently. Rather than disappearing into cover, it remained remarkably relaxed, sitting quietly and seemingly sizing us up before eventually continuing on its way. Although this was our only caracal sighting this month, we have been fortunate enough to record at least one sighting every month so far this year. With this regularity, it is possible that some individuals are becoming habituated to the presence of vehicles. This does not mean that they are becoming tame; rather, they have learned that vehicles pose no threat and can therefore continue with their natural movements and daily routines without feeling the need to flee.
- Honey badgers have also made a few entertaining appearances, bouncing energetically through the grass before pausing to glance back at us, occasionally accompanied by their distinctive, low crackling growl. These elusive and often unpredictable creatures are always a special sighting, making each encounter even more rewarding.

Birds

- This month has brought a wonderful return of familiar feathered visitors and some memorable sightings in the bush. The pale morph Wahlberg’s eagle is back at her nest along the N’wanetsi River, a welcome sign of the changing season. Yellow-billed kites have also returned, joining the red-breasted swallows as they once again fill the skies with their familiar calls and graceful flight. There have been multiple sightings of ostriches throughout the area, while one particularly spectacular morning brought us a close encounter with a Gabar goshawk. As we travelled along, the goshawk suddenly swooped down directly in front of the vehicle, snatching a small rodent from the grass before disappearing back into the bush. A large flock of great white pelicans flew overhead one afternoon in their typical “V” formation, most likely on their way from an inland water source to the Indian Ocean.

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



There are few things more entertaining on safari than watching a young lion discover that being a predator is harder than it looks. A cub crouches in the grass, eyes fixed on its unsuspecting sibling. Its shoulders drop, its tail twitches, and suddenly it looks every bit the serious hunter. One step, another, and then it launches itself forward, misses completely, tumbles sideways, bites its brother on the ear and gets bitten back. Within seconds, the hunt has become a wrestling match. To us it looks like fun, and it is, but in fact something much more important is happening too. The cub is learning.

We often think of wild animals as creatures that simply know what to do. A lion knows how to hunt, an elephant knows how to use its trunk. There is certainly a strong instinctive component to animal behaviour, but animals are not born with a complete instruction manual. They arrive with instincts, physical abilities and behavioural tendencies, but experience fills in the details. A young lion may instinctively know that it is a predator, but it still needs to learn how to stalk effectively, judge distance, coordinate its body and anticipate the movements of prey.

The African bush is therefore more than a place where animals survive. It is a classroom with play being one of its most important teaching tools. Watch young lions for long enough, and you will see the same behaviours repeated, again and again. They stalk, they chase, they pounce, they wrestle, they bite, they fall over. Then they start again. It may seem completely pointless. No food is being caught, and no territory is being defended. But play allows young animals to practise physical and social skills in a relatively safe environment. A pouncing cub develops coordination. A chasing cub learns about speed and timing. A wrestling cub learns how to use its

body against another animal. And a cub that misses learns to adjust, but most importantly, play allows animals to experience failure without catastrophic consequences.

A young lion can misjudge a pounce on its sibling and suffer little more than a mouthful of fur. Misjudge a pounce on a buffalo as an adult, however, and the consequences could be considerably more serious. Play is therefore something like a rehearsal for adulthood, except the actors are allowed to get their lines wrong. Play is not simply physical exercise. When young animals wrestle, chase and bite one another, they are also learning how to interact socially. A game can look surprisingly aggressive, yet genuine aggression and play are different things. Animals use body language, vocalisations and changes in behaviour to communicate their intentions and prevent playful interactions from becoming serious fights. Young animals learn how hard they can bite, when to back off and how to respond when another animal has had enough. Sometimes the larger animal allows the smaller one to win, and sometimes the chaser becomes the one being chased. These interactions teach the important lesson of how to live with others. For social animals, this can be just as important as learning how to find food.

Few animals demonstrate the importance of learning as beautifully as the African elephant. An elephant calf is born into a society full of experienced individuals. Its mother has years of knowledge and has travelled through the landscape for decades. They know where water can be found, where food is available and how the landscape changes with the seasons. The calf has an enormous amount to learn, and it does so by watching, following, touching, investigating and playing. The trunk alone provides endless opportunities for experimentation - often the trunk appears to have a completely different plan from the rest of the elephant, but through repeated use, the calf gradually develops the remarkable control required to use it. Young elephants also chase, push and wrestle with one another, developing physical coordination and social skills along the way.



And sometimes, quite simply, they may just be having fun. Not every behaviour in nature needs a single explanation.

Play is only one part of animal learning; animals also learn by watching others. This is particularly important in social species. A young animal does not necessarily need to discover everything through trial and error. If an older individual already knows where water can be found or how to respond to danger, younger animals can benefit from that experience. This is known as social learning - elephants provide an excellent example, but the principle is widespread. Young baboons watch older animals. Wild dog pups learn from the pack. Young predators observe adults hunting. Meerkat youngsters develop skills by interacting with experienced members of their group. In this way, an animal society contains more than individuals; it contains information.

Perhaps the most interesting thing about play is that it does not completely disappear with age.



Adult elephants, primates and carnivores can all engage in playful behaviour. It may become less frequent or take different forms, but play is not simply something animals do because they are young. It can contribute to social relationships, exploration, physical activity and behavioural flexibility throughout life. Scientists are still working out exactly what different forms of play accomplish in different species. And that uncertainty is important.

Animal behaviour is complicated. A single game of wrestling might simultaneously be exercise, social bonding, practice and

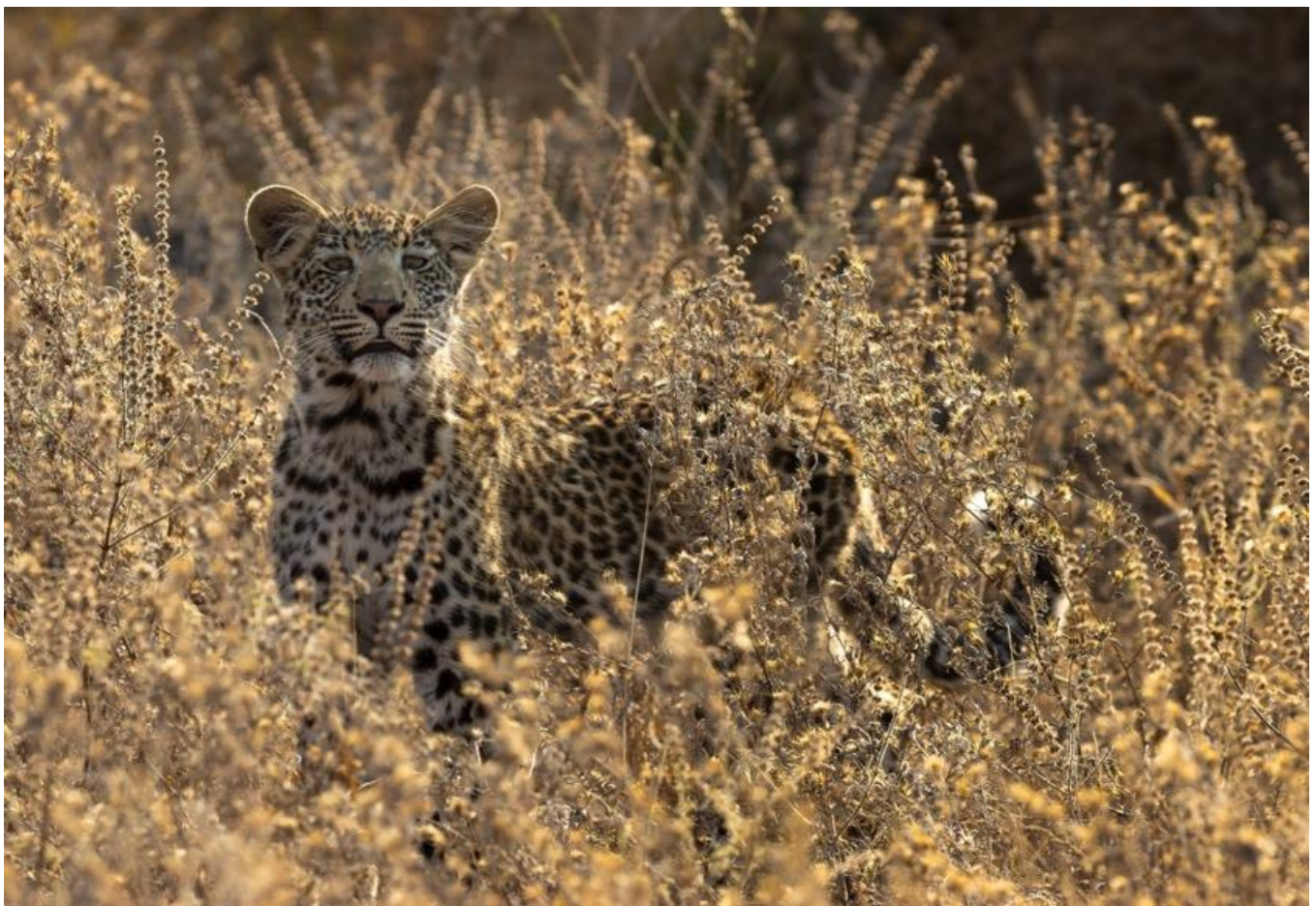
exploration. Nature does not always separate behaviours into neat categories. The next time you watch young animals playing on safari, it is worth looking beyond the obvious entertainment. A lion cub wrestling with its sibling is developing coordination and learning social boundaries. An elephant calf investigating its trunk is learning how to control one of the most extraordinary structures in the animal kingdom. A wild dog pup chasing its siblings is developing the physical and social skills it will eventually need as part of a cooperative pack. A young baboon scrambling through the branches is learning about movement, risk and the complicated world of its troop. They are not simply passing the time but rather building the skills they will need later. Perhaps that is what makes watching young animals so fascinating. We see play, but beneath the chaos is a remarkably sophisticated process of learning. The young animal is experimenting with its body, its environment and the animals around it. It is discovering what works, and what doesn't, and how to try again.



From the outside, it may seem that animals just know what they need to do and that they simply follow instinct, but if you look a little closer, you will begin to see generations of animals passing information to one another, experience shaping behaviour, and young animals testing the boundaries of what they can do. And, occasionally, you see a lion cub spectacularly miss its target, roll down a termite mound and attack its own tail. It may look ridiculous, but that cub is doing something remarkably serious. It is learning how to be wild!

It was one of those cold, crisp mornings in the bush where everything seems to come alive beneath an endless blue African sky. The sun was beginning to rise, casting a warm golden glow across the landscape, and we set off in search of the Dumbana female leopard and her cub.

After following their tracks for some time, the journey took us through tricky terrain, along a drainage line and eventually beside the river. The trail continued through tall, golden-coloured grass, which swayed gently in the cool morning breeze. Now and then, the rising sun broke through the trees, creating beautiful contrasts of light and shadow across the landscape. We followed patiently, knowing that leopards can disappear as quickly as they appear. After a while, we reached an area where the tracks suggested that they might be nearby. We waited. The bush was quiet. Then, suddenly, there they were. The Dumbana female and her cub appeared and climbed onto a rocky outcrop right next to us. As they settled into the morning sunlight, they were almost at eye level, an incredibly intimate view of these magnificent animals.



For a few moments, everything seemed to stand still. The soft morning light illuminated their coats, highlighting every spot and detail. Behind them, the colours of the Lowveld came together perfectly: deep greens of the trees, rich golden grass glowing in the sunlight, and the brilliant blue of the morning sky. It was one of those scenes that photographs do no justice to.

Watching a mother leopard and her cub so close, completely relaxed and unaware of how privileged we were to witness them, was an unforgettable experience. There was something particularly special about seeing the



two of them together, the mother constantly aware of her surroundings while the cub explored and followed her lead. Eventually, the warmth of the rising sun became too much, and the pair climbed down from the rocks. They continued their journey along the riverbank, moving back into the cooler shade and disappearing gradually into the vegetation.

We were left with a lasting memory of a truly remarkable morning — a cold start, a golden sunrise, spectacular scenery, and an extraordinary close-up encounter with the Dumbana female and her cub.

Winter in the Lowveld is a season of subtle transformation. The mornings become crisp, the grass gradually loses its summer freshness, and the landscape takes on a softer, more golden appearance. One of the most noticeable changes, however, can be seen above us: some trees lose almost every leaf, while others remain beautifully green throughout the dry season.

For me, as a guide at Singita Kruger National Park, these contrasting trees are a constant reminder that the bushveld is never simply “dry” or “green.” Every tree is responding to its environment in its own way, and understanding these differences adds another fascinating layer to a game drive.

The deciduous strategy - letting go to survive:

Many of the Lowveld's trees are deciduous, meaning they shed their leaves during a particular season. This is especially noticeable during the dry winter months, when rainfall is limited, and the soil gradually loses moisture. Although a bare tree might appear lifeless at first glance, the opposite is often true. Leaf loss is an effective survival strategy. Leaves lose water through a process called transpiration, so by shedding them, a tree can significantly reduce its water requirements when moisture is scarce. The timing of leaf drop is influenced by several environmental cues, including decreasing temperatures, shortening daylight hours and, most importantly in our region, declining water availability.

During a winter game drive, I often find myself pointing out these apparently bare trees to guests. It is a wonderful opportunity to explain that what looks like dormancy is actually a highly successful adaptation to the Lowveld's seasonal climate. Beneath the bark, roots and branches, the tree is very much alive and conserving its resources until conditions improve.

The evergreens - staying green when the bush turns dry:

Then there are the trees that seem almost unaffected by winter. While much of the surrounding vegetation becomes brown and leafless, evergreen species continue to hold onto their foliage. These trees have developed different strategies for coping with the dry conditions. Their leaves are often tougher and more resistant to water loss, sometimes with waxy surfaces or other structural adaptations that help them retain moisture. Their ability to remain active for much of the year also means that they can take advantage of favourable conditions whenever water and sunlight are available. It is important to remember, though, that “evergreen” does not mean that a tree keeps every leaf indefinitely. Individual leaves still age and fall. The difference is that new leaves are produced as older ones are lost, allowing the tree to maintain a green canopy throughout the year.

On a winter drive at Singita, these green trees often stand out against the golden grasslands. They can become particularly useful landmarks when navigating the landscape, but more importantly, they provide an excellent illustration of how different plant species have evolved to survive side by side in the same environment.

It is not only the tree species that matters. Leaf retention is not determined by species alone. The conditions in which a tree grows can make a significant difference. A tree growing close to a river, drainage line or area with deeper, moisture-retaining soils may experience very different conditions from one growing on an exposed rocky slope. Even within the same species, trees can sometimes respond differently depending on the amount of water available to their roots. These small variations create what we call microclimates, localised areas where temperature, wind exposure, shade and soil moisture differ from the surrounding landscape. This is something I particularly enjoy showing guests while out in the field. We might drive through an area where most of the trees are bare, only to find a greener pocket of vegetation nearby. That change is rarely random. The landscape is telling us a story about water, soil, exposure and survival.

Every species has its own strategy:

One of the most fascinating aspects of the Lowveld is that there is no single formula for surviving here. Different tree species have developed different strategies according to their biology and the conditions they have experienced over countless generations. Some species invest in producing leaves quickly when favourable conditions return. Others are better equipped to retain their foliage and continue photosynthesising through the dry season. Some have thick bark that protects from fire, while others have roots and growth patterns that help them cope with drought. Fire, too, is an important part of the story. In a fire-prone ecosystem such as the Lowveld, trees have evolved a variety of ways to survive and recover from burns. Thick bark, protected buds, and the ability to resprout are just some of the adaptations that allow certain species to persist in this challenging environment.

Reading the winter bush:

For a guide, learning to read these seasonal changes is an essential part of understanding the bush. A winter landscape may initially appear quieter and less productive than it does after the summer rains, but spending time observing it reveals a completely different story. The bare branches can make it easier to spot certain animals, while evergreen trees may provide important shade, food or shelter. Fruit, flowers and new shoots appear according to their own seasonal rhythms, and herbivores adjust their movements and feeding behaviour in response to what is available.

I often find that guests notice the colour of the landscape first. But once we stop and look more closely, the question changes from “Why are some trees green and others bare?” to “What is this tree telling us about its environment?” That, to me, is one of the great joys of guiding in the Lowveld. Winter is not simply a season of things disappearing. It is a season of adaptation. The bare trees are conserving water, the evergreens are making the most of their surroundings, and the entire landscape is adjusting to a period of scarcity.

When the first summer rains eventually arrive, the transformation can seem almost magical. Trees that appeared dormant begin producing fresh leaves, grasses respond with new growth, and the bushveld slowly returns to its vibrant summer character. But having watched the landscape through winter, we understand that nothing was ever truly dormant. The Lowveld was simply waiting for the right moment to begin again.



Example of a deciduous tree.

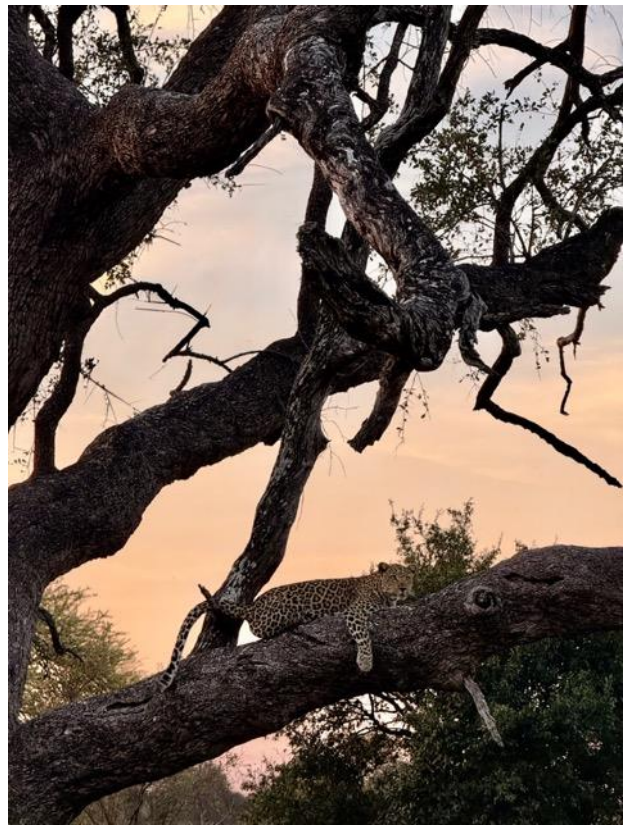


Example of an evergreen tree.

August Gallery



Vultures – Photo by Damin Dallas



Dumbana female – Photo by Damin Dallas

Young male lion feeding on a giraffe – Photo by Monika Dallas





Chacma baboon – Photo by Monika Dallas

Shish male lion – Photo by Monika Dallas



Nile crocodile – Photo by Monika Dallas





Zamani male leopard – Photo by Monika Dallas

Impala rams fighting – Photo by Monika Dallas.





Great white pelicans – Photo by Monika Dallas

Mating pair – Photo by Monika Dallas





Three male cheetahs – Photo by Monika Dallas

Khandziya female – Photo by Monika Dallas

