

# Singita



## WILDLIFE JOURNAL

### SINGITA SABI SAND, SOUTH AFRICA

For the month of February, Two Thousand and Twenty Two

#### Temperature

Average minimum: 20.4°C (68.77°F)  
Average maximum: 31.5°C (88.76°F)  
Minimum recorded: 16.0°C (60.80°F)  
Maximum recorded: 36.0°C (96.80°F)

#### Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 12 mm  
For the season to date: 473 mm

#### Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 05:40  
Sunset: 18:35

A sweet smell of marula fruit drifts through the air as heat rises throughout the day. It brings with it the last, lingering calls of the woodland kingfisher who will soon depart the land, and a bustle of monkeys, squirrels and elephants who are scrambling for the remains of any sweet treat they can find before the season changes. Rainfall has been minimal this month and it has become more evident in the yellowing tone of grass and the dried, cracked mud which no longer serves as a wallow to cool down for those who use it. Again, we are beginning to feel the transitional changes in the wilds and it hints to us a glimmer of excitement for each new day.

#### Here's a Sightings Snapshot for February:

##### Lions

- It would seem as if a new shift has taken place in the world of lion dynamics at Singita Sabi Sand with the new arrivals and changes with existing lions.
- The Plains Camp males have well and truly taken ownership of the land and continue to show their dominance as we hear their distant roars throughout the night. With these males having spent so

much time with the two Nkuhuma lionesses, we are very excited to announce the arrival of at least two new cubs! At this stage we haven't quite had the chance to view them properly as they are so young, however one of our guides was lucky enough to catch a glimpse of the two little fur balls at the beginning of the month, who are denning at the centre of the property. We are looking forward to seeing how the new pride develops from here as both females have mated with the Plains Camp males, however we are yet to see true signs of pregnancy from the amber-eyed female.

- Closer to the end of the month it seems as if one of the older Mhangene lionesses has also moved away from the pride to mate with the Plains Camp males. We watched in awe one evening as two Mhangene lionesses interacted with the male, both females submitting to him with no aggression from his side, only vocalisation. It was incredible to watch!
- An interesting turn of events this month has been the joining up of father and son, the last remaining Birmingham male and one of his first offspring, the Nkuhuma male. We aren't sure what the future holds for these two, however we are glad that they have company.
- With changes assumedly in the lion dynamics to the north of the reserve, this brought some of the first viewing of the Talamati Pride. This group of eight have spent the majority of the month to the north of the river with one or two appearances to the south of the river, close to the lodges.

### **Elephants**

- Elephants, elephants, everywhere! It has been a wonderful month filled with elephant viewing, with large herds of them moving towards the marula groves and gravitating toward any form of water source they can find around the area. It has been incredible to see the amount of young elephants this year and they have brought many a smile and heart-warming feeling to every guest.

### **Leopards**

- The Schotia female has been a highlight for February. She brought her cub out to show the world and we have had some incredible viewing of the two of them, most often up on the rocky outcrops just to the east of Boulders Lodge. We know she had given birth to two cubs and by our previous month's trail cam images it showed two being moved by her, however it seems that she only has one remaining which however sad that may be, it is nature and we are overjoyed that she has managed to look after at least one little spotted fur ball.
- The Kangelia male, now more independent than ever, makes for some incredible viewing. As a young male leopard who is learning the ropes of adult life, he is often seen as a spunky, over confident young male who is always up for a hunt and often seems to be found irritating his father, the Nyeleti male. At this point in time, he is still too young to hold a territory or begin to mate so he is still tolerated in the area by the Nyeleti male. We are making the most of the time we have with him as in the coming months he will soon leave us to find a territory of his own.
- Overall, we have had some spectacular viewing of leopards this month, with 90 sightings overall for the short month!

### **Buffaloes**

- The larger herds are returning and with an abundance of grass to feed on in the area, the southern portions of the property are a great place to look for regular sightings of buffalo. The mud wallows are beginning to dry up and the Sand River is becoming a favourite spot for some of the older, single bulls.

### **Cheetahs**

- Although a rare species to be found on the reserve, we have been delighted by some wonderful cheetah viewing this month. With low numbers of this species, it has been exciting to see at least three different individuals in February.

### **Bird List**

- The bird list for February includes 14 new bird species with the lesser jacana and yellow-bellied greenbul being the highlights. This brings our yearly total to 232.

## Do elephants get drunk on marula fruits?

Article by Quentin Swanevelder

For many years there has been an ongoing discussion on whether elephants do get drunk whilst consuming the fruits from a marula tree.

It is a known fact that marulas do ferment and create ethanol, however this is in small amounts. However, an elephant has a slower metabolic rate than humans so less alcohol is needed as per size of the species. Around 90 ml of 100% ethanol is needed to get a human drunk. If an animal like an elephant were to get drunk it would have to consume around 27 litres of pure marula juice, then fermented, to get drunk. Taking into account its large body size the elephant would have to eat around 1 800 marula fruit a day to possibly get drunk. However, an elephant can only consume around 800 fruit based on its diet, so this would make it even harder.

So, in my opinion, (backed by some science) it's virtually impossible for an elephant to get drunk on the fruit and that the slightly higher signs of aggression are mostly to do with the guarding of the individual's food source. Therefore, we can conclude (some years later) that the movie, Beautiful People by the director Jamie Uys, was indeed staged by soaking the fruits in alcohol before feeding them to the animals.

This entire story still does not take away any of the magic of having warm coffee with Amarula on your morning safari!





It's the time of year where, if you're not careful, and have taken a few roads less travelled, that by the end of drive your tracker may look like a silk entombed mummy! It is incredible to see how many of these beautiful, strong, golden-coloured webs there are at the moment. These belong to *Nephila senegalensis*, commonly known as the banded-legged golden orb-web spider.

It gets this name because of the beautiful colour of its silk, which is believed to have a dual purpose of attracting prey like bees in the sunlight, and to form a camouflage in dense foliage. The base strands are famous for being incredibly strong, and I have heard comparisons made of it to materials like kevlar (that bulletproof vests are made of) which gives you a small idea of how strong this striking web is. I can personally attest to seeing small birds caught in the webs many times.

One of the things that I find most interesting is what the spiders do to try and preserve the life of these webs. It is obviously very strong but to make it this strong takes a lot of energy from a small creature. So, what they do is create a visual marker for large animals not to destroy the web, and I have seen mammals like kudu and impala notice the webs and walk around them.

Although it may look quite intimidating, this spider is non-aggressive and relatively harmless. It can deliver a painful neurotoxin bite but you would have had to severely provoke it to get to that point.

It is definitely something to look out for on your next safari, especially if you are here in the summer months.



## The rock python

Article by Johan Ndlovu

This was one of the most interesting drives of my career. It was a reminder that nature is not predictable. Not everything will go as anticipated, as each drive yields different results. This day's encounter was extraordinary, as it took everyone by surprise.

The request for the day was giraffe. The drive started with no to few sightings. I decided the best thing to do would be to offer a better experience – a bush walk. The walk started quietly but along the way we heard a rustling sound heard. Cautiously my guests and I went to investigate. The realization of the scene was breathtaking! There in front of us was an African rock python consuming its prey of an impala lamb.

An African rock python (*Python sebae*) is an extraordinary animal. It is known as one of the largest constrictors. It is also known as one of the most infamous members of the 26 python species. It is the largest snake in Africa, where it can grow up to 6.1 metres long. They have some of the worst tempers, though dangerous these snakes are not venomous - their danger comes from their sheer strength killing their prey by constriction. Their diet mainly comprises of monkeys, monitor lizards, small antelope and guinea fowl.



This sighting was an amazing display of its remarkable strength. An impala lamb can walk and learn to run a few minutes to an hour from birth. The initial thought was that it would swallow it directly, however, it further demonstrated its impressive strength by dragging the impala lamb to possibly consume elsewhere in a secure location.



It is natural for them to eat in a hidden location as they will be vulnerable during consumption and digestion which happens at a very slow pace.

This was indeed a remarkable encounter. An experience which helps one respect nature even more. This encounter has helped offer clarity to everyone of how dangerous, powerful and remarkable the African rock python is.

I think that for most guides it's always such an emotional and exciting time when a leopard gives birth to a new litter of cubs. Leopards are notoriously elusive, which, for me, is one of the reasons they are my favourite animal to search for. Finding a leopard's den is always extremely difficult as she does an amazing job of finding a safe and secluded position to hide her cubs when she leaves them alone to hunt or patrol her territory.

The Schotia female at Singita Sabi Sand is a firm favourite who has raised several litters on the property, most notably all three of her previous litters being born within the lodge perimeter and within eyeshot of both staff and guests alike. In all my time in the bush I have never known a leopard, a usually shy and secretive cat, to place so much trust in a lodge, its surroundings and its constant buzzing movement of both staff and guests. To me this is testament to the conservation efforts of Singita and the ongoing sensitivity shown to this particular leopard and her young with each and every litter.



At three months of age this single cub, survivor of a litter of two, is now at an age where it is more aware of the constant danger it finds itself in. It is very capable of climbing even the tallest of trees and is more accepting of our presence and occasional visits to its den area.

Leopard cub mortality is high at around 70%, largely due to the fact that there is a high leopard density in the Sabi Sand Game Reserve including a large population of males which often have overlapping territories. Add this to the large populations of both lion and spotted hyena and the odds are stacked against the female leopards and their very vulnerable young.

Schotia female is a leopard with an incredible territory on the southern bank of the Sand River with dense riverine woodland, granite rocky outcrops with incredible little hiding spots and a fantastic vantage to scan for both prey and foe. Her territory has an abundance of water sources and fantastic grassland areas which attract large numbers of impala which make up almost 80% of her diet. She is a mother who has had great



success raising at least one individual cub to independence on the last two attempts, and is doing an incredible job of providing for and protecting her newest addition.





We are so privileged to have such access to an incredibly secretive cat and her most protected youngster. It is a privilege we never take for granted and are so appreciative of each of these unbelievable moments we get to spend in her presence. Only time will tell how this new cub will fare in this perfect but hostile environment. We look forward to observing the development of this new young leopard which gives hope to the ongoing survival of this amazing species.





February Gallery



Talamati Pride drinking – Image by Gareth Poole



Schotia and cub – Image by Nick Du Plessis





An abundance of impala – Image by Gareth Poole



Plains Camp male lions – Image by Gareth Poole





Schotia and cub – Image by Chene Wales-Baillie



Male cheetah – Image by Gareth Poole